



# THE MONIESON CENTRE

TRANSFORMING BUSINESS IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

**Principal's Installation Symposium:  
*Wisdom, Knowledge and Imagination***  
October 26, 2009

**A discussion of the nature and values of the University, issues of interdisciplinarity  
and the relations between the University and the broader community**

**Dr. Yolande Chan, Director, The Monieson Centre, Queen's School of Business**

Principal Woolf, fellow panelists, members of the Queen's community:

I am deeply honoured to participate in the Principal's Installation Symposium. It is a great privilege to have the opportunity to comment on the values of the University. Today, I represent The Monieson Centre, the Queen's School of Business research centre that I direct. It is from this perspective that I speak.

In my comments, I will address the University's values as they relate to *research* and pose the question, "What constitutes excellence?" I will also address the importance of positive relations between the University and the broader community. Some may argue that the two – research and relationship building – are incompatible. I argue otherwise.

At The Monieson Centre, we wrestle with all three foci of this symposium – values (in particular what research is valued and why), interdisciplinarity, and relationship building. The Centre was established in 1998 to serve as a bridge between the University and its community. It is named after Emeritus Professor, Dr. Danny Monieson, who inspired Queen's students and transformed their careers. The Centre has an applied focus. Our motto is "transforming business in the knowledge economy". Across campus, faculty, students and staff collaborate in Monieson Centre projects to study complex problems and conduct interdisciplinary research. In our studies, we partner and build strong relations with businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and federal, provincial, municipal, and local government agencies.

In today's presentation, I address two University values – excellence and diversity. At Queen's, these values generally complement each other. For example, in our teaching, innovation is welcomed. However, more can be done to promote *research* diversity, while maintaining excellence.

Why take the opportunity at the Principal's Symposium to examine our research values? Speaking from a social science perspective, are not traditional scholarly outputs, such as peer-reviewed articles and books, the mainstay of highly-ranked, research-intensive

institutions? While I greatly value these research products, I argue that there is room for innovation. In fact, change is inevitable. Governments and citizens rightly or wrongly are seeking to understand the benefits of government-funded university research. Granting agencies such as SSHRC, NSERC and CIHR are now requiring that researchers devote more of their attention to mobilizing or sharing research findings. They are adjusting funding programs accordingly. A new generation of academics are seeking greater relevance of, and meaning in, their research.

In fact, applied research can be seen as one of the highest forms of University service, permitting those in the academy to give of their best (our scholarship) to assist those who are less well equipped to find evidence-based solutions to important problems. Is the concept of a “servant researcher” an oxymoron? It need not be. In my discipline, business, Peter Drucker<sup>1</sup> writes that “management exists for the sake of an organization. It is the *servant* of the organization. And any management that forgets that is a mis-management.” I would argue that the same can apply to scholarship.

Nicholas Butler suggests that “an expert is one who knows more and more about less and less.” While a focus on rigour apart from relevance can be one of the highest forms of scholarship, I argue that relevance has its place in the academy and is compatible with excellence.

Research that serves others can be particularly difficult to conduct because the researcher answers not only to his or her academic peers but also to a non-academic audience. The best kind of applied research maintains rigour while remaining relevant. It is “double hurdle” research – meeting the highest academic standards while simultaneously addressing practical needs.

Today’s symposium addresses “knowledge”. It has been argued that knowledge is contextually-relevant information that *enables action*, and that out of context and with no thought of application, knowledge is reduced to information or simply data. Therefore, I ask, “does the task of social science researchers end when we publish new evidence or information?” I argue that it is appropriate for research to have a *social* role, and that researchers are responsible and ethical when they consider the possible impacts of their studies. The interactions that academics have with the community can provide valuable research inputs and outputs. Last week, the President of SSHRC, Chad Gaffield, described – to over 70 Canadian university representatives – a new, 21<sup>st</sup> century research paradigm that embraces the co-creation of knowledge with research partners, contextualization, complexity, and diversity.

Much of the Monieson Centre’s research involves studies conducted in collaboration with partners. For example, one SSHRC-funded project aims to revitalize rural Eastern Ontario, and contains more than 30 business, not-for-profit, and government partners. Research findings have been presented locally in Kingston and overseas to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Another project being planned will study Eastern Ontario communities, and involve more than 20 academics in

---

<sup>1</sup> Thought Leadership – Peter Drucker – A lifetime of wisdom. In *New Zealand Management*, October 2005.

departments such as business, economics, geography, urban and regional planning, and policy studies. These faculty will work closely with over 40 partners who will assist in study design, participate at times as co-investigators, and actively share research findings within their own organizational networks.

Maintaining relationships in collaborative research projects can be time-consuming. Hundreds of letters, phone calls, and e-mails are exchanged each month in these two projects alone. This is a daunting task for a small research centre, much less for an individual researcher. Is this not the end of research productivity? Yes and No. Fundamentally *different forms of research* are conducted with very significant social impacts. Long-term alliances are created. Whether community-university partnerships are productive depends on the time period considered (there are low near-term returns) and on the metrics that are used to assess research outputs. Last week in Ottawa, over 20 SSHRC-funded academics discussed new measures of scholarly output designed to *complement* traditional measures. These included metrics such as the use of reports, policy impact, and community engagement.

Do we value community engagement at Queen's? A recent article in the local Whig-Standard documented over 60 Queen's course-related and volunteer initiatives that involve students and contribute to Kingston. Despite this, a study that The Monieson Centre undertook last year with Student Affairs at Queen's and the Kingston Economic Development Corporation (KEDCO) suggested that relatively few Kingston residents engage the social and intellectual capital represented by Queen's students, and relatively few students attempt to work in Kingston after graduation, to their mutual detriment. Imagine the creative enterprise that would be possible if larger numbers of bright, entrepreneurial students found ways to make Kingston their economic and social base. Kingston's downtown and industrial areas could be transformed.

Today, I have a similar imagination challenge for faculty. Queen's very appropriately seeks global engagement as is fitting for a world-class, research-intensive institution. However, what if we could also find ways to increase community engagement through our *research*? Last week, the Whig-Standard featured a Queen's faculty member who applied her research expertise to a local housing challenge. What if more faculty viewed the community as a high priority research site, and engaged in research that could affect its future? This would be a form of socially responsible research. Can you *imagine* the possible impact?

I have encouraged us to exercise our imagination. Today, the Principal is discussing imagination guided by wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom involves "making the best use of knowledge ... by exercising good judgment."<sup>2</sup> Knowledge is information enabling action. In my view, interdisciplinary, applied research represents a form of research to be valued. Diversity in research need not represent a threat to excellence but a possible solution in challenging times.

It is instructive to note that in recent days we have witnessed excellence at Queen's in both traditional and non-traditional research avenues. Our University Chancellor David

---

<sup>2</sup> Webster (1961).

Dodge and three Queen's professors have been recognized for their “extraordinary achievement[s] in the arts, humanities and sciences” by the Royal Society of Canada. In addition, the province recently awarded \$13.6 million for GreenCentre Canada at Queen’s to support a new commercialization model that transforms green chemistry discoveries into real-world products. These research achievements are complementary. Both should be recognized and celebrated.

Can our Queen’s culture evolve to embrace the servant researcher? Embedding a culture of *diversity* and *service* in our research values creates challenges, but I argue that it can be done. Queen’s is a place of firsts. The University was established in 1841, 26 years before Canada’s Confederation. We were the earliest degree-granting institution in the united Province of Canada. I believe that we can lead the way in a difficult but perhaps inevitable transformation of the academy.

The University Senate records that it was not until the principalship of the Rev. George Munro Grant that Queen's “achieved a position as one of Canada's premier universities”. To quote, “Grant was an idealistic and forceful man ... [He] worked to produce graduates who would build the growing country in a spirit of dedicated service rather than material gain. Under his leadership, Queen's grew rapidly in size and prestige. By the end of his 25-year term the college had more than tripled its size, gained a measure of financial security, and charted a course towards greater academic diversity.”

In closing, I would encourage members of the Queen’s research community to exercise their imagination and ensure that wisdom – not narrow views of what constitutes academic knowledge – guides our choices. T.S. Eliot wrote, “where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?”

I imagine a Queen’s community that celebrates our research diversity, and works together to create a multifaceted, shared vision. John F. Kennedy wrote, “If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity.” I paraphrase this and state, “If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the *academy* receptive to diversity.”

We can have *research diversity with excellence*. My question is, “at Queen’s University, are we up to this challenge?” I believe the answer is “yes”. Thank you.