



# Dialogue on Civil Society: Re-Imagining the Role of the University

Report on Table Discussions held at the University of Guelph  
January 20, 2012

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**Date:** February 14, 2012

# Table of Contents

<b>Context</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Current State: What are we doing already?</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Guelph’s Reputation Supports Civil Society Endeavours; Suggested Changes to What is Currently Happening; Current Opportunities: Mapping and Leveraging	
<b>Desired State: Where do we want to go?</b> .....	<b>8</b>
University’s Role; Curriculum/ Pedagogy; Replacing/Retaining What is Happening Already; Principles/ Characteristics of a School for Civil Society; Operationalizing the School for Civil Society; Further Questions	
<b>Cautions, Advice, and Possible Obstacles: What to be aware of?</b> .....	<b>17</b>
Funding/ Resources; Elitism/ Exclusivity; Challenges of Interdisciplinarity; Community Capacity; Ethics of Engagement; Evaluation/ Assessment; Responsiveness/ Flexibility; Student Disengagement/ Apathy/ Lack of empowerment; Maintaining Academic Rigour, Credibility; Academic Structure, Rewards, Requirements; Universities’ Role; Lack of Sustainability/ Collaboration; Skill Development/ Job Market; Logistics/ How to Operationalize; Lack of Transparency	
<b>Participants and Partners: Who should be involved?</b> .....	<b>21</b>
Students; Community	
<b>Naming: What do we call this?</b> .....	<b>23</b>
Specific Definitions; Broad Questions: Should we (and how do we) define <i>civil society</i> ?	
<b>Local and Global: Where should we focus?</b> .....	<b>25</b>
Local Engagement; Global Engagement; Connecting Local and Global	
<b>Skills and values: What are they?</b> .....	<b>28</b>
Specific Skills; Further Questions about Values/ Ethics	

## Context

Universities in Canada and around the world are re-imagining their place in local and global communities. The University of Guelph has a strong and varied tradition of working with civil society in research, teaching, and service - through international development studies, community-university engaged scholarship from local to global, and numerous other programs that see participation from faculty, staff and students.

In response to these trends and possibilities, University of Guelph initiated a series of conversations on how we as a university can contribute to civil society. Students, staff and faculty have been invited to hear, explore, and respond to key ideas to inform this work.

On January 20, 2012, a University-wide dialogue on civil society engaged the university community in a discussion to:

- Broaden and deepen thinking on the meaning of civil society;
- Explore the linkages between the universities and civil society sectors;
- Engage university constituents in a process of imagining how the University of Guelph can move in a direction of greater engagement with this sector.

This document provides a review of the themes of this discussion and reflects the comments and suggestions of 94 participants. Participants were 49% students, 24% staff, and 27% faculty, primarily from across the University of Guelph, in addition to several invited guests and speakers.



**Figure 1.** Who was at the tables? Frequency of participants' self-reported department/ program represented by text size.

## Event Description

As participants arrived, they were asked to sit at a table with people they didn't know. Tables consisted of 5-11 students, faculty, and staff. During the morning, speakers reflected on civil society from diverse perspectives and began a dialogue with audience members. Speakers were:

- Alastair Summerlee, President and Vice-Chancellor, University of Guelph
- Paul Davidson, President Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
- Student Panel:
  - Ellis Hayman, Bachelor of Arts Honours, English (major), History (minor)
  - Gracen Johnson, International Development Studies
  - Erin Nelson, PhD Candidate, School of Environmental Design and Rural Development
  - Christina Thomson, Bachelor of Arts, Political Science (major), History (major)
  - Sarah Pugh, PhD Candidate, Political Science and International Development Studies (moderator)
- Budd Hall, Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research, University of Victoria

Over lunch and throughout the afternoon, the discussion continued, now guided by interns and staff from the Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship/Research Shop, who served as facilitators and note-takers (see Appendix). Group discussions were centred on the question:

*Given what you have heard today, what are the opportunities for the University of Guelph to re-envision our relationship with civil society?*

## Overview of Themes

Eight major thematic areas were identified across notes collected and collated across the tables. The themes presented here range from examining current connections between the University of Guelph and civil society, to exploring possible directions—both probing and concrete—for this new initiative, to outlining the “who, what, and where” of participants, definitions, values, skills, and local and global involvement.

- Current state: What is happening already?
- Desired state: Where do we want to go?
- Cautions, advice, and possible obstacles: What to be aware of?
- Participants/partners: Who should be involved?
- Naming: What should this be called?
- Local and global: Where should we focus?
- Skills and values: What are they?

## Current State: What are we doing already?

Participants highlighted both existing innovations in engaging community and civil society, and current challenges that might be addressed in interesting ways with a new school for civil society. This theme is divided into three sections: the first details the richness of Guelph's history, context, strengths, and enabling structures; the second explores how to learn from existing challenges so as not to replicate them as the school develops; while the third examines possibilities for more accurately accounting for what *is* actually happening on campus and in the community.

### Guelph's Reputation Supports Civil Society Endeavours

- Many tables discussed that the history of volunteerism and interdisciplinary work at Guelph, the mandate for the University that involves knowledge mobilization, teaching and learning, and the integrated plan's focus on 'internationalism and experiential learning' means that Guelph is well-positioned to create a school for civil society.
  - "For example, Waterloo is known for innovation, Western for business, and Guelph could position itself as the leader in Canada for community-engaged research."
- The consensus was that students are enthusiastic about engaging with the community, linking practical work with their curriculum to make what is being learned more meaningful, and to help improve society.
- Participants felt that there are many existing relationships between campus and community partners. The perception is that:
  - These relationships are increasing as community-engaged teaching gains momentum as a practice with the new institutional support.
  - These relationships are most beneficial when there is a common recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of all involved.
- Many examples of existing initiative and opportunities to build upon were discussed throughout that day at the various tables. Some of the examples:
  - "The ID program course in 3<sup>rd</sup> year allows for students to choose what they will do and learn. It is a personal learning course – you go and do what you want and then write a paper about it."
  - Graduate CSAHS Community Engaged Scholarship course: "8-12 students, across the college. It isn't on the books. 3<sup>rd</sup> year running. 2 semesters, which is a challenge, because CE work takes time and it doesn't fit neatly into semesters. Students have to get creative about how to register because it's only a .5 credit and runs much longer." Participants thought this was a great example of curricular innovation.
  - Institute for Community Engaged Scholarship/ Research Shop: "The model they use is good. It does a wonderful job of getting students to get more engaged in readings and other academic work as a result of their community work."

- “There are already organizations that develop education across disciplines- engineers without borders, vets without borders etc. There are so many engagement opportunities out there.”
- Knowledge translation happens through Horticulture, OAC, OMAFRA, SEDRD: all are engaged with civil society.
- There are currently soil and water conservation projects that are led by an external source but co-managed with the University.
- There are a number of opportunities for students to partake in community-engaged scholarship through research assistantships.
- A Mennonite community service provider, which provides services for Mennonite immigrants, called upon the University of Guelph to aid in the evaluation of their programs and services. Here, the Mennonite provider had the knowledge of serving the community while the students had the expertise in program evaluation.
- There is an existing U of G course on corporate social responsibility. Businesses are becoming more socially aware/ socially responsible. Business degrees are becoming an important tool/ asset for NGOs.

### Suggested Changes to What is Currently Happening

- Participants suggested that community engagement opportunities often occur on an *ad hoc* basis, organized by individual students and faculty, rather than in a systematic way. This is challenging for both students, who struggle to find opportunities, and faculty, who struggle to find the time to support and supervise undergraduate students on top of their other responsibilities.
- Participants suggested that in some cases engagement opportunities that are easy to find tend to be less academically focused (e.g., volunteering).
- There was a perception among some that students are currently restricted in their ability to engage by their course requirements and by course and program timelines. This is particularly a problem for students in more structured programs (e.g., engineering, nutrition).
  - Even in programs like ID, due to coursework and timing restraints, one participant suggested that “there was shockingly little opportunity within the classes [for civic engagement].”
- In some cases, participants said that students often find their own opportunities, but are limited by funding.
  - Students who need to work part time often cannot participate in civic engagement opportunities.
  - “There are economic barriers to participation due to lack of funding.”

## Current Opportunities: Mapping and Leveraging

- Most discussions at some point touched on how to get a better sense of what *is* actually currently going on campus around community engagement and civil society.
- Many participants highlighted a desire to be more cognizant of what already exists. Some suggested that it would be helpful to do a survey or an environmental scan to better understand what is already happening, who is involved, and how it works: What are the current strengths we already have? Who would we talk to? How would we break it down?
  - “I see that school for civil society is not new: we should assess what we already do and work from there.”
  - “I see a need to bring together people who are engaged globally in different capacities together. There may be different networks for each person involved and there may be gaps. We need to get to know what other people are doing- how connected are we really?”
  - “Can we determine all the faculty who are doing this work? Is there knowledge on the student life work? Do people know of these links? Who would be responsible for generating these links? Generating the list of people who are doing this? We need infrastructure to have connections, need links, and need faculty/staff.”

## Desired State: Where do we want to go?

Participants at all the tables spent a significant portion of time discussing and envisioning directions for the school for civil society. Building on conversations around possible limits and assessing what currently exists on campus, participants offered up innovative, probing, and—in many cases—concrete suggestions for where this initiative could go. Some conversations envisioned what a school might look like when it's complete, what principles should be adhered to in building the new initiative, what curricular innovations should be considered, and how students, staff, faculty, community, and the University, more broadly, might be affected. Participants also explored how to build on the strengths and possibilities of existing initiatives/structures and provided both broad suggestions and specific ideas for operationalizing a school for civil society.

### University's Role

Careful attention was given to assessing what the University's broad role would be if a school for civil society were developed in Guelph. Some participants suggested that the University be responsible for:

- Training students to become good citizens (experiential or project-based learning);
- Producing research for community benefit;
- Addressing key social/ political/ environmental issues.
  - “Universities are typically not part of the public debate on morality and ethics, but they should be.”
  - “We need to link to existing social movements, raise issues, and ask the tough questions.”

### Curriculum/ Pedagogy

Specific suggestions were offered for how to re-envision existing approaches to pedagogy and curriculum. The paraphrased suggestions below are organized based on recommended changes to the role faculty play, and on student expectations and requirements.

#### Shifting/ re-thinking the role of faculty

- Connect students with professors that advocate for/support experiential/ service/community-engaged learning.
- Figure out which blocks of skills are needed by community and have faculty support the development of these skills. Leave room for “messy” skills that don't fit neatly into a block (more of a squiggle).
- “The civil society school should have local involvement, experience with culture diversity, and provide training in people and resource management, to imagine projects that are sustainable or long-term, getting to the foundation of what a successful project needs.”
- Teach practical and transferrable skills that one would need to succeed in a career in civil society or to facilitate change in society.



- Figure out how to design courses, modules, projects, and field experiences in ways that are responsive to community and work with faculty to be adaptable.
  - “Rather than thinking about having students in a lecture for 12 weeks, what would student-faculty involvement look like?”
  - “What if a student picked an organization and volunteered/engaged there for 4 years? How would faculty support this?”
- Facilitate dialogue and discussions between students and professors, breaking down barriers and creating an environment in which students are comfortable sharing ideas.
- Have faculty ensure student accountability to community.
- Encourage faculty to talk to students about post-undergraduate options other than graduate school, and support community engaged work in existing programs.
- Change faculty requirements from traditional teaching and research to supporting experiential and community-engaged teaching and learning.
  - Some participants looked at how this has been done historically at the University: “For example, OAC was traditionally 1/3 extension, 1/3 teaching, 1/3 research to do it around the structure of what a faculty member is supposed to do.”
  - “At UQAM, 25% of faculty time is set aside for community based research and faculty have 25 days to teach in the community per year”
  - “At UC Davis, 50% teaching; 50% extension”
  - “What about different breakdowns, like teaching, research, 10% extension, 5% service?”
- After a lengthy conversation about shifting faculty roles, one participant remarked that “Faculty may need support doing this, as they mainly have experience with going to graduate school and being academics.”

### Students’ role and opportunities

- Have students help shape curriculum and topics covered.
- Reward and support student engagement with community organizations and projects.
- Provide opportunities for students to have service-learning as part of their academic experience rather than an add-on.
- Link students with topics that they are passionate about, rather than curricula being imposed on students.
- Find ways to help students engage with their areas of interest in civil society.
- Offer learner-centred education “which means that students won’t necessarily finish in 4 years, and graduate students won’t necessarily finish in timeline. Moreover, students may wish to study outside their discipline.”
  - How can current funding models and university culture be changed to support this kind of flexibility?

## Replacing/Retaining What is Happening Already

Much discussion focused on how to move forward from what is already happening on campus. Below are specific suggestions that participants provided around mapping what exists and on what programs should be built upon.

- Map what is happening already:
  - “An open-source and collaborative mind map might be a great place to start.”
  - “A map could be built virtually on the Guelph website; it could be open and accessible, and would build interest in the initiative.”
  - “It would be great to map both thematic areas of a school for civil society, along with what is happening already.”
- Build on strengths and overcome weaknesses of International Development program and its existing connections.
  - “We should re-envision the ID program and create courses on volunteerism & long term community engagement and sustainability.”
  - “ID should be positioned as a leader in the school for civil society.”
- Explore opportunities for collaboration in the College of Arts that are less recognized in other colleges.
- Learn from and build on the Research Shop model:
  - “The model they use is good. It does a wonderful job of getting students get more engaged in readings and other academic work as a result of their work.”

## Principles/ Characteristics of a School for Civil Society

Below is a list of principles and/or characteristics that participants felt were important to envisioning a school for civil society:

- Interdisciplinary
  - Some participants suggested that there should be an interdisciplinary committee and cross-appointed faculty not just at a CSAHS level, but across the University.
  - “We should work to get interdisciplinary involvement and collaboration even without an exact agreement on terms and scope (i.e., people want to be involved even if they’re not all working in the same direction).”
- Integrated
  - “Town/gown, student/faculty, classroom/extra curricular, theoretical/applied; developed/developing worlds”
  - “Incorporate not only the entire university but the local community and all these local stakeholders to create a project that’s much larger than any of us on our own.”
- Inclusive

- More than just social science.
- More than just one kind of student or one kind of program.
- Multiple options and ways of engaging.
- Collaboration in the broader context (faculty, students, international, community, business).
- “The thinking and curriculum for civil society engagement needs to develop from students, staff, community organizations, as well as core faculty.”
- Multi-semester courses and longer-term commitment
  - E.g., build course on top of a year in the field
- Participatory learning
  - Engagement and empowerment.
  - Experience with participatory learning and civil society from early undergrad all the way through: for example, seminars or small classes in first year could expand to larger courses in fourth year.
  - “Offering more opportunities for participatory learning could be a unique selling point for the University as a whole, fitting with the innovative reputation of Guelph.”
- Experiential or inquiry based learning (small group learning)
  - “Smaller group learning allows more diverse and creative ideas to emerge.”
  - “Inquiry-based learning and other innovative approaches to pedagogy would allow us to move from lecture-based ‘pedagogy of oppression.’”
  - Provide credit for experiential learning and community work.
  - Figure out when student volunteering counts for credit, and when it’s “just” volunteering.
  - Some participants reported that community engagement shouldn’t be optional, whereas others felt that only select students have the interest and capacity to participate in this kind of work.
  - Also, may want to give pass/fail rather than letter grades, as concern over marks can limit top students’ engagement efforts (concerns about scholarships and graduate school).
- Deep learning
  - Learn more in-depth, take fewer courses.
  - Fewer, but better (more sophisticated) skills (same with scholarship).
- Link classrooms/ curriculum and community
  - “We can do good work related to civil society in the classroom without going into civil society.”

- “We can also reduce classroom learning in favour of experiential and community-engaged learning.”
- Help students gain skills that community organizations value.
- Community-driven
  - “Need to promote to community partners that we will do no harm and address not their *perceived* need, but *identified* need.”
  - Let community define what’s important (don’t impose research areas).
  - Community representation on curriculum planning boards (as with Colleges).
  - “What are community needs? What issues do front-line workers identify?”
  - “Build good will and meaningful connections to political systems and NGOs.”
- University-wide values
  - E.g., no plastic bottles at pep rally.
- Flexibility
  - Recognize that structures are hard to change once they are in place, but that flexibility and agility are important so that the school can evolve over time.
- Sustainable relationships
  - “This initiative needs to build long-term, sustainable relationships with community organizations and provide long-term planning rather than short-term relief projects.”
  - “We should consider the work of groups like AVAAZ who have global impact and have gained global support with only 8 staff.”
- Accountability
  - “Faculty and staff should ensure student accountability on community projects, because they are (most likely) the ones with the long-term relationships with community organizations.”
  - “We should consider the importance of transferring values as part of the training process.”
- Ongoing evaluation and reflection
  - Reflecting on and evaluating both process and outcomes of the school for civil society is essential to evolving and improving the school over time.
  - “Evaluation is critical in making evidence-based decisions.”
  - Evaluate mutual benefit (university and community), relationships and relationship brokering and the impact on student skills, learning, and community organizations.
  - Some evaluative questions that participants thought were critical: Are there barriers to student involvement? What mistakes are being made in the initial

stages? Are the opportunities meeting the needs of community, students, and faculty?

- “There would need to be institutional support for evaluation – it can’t be left to individual faculty members or staff.”
- Student involvement
  - “The school could be a great hub for student collaboration.”
- Knowledge mobilization, transfer, and translation
  - “KM needs to be part of the long-term plans, not an afterthought.”
  - Some participants asked how results would be shared outside of the semester and with a potentially limiting funding structure.
  - “It would be great to have support for translation of theses and other research into different languages.”
  - Participants suggested school could use video conferencing, social media, and digital resources as ways of sharing information outside of journals and books. The importance of open access was also highlighted.
  - “Science and engineering students and faculty could be trained to translate their findings and mobilize research, but also promote science literacy training for humanities and social science students and faculty.”

### Operationalizing the School for Civil Society

Both general and detailed suggestions were made for next steps. While the conversations captured earlier in this theme speak to broader questions of vision, principles, roles in envisioning a school for civil society, a number of discussions actually produced fairly concrete, pragmatic ideas for how exactly this initiative should move forward. This section is divided into more broad strokes suggestions for operationalizing, followed by a summary list of more specific ideas.

#### Broad approach

- Use trial and error and learn from mistakes.
  - Experiment; evaluate pilot projects.
- Start slow and small and build up over time (e.g., Better Planet Project).
- Communicate expectations about what we want the graduates of this school to look like.
  - Part of this would require figuring out the branding/marketing of the school.
- Define audience or area of scope and communicate that to community and students.
  - Think of issues that are often overlooked in academia (e.g., Civic Imprints Speakers Series).
- Take advantage of institution’s current openness to change and connect with board of governors and other key players.

- Figure out 75% of the plan and then get started.
  - Build on our current strengths and reputation.
  - Consider what we want our future reputation to be.
- Brand what we are doing already to get started quickly, but keep things deliberately flexible at first.
- Undertake radical changes in curriculum and approach to learning.

### Specific suggestions

- Use a thematic area to define and shape the school for civil society.
  - For example, local food production (Lakehead), water
  - “The university could work to insert hunger issues into an academic form and current curriculum of courses such as BioChem and Agriculture.”
  - “New curricula topics could be picked regularly based on changing needs.”
- Provide a physical location or place on campus where people can connect.
  - Location of the school will determine how it is perceived by students, by other disciplines and departments, and by the local and global community.
- Offer a mandatory university-wide first-year global citizenship course exploring concepts related to civil society with older students acting as mentors.
  - Defining civil society, considering issues and challenges of society, identifying stakeholders, learning how to affect political change, etc.
  - Foster mutual dialogue and understanding.
  - Centennial College does this, with varying degrees of success.
    - This can be difficult to tailor to different disciplines.
- Move away from 1-2 semester courses to allow for more flexibility.
- Change structures of faculty reward to value community engagement.
- Conduct ongoing research on civil society questions – especially the less ‘sexy’ research topics that are related to civil society.
- Allow first year students to take more interdisciplinary courses before picking a major (like in the Arts & Science program).
- Provide an experiential context and a catalyst of support systems, then give students credit when skills are put into practice.
- Invest in core faculty.
- Have intermediary organizations and staff that broker relationships (not just faculty and students).
  - Staff or faculty should make links between students and community organizations because students come and go.

- It's important to have faculty and staff who see eye-to-eye and can form long-term relationships with civil society partners.
- Offer open access (to research findings) as a core component and core value (i.e., knowledge mobilization, transfer, and translation). The school for civil society could help faculty negotiate with publishers to support open access at an institutional level.
  - Knowledge belongs to the people who fund it (e.g., Canadian taxpayers).
  - Concordia uses this model, where researchers are mandated to publish in open access journals.
  - Research Shop already supports this model on campus.
- Build consensus about interdisciplinary programs through learning goals.
- Offer lots of options to students – certificate programs, degree programs, minor programs, summer programs, co-op programs etc.- that provide multiple options for student accreditation and engagement, to meet multiple student needs.
  - One participant suggested that there could be “10 credits in methodology and theory as a minor or 5 courses as a certificate. It could be an add-on like ID at the graduate level, managed by a new school for civil society, and including existing CBR organizations (Research Shop, etc.).”
  - Other participants suggested that the school could offer a certificate program at first, involving elements that are already in place (both academic work and community engagement).
    - “It terms of a certificate model, it might be better to start at a graduate level.”
    - “We should build on what is there already (capacity development courses, ASCI, Research Shop CES course, ICES)”
  - Some thought it would be interesting to have an interdisciplinary civil society co-op program.
- A few tables discussed having the Research Shop facilitate an expansion of the relationship between community and university. Instead of the University initiating/ outlining the ‘rules’ of these relationships, the Research Shop could allow the community to initiate the relationship and develop their own ‘rules of engagement.’
  - There needs to be a conversation/ dialogue with others within the community so that they can contribute to this vision of civil society. The University must make the process more decentralized (ensuring that it actually is a two way street).
  - The University must acknowledge that there are numerous active creators in this reality that exist external to the University.
    - Some questioned whether the University could realistically take a back seat.

### Models from other institutions

- MA social work MSW at Laurier.
  - “The developmental part of this program teachers courses like what we are envisioning here. One semester of academic study and one semester of co-op experience and then students get invited back. It is hard to have co-op with many students so we would have to limit intake.”
- ID program at Scarborough College.
  - “This program has a cooperative stream where students who have high grades can do co-ops. Those with high grades do a whole year abroad. This group is really good.”
- Evergreen State College.
  - “It’s a university without courses and without marks. Students are provided with written feedback rather than grades.”

### Further Questions

- Does the “school” have to be an entity and have its own identity, or can it permeate the entire University?
  - “Without a specific home, it’s hard to get reinvestment and core faculty. Development and stewardship are challenging (e.g., ID program).”
  - Should the “school” be part of one college, or exist across colleges?
- Where do ideas around specific disciplines like women’s studies belong?
- What about a place for specific conversations around civil society that infuses out into the University?
- What about creating opportunities to fund projects that other organizations would not fund?
- What happens to other similar programs (e.g., ID)?
- Is there a potential for research chairs in this area?
- Where do faculty come from? Who are they?
- How will the school for CS change the branding of the University as a whole?



## Cautions, Advice, and Possible Obstacles: What to be aware of?

This theme reflects perceived obstacles and key considerations in creating a school for civil society. Participants discussed questions of funding, carbon footprint, interdisciplinarity, and student access/privilege, among others. A number of conversations touched on the ethics of engagement, how to be mindful of community capacity, and how to remain responsive and flexible as this initiative grows and develops. In general, participants were enthusiastic about moving forward, and what is detailed below—while pointing to potential stumbling blocks that could slow progress if ignored—ultimately offers some avenues for a careful yet optimistic way forward.

### Funding/ Resources

- Participants discussed that finances are a barrier for many students.
  - “University tuition is expensive, and extracurricular or off-campus opportunities (e.g., conferences, Model UN, semester abroad) are not financially possible for many students.”
- Other tables discussed that non-profit organizations are also not well funded and they have to fight for funding, which in turn makes students fight for positions in these organizations.
  - “Funding organizations don’t usually fund development projects, only research projects. We need more umbrella organizations to provide both.”
- Many stressed that staff time and resources are also limited. This should be taken into consideration when coordinating placements/ practicums etc.

### Elitism/ Exclusivity

- Some participants suggested it would be problematic if only more privileged students get to be engaged and to experience mentorship within civil society organizations. Who gets to be a leader? Who defines the terms?
- Other participants similarly expressed concern about elitism and exclusivity in terms of students enrolled, in terms of community partners, and in terms of where on campus the school would be located (and who would be able to access it). Will this create more silos?
  - “The risk is that you just create another set of jargon and silo with this new entity.”

### Challenges of Interdisciplinarity

- Some issues around programs bridging multiple disciplines were raised. Participants felt this could lead to problems with restrictions from courses due to prerequisites. If a degree were awarded, what would it say? How do we bridge disciplines in a way that works effectively both structurally and ideologically?

## Community Capacity

- Many tables discussed concerns around overwhelming and/or overburdening community partners, NGOs etc. and needing to find ways to effectively manage these relationships.
  - “What happens when community partners don’t have the capacity to support students? How do we make sure we do this in a way that benefits the community?”

## Ethics of Engagement

- Many raised issues around (as one participant put it) “indiscriminate community engagement.”
  - “When do you do ‘good’? And when did you do something that you thought was good? What is actually ‘good’ for the communities that we work with? How do we create a physical space that is conducive to community involvement?”
- Other questions that participants raised related to the ethics of engagement included:
  - How should the community in which you study drive the research project? How do you manage this relationship? Several difficulties would need to be addressed since conflict may arise when the group and researcher have different/competing visions of the research project.
  - Who “owns” the research?
  - Where is “the community” or “civil society” in this conversation?

## Evaluation/ Assessment

- Questions about evaluation were raised at a number of tables:
  - “How do you evaluate experiential learning and maintain strong academic rigour? Should students even be graded?”
  - “We need to try to bridge the need for students to be community engaged while also being able to assess them in that engagement.”

## Responsiveness/ Flexibility

- Several stressed the importance of learning from successes and mistakes as this initiative evolves and of finding ways to move flexibly and responsively to changing needs in the community and on campus:
  - “How do we avoid institutionalization to the point at which we are no longer able to move and shift in response to community need?”
  - “Will we be able to have this school, based on the idea of constant flux while we’re stuck in the bureaucracies? Will it be able to be more fluid where it needs to be? At the rate it needs to?”

### Student Disengagement/ Apathy/ Lack of empowerment

- Participants raised questions about how to challenge apathy, and engage students who might not be obvious participants. Some participants suggested that students are often afraid to break rules or be a problem.
- Others suggested that students may not want to be involved:
  - “If there’s no value or they can’t get credit for it (...) they don’t do it”
  - “Choosing between engagement and grades, do I aim for Dean’s Honours list or do I keep engaging?”
- Participants suggested that many barriers exist that prevent students from recognizing and seizing these opportunities such as monetary issues, time constraints, limited exposure and experience etc.
- Moving forward would require recognizing these challenges and re-thinking how we engage students.

### Maintaining Academic Rigour, Credibility

- One participant asked, “How do we prevent this becoming so alternative that it has no credibility? The school would need to have academic standards, or we lose our credibility.”
- Another participant was concerned that a completely community-oriented approach (such as participatory research, for example) might mean “losing rich intellectual research.”
- Others felt that Community Engaged and participatory approaches are rigorous and are about recognizing multiple sites of knowledge and acknowledging work across methods and approaches.

### Academic Structure, Rewards, Requirements

- The whole academic structure was seen by some as a possible barrier to initiating a school for civil society. Specific issues stated include the current faculty reward/tenure process, graduate students requirements and need to graduate, traditional approaches to teaching and learning, large classes preventing effective community engagement, semester and course structure not being flexible enough to be responsive to community, issue of time, pressures to publish etc.
  - “The system as it is structured doesn't allow for it work - there isn't the time. The structure makes it difficult for faculty to engage in CS, and when we do, there is a fear of being penalized with tenure.”
  - “Curriculum change? Students want concrete skills but at the end of the day how can all these curriculum changes actually work? Is it feasible? “
  - “These proposed changes are very idealistic. How practical/ realistic can this be? Professors/ departments/ students may not be accepting.”
  - “The university can be fragmented just by design, which creates a barrier to change.”

## Universities' Role

- Some participants suggested that the University needs to rethink its position within civil society.
  - “Aside from empowering students, does the university have any idea what they are doing?”
  - “What right does the University have in staking this position? What about the role of trades and college programs?”
- Many felt that governments, universities and other associations should ensure that the University actually meet the expectations of broader communities and makes a lasting impact.
  - “The system itself needs to change. As Alastair said, we really need to turn University education on its head.”

## Lack of Sustainability/ Collaboration

- Some voiced concern about sustainability and working across silos:
  - “We should be careful about re-inventing the wheel, repeating what others are doing, and not making any new, innovative thinking/progress. We need to learn to collaborate.”

## Skill Development/ Job Market

- There were many comments about there not being enough focus on student skill development at the University in general, and what skills would students at the school for civil society learn, what jobs would be available to graduates, and how big is the market for this initiative.
  - “How do you make sure your skills are transferrable and wide enough to apply to different areas?”
  - “Top students kill each other for unpaid jobs to get the experience.”

## Logistics/ How to Operationalize

- Some tables addressed the challenges and importance of providing both critical learning and engaged experiences.
  - “We can't have everyone go abroad. We can't all have an overseas experience? How do we manage this?”

## Lack of Transparency

- A few participants underlined the importance of making the process of creating a school for civil society as transparent as possible.
  - “I thought I'd come to a dialogue on civil society and I didn't know I was coming to more of a ground lay on a school for civil society.”

## Participants and Partners: Who should be involved?

This theme reflects questions about the intended participants of a school for civil society, both in terms of students and in terms of community/ civil society partners. Participants discussed possibilities and questions around student recruitment, branding, admissions, and support. They also addressed strategies and questions around, for example, how to link the University with broader communities, how to build and sustain relationships, and how to build capacity within civil society organizations.

### Students

- Participants discussed who the school for civil society would attract:
  - “Which students do we expect to attend this school for civil society?”
  - “How can the student audience be expanded outside of traditional ID-type students (e.g., into sciences, across disciplines)”
- Tables also addressed strategies around recruiting students. There was a sense that a recruitment strategy would need to assess students’ passion for social change and a desire for a deeper understanding of the world.
- Other key considerations participants raised included:
  - How will program admission be determined?
    - “It would be good to look for more than just academic skills. Program should consider community-engagement and life experience.”
    - “We may want to avoid recruiting students with paternalistic attitudes, trying to ‘save the world.’”
  - How should students be credit for their work?
    - “There is a tension between assigning grades and crediting experience. Figuring out how this works is essential to recruiting and retaining students in this new endeavor.”
- How will students be supported in connecting with community projects?
  - “There are wide-ranging implications for the semester system, for funding models, and for curriculum models that need to be considered in terms of integrating student learning in the community.”

### Community

- Participants spoke about the importance of developing intentional and well-supported relationships with the community that would:
  - Give recognition and credit: “Building relationships with community partners requires giving recognition and credit.”
  - Consider context: “In some places, being a business is more palatable for community partners than being an NGO. Considering context is very important.

- Build capacity: “Once involved, how can NGOs and other civil society organizations be transformed to build capacity for civil society careers?”
- Address funding constraints and possibilities.
- Link to current social movements: “It would be great to think about ways to capture current social movements (e.g., Occupy movement) in the University, capitalizing on existing links with civil society organizations.”
- Some questions and considerations around community partnerships were raised across the tables, including:
  - How do NGOs and other community partners get involved in the school for civil society?
  - How will students be linked with civil society partners?
  - What is the role of business in civil society?
  - What kinds of businesses fit with the values and purpose of a school for civil society? What about unions? Are there restrictions on who we want to be involved?

## Naming: What do we call this?

Below is a brief outline of the conversations that emerged on January 20<sup>th</sup> around the *term* “civil society.” Participants considered questions such as: What is civil society? Should we call this a “School for Civil Society”? Should we define the term or not? Other definitions and terms are also discussed.

### Specific Definitions

- Some suggested that our definition of civil society should be about “combatting hyper individualism” and about engaging with others, with political systems, and with social issues.
- Many definitions focused on process, purpose, and social change:
  - “Civil society is composed of all those actively interested in working towards the social good.”
  - “We find common ground in our desire to achieve social change.”
- There were also wide ranging discussions across the table about what *should be included* in our definition of civil society:
  - Optimist society, boy scouts, and rotary
  - Community impact organizations
  - International development agencies
  - Social movements
  - NGOs
- Others suggested that, historically and in some contexts, “civil society” has been defined by what is *not included*.
  - Business
  - State
  - Education
- Other terms such as “volunteering” and “engagement” were also discussed. Some suggested that “volunteering” is done for one’s own enjoyment, while engagement is more about activism and advocacy.

### Broad Questions: Should we (and how do we) define *civil society*?

- Some participants suggested that civil society shouldn’t be defined as “civil society means different things to different people.”
  - “Maybe we should be cautious of coming up with a universal definition because it functions outside of defined entities.”
  - “The term should be purposefully open in order to create dialogue.”
- Others suggested that we need to focus the broad term in order to define our strategies and values and work flexibly within that frame.

- “Rather than defining ‘civil society’ we should find common ground on vision.”
- Many questions arose regarding the role of business in civil society. Where does business fit?
- Some addressed discomfort around the term “civil society” and its associated baggage. The following alternate names were suggested: “School of Global Engagement,” “School for Civic Engagement,” something with “International” in the title.
- A few expressed concern that people would not see themselves in (or understand) the term “civil society” and may therefore not want to be involved.
- Rather than defining specifically who is “in or out,” some tables discussed the importance of focusing on the *process* of engagement.
  - “We need a definition that works with the dynamism of civil society.”
  - “We should think about process: how and who are we doing research with? How and why are we mobilizing this term? How are we engaging? What is the university currently doing?”



## Local and Global: Where should we focus?

While questions of local and global engagement strategies permeated discussions throughout the day, this theme captures in some detail the range of questions and debates around whether engagement should take place locally and/or globally and how participants felt the school should be positioned in relation to these debates.

### Local Engagement

- Participants raised questions about how to keep local engagement on the radar:
  - “For me, around international experiences and desire for students to have such experiences, I wonder how do we market *local* engagement to students and get them excited about the local, not just the ‘out there.’”
- Many participants suggested that we always need to start from our own local context and our own positioning before engaging more broadly:
  - “It is important to learn where people come from, and who we are first.”
  - “We think international, but it can be right here right now. Are there domestic issues that we need to tackle first?”
  - “There is the need to work on poverty issues in our communities.”
  - “The school for civil society may encourage more local engagement as opposed to international.”
- Questions were raised about how we actually facilitate local partnerships.
  - “It shouldn’t be driven by faculty research interests or connections because those wax and wane depending on funding, teaching demands etc. It isn’t effective if an organization comes to the RS and link to faculty because we can’t work that quickly.”
- Discussions around local engagement also focused on the importance of engaging community stakeholders in design and execution of the school:
  - “I think that would be the most important thing, to really incorporate not only the entire university but the local community and all these local stakeholders to create a project that’s much larger than any of us on our own.”

### Global Engagement

- Some of the discussions around global engagement asked questions and/or offered suggestions about the logistics and scope of “going global”:
  - “It feels very big the global: how do we send students out into the world, what does that look like?”
  - “How do you choose international partners, what are the implications? Does it impede the spontaneity and openness of discovering opportunities in your own research?”

- “Is it possible to take the principles of the Research Shop and scale it larger, to be global?”
- “Maybe you could create an organizational team: some students work from here globally, while others are happier on the ground and connected. Send delegations.”
- Some participants raised concerns about the cost of global engagement:
  - “The farther from Guelph you move, the more money you need. We do things locally and southern Ontario but after that the resources aren’t there.”
- Others wondered about issues of sustainability (both environmentally and socially) in relation to global engagement.
  - “Is it environmentally responsible?”
  - How do we maintain relationships at a distance? How do we stay ethically engaged?

### Connecting Local and Global

- There were many discussions about how to include concepts of both local and global in the conception of the school for civil society:
  - “I would be much happier that if we were talking about development, rather than about international development. That would be more inclusive.”
  - “It’s been very clear and accepted that even in international development the message should be that this is not something that just happens ‘over there’ that we also have issues locally.”
  - “What is the difference between engaging civil society locally and globally and how can we build on this?”
- Some tables brainstormed ways of engaging locally with global implications. One table discussed an international travel model where individuals from around the world could learn the community engaged model here at Guelph, and then spread it to wherever they travelled next. This idea again brought up the question of sustainability, and whether creating community engaged travelling ambassadors would really work.
- Others discussed possibilities of bridging local/ global through virtual engagement strategies:
  - “We should talk about using the benefits of new tech while we envision our relationship with civil society. Real time, online engagement.”
  - “The difference between being a global citizen and having a global perspective may be decreasing due to the growing availability of social media/ the internet.
- Some participants also stressed that the concept of the “global” does not need to be thought of as separate from the local, that they should be thought of as interconnected:

- “We don't have to go overseas to be a global citizen. The thing about ID is it makes us think internationally but the idea of CS means to look at links here and there and everywhere. A globalization of people. And a globalizing democracy.”
- “Eat local, taste global.”
- “Local is global and understanding it in this sense makes you a global citizen BUT it does not mean you have a global perspective. In order to gain a global perspective, you actually need to be in the field with the people you hope to help/ research.”
- One participant spoke about the concept of “informed practice” in connecting local and global:
  - “Students have experiences abroad or locally that are informed by academic work. When it comes to ID or exchanges, both partners need to be informed by each other and former practices. Informed practice needs to be two way and take in a lot from both local and global contexts.”

## Skills and values: What are they?

Discussions throughout the day returned again and again to key questions around skills and values. What values should a school for civil society operate with? What kind of skills should students graduating from such a school possess? How do we teach skills? How do we attract students and community partners with the “right” values? What values/ethics/morals/and definitions of “societal good” are involved? Below we have summarized 1) the specific skill and values participants expressed as being important to this initiative, and 2) broader questions that arose in the discussions that focused on skills and values.

### Specific Skills

Several tables spoke about what skills graduates from the “school for civil society” should possess:

- Critical thinking, and “how to apply critical thinking practically”;
- Adaptability to a changing world and changing jobs, within civil society and within democracy;
- Knowing how to re-envision the world, come up with new structures;
- Ability to adapt to different power dynamics;
- Ability to problem solve, deal with the unexpected;
- Being able to work across disciplines/ knowledge sites;
- Facilitation;
- Leadership skills;
- Ability to think holistically;
- Being able to understand finance, marketing;
- Project management;
- Openness;
- Ability to deal with failure and to take risks;
- Learning how to influence policy;
- Accountability (making sure students are accountable for their actions).

### Further Questions about Skills

- Many students indicated that there is a common perception that “they don’t have skills” when they graduate from university.
  - “There is an underlying understanding that you need SKILLS to be effective. Understanding how things work isn’t the same as making things work.”
  - “ You have a degree, but what can you do? What are your skills?”

- Many participants discussed tensions and possibilities around job readiness, the “market need” for specific skills, and what the role of the University should be in preparing graduates for specific “civil society” jobs.
  - “How do we communicate the idea about civil society and the need for training for specific skills?”
  - “Do we want to have a sole program that trains people in civic involvement?”
  - “It is a challenge to engage students in civic society while training them for future jobs.”
  - “Is pursuing ‘job market readiness’ too much of a consumerist approach to education?”
  - “We could think of training people in civil society and issues, but also have ways to train individuals in other careers to see them through a civil society lens.”
- Many tables discussed how students’ experiences “in the community” were key learning opportunities “that gave them the skills to gain meaningful employment post-graduation.”
- One group discussed whether we should be moving away from training people to do something specific:
  - “Perhaps the ‘training’ should be more generally about strategies for engagement in civil society or for ‘doing good’ in their own particular careers.”
- Some participants discussed the importance of facilitating connections with the community and learning those skills: what are the skills required for “engaging community”?
- Some suggested that a civil society school “could be the closest thing to a trades school” in terms of teaching specific skills around working in/ with civil society organizations.
- There was a suggestion that evaluation methods for the school would need to test “real skills and not just facts that are memorized and regurgitated.”
- One table spoke about the importance of training *faculty* in developing skills related to understanding civil society.
- In the discussion of skills and job market training, a few participants were careful to bring the conversation back to balancing the focus on student skills with community impact:
  - “Students come home and have more skills/ experience but their efforts do not necessarily translate into long term change for the community. Less is known about the true impact students/ the University have on the community.”
  - “We need to build in an end piece to evaluate the relationships and the effectiveness of the project or encounter.”

## Articulated Values

Below is a list of specific values that participants articulated over the course of the discussion.

- Many participants stressed the importance of Universities taking a moral stand, and making the university a place for critical debates around what matters;
- Doing research *with* civil society/ community and not *for* them;
- Being wary of coming to the table with preconceived knowledge;
- Being part of an actively engaged community;
- Seeing a reflection of a diverse community in who is involved (concerns around gender balance);
- Showing compassion and concern;
- Avoiding being elitist;
- Being responsive to community need;
- Valuing and recognizing interconnection;
- Moving beyond inequalities;
- Engaging in constant self-reflection;
- Valuing reciprocity;
- Encouraging mutual responsibility;
- Social justice;
- Creativity, spontaneity;
- Being aware of context, history, what has already been done: “aware of how we are situated and being open to other types of knowledge and learning”;
- “Using the power of our students to be relevant to the world out there”;
- Recognizing that “knowledge is created in many places”;
- Moving “beyond the existing oppressive classroom context” and dogmatic approaches to teaching and learning;
- Absorbing values of experiences in a rural environment;
- Making a better world;
- Connecting through common values;
- Committing to the development of a society that is inclusive, respects diversity, respects multiple perspectives;
- Fostering a democratic, grass-roots approach;
- Valuing Interdisciplinarity;
- Being “bold, not boldish”;

- “Looking in each other’s eyes—that’s the fundamental aspect of civil society—I see you, I hear you”.

### Further Questions about Values/ Ethics

A number of key questions and tensions around values were also raised at various tables.

- How do we prioritize values? Some participants felt that values are personal and certain ones shouldn’t be prioritized over others.
- Others asked about the implications for taking a moral/ critical/ political stand from a University that is increasingly corporatized? “Are we allowed to bite the hand that feeds?”
- “How do you articulate a value without it becoming dogma?”
- “We are looking at civil society as a big ball of wax and assuming that all is good. What is ethical in the end?”
- How do we move beyond Western definitions of value? “Are we coming from a ‘we know what’s best’ approach or are we committed to working more collaboratively?” “Who gets to decide which values are correct?”
- Many participants also felt that it’s *critical* that we not shy away from a discussion of values. Our discussions are already saturated with values, so we need to bring more focused and critical attention to the values that infuse our work.

## Appendix: List of Note-takers and Facilitators

Note-takers and facilitators from the Institute for Community-Engaged Scholarship/ Research Shop were:

Petrina Aberdeen	Ryan Hayhurst	Ingrid Mündel
Trish Altass	Rebecca Ivanoff	Wanzirai Muruvi
Anne Bergen	Kelly Janz	Erin Nelson
Maria Cabal	Andrea Lamarre	Shawna Reibling
Kim Chuong	Rachel Sim Yu Lau	Jane Robson
Jacqueline de Guzman	Rashelle Litchmore	Alberto Salguero
Frances Dietrich-O'Connor	Melisa Luymes	Rachel Schumann
Warren Dodd	Sophie Maksimowski	Erika Stewin
Laura French	Heather Millman	Sonya Strohm
	Clare Morgan	Kathryn Walton