

The Changing Role of Higher Education: Developing the Next Generation of Global Leaders

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Thank you very much.

It's an honour and privilege to be with you, in this strikingly beautiful Ismaili Centre. For nearly four decades, the Ismaili Centre has offered spaces for spiritual contemplation, as well as social, cultural and intellectual gatherings.

The Centre truly does provide a bridge to friendship and understanding for the wider community, and opens our minds and hearts to pluralism in Canada and around the world.

This is a message that resonates personally with me. My own experiences have made me very aware of how different cultures and races interact and are treated, in higher education and elsewhere. I appreciate the work the Centre does in this regard.

I'm proud to say that the University of British Columbia and the Ismaili community collaborate on a number of initiatives; globally through the Aga Khan Development Network and locally through the Ismaili Council of BC:

- An agreement to enable UBC to design curriculum for use by University of Central Asia (UCA) faculty members to teach Earth and Environmental Sciences Program.
- A Memorandum of Understanding to help prepare young Kenyans to teach the International Baccalaureate program and contribute more widely to the improvement of education in Kenya.
- A collaborative project between UBC and UCA researchers to guide the development of long-term socio-ecological research by UCA's Mountain Societies Research Institute.
- UBC faculty Peter Klein was a consultant for the Aga Khan Foundation and helped to create the School of Journalism at Aga Khan University in Nairobi.
- UBC Okanagan's Professor Hussein Keshani, in partnership with the Aga Khan Trust for Culture and the Devonian Botanical Garden in Edmonton, is developing a digital application for visitors to a new Islamic Garden that the

Aga Khan gifted to the University of Alberta.

- The Aga Khan Development Network works closely with UBC's Human Early Learning Partnership. (to name a few)

As president of UBC, I am also proud to acknowledge ...

- Khalil (Z.) Shariff, CEO of the Aga Khan Foundation of Canada, is a graduate of UBC. (moderating this evening)
- Firoz Rasul, a former member of UBC's Board of Governors, is President of Aga Khan University.
- Shamez Mohamed, responsible for building the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto and the Global Centre for Pluralism in Ottawa, has served on the UBC's Museum of Anthropology external advisory board.
- UBC's former head of Pediatrics, Dr. Robert Armstrong, Professor of Pediatrics and Foundation Dean of the Aga Khan University Medical College, was responsible for establishing a new Medical College as part of a Faculty of Health Sciences for East Africa based in Nairobi.
- The VGH and UBC Hospital Foundation was the principal beneficiary of the 2016 annual Ismaili Walk. We are grateful for this support.

I might add that the Ismaili Student Association at UBC is a very active student group, holding weekly meetings, volunteering, and supporting their fellow students. This year, their annual fundraiser provided \$6,000 to the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre.

This evening, the topic of our dialogue is “the changing role of higher education in developing the next generation of global leaders.” The topic is almost limitless in scope, but I can think of no better way of thinking about how we can shape future leaders than by the example of **His Highness the Aga Khan** through sixty years of global leadership and tireless humanitarian service.

I'd like to begin by sharing some of the words His Highness spoke in Toronto last year on accepting the Inaugural **Adrienne Clarkson prize for Global Citizenship**. Here is what he said:

“Perhaps the key to resolving the ‘Paradox of Citizenship’ is to think about layers of overlapping identity. After all, one can honour a variety of loyalties -- to a faith, an ethnicity, a language, a nation, a city, a profession, a school, even to a sports team! One might share some of these identities with some people, and other identities with others.

“My own religious community identifies proudly as Ismaili

Muslims, with our specific interpretation of Islamic faith and history. But we also feel a sense of belonging with the whole of the Muslim world, what we call the Ummah. Within the Ummah, the diversity of identities is immense -- greater than most people realize -- differences based on language, on history, on nationhood, ethnicity and a variety of local affiliations. But, at the same time, I observe a growing sense within the Ummah of a meaningful global bond.

“When the question of human identity is seen in this context, then diversity itself can be seen as a gift. Diversity is not a reason to put up walls, but rather to open windows. It is not a burden; it is a blessing. In the end of course, we must realize that living with diversity is a challenging process. We are wrong to think it will be easy. The work of pluralism is always a work in progress.”

As a university president, I find his words especially relevant and inspiring. The very nature of a post-secondary environment is a place to foster diversity, as students encounter people whose views and backgrounds differ from their own. Higher education is a transformative experience, as students learn not only about themselves, but others as well.

In an open learning environment, students need to be able to build successful networks and collaborations that are diverse and global in order to pragmatically understand and experience

pluralism.

The spirit of innovation and global citizenship is very much at the heart of what we are trying to do in our colleges, polytechnics, and universities today. Traditional methods of teaching and learning are being transformed as we prepare our students to meet the challenges of a world very different from the one encountered by their parents and grandparents.

Students today have progressed far beyond the passive recipients of information they were in the old days. Today, professors tend to be facilitators, creating the right environments for students to acquire information in a variety of dynamic ways.

Courses in many areas, such as law, medicine, and engineering, are often case-based or problem-based, requiring students to work collaboratively in teams to find solutions—and preparing them for the way problems are tackled in the working world beyond university.

Higher education is responding to pressures for change by introducing new courses to prepare students for work in fields that barely existed a decade ago. At UBC, for example, students in Arts can now take a program in Cognitive Systems, in which the participating units are Philosophy, Psychology, Linguistics, and Computer Science. Through the interrelated

study of these fields, the students gain a comprehensive understanding of human cognition, and learn to apply this knowledge to create intelligent artificial systems.

The traditional barriers between disciplines are disappearing as we try to prepare students for the demands of the working world. So, for example, a student in Applied Science can twin her studies in hydraulic engineering with a program in entrepreneurship, so that she is prepared for the post-university challenges of commercializing and monetizing her skills.

Many more examples can be found, in both the so-called STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and in the arts & social sciences. Indeed, I've been telling people that we need to add the Arts to that acronym and talk about STEAM, not STEM.

The Arts and STEM subjects are now beginning to intersect in ways we could never have predicted a few years ago. Such interrelatedness is essential if we are to give our students the kind of preparation that will prepare them for a profession beyond the BA or the BSc in an increasingly technology-oriented workplace.

Through a combination of carefully crafted curricular learning objectives in the classroom and experiential learning in

internships or co-ops, the liberal arts student at UBC is encouraged to cultivate a unique professional identity, an identity that reflects their personal interests while at the same time giving them the tools they need to succeed in a world that is increasingly shaped by science and technology.

And on the other side of the coin, engineering and science graduates are beginning to discover the social and ethical implications of their disciplines through new breadth requirements and arts electives.

What we're all aiming for is to create an environment in which our students are exposed to a variety of ideas, and acquire the knowledge and skills that will enable them to achieve their personal goals and become responsible members of society, regardless of their choice of profession.

And then, of course, there's the whole area of information technology. The huge expansion of digital tools has revolutionized the business of teaching and learning. Many courses now take a blended approach, mixing face-to-face presentations with online or video presentations. Students now have instantaneous access to vast electronic databases, and require a sophisticated understanding of software tools to access and use that information.

Many students also have the benefit of co-op education programs, where they can gain invaluable work experience before they graduate. UBC offers a program called **Go Global**, where we partner with over 200 universities and institutions worldwide for students to study abroad for a semester.

Leaving home to study in another country, students learn to approach different situations and people with respect and sensitivity, to remain humble, to make the effort to learn things about other cultures, and to become aware of their own biases

So you can see that higher education is preparing a highly skilled, tech savvy, and cosmopolitan workforce.

However, I don't think we can we talk about developing the next generation of global leaders, without talking about their need for jobs.

Could any students embarking on a degree program in 2004 have predicted the economic situation awaiting them on graduation in 2008? The precarity of new graduates with \$50,000 in student loans to repay, seeking a position in their field during a depressed economy, cannot be overstated.

That is why I'd like to spend a few moments on how the post-secondary education sector plays an important role as an economic growth engine. Recently, I was honored to be appointed by the premier as Chief Advisor for the BC

Innovation Network. This is an open, collaborative network that will bridge the efforts of industry, government and post-secondary institutions.

One of the most important ways the B.C. post-secondary sector is contributing to the economy is through research clusters. These are interdepartmental networks of leaders in particular fields who are brought together to investigate large problems through collaborative research.

One UBC example is a cluster formed by bringing together researchers from the Faculty of Forestry, Botany, the Michael Smith Laboratories, Biodiversity, and the Faculty of Land and Food Systems. They have formed a forestry and plant productivity group studying plant genomics and bio-products from renewable resources. Other BC post-secondary institutions can provide similar examples.

By working together, we can promote stronger links between the B.C. companies that depend on the availability of talented people, and the colleges, technical institutes and universities that are responsible for training and educating our students to take on those jobs.

Another component in fostering global citizenship is the role of international students. At one time the idea of

internationalizing the university was seen as something threatening and undesirable, because it was thought that such students were taking seats that should be reserved for domestic students only.

But under my predecessors, UBC began to expand international enrolment, recognizing that there is a huge pool of potential talent, investment, and immigration that will be of immense benefit to this country. Recruitment of top international students brings with it future networks that will enhance connections with our international partners.

Let me share with you the words of one of UBC's international graduate students, from the valedictory address given by **Dr. Olga Pena**, on receiving her PhD in Microbiology and Immunology.

Here is what she had to say about on her student experience:

"My experience at UBC went far and beyond than just acquiring academic knowledge.

"At UBC, I also learned the real meaning of multiculturalism, by interacting with people from many different countries and cultures.

"I learned the meaning of international and community

engagement, by being engaged and engaging others in initiatives that can contribute to building a better world through dialogue, teaching and learning.

“I learned the meaning of sustainability and not just the importance of environmental but also economic and social sustainability, by applying these concepts into my every day life.

“I learned the real meaning of research excellence, by following excellent role models such as my own PhD supervisor and other great professors.

“As a wife in love, a very happy mom, and a career-oriented woman, I learned the real meaning of having a balanced life, understanding that with love and collaboration everything is possible. I was personally able to finish my PhD while being a Mom, thanks to my lovely husband and what we call teamwork and my beautiful family in Colombia who has always been there supporting me. As a woman, I truly believe we can be great moms, while following our passion for knowledge.

“Most importantly, as an international student coming from a very small town called Chicoral, I also learned that I am not just a citizen of Colombia, and you, my fellow graduates are not only citizens of Canada or Germany or China or Brazil... We are citizens of the world!”

It's obvious to me this international student took to heart UBC's motto: ***Tuum Est – It is Yours. It's up to you.*** A campus environment fosters conversation about identity, race, religion, politics; it's up to each individual student to take advantage of the opportunities to step out of their comfort zone and grow -- intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally.

I believe the next generation holds great promise in meeting the social, geo-political and economic challenges that lie before us, and stepping into leadership roles at home and around the world. I'm looking forward to our dialogue with Khalil, a UBC alumnus and a living example of global leadership!

Thank you.