



DESIGNING THE
SCHOOL FOR
CIVIL SOCIETY

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

WHAT ARE THE TRENDS YOU SEE THAT WILL HAVE EFFECTS ON BUILDING THE SCHOOL FOR CIVIL SOCIETY?



Our demographics at Guelph are changing - it's very exciting to think that within the last five to six years, we've moved from about 75 Aboriginal students to 381 who have self-identified on our main campus. There are approximately 700 International Students – with 200 from China. The number of commuter students is increasing – roughly 1,200 of our entering students come from within 100 kilometres so, with the economic factors coming into play, more students are commuting to Guelph after their first year and working part-time to finance their education. We have an increasing number of First Generation students – those who are the first in their families to attend college or university. These students often arrive without the support net that others have, or a frame of reference that values community engagement as a vehicle for developing valuable skills, contributing to the betterment of society, and solving complex problems.

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So, from an engagement perspective, how will we ensure that students who catch the bus to travel home every day, or those who are working when they aren't in class are connected in a real way to this community? What are the implications for the kind of work that we are doing and the support that is needed from us?

WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR THE SCHOOL FOR CIVIL SOCIETY?



I really see it as first and foremost an ethos. Across this campus, whether in the classroom or not, whether engaged with community partners or in the playing field, we are really fostering some values around civic engagement and action for the common good. At the heart of it all, those values are already present – that is clear whenever one hears about the rates of volunteerism and community service on this campus. However, this school will in many ways serve as the physical embodiment of those values and as a catalyst for further dialogue, education and collaboration, encompassing research initiatives, co-curricular activities, and scholarship.

Once again yesterday, I met with a group of students who have an exciting idea they want to implement – they want to connect a service experience that addresses an issue of local and global significance to a course. We are supporting these students in navigating the system and in developing this initiative, however, the time has come to approach opportunities like this in a collaborative way, and to leverage the skills, knowledge and expertise held by staff, faculty and students across the campus seamlessly, in an environment of commonly held values. A school for civil society will provide not only an infrastructure to facilitate this important work, but a web of resources and support that will inspire the most innovative and responsive approaches possible. Now THAT is exciting!

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