

# Universities and the IBO: your mission is our mission

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Thank you and good morning. It's an honour and a pleasure to be here with you today: an honour to have been asked to give the prestigious Peterson Lecture and a pleasure to feel that, in doing so, I am among friends and associates who share an interest in and passion for "international" education.

I'd like to begin by saying how proud University of British Columbia (UBC) is of our own contribution to the IB movement, in the person of your secretary, Dr Sid Katz. You appear to have discovered something about Sid that we at UBC have known for a long time. While other, less industrious individuals can make any job expand to fill the time that they have available, Sid seems to be able to make his time expand to fill the number of interesting jobs that are available. He brings a mixture of energy and enthusiasm that we appreciate enormously—and that we are happy to share with the IBO.

I also believe that, although we have not engaged in direct negotiations, we have nevertheless achieved something of a fair trade. I'm thinking, in this instance, of a single IB graduate, a young man named Spencer Keyes, who this year was president of UBC's student body, the Alma Mater Society.

Spencer is a remarkable young man—curious, knowledgeable, thoughtful and a wonderfully effective communicator. In my dealings with him, I have found him to be not only open-minded and bold, but also principled, compassionate and balanced in his approach. He has, during his term, made an outstanding contribution to UBC; he has shown himself to be what people always refer to as a "born leader".

But while leaders are certainly born with their own gifts, the skills of leadership must be learned, and I wasn't completely surprised to find out, from Sid Katz, that Spencer Keyes learned his leadership skills as an IB student.

That brings me to the two things that I would like to accomplish with the time that you have so generously given me today. First, I would like to applaud and celebrate the International Baccalaureate Organization. I would like to offer a statistical and anecdotal argument for why I believe that the IB programme has been a boon to my university and to other universities around the world. This is clearly an argument that focuses more on the advantages gained by post-secondary institutions than on the benefits gained by the students themselves.

Then I would like to delve more deeply into the true challenge that the IBO has taken in hand—and the more substantive benefit that I believe the IB programme confers. The programme's goal, as I interpret it, is not just to educate students who are particularly well prepared for university. It is to educate students who are well prepared for the world. That goal—preparing students to assume their rights and responsibilities as global citizens—is one that my university, UBC, shares with the IBO. Indeed, it's a goal that I think we should all share.

But let's first begin with the celebration. The University of British Columbia is proud to be the third highest recipient of International Baccalaureate students among all universities in North America—and let me tell you we are delighted to have them.

As a large, comprehensive research university that is consistently ranked in the top 40 universities in the world, UBC is in an incredibly competitive environment. We are forever trying to stretch limited resources to meet our educational and research potential, even as we compete with other richly-endowed institutions for faculty, for funding and, especially, for students.

I suppose it's something of a cliché to maintain that in order to have a great university you **must** have great students... that even if you have great facilities, great resources and great faculty, you will not be a great university if you don't have great students. Why is this so? Why are great students so important to a university's success? I would suggest two reasons.

Firstly, great students enhance the learning environment for other students. They lead, inspire and stimulate the students around them—energizing the classrooms, lecture halls and laboratories with their intellectual curiosity and social awareness. They shape the scholarly debate and discussions both inside and outside the classroom. They assume leadership positions throughout the academy—pushing their peers to think differently and to act responsibly. Case in point, Spencer Keyes.

And secondly, great students foster outstanding research and knowledge discovery. About 15 years ago I had the opportunity to visit Stanford University to acquaint myself with the science and research environment of this world-class university. During that visit, I was privileged to have lunch with six Nobel Laureates—individuals who had spent their entire careers at Stanford, winning the prize later in their lives. Knowing full well that they would have had numerous offers from other universities, I wondered why they had all spent their entire careers at Stanford, and so I asked them what had kept them there. I assumed that they would identify Stanford's superb research environment as the reason. I was dumbfounded when they uniformly cited the quality of the **students** at Stanford, not only as the reason for their staying there, but also as the underlying reason for their Nobel achievements. They all believed passionately that the excellent students at Stanford had stimulated them as much as they had stimulated the students—and that it was the students who had pushed them to ask the questions that ultimately led to their research discoveries and their Nobel Prizes. Great students, great universities!

It is for these reasons that most universities work hard to identify great students. That is why we try to set high admission standards—even though neither SAT scores in the United States nor stellar high school marks in Canada turn out to be consistently good predictors of success at university.

There is, however, one excellent predictor of success. There is, in our experience, one reliable way to identify a great student with excellent prospects. A couple of years ago Paul Harrison, our associate dean of science, tracked a cohort of IB students to measure their performance against students matriculating in other programmes. He compared the IB students' marks with the class averages and he found that when IB students entered first-year courses, they scored marks that were 12–13% above the average. That's pretty good.

But there is another result that is even more impressive. Given the high level of accomplishment that is typical among IB students, UBC offers a first-year credit to any student who has scored a 5 or a 6 on a higher level IB course, allowing those students to enter directly into second-year courses. Dr Harrison found that students who had accepted that offer—students who went directly from completing the IB programme into second-year university—scored 7–12% above the class average. That’s 7–12% higher than students who had already spent a year at university.

That’s very impressive. As a measure of the IB programme, it’s also simple, clear and evidence-based. And, while we at UBC don’t need to be coaching the competition, I would suggest that this presents an obvious avenue for you to pursue in building your relationship with other universities and with the community at large.

Challenge universities to conduct this kind of assessment. Challenge all post-secondary institutions to follow the progress of IB students—and to measure their performance against the entire student population. I dare say that the closer other universities look at IB performance levels, the more enthusiastically they will support the programme.

That’s the statistical argument for the institutional benefit of the IB programme; now I’d like to share a brief anecdotal example.

Hannah is a 16-year-old student in an IB preparation stream at Sir Winston Churchill, a high school in Vancouver. Hannah has already distinguished herself as a good student by any number of measures.

I asked her why she had chosen the IB stream, given that she and her high school compatriots recognize it as a much more rigorous programme. And I asked the question on a day when she had passed up a family ski trip to Whistler to try to catch up on her homework.

She said, “The extra work doesn’t bother me. It’s **better** work. It’s more interesting work. It’s not fluff.” On the contrary, she said, “Everything seems to have a purpose and I get something back from everything I do. It’s not a chore.” (What an incredible endorsement from a 16-year-old!)

Hannah also said she appreciated that everyone else in the programme is as motivated as she is. “There is,” she said, “no weak link when you’re doing group work.” Once again, great students foster excellence in other students around them.

If I had any doubts about how hard UBC competes for IB students, Hannah would have put them to rest. We **do** compete. UBC is aggressive about courting IB students. As I mentioned, we typically offer first-year credit to any student who has scored a 5 or a 6 on a higher level IB course. We offer six university credits in philosophy for any student who scores an A or a B on the theory of knowledge.

In 2004, we gave scholarships to 46% of students entering UBC from a Canadian IB programme. Students who had an anticipated IB score of 35 or a final score of 32 (including bonus points) automatically qualified for the Undergraduate Scholars Program, a complete scholarship package that included a C\$2,500 grant, early registration and a guaranteed place in a campus residence.

In 2005, we admitted 348 IB students, comprising 8% of our first-year class and representing a 13% increase over the previous year. Of those registrants, 84 came from outside North America and 23 came from the United States. We have also recruited IB students by pointing out the similarities in some of our academic programmes—the fit.

UBC is building a reputation for its interactive and interdisciplinary undergraduate programmes—something that IB students find immediately familiar. In the first year, for example, we offer team-taught, interdisciplinary programmes such as Arts One, Foundations, Science One and a Coordinated Science Programme.

Like the IB programme, these programmes take a holistic approach to education. They push students beyond rote learning, forcing them to ask—and answer—the question “why?”, and inspiring them to make connections to every part of learning, and every part of life.

That leads me to my second point today—to the connection that the IB programme promotes to life—to the world. I have said a fair amount about the importance of recruiting excellent students. And I suspect that the IBO shares that concern. We are all delighted when someone like Hannah walks through the door. But the real question is this: what do you do with that student once he or she has passed into your care? What is your underlying educational mission?

Let me tell you first about UBC’s. We have recently redrafted our strategic plan, creating a document that we call *Trek 2010*. (It is, I have to say, mostly a coincidence that 2010 is the year that Vancouver will host the Winter Olympics.)

The vision statement from *Trek 2010* reads as follows:

The University of British Columbia, aspiring to be one of the world’s best universities, will prepare students to become exceptional global citizens, promote the values of a civil and sustainable society, and conduct outstanding research to serve the people of British Columbia, Canada, and the world.

Now, we didn’t define the term “exceptional global citizens”. But if I were looking for a definition, I might choose something like this:

Exceptional global citizens are: “inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect”.

I might define the term even further by stating that exceptional global citizens are “active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right”.

You may well have recognized those definitions as excerpts from the IBO mission statement, which I read as a statement of common cause with UBC.

But I would like to offer one more “mission statement”—an older one, but one that I have always found inspiring. This one derives from the Greek philosopher Diogenes, who when asked where he came from, replied, “I am a citizen of the world”.

I don’t think that Diogenes meant that he was particularly worldly in the modern sense. He certainly was not well travelled by any standard we would recognize today.

No, Diogenes meant only that he refused to be defined simply by his local origins and group affiliations; he insisted on defining himself in terms of more universal aspirations and concerns.

The Stoics who followed his lead developed his image of the *kosmopolites*, or world citizen, arguing that each of us dwells, in effect, in two communities—the local community of our birth and the broader community of human argument and aspiration.

This is important. A global citizen is not one who is willing to sacrifice his local affiliations. On the contrary, it is the values inherent in the local and global communities coming together within an individual that I believe constitutes global citizenship. We need not give up our special affiliations and identities, whether national or ethnic or religious, but we do need to work to make all human beings part of one community of dialogue and concern, framing local or national politics within a broader structure of respect for all human beings.

If there could ever have been any doubt, since Diogenes' era, about the importance of such an approach, I would think it has been settled since the turn of this new millennium. The world has grown smaller and increasingly dangerous—whether the risks come from disease, political upheaval, economic interconnectedness, international terrorism or environmental degradation, we are evermore obviously all citizens of one finite planet.

But the threats—and temptations—of this global citizenship are not a new discovery. The warning notes were sounded half a century ago by a great Canadian—someone who was instrumental in establishing the internationalist reputation for which Canada is still renowned. Lester Bowles Pearson was Canada's prime minister from 1963 to 1968. In the 1950s, he was a minister of external affairs, a member of the United Nations General Assembly and, in 1952, its president. In 1957, Pearson won the Nobel Peace Prize for his role in resolving the crisis over the Suez Canal.

Even before this, in 1946, when he was still a functionary in the Canadian diplomatic corps, he foresaw the dangers posed by a rapidly shrinking world:

“Fear and suspicion engendered in Iran can easily spread to Great Bear Lake above the Arctic Circle in Canada and bedevil economic developments there. There is, now, no refuge in remoteness.”

“There is, now, no refuge in remoteness”—no protection to be gained by distance, by oceans or borders or walls of any sort. Pearson understood this in 1946. He saw the way the world was heading. I would argue that most North Americans didn't fully digest the implications of that warning until the events of 9/11.

Pearson was a quotable man. In 1957 in Oslo, accepting his Nobel Peace Prize, he spoke of the horrors of the first and second world wars and of the unsteady peace that followed. He said:

“I have lived since—as you have—in a period of cold war during which we have ensured by our achievements in the science and technology of destruction that a third act in this tragedy of war will result in the peace of extinction.”

“The peace of extinction.” It's a chilling image, isn't it? And for a while, it was an image that caught our attention, an image that forced everyone to the world's great negotiating tables. But when the cold war drew to a trembling close—when Francis Fukuyama declared “The End of History”—the rules changed. And when the global threat came home to North America on 11 September 2001 there were those who thought that reviving isolationism might yet be a reasonable alternative.

Even 50 years ago, Pearson knew differently. He said:

“We are now emerging into an age when different civilizations will have to learn to live side by side in peaceful interchange, learning from each other, studying each other’s history and ideals and art and culture, mutually enriching each others’ lives. The alternative, in this overcrowded little world, is misunderstanding, tension, clash, and catastrophe.”

That is my favourite image of global citizenship—an image of engagement, an image in which we do more than merely acknowledge the differences of those around us. We study “each other’s history and ideals and art and culture, mutually enriching each other’s lives”.

So then how do we provide such an education—one that prepares students to be exceptional global citizens? If we are to succeed in educating students who comprehend their responsibilities as citizens of the world, we must embed the messages of citizenship and global responsibility in every course, in every specialty.

Barry McBride, a former VP academic and provost at UBC, recently offered a nice example of how that might work—or, more specifically, on how it has **not** been working to date. He said that, as a microbiologist, he had spent his entire teaching career trying to get students excited about things like the bacteriology of salmonella; but in all his classes—in almost four decades of talking about salmonella—never once did he draw a connection between what was happening in the Petri dish and the little boy in Guatemala who, for lack of a safe water source, was going to die from diarrhea.

That’s got to change. Anyone who has read the bestseller *Reading Lolita in Tehran* by Azar Nafisi can begin to imagine how even with the teaching of *Pride and Prejudice* or the novels of Henry James one can stimulate students to think globally. This, then, is our challenge—to transform our curriculums so that they reflect our commitment to the education of future global citizens.

While we at UBC are beginning to revise our curriculums, I believe that the IB programme has already made significant progress through its aim to develop “internationally minded people who, recognizing our common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet, help to create a better, more peaceful world”. In other words, global citizens.

There is another aspect to the IB educational programme that also reflects and defines a degree of **global** citizenship, but that most often occurs on a very local scale: it is community service.

I believe that community service is critical—at UBC as in the IB programme—because isolationism begins at home. The fear, mistrust and misunderstanding that characterize the worst of international discourse are just as destructive—and sometimes more prevalent—on a local scale. People who build fences and bar their windows never get to know their neighbours. They never grow to understand and appreciate what makes them different; they never discover the common concerns that make them the same.

It is greatly to the IBO’s credit—a wonderful tribute to the memory of people like Alec Peterson—that your organization came to understand the importance of community service so early. And it is greatly to the advantage of your students—and your broader community.

UBC has come to this area only recently. Nevertheless, we are determined to develop it as one more positive similarity with the IB programme.

We began our first organized programme of community service in 1999, when we opened something called the Downtown Eastside Learning Exchange. Vancouver's Downtown Eastside is infamous as Canada's most impoverished neighbourhood. There are chronic problems of drug addiction and mental illness, homelessness and hopelessness. It is a part of town that UBC students and their parents would usually avoid.

But in 2000, 30 students began offering their services as volunteers in 10 non-profit organizations—tutoring, gardening, coaching basketball—whatever was needed. Under the direction of the Learning Exchange director, Dr Margo Fryer, the programme grew to 60 students the next year and to 150 the year after that.

There was a significant amount of early concern. Students worried about their safety, parents worried about their children and the people in the Downtown Eastside worried about an influx of university dilettantes coming to experiment in their neighbourhood. But as the students immersed themselves in the community, everyone began to notice incredible benefits. We became more and more excited about the possibilities and set a goal: we now want to see at least 10% of UBC's students participating in community service every year.

This year, we broke through the 1,000 mark—not bad after just six years—and 25% of those students are also earning academic credit for the work that they perform. Through the Learning Exchange, UBC is now linked with more than 40 organizations and inner city schools.

For the future, we have just announced a private donation of C\$1 million from the JW McConnell Family Foundation towards a programme that by 2011 will enable another 1,800 students annually to participate in for-credit community service learning. UBC topped up that donation with an investment of another C\$1.5 million to ensure the programme's success.

I don't think that I can overstate the benefits of such programmes. Our students are energized by their experiences. They are inspired to see a practical application to their theoretical work. They become more knowledgeable about the challenges facing the marginalized citizens in Vancouver's inner city and less judgmental about people who are not currently succeeding. And they transform themselves from **residents**—disengaged and uninterested—to **citizens**, to people who are assuming all of their own responsibilities and also finding time to make a contribution to their community and to their world.

In preparing for this event today, I looked over the IB learner profile.

Among the characteristics in that profile there are many that most reputable educational institutions would hope to encourage. All students should be “inquirers”. All should be knowledgeable and thoughtful. All should be bold—should be risk-takers—even as all should be reflective. And all students, no matter what their specialty, should have an ability to communicate.

But there is another list of attributes that, in North America's super-secular educational environment, is sometimes seen as beyond the purview of anything other than faith-based institutions. IB students are supposed to be principled, caring, open-minded and balanced in their world view.

Those should not be controversial attributes. If people read the fine print, they are certain to endorse the nurturing of principles such as “integrity and honesty... fairness, justice and respect for the dignity of the individual, groups and communities”. And who would dispute the IBO's description

of open-mindedness that says students should “understand and appreciate their own cultures and personal histories and (be) open to the perspectives, values and traditions of other individuals and communities”.

There is nothing here that sacrifices local affiliation and much that will build intercultural and international understanding. A similar point was made in the Peterson lecture of 2003 by Azim Nanji, whose words I want to cite here. Speaking about the benefits of pluralism, Professor Nanji quoted a speech by Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan III at a meeting of the League of Nations in 1937, a speech in which he quoted a poem by a famous Persian writer called Sadi:

“The Children of Adam, created of the self-same clay,  
Are members of one body,  
When one member suffers all members suffer, likewise.  
O Thou who are indifferent to the suffering of thy fellow,  
Thou art unworthy to be called man.”

This is, most pointedly, not a conclusion about the worthiness of our critics. But it is an eloquent—and prescient—analysis of the state of the earth today. We are one community, sharing one finite and fragile environment. We have shown, in the many centuries that have passed since Sadi wrote those words, that humankind has a nearly limitless capacity to invent and innovate, to create great art, fine literature, and scientific advancements that have extended and enriched our lives.

Why, then, should we not aspire to the same high levels of excellence in terms of creating a civil society—one in which we excel at being human?

I remain optimistic that, through the efforts of agencies such as the IBO and universities such as my own, we will nurture a degree of responsibility and citizenship that will make the earth a blessed, peaceful, civil and sustainable environment for many centuries to come.

Thank you.