

Message from the President – November 2009

The next time you walk through the main hallway of the new residence buildings, look up at the ceiling at the dozens of flags hanging there. These represent the home countries of all the students who live in residence. It is an impressive visual display that honours our University's global connections and recognizes and welcomes our international community on campus.

One of our longest-standing global connections is with the People's Republic of China. I traveled there recently with a University of Regina delegation to renew our relationship with our first international partner. This relationship dates back more than four decades to the first visit by an official Chinese group in September, 1966. In 1980, our University, with the Government of Saskatchewan, organized the first nationwide Canada-China Trade Conference. The following year, the University signed a formal "twinning" exchange agreement with Shandong University (SDU). Since then, visits by delegations and visiting scholars, student and faculty exchanges, research and teaching collaborations, honorary degrees, study tours, and scholarship agreements have followed with Chinese schools, agencies and individuals.

Today, students from China represent the largest international group on campus. This fall, almost half of our 918 international students enrolled in credit programs are from the People's Republic of China. An additional 101 Chinese students are in the non-credit English as a Second Language (ESL) program.

We'll be honouring this important partnership in 2011, with plans to celebrate the 30th anniversary of our relationship with SDU and China as we mark 100 years of education at what is now known as the University of Regina.

When I met with students in China, I told them that it is easy to be part of a Chinese community at our University – we have many different Chinese student groups here with whom they can become involved – but I also told them it is easy to be part of a Canadian community. This reciprocal nature of our relationship is important and is true of all our international partnerships. While there are many things for our international students to learn here, just as importantly, our international students have so much to teach our students and professors.

Our international students – through their culture, traditions, and presence – are making our campus an increasingly diverse and international learning environment. They help bring global perspectives to our campus, and at the same time are University of Regina students and as such, are part of a strong community of learning, research and service to the world.

We also know that international study contributes greatly to our national economy, another benefit of international education of interest to me in my role as Chair-Designate of the Canadian Bureau for International Education. According to a recent report commissioned by Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, international students contributed \$6.5 billion to the Canadian economy in 2008. The report also credits international study in the country with creating more than 83,000 jobs and generating over \$291 million in revenue.

It is important to note that while the majority of our international students are from China, students from many other countries are an important part of our campus as well. The remainder of our 918 international students who are taking credit programs are from nearly 75 other countries. Most are studying for Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral degrees, and an additional 228 students from countries other than China are studying ESL at any given time.

Two of our newest international partnerships have been with organizations in Saudi Arabia and Nigeria. In spring 2008, 18 students from Saudi Arabia enrolled in our ESL program; that number grew to 100 a year later. This fall, nine undergraduate students and five graduate students are on campus through programs under the Saudi Arabian Cultural Bureau of the Saudi Ministry of Education. We have also recently welcomed students from Nigeria to the University. A new program with the Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency (RSSDA) in Nigeria has seen 49 students arrive in May 2009 and another 12 this fall. Through international scholarships, the RSSDA prepares students for active roles in creating new and emerging industries in Nigeria. Many of the students here are enrolled in the Faculty of Engineering as well as Business, Arts and Science. Fifteen more students are expected for January 2010.

In total, our university has close to 150 academic agreements with institutions in more than 30 countries, and we regularly welcome international visitors and dignitaries to our campus. So far in 2009, we've hosted visitors from close to 20 countries.

Our international agreements allow us to bring our knowledge to the world – for example, our Faculty of Education is helping with technical training in Malawi. These agreements also provide our students with the opportunity to visit other parts of the world. As we developed our strategic plan, our students told us they would like more opportunities for experiential learning. We have mobility agreements with 84 institutions around the world and we are committed to developing more ways to increase the options for our students to get international experience. I encourage every student to consider these opportunities.

We can all realize the potential that international education offers to us and to our world. It is one of the best ways to create understanding among peoples and to develop enduring political, cultural and economic links between nations. As a university and as individuals, we have an important leadership role in creating global connections, and it can begin with our relationships with the people around us.