



University of Manitoba: Committed to global community service

Strategy for North-South engagement

The mission of the University of Manitoba (U of M) is “to create, preserve and communicate knowledge, and thereby, contribute to the cultural, social and economic well-being of the people of Manitoba, Canada and the world.”

One need only glance at the U of M’s extensive portfolio of international “service” projects and it becomes clear that this is a university that lives and breathes its mission statement.

The U of M recognizes that North-South partnerships differ from North-North partnerships. While both are based on the principle of mutual benefit, the nature of these gains, and the timelines in which they are realized, are different. The U of M is committed to engaging in longer-term partnerships with Southern partners, recognizing that there are highly valuable outcomes to be realized from this approach. For example, Southern institutions can be more flexible and responsive and be better positioned to achieve results in an appropriate timeframe. Longer-term partnerships also enhance the goals of sharing knowledge, information, resources and expertise between the respective institutions. In this way, North-South partnerships help form more finely-tuned and responsive institutions in the South over time.

Implementation: Leveraging success

Presently the U of M has five active University Partnerships in Cooperation and Development (UPCD) Tier 2 projects¹ through AUCC, operating in China, Cuba, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Uganda and Bangladesh, which cover a wide range of sectors, from nursing, eco-tourism, environmental governance, and HIV/AIDS to pest control. These projects are driven by dedicated staff from within the faculties of nursing, geography, kinesiology and recreation management, agriculture and food sciences and the natural resources institute. The broad scope of its North-South engagement is one of the defining features of the U of M’s internationalization efforts.

The U of M does not pre-define the countries or sectors in which it engages; it is an evolving process, driven by “champion” faculty members. Over time, the U of M has succeeded in creating vibrant linkages and synergies between its various international research and development activities.

The International Advisory Council, comprised of deans from all faculties, meets regularly to discuss international activities and maximize the potential for collaboration. This culture of information sharing promotes dialogue beyond this forum, and has led to South-South collaborations

¹ UPCD Tier 2 projects are development and institution-building projects administered by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada on behalf of the Canadian International Development Agency. See: www.aucc.ca/upcd

among the U of M's wider set of partners. For example, the University of Nairobi recently hosted an international HIV/AIDS conference which was attended by Chinese partners from the U of M's UPCD Tier 2 Building Capacity to Respond to HIV/AIDS in China project.

The U of M acknowledges that internationalization is a bottom-up process that places an emphasis on creating an enabling environment for faculty and staff. Professors tend to be motivated by their unique academic and research interests, as well as the interests and demands of the students with whom they interact on a daily basis.

This process requires substantial institutional support if it is to flourish. The Office of International Relations (OIR) acts as a centralized support system, providing, for example, seed money to faculty members to establish new research and/or service projects; technical assistance to faculty members such as the preparation of letters-of-intent and proposal writing services; and, through its website, information and resources on establishing institutional agreements, developing international opportunities for students, designing development projects, and lists of funding sources. By offering these services, the OIR allows faculty to concentrate on their academic and research strengths, and to navigate the administrative process with greater ease.

When partnerships gain significant momentum, they are often scaled-up, leading to higher-level institutional partnerships resulting in memoranda of understanding that in turn fosters student mobility and faculty exchanges.

Innovative features and programs

Faculty members who go abroad to participate in international activities gain a sense of awareness and insight which translates directly into the student learning experience, including sharing case studies in the classrooms, generating a range of worldviews among their students and stimulating new ideas for student engagement in research. Kelly Beaverford, Professor, Department of Architecture, has designed a course called service learning in the global community in which architecture students partake in a one-month service learning course in a Southern country where they complete a community development project. To date, the course has taken place in Uganda, Turkey, and Ghana. Participation in courses such as this one is inspiring Manitoban students to become more responsible global citizens.

The U of M's 30-year commitment in Kenya is a testimony to its long-term approach to partnerships – its collaboration with the University of Nairobi has resulted in the establishment of the most modern microbiology lab on the African continent. According to the Kenyan Minister of Health, "This is the facility in which we expect a Kenyan to win a Nobel Prize in science." James Dean, executive director of the OIR notes that this "long-haul collaboration" has not just benefitted the Kenyan partners; it has resulted in significant research opportunities for Canadians as well, particularly in the field of HIV/AIDS. Benson Estambale, director of the University of Nairobi Institute of Tropical and Infectious Diseases (UNITID) notes that the partnership has increased the international profile of both the Kenyan and Canadian universities as key research institutions.

The microbiology lab is facilitating great advances in knowledge about tropical diseases affecting the region. "[It] has put Kenya on the world map as a research destination... Since [its] establishment, UNITID has developed many research partnerships with public and private enterprises all over the world," adds Dr. Estambale.

As a tribute to the U of M's commitment to global community service, in November 2009, Rhonda Friesen, Manager of International Cooperation Agreements in the U of M's OIR was awarded the Canadian Bureau for International Education's Internationalization Service Award.



A UPCD project with North South University in Bangladesh has several goals, including making women part of the decision-making process regarding the management of natural resources.

Photo: University of Manitoba