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**ADDRESS TO THE SYMPOSIUM ON 'THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES AND
RESEARCH/CULTURAL CENTERS IN CIVILIZATIONS DIALOGUE'**

**GLOBAL UNIVERSITIES:
INCUBATORS FOR WORLD LEADERS**

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Introduction

In the last few decades, the world has witnessed a revolution in information and communication technologies that has created unprecedented world connectedness and given rise to global interdependence. An increase in the mobility of people as well as knowledge-sharing across the globe, have become common characteristics of the world in which we live today. Indeed, today's global economy is being driven primarily by systems of knowledge, the opportunity to transform knowledge into services and products, and the capacity to build bridges with others across the world. In response to the need to operate, create knowledge and prepare new generations of young people in this new global context, major universities have adopted internationalization as a strategic priority.

Overview of Internationalization Strategies

For any country, the ability to build a prosperous society is closely linked to that nation's capacity to build a leading knowledge-based economy and to have the human resources capable of functioning in a global context. As such, the predominant internationalization strategies for universities include: academic programs and curricula that enhance students' understanding of world cultures; massive growth of global research consortia; faculty and student exchanges; joint degree offerings; and an unprecedented increase in the number of international students on university campuses.

Global Universities: The Campus Environment

To facilitate such internationalization strategies necessitated by this new global context, universities have developed campus environments that encourage and support positive interactions of individuals from many diverse backgrounds. The creation of such environments not only facilitates the development of future world citizens, but can also serve as a model—and perhaps even a catalyst—for world peace.

As global universities welcome domestic and international diversity in their students, staff and faculty, they have a fundamental responsibility to foster respect for the equal value and dignity of each person while they are with the institution, and beyond. Such humanitarian values can only be transmitted through exposure to and participation in rigorous debates and dialogues about challenging subjects that may fall outside an individual's cultural experience or comfort zone.

With their academic mission of discovery and the transmission of knowledge in research and scholarship, universities, arguably more so than other institutions, have learning and exploration at the core of their existence. As organizations that value the curiosity, creativity and innovation intrinsic to the intellectual endeavor, universities are unique spaces where difficult and challenging issues are freely discussed and collide in remarkable ways. Academic freedom and freedom of speech are essential to the mission and principles of the academy. Moreover, when considering the dialogue of civilizations, the best and most cited universities often have strong humanities and social sciences departments, which foster difficult dialogues and cultural exchanges with the aim of encouraging understanding, respect, and practices that sustain democracy and allow individuals to exercise the rights and responsibilities of good citizenship. Global universities are thus uniquely equipped to bring together diverse cultures, groups and civilizations for such vital exchanges.

As citizens of our globe continue to travel and/or relocate for educational, personal and business purposes, it becomes ever more important that they become better acclimatized to different cultures, ideas, ways of thinking and perspectives. Today, the availability of modern technologies that connect the world at an unprecedented level should serve as catalysts to foster better understanding among world cultures. However, technology is not enough. Without understanding, appreciation and respect for differences, we will remain in conflict and the advancement of civilizations will continue to be in jeopardy.

This was most vividly and tragically demonstrated during the First and Second World Wars. Following these conflicts, and specifically the Second World War, various civilizations came together to form the United Nations and the Declaration of Human Rights, with notable involvement by the Canadian legal scholar, John Peter Humphrey. The Declaration holds that all members of the human family have inherent and inalienable rights of dignity and equality which are the foundation of freedom, justice and peace. Signatories to the Declaration, including Canada, agreed to follow the Declaration and strive to teach and educate their citizens about the need to respect such fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Indeed, these fundamental rights were later adopted by Canada in its Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as in the national Canadian Human Rights Act. Canadian provinces also adopted similar fundamental rights through their respective Human Rights Codes. Private and public institutions, including universities across Canada, have in turn implemented policies that adhere to these fundamental rights. This is not only the right thing to do morally, but there is a legal imperative that compels public and private institutions to adopt such policies and practices. Without them, institutions are much more vulnerable to legal action by those whose rights are infringed, as they have no internal mechanisms by which to address such complaints when they arise.

York University: Incubating World Leaders

As a former international student, my perspective on internationalization and global partnerships in higher education reflect my personal experiences as well as my views as President and Vice-Chancellor of York University, Canada's third largest university. As one of Canada's most multicultural universities, York University is home to more than 65,000 students, faculty and staff who can trace their roots to 177 countries around the globe. With research that is influencing global thinking and alumni making an impact on distant communities, York University is, in every way, a global university. Collectively, the York community is learning in 20 languages and studying abroad in places like Beijing, Helsinki, Paris and Mumbai, with hundreds of international academic and student exchange agreements. As reflected in University policy, research partnerships, administrative offices, student clubs, and other institutional initiatives, we remain committed to internationalization as a strategic priority and to incubating the leaders of tomorrow for global citizenship by providing a campus environment rich in diversity and founded on the principles of equity, tolerance, and inclusivity.

The imperative to adopt such policies and practices is even more critical at organizations such as my own, York University, where students are admitted from all walks of life—from urban to rural regions; from upper to lower-income backgrounds; from new immigrant families and from many historically disadvantaged groups and communities. This diversity in our student body is further enhanced by the University's goal of attracting a greater number of international students from every part of the world. We see diversity as one of our greatest strengths as it exposes our students to the multiplicity inherent in world cultures, religions, political views, etc.

Under the Division of Students, all aspects of student life are considered and addressed to help build both a sense of community as well as citizenship. This is done through various programs where critical learning opportunities are made available to students related to leadership as well as community-building skills. Examples include *YUConnect*, York's new online system that allows students to get involved by tracking their out-of-the-classroom experience in a revolutionary way. It gives students a directory to find clubs and to match opportunities to their self-selected interests. It is also a platform for creating a record of a student's extra and co-curricular involvement throughout their time at York. Another example is a leadership program called *LeaderShape*, a partnership with the LeaderShape Institute that facilitates six intensive days of dialogue and interactive self-discovery in a supportive learning community.

Each of these initiatives is aimed at engaging students with each other and also with their community, with a goal of learning from each other's similarities as well as differences. The University encourages students to create clubs and groups that reflect their interests, ethnic backgrounds, political worldviews, etc. Today, York is home to more than 300 student-run clubs and organizations that fall under various categories including academic, advocacy, charitable, environmental, faith-based, professional, and so on. The University also encourages student leadership through organized student bodies who arrange activities for their fellow students, such as the student-run Orientation and Multi-Cultural weeks, as well as providing services and resources for students, including for students with disabilities, racialized students, and students of differing sexual orientation. This extra-curricular involvement not only enhances students' experience outside of the classroom, it also enriches the classroom environment.

In addition to these student-focused initiatives, a number of other offices educate students about their rights and responsibilities. York's Centre for Human Rights is an office dedicated to addressing human rights questions and concerns on campus, providing specialized training about human rights both online and in-person, including sessions on positive space, race and inclusion, consent awareness for first-year students, and a tutorial on Respect, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (REDI).

The Centre for Human Rights has also created dialogue sessions over the last few years on international topics of importance to our students, including: multi-faith dialogue sessions (several sessions held over the course of two years designed to learn from external faith leaders of each Abrahamic religion about the common principles and tenants of each faith); and intercultural dialogue sessions (an ongoing partnership with an external organization over the course of the past three years about topics ranging from peace in the Middle East to rebuilding the Somalian economy/society).

Enriching our campus environments is one important way that Canadian universities are contributing to the overall enrichment of our national environment and culture, as well as helping to build a global culture that encourages understanding rather than dissension. That being said, along with the increasing number of ethnic, cultural, religious, racial, national and sexual diversities on our campuses—as students learn and study side-by-side in both large and small classes—tensions and apprehensions are inevitable. York University has put in place several measures to assist in addressing these issues primarily in a proactive manner, and secondarily to resolve matters as they arise. We have instituted a student code of conduct that applies to all students, and students are made aware of their rights and responsibilities.

To complement the proactive educational and outreach initiatives, there is a process to address concerns and complaints about discrimination and harassment through the offices of Student Relations (OSCR) and the Centre for Human Rights. The University also provides critical support to students through offices such as Counselling & Disability Services as well as Student Relations and ResLife. International students also benefit from an office dedicated to orienting them about Canadian values and norms as well as their rights and responsibilities in Canada. There is a great deal of information available for students

both international and domestic, and we understand that the emotional and mental wellbeing of students is paramount as they grow to become engaged world citizens and as they are challenged about their cultural and personal views.

Global Citizenship: The Canadian Postsecondary Education Landscape

Given its mission of higher learning, I believe that a university succeeds best as a member of the wider universe. This has always been true, and is increasingly true today. The ultimate goal of leading universities today is the development of global citizenship. By instilling in our students, staff and faculty a sense of social responsibility and a public spirit, we are preparing them to be and to become the world leaders of tomorrow, who will lead peaceful and sustainable initiatives for the betterment of all civilizations.

Universities in Canada are increasingly adopting this internationalization strategy, as a comprehensive survey conducted in 2014 by the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada (AUCC) showed.¹ Indeed, the theme of the most recent International Education Week conference, hosted by the Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) this past November, was 'Celebrating Canada's Engagement with the World.' We are fortunate that our country's deliberate immigration policies over the last 50 years have helped to make Canada the model state for multiculturalism that it is today.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I strongly believe that as universities develop internationalization strategies to address the needs of their graduates in the global landscape of the twenty-first century, it is important to ensure that their academic programs, research activities and student life reflect a strong commitment to promoting and supporting intercultural understanding and the values of equity and freedom of expression. This should be a priority for all institutions of higher learning today, as what is at stake is not only the development of world citizens, but the possibility of world peace.

¹ *Canada's Universities in the World* – AUCC Internationalization Survey (December 2014). <http://www.aucc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/internationalization-survey-2014.pdf>