

UWC Costa Rica

UWC: Growing and Diversifying for the Future

(Address to UWC Costa Rica Board, Council and staff, and participants in the Latin American and Caribbean meeting)

Sir John Daniel, O.C.
Chair, UWC International Board

Introduction

Madam Chair of the Board and the Advisory Council, Susan; Head of UWC Costa Rica, Mauricio; Vice-Chair of the International Board, Jill; Members of the Board and Council and representatives of National Committees; Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a pleasure to be with you today. I took over the volunteer role of chair of the UWC International Board on the 1st of January last year and this is my first visit to UWC Costa Rica. I try to organise my visits to UWC institutions and projects to satisfy two conditions. First, I like them to coincide with special events, such as the meetings you are holding here now. Second, I try to get another organisation to pay most of the travel costs. Sometimes, as today, these two criteria do not match perfectly. The US Council for Higher Education Accreditation paid my fare as far as Washington DC, but I had to chair a meeting there yesterday, so I am sorry to arrive on the tail end of your important meetings. But better late than never!

I had also hoped to stay on for a few days holiday after the meetings because this is my first visit to a special country. They had to de-ice the plane when I left Toronto, and the temperature only just crept above zero in Washington yesterday, so a few days in the lovely climate of Costa Rica would have been delightful. However, I must go to Japan next week.

How did I become chair of the UWC International Board? Even though it is a *pro bono* assignment, the UWC went through a thorough search process before appointing me.

I am not an alumnus of any of the UWCs and I think that is an advantage in my role as chair for two reasons. First, it means that I can never be accused of bias in favour of any particular institution. Second, the UWC is a close-knit community and being an outsider gives me a degree of objectivity.

But I have had various contacts with the UWC over a thirty-year period. They began in the mid-1980s with an invitation to give a talk at Pearson UWC, which has longstanding links with UWC Costa Rica.

I was travelling with my 16-year-old daughter Catherine. While I was speaking to some of the pupils, the Head, Tony Macoun, detailed other pupils to take her out to their

underwater reserve at Race Rocks. She came back with stars in her eyes, declared her eagerness to attend a UWC, and started at the UWC of the American West less than a year later.

Not long afterwards I was invited to join the Council of Foundation of the International Baccalaureate and served as a member for almost ten years, winding up as vice-president of the IB. It was a period of rapid growth and considerable change.

Wheels sometimes come full circle. Tony Macoun, who was head of Pearson when I visited in the 1980s, and later founding head of UWC Nordic, has just this week been appointed chair of the Pearson UWC Board. I very much look forward to working with him again.

Congratulations to UWC Costa Rica and the National Committees of the Region

After that introduction let me first congratulate UWC Costa Rica on its achievements. All UWC institutions have a unique history. UWC Costa Rica is the only college that was founded directly by UWC International. As many of you know, the institution was struggling as part of the SOS Children's Village organisation when UWC International was offered a donation to take it into the UWC system. There was a dramatic meeting at SOS's headquarters in Innsbruck in 2005 when the UWC representatives were given just one hour to answer yes or no.

Nearly a decade later it is clear that you have done a remarkable job in blending two distinct cultures while preserving the SOS heritage. My international colleagues tell me that UWC Costa Rica leads the UWC movement in its emphasis on pastoral and residential care and that the pupils here are notable for their humility and sense of responsibility.

The road has not been easy. More than most UWC institutions you have had challenges of governance and finance. I believe this meeting symbolises a turning point for your governance and it will only be a matter of time before financial rewards follow.

Your Board and Council are new teams and I congratulate Susan, your chair, and Mauricio, your head, on bringing together some distinguished, diverse and eager people. You have hard work ahead of you. I wish you well and I am sure that it will be crowned with success.

I also congratulate the members of the National Committees here present for their wonderful work in support of the movement. Few people outside the UWC system know much about the existence and role of the National Committees. That was certainly true in my own case. But since I took over the chair I have come to a very full appreciation of the vital function that National Committees play. I also observe their increasing effectiveness as each committee learns from the good practice of others at meeting like this.

Each UWC institution incorporates special features into its educational programme. I have just come from the annual conference of the US Council for Higher Education Accreditation and its International Quality Group whose advisory council I chair. At that conference the air was full of talk about the growing trend to competency-based education. I am delighted that UWC Costa Rica is leading on that important development. Let me also congratulate the pupils on the TEDx activity. I am sorry that I missed it.

Looking ahead

I shall conclude with some remarks about the future. It was stimulating to come in on the tail end of your strategic planning discussions this afternoon. Clearly, the College is setting a firm direction for the future.

What is the international context for your work? I have titled these remarks, *UWC: Growing and diversifying for the Future*. The UWC movement is at an exciting moment in its evolution.

I mentioned that UWC Costa Rica was the first institution to become a UWC by action of the UWC International. Prior to that point you could not really talk of a UWC movement. UWC was a disparate set of institutions united by a name and some common features, but it had little sense of itself as a global entity. That has changed rapidly in the last five years. There is now a degree of cohesion within the movement and a level of trust among the heads and board chairs that is a firm basis for moving forward in a purposeful way.

I congratulate your own head, Mauricio, on being elected by his fellow heads to chair their group. The meetings of heads are the most important motor of the educational and pastoral development of the UWC movement, so his election is a great tribute to Mauricio personally and to UWC Costa Rica in general.

First, what about growth? At its last meeting, held in Maastricht, the international board gave final approval to the launching of two new institutions, the Robert Bosch UWC in Germany and the UWC Dilijan in Armenia. Both will take their first pupils later this year. We also gave preliminary approval to a UWC in China. This will be a substantial expansion of our existing network of 12 institutions and helps to increase UWC's geographic spread.

Second, the UWC system is diversifying. The majority of the institutions are still two-year colleges offering the last two years of secondary school, but a growing minority of institutions are schools that take children right through – in the case of UWC South-East Asia in Singapore, right through from kindergarten.

Last October His Majesty King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, himself an alumnus of UWC Atlantic, formally opened the new UWC Maastricht. That institution includes full primary and secondary schools as well as the IB Diploma programme.

This growth and diversification would not have been possible without the ever-stronger cohesion within the UWC movement that I mentioned earlier. We are seeing convergence of views and practice in two vital areas. First, I noted that the National Committees, while maintaining the cultural distinctiveness proper to their countries, are learning from each other and harmonising some of their procedures. Second, where there used to be considerable divergence in scholarship policies between institutions, there is now a greater meeting of minds. An important step came last year when Pearson College adapted its previous full scholarship policy to two current realities.

The first reality is that the full scholarship policy is no longer attractive to most donors – if indeed it ever was. I remember that when my daughter went to UWC USA in the 1980s I felt guilty that she had a full scholarship. I was a university rector at the time and I could well have afforded to pay part of the cost, allowing some of the scholarship money to give a chance to someone else.

The second reality is that the full scholarship policy gave the two-year colleges an almost impossible hill to climb in balancing their books. This put a brake on increasing the number of UWC institutions, because existing colleges that were strapped for funds feared expansion would be a zero-sum game, meaning less money and students for them.

The key principle, to which we are all committed, is that no child, who could benefit from a UWC education and gets through the admissions process successfully, should be denied access because their family cannot afford to pay anything. But full scholarships for everyone are a blunt, inequitable and inefficient instrument for implementing that principle.

The steady harmonisation of scholarship policy across the movement will take time, but already the existing institutions have the confidence to support the addition of new institutions, raising UWC's profile and its ability to raise funds for all institutions.

However, I must add that we have also set the financial bar very high for the new institutions. Most existing UWCs could not have jumped over it when they were created!

I am frankly amazed by the way that groups in countries as diverse as Armenia, China and Germany have pulled together such large amounts of money that the financial solidity of their new institutions is assured for years into the future without reliance on funds from the rest of the movement.

Conclusion

So let me once again congratulate you all on the remarkable evolution of the UWC Costa Rica in particular and the development of the UWC culture in Latin America and the Caribbean generally. It is a great pleasure to be here with you and I am only sorry that I was not able to get here earlier. I hope I have shown you that the UWC movement is much more than simply a going concern. It is a vibrant community poised to lead the

development of international education into the future. We are proud that UWC Costa Rica is striving become a jewel in that crown.

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