

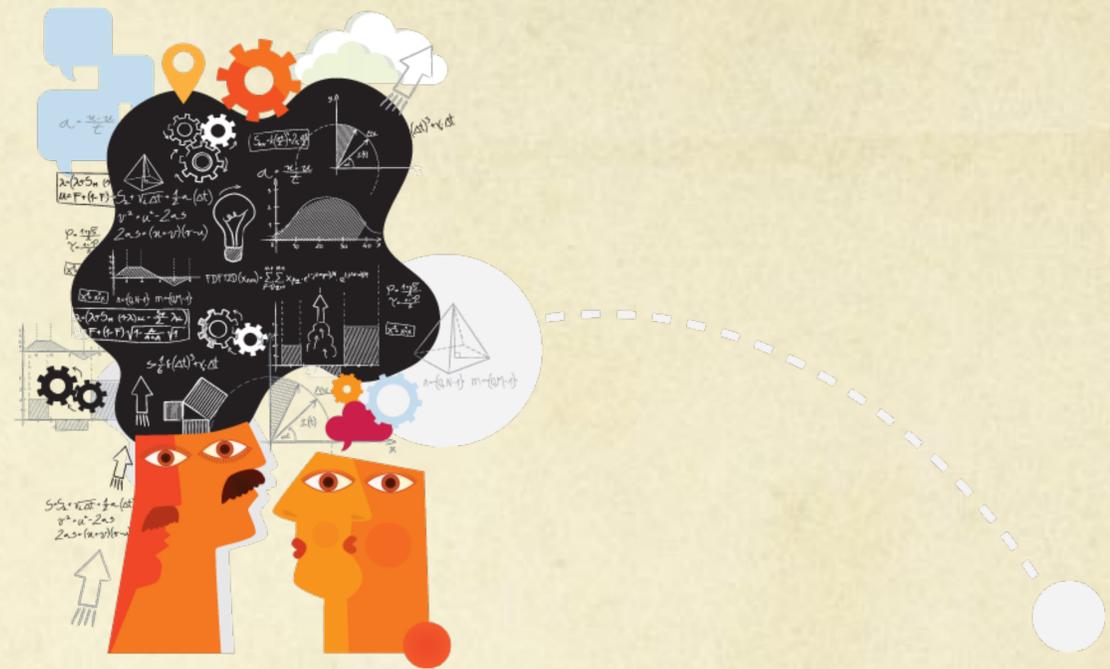
Introduction:

Creating a Vision for the School for Civil Society & Engagement

Why? Poverty, environmental sustainability, political instability, infectious disease, homelessness, unemployment - complex social, political and economic issues that require equally complex, creative, innovative and multi-disciplinary action. Interconnections across issues requires practical *and* scholarly knowledge and skills, social *and* biophysical approaches, attention to humans *and* other species, understandings of policy regimes *and* the work of local practitioners. The vision for a School for Civil Society and Engagement at the University of Guelph seeks to bring together expertise, to develop and support rich partnerships that will explore and actively address issues in local and international contexts, and to develop deep learning processes, modes for reflection and the teaching of new skills and knowledge(s) that see civil society actors, students and faculty engage for change.

Why Guelph? The University of Guelph has both a long history *and* a new emphasis on engagement with civil society.

- Over a hundred years of agricultural **extension** with many practices that actively link teachers with students, farmers and communities locally, regionally, and internationally- with webs of relationships and competent feedback loops that inform both classroom and research endeavours with relevance.
- Our reputation for the **civic engagement of undergraduate students** in local voluntarism and service through participation such as in Project Serve, WUSC local committees, and both Vets and Engineers without Borders.
- The collaboration International Development studies programs **pioneered** “ID” in Canada, with a firm scholarly foundation in a **unique collaborative model** producing graduates who excel across disciplines
- New engagement with citizens as a tool for change in **multiple complex initiatives** across our campuses and colleges including individual faculty efforts, research centres, degree programs and collaborations, from a permaculture program that supports primary schools and food security in Kenya, a “Biobus” that links scientist and naturalist communities on DNA barcoding of species, the Centre for Business and Social Entrepreneurship (CBaSE) service learning with both industry and nonprofit outputs, and the linking of engagement and scholarship through community based research of the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship (ICES) and the Research Shop
- Unique pedagogies that push against typical first year classrooms with too many students and powerpoints and exploration of interdisciplinary learning opportunities grounded in experiential learning such as the First Year Seminar Courses, 4th Year Capstone Courses with applied focus, and the many practicum, fieldwork and other placements both local and international



Early conversations began in fall of 2011 to think about the school, and in February 2012 a team of three was charged with managing the process to create a vision. This Catalyst Team* composed of campus leaders with expertise in engagement, international development and planning, designed further strategies and process, and to elicit support from additional stakeholders.

The objectives of all conversations, convening and dialogue over the last year have been to:

- *Broaden and deepen thinking on the meaning of civil society and the linkages between the universities and civil society sector*
- *Engage university constituents in a process of imagining how the University of Guelph can move in a direction of greater engagement*
- *Engage community, civil society organizations and individuals to inform and partner in building greater opportunities for teaching, learning and engagement*
- *Provide vision and key directions for a new school for civil society that re-imagines civic engagement, community engaged scholarship and international development*

Through a process of engaging others to convene conversations, conduct interviews and visioning sessions on campus and beyond, a plethora of ideas, information, inspirations and suggested directions have been gathered. Contributions from faculty, students and practitioners, pedagogy innovators, arts-based educators, international development practitioners, radical librarians, and many partners were complimented by an international scan of efforts at other universities, and a snapshot of complex initiatives around community engagement, research and teaching already taking place at the University of Guelph.

*The members of the Catalyst Team are Linda Hawkins (Director, Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship), Wayne Caldwell (Director, School of Environmental Design and Rural Development), and Belinda Leach (Associate Dean (Research), College of Social and Applied Human Sciences)

