

**International Development and
the “School for Civil Society”**

**Consultation Report for the Catalyst
Team**

July 11, 2012

Background & Introduction

This report is based on a series of twenty-eight individual international development-related faculty and staff interviews along with 6 faculty interviews in the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development (SEDRD) and two student focus groups (undergraduate and graduate students in ID programmes). This work was conducted between May 18th and July 4th 2012. This consultation process represents one piece of a much larger discussion currently underway at the University of Guelph regarding the potential development of a new unit or structure on campus that may draw together and build upon the University of Guelph's strengths in community-engaged scholarship, volunteerism and civic engagement, and the existing academic programmes in international development.

Dr. Sally Humphries, Director of International Development Studies (IDS) at the University, and Sarah Pugh, a PhD candidate in Political Science and IDS, conducted 28 of these interviews, along with the graduate student focus group. Sarah Pugh and Anita Beaudette (the Undergraduate Academic Advisor) conducted the undergraduate focus group, while Dr. Erin Nelson simultaneously conducted six faculty interviews within the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development (SEDRD). While most interviews were held in person, we were also able to conduct interviews by Skype or by phone in cases where the individual was not in Guelph or was otherwise unavailable to meet on campus. This process was facilitated with the administrative assistance of Catherine Badham, the Administrative Secretary to the Director of IDS.

We spoke with faculty and students from Economics, Political Science, Sociology and Anthropology, Geography, OVC and SEDRD, as well as graduate and undergraduate students (including recent graduates) from IDS, OVC and SEDRD. While we reached a significant number of faculty and students, we recognize that there are many others with whom we did not have the opportunity to speak, given the timeline and scope of our consultations, alongside the fluid boundaries that define who identifies and associates with international development programmes on campus. We also recognize that distinct themes emerged from the interviews conducted within SEDRD, and have chosen to present these themes in a separate section of this

report, to ensure that these perspectives are appropriately represented. Due to the much smaller number of SEDRD interviews undertaken, the names of faculty members who were interviewed for this report have not been included.

Interviews and focus groups were built upon a foundation of six key questions (*see Appendix 1*) but were also often conversational and sometimes diverged from the formulated questions. Most interviews were between 45 minutes and one hour in length. While there were certainly some differences in opinions regarding the proposed “School for Civil Society” and the relationship of international development programmes to this new unit, some very clear themes emerged from these interviews.

Key Strengths and Values of International Development Studies Programmes

There was a very clear convergence of opinions amongst the interviews and focus groups that one of the most important strengths of international development programmes at the University of Guelph is the interdisciplinary nature of IDS. This was identified as a key strength at both the undergraduate and graduate programme levels. At the graduate level, in particular, faculty identified the importance of having a core disciplinary home, in conjunction with the interdisciplinary structure of IDS. Undergraduate students, recent graduates, and faculty interviewees identified the various streams offered within the undergraduate programme as a key strength as well. In particular, the focus on gender was identified by several faculty members as an essential and valuable dimension of the programme, especially given the lack of a specific programme for gender and women’s studies elsewhere at the University.

A majority of faculty interviewees noted that international development students are consistently amongst the strongest students in their classes, and that they can often pick out the international development students within the class by their levels of engagement, enthusiasm, experience, and ability to connect issues, theories, and ideas from across the disciplines. There was widespread agreement that the IDS programme attracts a very high calibre of incoming students. There was also general agreement within the faculty interviews that students often enter the programme already having had some degree of cross-cultural and international travel/work experience, contributing to these students’ strong analytical perspectives on the world and their own place within it. IDS students are perceived to be generally very flexible, bright, adaptable

and often “fearless” students, who tackle on a daily basis some of the most complex, difficult, and emotionally challenging issues facing the world.

Most interviewees linked the interdisciplinary nature of the programme to a rich capacity for critical thinking, due to the exposure of IDS students to the various perspectives inherent within different disciplines and amongst the range of faculty who teach within, or are affiliated with, IDS. This range of perspectives, we heard, also helps to maintain a programme that leaves sufficient room for “development” to be conceptualised differently by different faculty and students. The lack of ideologically driven pedagogy was also one of the key strengths identified by a range of faculty interviewees within different disciplines. While students are exposed to various perspectives and encouraged to think critically about each of them, the lack of ideology, according to some faculty, enables students to retain their ability and desire to act on what they are learning, and to continue to engage with the world. Conversely, one faculty member interviewed believed that the principal driving ideology of the IDS programme was the promotion of the corporate agenda and felt that the programme needed to become more pluralistic with a more diverse approach to issues within the global arena.

Given the importance that some faculty and students placed on the lack of dogmatic or ideologically-driven conceptualisations of development, some were hesitant to identify core values associated with IDS programmes, noting the subjectivity of values and questioning the appropriateness of a values-driven approach to research and engagement, especially in light of global and local power differentials in research, and the dangers of paternalism and the potential disregard of individual and community agency. However, others identified broad guiding parameters such as humanism, responsibility, patience and persistence, lifelong commitment to learning and engagement, cultural sensitivity, the recognition of the difference between social justice and charity, critical thinking without cynicism, and the maintenance of hope and a will to engage, in spite of an awareness of the overwhelming scale of global problems. Still others spoke of democratic ideals, inclusiveness, progressiveness, community-led development, humility, compassion, non-racialism, and the ability and will of the students to “face the unfaceable” and work towards the fostering of opportunities for all. The very interdisciplinary nature of the programme was also identified as a core value by some, in that it fosters respect and value for the different disciplines and approaches to solving problems. One faculty member

spoke of IDS students as “facilitators” rather than “engineers” of community-led processes of change.

Exploring the Local-Global Nexus

In the ongoing discussions around the proposed new structural unit or school, exploring the relationship between local and global engagement has been a constant theme. In our discussions, faculty and students were asked to share their perspectives regarding this relationship. Some faculty felt that the very concepts of local and global were problematic and fluid, and noted that there was a great deal of “local” work being done “globally,” while other faculty’s work engaged with “global” processes and themes in a “local” context.

Most faculty and students acknowledged that to some degree, the global was almost always linked to the local, and vice versa. The local, we heard, was largely nested within the global through interconnected processes. One faculty member noted, for example, that the processes were similar, “depending on the sameness of the goals.” There were, however, also very strong points made within our interviews regarding some important distinctions between local and global work, in the context of international development studies and engagement. Key amongst these differences, we heard, is the scale of the issues that are confronted by some students and faculty working internationally. The sheer scale and magnitude of poverty and other social, political and environmental challenges facing populations in Canada, for example, is very different than are experienced by those living in parts of India, Africa, or many other “developing world” settings. International engagement may also come with a different scale of cultural and logistical challenges, requiring students and faculty to be well-versed and sensitive to international histories and contexts within which they are working. While this may be true of some “local” engagement as well, to some degree, many of the logistical, cultural, and contextual challenges may be less intensive or extreme than challenges faced by those working or researching in developing world contexts. We also heard that IDS faculty and students, by nature of the programme, may be much more likely to frame a local issue in a global context than someone without a background in IDS. International work might also provide more opportunities for the comparison of issues and processes of change in different corners of the world. One faculty member noted that it may be easier to build accountability into locally

engaged work, simply due to the geographic proximity of the researcher to the project or programme at hand.

Notwithstanding these differences, many faculty members felt that in large part, the kinds of processes used to engage at a local or global scale were similar in nature, involving many of the same skills and approaches. Students within the undergraduate focus group felt that one of the strengths in one particular IDS class was that it entailed an exploration of local, national and international issues and opportunities for engagement. Students within the focus group emphatically expressed that an enhanced focus on the linkages between the local and global would be a welcome addition to the programme. However, we also heard that faculty members working in a “local” context may not relate at all to an association with “international development,” and may indeed be uncomfortable with such an affiliation, despite what are potentially very similar approaches and processes of engagement. Still, students and faculty also noted that many IDS graduates do not actually go on to work internationally in their careers, but remain active, engaged citizens in their personal and professional lives in a local or national context. One faculty member noted that even for those students and faculty working internationally, being somehow rooted in, or connected to, a local context (starting, perhaps, with greater engagement with Canada’s First Nations), may help to resolve some of the cognitive dissonance that can be involved in working internationally, and may help create the space for different pedagogies and approaches to research and learning to emerge.

Opportunities to Strengthen International Development Programmes Through a New Structural Unit

Throughout the course of the interviews, many strong feelings and opinions emerged about the appropriateness or “fit” of the proposed “School for Civil Society” for international development studies programmes on campus. Recognizing this perspective, we asked faculty and students to first set aside the proposed name of the new unit, and to imagine a new structure that could actually enhance the existing international development programmes and could address some of the perceived weaknesses of the programme that were identified within some of the interviews.

For example, while there was a widespread recognition of the many strengths of IDS students, some faculty also felt that a stronger set of tangible, practical skills would be an important

addition to the programme for students. In particular, a stronger grounding in skills such as quantitative research methods, statistics, basic econometrics and GIS was recommended by some faculty as a way of further preparing IDS students for work in their field upon graduation. Conversely, some faculty worried about the potential “neoliberalisation” of post-secondary education, in which the principal focus of such education would become the preparation of the student for the work force.

Nonetheless, the potentials of building stronger bridges between disciplines and departments was raised by the majority of faculty and students. There was general agreement that the diversity of faculty working in international development (broadly defined) across campus is simultaneously one of the programme’s greatest strengths and greatest weaknesses, in that the dispersal of faculty across disciplines and departments makes it difficult to know who is working on what issues, and hinders the ability of faculty and students to collaborate. Undergraduate students in particular pointed to an inadvertent overlap between the courses that they took during their degrees, due to the lack of capacity to map courses between the departments and disciplines. Undergraduate students, along with many of the faculty interviewees, also identified the lack of designated core IDS faculty as a shortcoming of the programme, and noted that there was a lack of “community” and a physical “home” for students within the IDS programme. Greater opportunities for communication and coordination across departments and disciplines, we heard from many of our interviews, would be highly valued by both students and faculty.

The idea of a physical space, or “home” for international development was raised within many faculty interviews along with both the undergraduate and graduate focus groups. A physical space, it was argued by many, would present the opportunity for greater collaboration between faculty members from a range of disciplines, and could help to enhance a sense of community amongst those working in international development on campus. One faculty member, along with some of the students within the graduate focus group, suggested the design of a non-traditional, not entirely Western-designed space that would help break down the barriers between community and the university, and would take academics outside of their comfort zone.

The idea of a new structural unit met with a mixed reception from the various faculty members and students interviewed, but there was nearly unanimous support for increasing the resources available to the programme, for core faculty hires, enhanced capacity for communication and

collaboration, and potentially a physical home. Several interviewees brought up the potential of a “Research Centre” for international development, in which people could remain within their home disciplines, but with affiliation with the Research Centre which would allow for collaborative research programmes to emerge. It was noted in numerous interviews that there are undoubtedly many faculty members who currently teach in international development, but would be unwilling or unhappy to leave their own departments to move fully into a new organisational structure. Many interviewees wondered where the new school would or could be housed, and suggested that a school or unit outside of a college could enhance opportunities for interdisciplinary and interdepartmental collaborations, and could help alleviate concerns that this new initiative was one that would largely benefit only the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences (CSAHS).

Others noted that there could be potential and value in having an institution, unit, or structure within which actors from international organisations could come, for example, for six month periods and build research relationships and projects with students, who could then travel and work in connection with these contacts. We heard from one faculty member that the new school or unit could be something like the Munk Centre, for example, but with less of a focus on international relations and more of a focus on international development, with speakers from both within specific disciplines and also from on-the-ground, community organisations working in the arena of international development. While some interviewees raised the myriad issues and challenges involved in experiential learning and the enhancement of international opportunities for students, many students and faculty members envisioned a new school or structural unit on campus that might be fashioned to enable more experiential and/or international opportunities for students.

While there was room to imagine and identify some significant potential avenues for strengthening international development through a new structural unit, there was widespread and very strong resistance to the proposed name of the “School for Civil Society,” within almost all interviews. Reasons given within the interviews and focus groups for the strong reactions against the name were diverse, including:

- The lack of clarity around the definition of “civil society”

- The perception that in most definitions, “civil society” excludes the state and the market, both of which are inextricably linked to international development research and practice
- A related concern that “civil society” was a limiting, limited and loaded concept that did not encompass the breadth and depth of international development-related research being conducted on campus
- The idea that while civil society may be a theme underneath the broad umbrella of international development studies, international development studies as a field of inquiry and practise does not “fit” under the broad umbrella of civil society
- A critical discourse within international development studies, and African studies in particular, that critiques “civil society” as a western theoretical construct that may have limited value and applicability in a non-western and developing world context, especially in societies characterised by clientelism and patronage networks
- A critical discourse within international development studies that explores and critiques the various roles of non-governmental actors in processes of development and social change, especially in terms of accountability questions
- A related concern that “civil society” is being normatively conceptualised within this dialogue regarding the new structure as a force for “good”, without adequate attention being paid to the fact that civil society organisations can be both constructive and destructive forces for social change
- A strong aversion to the potential loss of “International Development” as a recognized, reputable programme (a kind of recognizable “brand” that high school students and other prospective students can search for and find when looking for a programme)
- Concern that we maintain and protect the “International Development” name, for which the University of Guelph is already known and respected by many international organizations and actors.
- Concerns regarding the degree to which the concept of “civil society” may shape, frame, or potentially impede research, research possibilities and academic freedom on campus
- Confusion about the origins of the proposed “School for Civil Society” as both a name and a concept, and about the agenda behind the name (suspicion that it is donor-related, but this cannot be clarified because the potential donor has not yet been publically disclosed)

- Concern that the proposed “School of Civil Society” would be an administrative platitude, rather than a substantive school, reified because it sounds good, rather than existing because there is a key group of scholars who relate to this particular approach
- Concern about the financial sustainability of the school
- Concern that the concept of “civil society” is dated within international development theory and practice, and that such a school would thus damage the University of Guelph’s reputation
- Concern that the term “civil society” has connotations of colonial missions of “civilising” populations, and that many people with whom international development researchers and practitioners interact would relate negatively to the term

There were also a range of concerns around the concept of a new structure or unit altogether, including concerns about what a new “School for Civil Society” could mean for tenure and promotion processes, and concerns about resource allocation (the fear that a new school would not increase resources, but would rather spread existing resources more thinly).

We also heard concerns about the process itself, including a general mistrust of the degree to which the consultation and design process is actually meaningful. Part of this mistrust seems to have stemmed from the advertisement of the new “School for Civil Society” through the Globe and Mail in May, along with the general publicity surrounding the new School, which, we heard, has left a number of people concerned about the degree to which core decisions such as the name of the new unit have already been taken by administration. Undergraduate students expressed very similar concerns, and along with some faculty members, also expressed a level of discomfort in participating in consultations without having a clear idea of some of the pre-existing administrative parameters, such as where or from whom the money to fund the initiative would come from, and what kind of influence a core donor might have in shaping the design and outputs of the new structure. Some expressed the impression that while the intentions behind the proposed school were undoubtedly laudable, popular and colloquial terms were being used that were actually out of date, and which alienated those working and researching in international development. Many faculty members and students also found it difficult to express opinions as to what a new structural unit might look like, without knowing what other kinds of programmes or functions the new school would house. We heard some faculty members question the need for

a new structure, in that such resources might be better spent strengthening the existing international development programme and other related programmes and institutions on campus.

Summary and Moving Forward

The faculty, staff and students consulted in this process widely agree that if the international development programme undergoes any kind of change, there are specific strengths of the programme that must be retained in order to maintain and build upon its existing reputation and successes. There is also widespread agreement that the name, or “brand” of “International Development” must not be lost, or subsumed within a new structure or unit on campus.

Interviews revealed myriad suggestions for how the programme could be strengthened or enhanced, and how some sort of new structural unit, along with sufficient resources, could help in this process. However, there is also significant resistance from the majority of interviewees regarding the name “School for Civil Society” and a perceived lack of fit between international development studies and a new school or unit by that name. From many of the interviewees, there is a sense that strengthening the international development programme is a necessity and a welcomed endeavour, but that being housed within a new “School for Civil Society” would not be the best way forward for the programme.

Through the course of the interviews, however, an emerging vision began to take form that may address the kinds of concerns, opportunities, and potentials that were raised in these discussions. While the idea of a specific “School for Civil Society” does not enjoy support amongst the vast majority of those interviewed, the idea of some new structure for international development, independent of a college system, was of interest to many of those interviewed, given the size, reputation and growth of the programme. Such a structure could be a Centre, a Research Centre, or an Institute, and could explore models used by other Centres or Institutes on campus. We heard, for example, about the non-college-based model of the Centre for Public Health and Zoonoses on campus, which provides affiliations and interdisciplinary opportunities for faculty and students. Similarly, a Centre, or Institute for Development Studies could provide opportunities for faculty and students from across the university to network, develop key, co-ordinated research and teaching partnerships, and further raise the profile of the University of Guelph’s already successful International Development Studies programme. Such a Centre, or Institute, might house core faculty hired specifically for the IDS programme, and could also

provide a home for interdisciplinary faculty who feel more comfortable within the IDS umbrella than within their home department (although those for whom the reverse is true could remain physically based within their home department). Tenure and promotion processes more aligned with the specific challenges of interdisciplinary, engaged, and often internationally-based work could be developed, building on the tenure and promotion work of the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship, which could, perhaps, allow faculty to choose whether they are evaluated within their home department or within the Centre or Institute. The Institute, or Centre, could house the collaborative MA and PhD programmes in IDS, while the interdisciplinary undergraduate IDS programme could remain within CSAHS, but with strong linkages to the new Centre or Institute. One of the key strengths of such a Centre would be that it would allow for the voluntary participation and affiliation of faculty and students working in various departments and across colleges, providing an opportunity for those working in the broad field of development across the university to share approaches, expertise, knowledge, skills and networks. It could also serve as a communication hub, with an increased emphasis on building communication networks both amongst faculty and students through seminars, guest speakers, etc., but also with the wider community, other development-related institutions and organisations (nationally and internationally), and policy-makers. The Centre or Institute could develop and maintain key linkages with a “School for Civil Society,” but would retain its own independent international development studies identity. Alternatively, a “civil society” stream could fall within a new Centre or Institute, resolving one of the key concerns we heard throughout our interviews, which is that “international development” is more appropriate as the broader umbrella under which “civil society” could be explored, as opposed to the other way around.

For the majority of international development faculty and students we spoke with, it is clear that there is great motivation, excitement and support for the international development programme in general, alongside some key ideas for how to build and strengthen the programme. We heard that a new unit, school, or structure of any type will only work if the people that are there believe in it, and if it fits with their values, career aspirations, ambitions and beliefs. However, our interviews clearly revealed that for the majority of those consulted for this report, the idea of “civil society” does not resonate with peoples’ visions for the future of the programme.

SEDRD Perspective

Like their IDS counterparts, SEDRD faculty identified both interdisciplinarity and high quality students as important strengths of their programmes; however, the most widely cited strength of both Rural Planning and Development (RPD) and Capacity Development and Extension (CDE) was their applied nature. This focus on “real world problem-solving” – which interviewees felt sets SEDRD’s international development work apart from the more theoretically-oriented IDS, and provides an important complement to that programme – includes the teaching and practice of tangible skills such as project development, management and evaluation, budgeting, a wide variety of quantitative and qualitative research methods, communication techniques, group facilitation, and conflict management.

There was general agreement that the community-engaged work being done by faculty and graduate students in RPD and CDE seems to overlap with the vision of the proposed School for Civil Society, as currently understood by the interviewees. For two, this translated into some support for the idea that the programmes could potentially be incorporated into a new unit in some way (albeit only if significant political challenges, and the limitations presented by an exclusive focus on the third sector, could be overcome). For the majority however, in spite of the apparent overlap in mandates – or perhaps because of it – the idea of a School for Civil Society provoked some deep concerns. The first, and most significant, critique stemmed from questions regarding the resources that those interviewed assume will be invested in a new School. Specifically, there was widespread frustration that existing programmes such as RPD and CDE – with high enrolment, strong reputations, and a long-standing history of effective work with civil society – are suffering from a lack of support (in particular no funding for new hires), while the creation of a new unit similarly dedicated to engagement with civil society is being considered. This frustration was especially pronounced given the assumption that a School for Civil Society would be located within the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences, which led some to feel that the proposed initiative implies strengthening CSAHS at the expense of CDE and, in particular, RPD.

While the feeling that a new initiative should not be created while existing programmes working under a similar mandate are left to struggle was the primary critique expressed by SEDRD faculty, they also echoed many of their IDS counterparts’ concerns regarding the “School for

Civil Society” name. In addition to a general discomfort with the term “Civil Society” (for many of the same reasons outlined above), most SEDRD interviewees also felt that the term “School” was inappropriate, as it implied to them that the unit would offer professional programmes and would be too large in scale.

In spite of the misgivings many had regarding the proposed School for Civil Society, most SEDRD faculty shared the opinion of IDS interviewees that some new structural unit could have the potential to benefit their programmes and the university as a whole. Again, like those in IDS, the general preference expressed by those interviewed in SEDRD was that such a unit be a “Centre” (e.g. “Centre for Community Engagement”, “Centre for Community Service”) rather than a “School”. In order for such an endeavour to be supported broadly by SEDRD, interviews suggested that it would ideally:

- Not be located within any particular College, but rather at the university level;
- Not compete for resources with any existing programme that already focuses on community engagement and has both a proven record of success and strong reputation within and outside of the university (e.g. RPD, CDE, IDS);
- Not be limited to an exclusive focus on the third sector, which could constrain work with other actors (in particular municipal government, with which SEDRD faculty and students frequently engage);
- Focus on supporting and strengthening *existing* programmes and structural units that do community-engaged work (in addition to RPD and CDE, specific mention was made of IDS, CIP, and ICES) by facilitating communication and cooperation (e.g. encouraging more structural collaboration between IDS and SEDRD’s programmes);
- Be developed on a smaller scale than currently envisioned, at least initially (i.e. not immediately house whole programmes, but instead offer workshops and courses, host conferences, run summer schools, etc.); and
- Take seriously the results of the consultative process, rather than moving ahead with any pre-determined agenda or plans.

Appendix 1: Guideline Interview Questions

- 1) What are the key strengths of international development programs at the University of Guelph?
- 2) What do you think are the unique skills and aptitudes fostered in students through international development programs?
- 3) What values do you associate with international development programs?
- 4) What do you see as the relationship between local and global engagement?
- 5) How might international development programs fit within a new structural unit on campus?
- 6) How do you see international development programs interfacing with the proposed “School for Civil Society”?