

"BUILDING CIVIL SOCIETY AND GLOBAL CONSCIOUSNESS"

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SOME of the previous columns in this series have illustrated the ways in which universities – through their teaching, research and service roles in the emerging knowledge economy – have a direct impact on both our regional and national economic development. While we must not downplay these contributions, we must also recognize the increasingly important societal roles that our university communities play.

Through their power to bring about change and shape the thinking of today's policy makers, our students, faculty, staff and alumni are helping to transform our existing social mosaic.

Cardinal John Henry Newman, writing in 1852, saw the purpose of a university to be "the training of good members of society." Such a viewpoint harkens back to an age when education was reserved for the elite and a time when there was greater stability in the world. Today, we enjoy a more inclusive university enrolment, but we face the imperatives of greater interdependencies and competitiveness among countries and the need, in my view, for a global consciousness – not only by policy makers, but within ourselves.

Universities have historically embraced the Newmanesque role of developing the foundations for civil society by providing the essential tools of civilization and, hopefully, guidance on their application. Through the more inclusive enrolment to changes in curriculum, participation in international development projects, offshore programming, study/work abroad programs, and the attraction of international students and faculty, the university campus of today is more informed and globally conscious than ever before.

Our university communities are helping to achieve UNESCO's World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century, promulgated in 1998, of being at the forefront of "the development of a more equitable, tolerant and responsible society."

While institutional leadership is important in articulating the values of civil society and in providing the environment for dialogue, debate and societal change, it is the engagement of the campus with societal groups – including on a transnational basis – that can be a powerful and sustaining dynamic that goes beyond academic disciplines and institutional boundaries.

In my own undergraduate university days in the U.K., the campus imperative was the campaign for nuclear disarmament (CND) that had gathered momentum following the

Bertrand Russell-Albert Einstein Manifesto to the World of 1955. Signed by 11 other prominent scientists, it stated, "We appeal as human beings to human beings: Remember your humanity and forget the rest." While I knew that these words had led to a significant international movement among some of the scientific community, it was not until I came to Halifax that I realized the role Nova Scotia played as a venue in bringing about major global policy changes. I am referring, of course, to the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, that celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2007.

Through the leadership of the late Joseph Rotblat, then a scientist at Liverpool University in the U.K. and a past member of the Manhattan Project, and with the assistance of Cyrus Eaton, a Canadian-born U.S. industrialist, 22 scientists and their associates from both sides of the Cold War met at Eaton's summer home (Thinkers' Lodge) in Pugwash. This historic conference became the forerunner of a series of meetings that are credited with providing the basis for a number of groundbreaking multilateral treaties. In the 1970s, these included the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and the SALT Accords; and in the '90s, the Chemical Weapons Convention. Indeed, the Russell-Einstein Manifesto is often referred to as the Pugwash Manifesto and, in 1995, Rotblat and Pugwash were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

At a time when the threat from the proliferation of nuclear weapons is once more in the international policy arena, Thinkers' Lodge will be the site for yet another extraordinary gathering in July of next year. A highly anticipated workshop, chaired by Senator Douglas Roche, will commemorate the milestone anniversary of this historic conference and will provide a further needed catalyst to the vision of the Pugwash Manifesto. Co-sponsored by a number of NGOs, including the Pugwash Park Commission, the Pugwash Peace Exchange and the Middle Powers Initiative, the workshop will produce an action plan which could lead to the conclusion of a Nuclear Weapons Convention.

The Pugwash Conferences, inspired by a group of scientists and peace advocate Cyrus Eaton, are but one illustration of the engagement and leadership role that academics and others can play in framing public policy. I am sure the readers of this newspaper can point to many other examples of initiatives of global consciousness that confirm the Newman vision and the more recent UNESCO declaration of the centrality of university communities in building civil society in Canada and around the world.

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Saint Mary's University is known for its community outreach projects, both in Canada and around the world. Saint Mary's, founded in 1802, is home to one of Canada's leading business schools, a Science Faculty widely known for its cutting-edge research, a comprehensive and innovative Arts Faculty and a new Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research.