



# DESIGNING THE SCHOOL FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

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College of Social & Applied Human Sciences

Interviewed March 2012 | *This interview has been condensed.*

### WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR A SCHOOL FOR CIVIL SOCIETY?

*In thinking about a school, we could actually call it a “school of anti-complacency” or a “cynicism-free school” or “the school of unfailing optimism”. The vision for me is actually a place where we really foster in students a sense of being able to stay with overwhelming problems, because I think the results of so much of our cynicism and our complacency is we very quickly do get overwhelmed by the magnitude of things. How do we encourage and support students to engage with these issues and break them down?*

*The school should be about not so much actually solving problems but it's teaching students how to engage with problems, how to see them to formulate questions, how they learn to talk to partners and members of community, how they develop a strategy of inquiry to do something about that. It could also a place where we have a role in cultivating students a perspective that puts priority on others. I think a lot of our higher education has shifted from social action and what we can do to make change to what do I need to do to get this job, what do I need to do to create these skills so that I can be competitive, so I can earn a reasonable income and so on. I think the core of civility is really about paying attention to others as a core value.*

**SCHOOL FOR CIVIL SOCIETY**

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*I do think that having curriculum organized around broad themes, whether those are issues of food security or governance or engagement has tremendous potential and value at the end of a package of four years. You know, our four pillars for The Better Planet project of food, health, environment, and community could make such an interesting way to organize a four-year curriculum, with, basic skills of research, engagement and reflective practice built into that process. One of the other things that I would love to see is looking at how we can capitalize on so many people who are interested in Third Age learning, how do we engage the “wisdom sector” in a way that really capitalizes on some of their strengths?*

## HOW DOES IT LOOK A FEW DECADES OUT?



*And as part of the vision maybe it will be housed in the new “MacKinnon commons”, which is going to be like the Science Commons, a nice closed in area where students will have a big congregation space and it'd be the school for civil society - very accessible, very visible, and very much part of the community commons that is there already. It will have robust enrolments with a high entrance average as we have so many people clamouring to be part of it. It will have a council of elders who will be very much entrenched and part of the school. And we'll be turning people away from those cherished positions as well because we can only accommodate so many wise people. We'll have a number of strong partnerships where our faculty are very engaged in research, with a great slate of scholarships in place to support our students in their experiential learning activities. And it will be very strongly interdisciplinary -- in terms of both faculty contingent but also our students and will have a very strong international flavour in terms of our student body and presence - with lots of open learning opportunities attached to that as well.*

2

## WHAT TRENDS OVER THE OVER THE NEXT DECADE OR SO DO YOU SEE AFFECTING THIS EFFORT?



*Number one is the ongoing call for greater accountability of universities in terms of what they do -this will continue and it will continue to show up in a variety of ways. What do we really want our students to learn? What's the deep learning that we need them to have beyond information to teaching students puzzle solving, deep thinking, engagement kinds of skills? And that accountability will increasingly show up with respect to our research activities and our ability to work effectively with organizations, both private and public. That's particularly important for social sciences because of our tradition of having been less valued than the science and tech transfer side, but this will affect all disciplines. I think that this has the potential to fit very well with this because of its intention of being engaged with community, having high social impact...*

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