A new year has just begun for those involved in the academic community. There is a dynamic energy in the air as students re-ignite their journey of discovery and as faculty transition from an intense focus on research to engagement with their students and the larger community. Over this year, I will report important activities of our Sobey School of Business community, such as entrepreneurship and internationalization. In this time of shifting gears, I want to share with you some insight into one element of our work: partnerships.

Saint Mary’s University has a deep and strong connection to our external community. It is in the DNA of the university and it manifests in many ways. In this report we share with you some examples of this dynamic, through stories of partnerships with the Halifax Port Authority, Sobeys, IBM, CBC, NSBI, ACOA, cooperative businesses in Cuba, a university in China and the Institute for Corporate Directors and Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto.

You might ask why we are so proud to share these stories of partnerships with you. Well, it is because we think of ourselves as being in the business of accelerating success. We want our students to find their passion and personal definition of success and work diligently to make their vision a
realities. Similarly, we support businesses in accelerating sustainable value creation through skills development and knowledge of best practices as well as through having access to exceptionally trained graduates prepared to deal with the rapidly changing context of business.

Finally, our mission statement says we “prepare citizens of the world to lead sustainable, entrepreneurial businesses and communities,” and accelerating the success of the whole community is a critical priority.

We know that no one part of the community can drive prosperity alone, but through collaborations and partnerships we can amplify what we do.

The time is now and we want to be your go-to business school for customized senior executive training, for the best trained graduates for internships, co-ops and new hires and for the latest thinking about business challenges.

We partner to accelerate success. ■

A TRADE MISSION IN ECUADOR

“THIS IS THE REAL DEAL!”

Those are the enthusiastic and accurate words of Marc Braithwaite, acting manager of the Sobey School’s Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) program. Part of his role is taking 20 second-year Executive MBA students on an annual nine-day International Business Trade Mission.

The mission is not an academic exercise. The students are opening doors for genuine international business opportunities for Nova Scotia companies. The program is unique in that it provides an annual tangible, practical contribution to business development in Nova Scotia, which has added up, over the years, to a large economic impact.

The Sobey School and its partners—the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) and Nova Scotia Business Inc. (NSBI)—place tremendous confidence in our students because they bring many years of high-level business experience to the table. NSBI works to identify Nova Scotian companies with interest in expanding international trade to specific destinations.

This year, the students went to Quito, Ecuador. Last year it was Colombia and next year it will be Poland. Now in its tenth year, the trade mission has also been to Brazil, China, India, and Indonesia. The destinations are chosen carefully based on expressed needs from Nova Scotia businesses.

Ecuador, for example, is already a significant trade partner, with about $300 million in annual trade with Canada, half in agricultural products. Its economy is growing steadily at around 5 percent, along with its middle class. Poverty reduction is a major priority of the present government and Ecuadorian spending power has already improved significantly. Quito is a rapidly developing city highlighted by a new international airport.

Our students represented the interests of several Nova Scotia companies including Rolls Surrette, a Springhill-based industrial battery
manufacturer; Taste of Nova Scotia, an industry association for agricultural producers, and Nova Scotia Community College, which provides training for significant Ecuadorian sectors like oil & gas, mining, and technology.

In preparation for the mission, students spent four months working with these companies to better understand their industries and trade needs. In Ecuador, each student took part in eight meetings with potential trade partners—like eight blind dates, but with a lot of prep work—in order to open doors to new international trade deals.

By design, it is a mentally exhausting experience functioning in a new industry, language, and culture—a baptism by fire. Students, even those with many years of leadership experience at major corporations, are pushed to their limits and must perform under pressure, applying their classroom learning on the fly in an unfamiliar setting.

By all accounts, the mission was an unmitigated success. Had the students had Rolls Surrette’s industrial batteries on hand they could have sold them on the spot. Students received commitments to move forward toward selling Nova Scotia products.

In the fall, the business owners will be part of a follow-up mission to close deals with the most promising Ecuadorian firms. The student mission makes for more efficient use of their time. Real opportunities are identified and students get real-world international experience. That is the uniqueness of a Sobey School Executive MBA experience.

Beyond those benefits, these trade missions offer valuable lessons for the entire Nova Scotia business sector on effective exporting and insights into everything from relationship-building to cross-cultural communication, logistics management, and mastering the rules of trade. For example, while our students were in Ecuador they learned of a brand new emergency import tariff passed in March, an attempt to counter the effects of falling oil prices. Such a change will have an obvious impact on budgeting in any trade negotiations. This is the kind of on-the-fly learning you can’t get in the classroom.

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CONNECTING THE DOTS

TOUR OF CUBAN CO-OPERATIVES

Through its Co-operative Management Education (CME) programs, the Sobey School of Business has been learning from the exciting economic transformation of Cuba, going back to 2011 when the CME participated in an inaugural Cuban study tour attended by several instructors and alumni. In February, CME returned as Cuba embarks on a project to decentralized and democratize its economy while maintaining its socialist principles. It proposes to do so by shifting from state-controlled enterprises to citizen-led co-operatives. Tour participants included students and instructors from Canadian and U.S. campuses as well as farmers and representatives from co-op organizations working in a wide array of sectors (arts, financial, food production, and more). They were hosted by Cuban academics, farmers, consultants, civil servants, and other professionals. Participants attended lectures and panels in the mornings and in the afternoon, visited co-ops in the fields of graphic design, fashion, car repair, construction, and urban organic farming. The opportunity to study such a radical economic shift, as well as to research the impact that the co-operative business model has on the economy, will better equip participants to adapt to the dynamics of a changing economy here in Nova Scotia.

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The One Nova Scotia Now or Never Report reinforced the essential importance of putting talented people to work. That includes well-trained new graduates and skilled immigrants. Shawn Swallow manages our Graduate Career Services and he understands this need as well as anyone. He spends much of his time connecting with Nova Scotia businesses, helping them develop and provide real-world business opportunities for students and graduates.

Shawn himself followed a well-travelled road out of his home province of Nova Scotia, with a five-year plan to work at the University of British Columbia. Five years became fifteen, but he always knew he’d come back when the right opportunity came along. Now he works to develop the right opportunities for young professionals at the Sobey School. That usually involves a lot of legwork, networking, and matchmaking.

Recently, management at the Halifax Port Authority was inspired to help reverse the brain drain that has for so long sapped our province’s economic performance. Joan MacLeod, the Port Authority’s human resources director, contacted Shawn with an opportunity for MBA students. She was drawn to us because our students have real-world work experience (a requirement for all our MBA students) and because half of our students are international. The Port Authority works with companies from all over the world, wherever a cargo ship may travel.

The result is a three-year commitment by the Port to hire up to two Sobey MBA students annually for summer and fall internships. The Sobey School screens students to ensure a good fit with the position and the skills needed. The Port Authority does the interviewing and makes the final hire.

MBA student Jia Li is the first student hired by the Port Authority. She hails from Weihai, Shandong Province in China, a harbour city she says is in many ways similar to Halifax. She brings international business experience and an undergraduate degree in international trade from Qingdao University. Like many of our students, she hopes to remain in Halifax when she graduates.

For Li, this is a valuable opportunity to gain Canadian experience, learn new skills, and better connect locally while using her experience and cultural understanding of China. China is Canada’s second largest trading partner, responsible for 10 percent of our imports.
Global connectedness is one of the most impressive things about Sobey students at the undergradu-
ate and graduate levels.

Many come with the hope of establishing themselves in Nova Scotia’s workforce and helping grow our economy, which is why they seek internship opportunities. Part of our role, something Shawn does so well, is opening doors to employers and connecting students to help them make a life here.

As Shawn says, “We have keen, smart, talented students who can add value to a company right away. Employers just need to give them the chance.”

We’ve very pleased that the Port Authority is boldly doing just that, and helping to ensure that the education we provide is genuinely connected to Nova Scotia’s economic performance.

We are delighted to start the new Atlantic Research Group on Economics of Immigration, Aging and Diversity at the Sobey School of Business. This important research group analyzes the economic impact of immigration, population diversity, and aging in our region. Last October we proudly hosted their first public outreach event, attended by more than 130 policymakers, influencers and students. Through presentations by notable demographer David Foot and researchers associated with the Atlantic Research Group, we examined important policy implications of our changing demographics. For example, we know that more immigrants are needed to maintain a productive workforce as our population ages, but in Atlantic Canada we lose too many newcomers to a lack of relevant jobs or established ethnic communities. To compensate, the research indicates that we need to provide better supports to help all newcomers connect to opportunities and communities. This September, a follow up event featured Dr. Bill Ashton describing the components of a welcoming community. This kind of research is essential for moving our economy forward as our communities inevitably change.
Dr. J. Colin Dodds, former President and Vice-Chancellor of Saint Mary’s, said these words last October when we announced a new Bachelor of Commerce cohort in China, a partnership between the Sobey School of Business and the Beijing Normal University, Zhuhai (BNUZ).

Dr. Dodds is absolutely right. The world is so connected that a small northern coastal city like Halifax can become a natural partner to Zhuhai, China, a booming subtropical business district just west of Hong Kong. These two cities have more in common than you might expect. Both are top-notch tourist destinations – they call Zhuhai the Chinese Riviera. They are both significant shipping ports as well.

And now, they share a high-quality four-year Bachelor of Commerce degree with a major in Finance. The program will be delivered in Zhuhai, with half the courses taught by professors from the Sobey School of Business who will travel there to teach.

The Sobey School of Business has been working directly with BNUZ for thirteen years, during which time several hundred students have completed joint degrees, two years at BNUZ and two years here. Given its location in a premium business district in one of the most populous places on the planet, BNUZ leadership felt there would be enormous value in having Sobey professors come to their
environment and help build the capacity of the city’s future financial leaders and decision makers.

Finance is a big demand area for Chinese students. By heightening our global reach and building our brand in China, we also expect to increase student recruitment locally.

Starting in March 2016, we’ll send small teams of professors for five-week stays in Zhuhai to teach. The faculty first participate in a number of intensive training sessions on living and working in Zhuhai. For them, it will be a phenomenal cross-cultural business experience. Several of them will bring their own international experience, having worked, lived, or come of age outside of Canada.

Students will graduate with a degree from the Sobey School of Business, an internationally recognized leader in training business practitioners and executives.

The partnership gives us a unique opportunity to have a program in China and a valuable inter-cultural experience for our professors. It’s unusual for a business school to take on this kind of partnership at the undergraduate level. It establishes the Sobey School as a significant international player and will raise Nova Scotia’s profile in China.

2016 will see us add to our Chinese partnership with a planned China Competencies program for Nova Scotia Businesses. Stay tuned!

PARTNERING FOR RETAIL SUCCESS

The new David Sobey Centre for Innovation in Retailing and Services has already cultivated exciting and productive research relationships with companies including Ernst and Young, the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission (NSLC) and Sobeys.

Sobeys Inc. was involved with the first David Sobey Live Case Competition, held last fall. They, as well as Wicker Emporium and Sunnyside Mall, provided a business challenge that student teams were required to analyse and develop solutions for.

This fall, along with IBM, Sobeys is again partnering with the David Sobey Centre to present a retail hackathon in conjunction with the new Saint Mary’s Master of Science in Computing and Data Analytics program. In addition to providing teams with anonymized retail data for the challenge, Sobeys is providing prizes including a workshop with IBM on design thinking.

Through partnerships like these, the David Sobey Centre is providing our students with opportunities to research, learn and build their own networks.
Governance is a critical function for all organizations from nonprofits and cooperatives and credit unions to family-owned businesses and large corporations. Best practices are evolving quickly, and both current directors, and those who want to take on the challenges of governance, are equally enthusiastic to learn from and stay connected to the latest thinking.

The Directors Education Program (DEP), jointly developed by the Institute of Corporate Directors (ICD) and Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto, has become well respected for developing the skills of board directors. The Sobey School of Business is proud to partner to offer this challenging program, unique in North America, led by well-recognized experts, university faculty and experienced board members.

The goal of this partnership is to contribute to the development of better governance practices in the region and across the country. In fact, alumni of this program join a network of over 3,300 directors and almost 9,000 ICD members across the country.

The participants in the program are some of the best business and community leaders from across the region and the program brings them together to explore real world scenarios and understand challenging governance dilemmas. From risk management, shareholder activism and mergers and acquisitions to CEO succession and board composition, all topics are explored and hotly debated.

We are delighted to partner in delivering this best-in-class program, supporting a national and international movement to improve corporate governance. Training in how to exercise due diligence using a “noses in and fingers out” approach is critical to helping create more organizational value and to fulfilling each directors’ fiduciary responsibility. As Dr. Margaret McKee, the academic director for the Halifax DEP and Associate Professor with the Sobey School of Business, puts it, “Good governance is informed by a strong commitment to doing what’s in the best interest of the organization and its stakeholders. The DEP prepares directors for their critical oversight role, equipping them with the knowledge and confidence to ask the necessary – and sometimes tough – questions”.

The DEP offers the knowledge and practical tools directors need to responsibly govern corporations, universities, hospitals and other not-for-profit organizations. Using active, hands on learning activities – including simulations and role plays that grapple with real business challenges – participants complete four deeply intensive sessions, each lasting three days. DEP faculty members are recognized experts in executive leadership, strategic planning, finance and financial disclosure, business law, and executive
recruitment and performance management, areas which have become increasingly sophisticated with new accountability legislation. These are the things that every leader in the region needs to know—the health of our provincial economies depends on it.

Beyond legal duties, participants learn about the varied expectations of multiple stakeholders, including corporate social responsibility. Not so long ago, if a company pleased its shareholders it was seen to be doing enough. More is expected now. Environmental and social considerations must inform all business decisions. This is the level of complexity at which the DEP is working.

On completion of a written exam and simulated board meeting, participants earn an ICD.D designation from the Institute of Corporate Directors. The ICD, a national membership organization serving directors and boards, developed the DEP twelve years ago in partnership with faculty from the University of Toronto’s Rotman School of Management, and it has since expanded into selected institutions across Canada. In 2010, ICD was seeking a Halifax university with the capacity and reputation for delivering quality executive education to Atlantic Canada and we’re very proud they selected the Sobey School of Business.

We launched the Halifax DEP in September of 2014 and graduated our first class of 36 participants in May of 2015. Our second cohort started the program in March, and future DEP offerings are already scheduled for 2016.

Through offering programs such as the DEP, we become ever more connected to companies and executives throughout the region. We hear firsthand from top level leaders about real challenges they face in this economy.

In turn, we share the learnings from our cutting-edge management research, fostering more innovation. As Dr. McKee says, “This program contributes to a deeper connection between the University and the business community across Atlantic Canada.”

“GOOD GOVERNANCE IS INFORMED BY A STRONG COMMITMENT TO DOING WHAT’S IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE ORGANIZATION AND ITS STAKEHOLDERS. THE DEP PREPARES DIRECTORS FOR THEIR CRITICAL OVERSIGHT ROLE, EQUIPPING THEM WITH THE KNOWLEDGE AND CONFIDENCE TO ASK THE NECESSARY -- AND SOMETIMES TOUGH -- QUESTIONS”.

PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT

Last spring, the Sobey School of Business signed onto the Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME), a UN-backed initiative to evolve our curriculum, research, and learning approach to management education to focus on corporate sustainability and responsibility. PRME was launched in 2007 and stems from the United Nations Global Compact, launched in 2000 in New York City with about forty companies. It now has more than 14,000 participants in 145 countries. Its aim is a more sustainable and inclusive global economy with attention to human rights, anti-corruption, and ending poverty. The Sobey School is one of 500 business schools in 80 countries that have become signatories PRME. Our signature commits us to train students capable of responsibly generating sustainable value for all of society.
The CBC newsroom in west-end Halifax is a frantic, wide open bullpen of curiosity-driven storytelling. It is the nerve centre of mainland Nova Scotia, pulsing with the daily events of our region.

Few get to witness it in action. Those who do are, for the most part, trained and seasoned journalists with their ears to the ground, following tips and hunches trying to illuminate murky truths.

But this building is also a business, and none understood it better than the late Krista Harris, who graduated from Saint Mary’s with a Bachelor of Commerce in 1987. She started work for the CBC in 1994 and quickly climbed the ranks to become a national director of production and resources for CBC radio.

Krista then led a redesign of CBC.ca and launched the Corporation’s first podcasts. Her colleagues fondly remember her for her compassion, vision, strategic thinking, and exemplary leadership skills. Tragically, she died of cancer in 2006.

Two years later, CBC and the Sobey School of Business partnered to create a memorial Krista Harris CBC Fellowship for high-achieving students with demonstrated interests in current affairs. For six weeks each summer, a talented Sobey School of Business student receives a salary and bursary and experiences the vibrancy of that newsroom firsthand, opening their minds to new ways of using their business skills.

Last summer, that student was Naina Garg, a fourth-year undergraduate focusing on economics with a strong interest in journalism. For her, the Krista
Harris fellowship was a golden opportunity to immerse herself in economic stories by some of the country’s best radio and television reporters.

Naina fondly recalls three days job shadowing veteran reporter Paul Withers as he broke stories involving Nova Scotia Power and our province’s struggling mink farmers. The grueling twelve-hour days – no time for lunch – showed her the human side of the economic theory she’d been learning and gave her a chance to see prominent political leaders in action. She saw Halifax from all angles, gaining perspectives of our city’s economy she didn’t know existed.

At the same time, Naina got an insider’s look at a high-profile institution in a time of major economic change. “It was interesting to see how CBC is responding to cuts by communicating through the web more and maximizing resources,” Naina says.

That is the kind of perspective fourth-year commerce student Nelson Xie will have as this year’s successful applicant. He’s an accounting major with a particular interest in the CBC’s financing model. It’s in his blood; his father is a VP of a television station in China.

An internship at CBC shows our students a non-traditional business path, a way to use their skills, as Naina puts it, “an interface between newsmakers and the people who need news.” It is an essential service requiring exceptional management skills. Krista Harris personified the application of such skills for a public good.

Nelson and Naina, who wants to specialize in journalism that explores the emerging green economy, are able followers in Krista’s path. Naina knows, from her experience in the CBC newsroom, that it’s a difficult but rewarding path to take. As she says, “It takes a lot of determination and curiosity, constantly looking for a story in anything, always on your feet.”

Below left, Nelson Xie, photographed at a kite-flying event. Below right, Naina Garg (front left) poses with other members of the Sobey School Commerce Society Executive, 2014.
How would you like to be involved?

To discuss, please contact:

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