Patrick Deane:

Welcome, it’s great to have you all here this afternoon for what I hope will be a very good conversation and the first of a great many that are going to occur between now and the spring. Before I get into some of the housekeeping information about the conversation and to give you a sense of where I want to go today, I’d just like to begin as is our custom by acknowledging our presence on the lands of the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples.

While all of us are encouraged to honour the history of the land we live on, I move to reflect on my own positionality as the product of a settler culture in another country recently settled on this land. I reflect on the privileges I experience here in Kingston, the ways in which I’ve benefitted from the colonial project—a project that has its foundations in the exploitation of many nations here in what we now call Canada and around the world for the benefit of my ancestors and myself.

And today especially, in the light of the events in Chown Hall last week, very upsetting events for many, many members of our community. I would urge everyone to consider their own positionality on this land and to act on whatever privileges we have so that we can contribute to the work of decolonizing our institutions and our minds.

I imagine you will want to come back a little later on to talk about the Chown Hall poster—this is, after all, to be a conversation about values, and about the values that should animate the institution. This is not, of course, a desirable way to begin a conversation except, in many ways, it’s exactly to the point. The university does its work in challenging circumstances and we have issues both within and without our institution that we need to think about as we think about the future for the university as we map it out.

Now if I may, by way of some housekeeping items—by the way, for this event there is no agenda. I’m going to say a few things about what I’m hoping for and now I’m going to try to draw from you some observations about issues that matter to you, about your aspirations for the institution, about the things which you think I as a newly returned member of this community should be addressing myself to and ways in which we might imagine our future for the university in the next 10 years and beyond. Before we get to that point, I’ll say a little bit about the challenges that I think beset institutions nowadays.

So, there is, as I said, no particular agenda this time. In subsequent meetings or occasions of this sort, I’ll probably want to announce a topic, so we might want to have a topic, for example on research—we most certainly will have more than one conversation about that subject, internationalization, student experience, community engagement, those kinds of topics depending on what emerges from our conversation here today and in subsequent meetings. We might have more structured thematic occasions but the discussion, I hope, will always be free flowing because that’s what this is supposed to be.

This is not a process that has an outcome envisaged by me, except that what I hope we end up with at the end of this is a more clearly articulated set of aspirations for the institution and a notion of what the
key issues are that we need to address to get where we want to go. So, please, in the course of the conversation, feel free to be very frank, to raise issues that matter—it’s important for every voice to be heard.

You’ll notice that the event is being recorded and we’ll put it up on the principal’s website so people who were not able to be here can be part of the conversation, and there are also many other ways in which you can contribute to the conversation even if you don’t wish to stand up today and talk. There’s this little card on the seats and you can fill that in. If you want to come and talk to me privately, you certainly can do that or have me come and talk to different groups, I’d be more than happy to do that.

What I’ve said is that everything I do between now and the spring will be to advance this conversation. So, whether I’m visiting a department meeting or a faculty council or an alumni gathering or the AMS council, I will be engaging in this conversation in attempt to move us towards articulating our values and aspirations. I said in the letter I wrote that it would be premature to start one of those conventional, mind-numbing strategic planning exercises before we know actually what we care about and what this place should represent in the future. So, that’s why we’re doing this, relatively informal and unstructured. But do feed into it any way you can. I’m reachable by email and in person and I hope that no one will have any trouble getting to see me if they need to talk about this.

So, maybe I’ll just begin then if I may by reiterating some of the points I made in the letter and then I will really want to be open to hearing from you—we’ve got some mics that will go around, and I invite you when you do speak just to use the mics for the purposes of the recording in particular, and if you don’t mind saying who you are so I can get reacquainted. It’s nice to see lots of familiar faces here today, though, from what is surprising to me, 9 years ago.

So, as I indicated in the letter, I believe it’s extremely challenging at the moment not only in this province but more broadly for universities to hold the course according to values that matter to them. These institutions are beset by—everybody thinks they know what a university should be, every member of the public thinks the university has a particular function to perform, every member of government thinks that. Within our institutions, I like to think there is a consensus in support of a broader vision of what the university is but these are not easy times as our funders are establishing evermore narrow criteria for what they want to support in a university. You can look at, there are plenty of dystopian examples around the world to look at, in the UK system in which universities don’t offer mathematics anymore because they assume not every institution should offer those things and they should be offered in one or two particular places.

So, really, it’s an odd time in which the notion of the university as a place in which citizens are broadly and deeply educated to be contributing members of society in a progressive way is under threat. I think we’ve seen in this province an erosion of the difference between the mandates of the universities and the colleges. Some of you will remember that when Bill Davis set up the college system in Ontario set it up so there would be no confusing the two and increasingly we see the two sectors merging, and that’s not in itself a problem to me. What is problematic is a blurring of the mission.

The mission of the college is very specific and skills oriented. The mission of the university is different, not that we aren’t interested in specific skills, but it is that notion of educating the whole person that is at the heart of our mission. Institutions like this do, I think, have to concern themselves with values as a key part of what we have to contribute to society, so it’s a challenging time. Everybody has an idea of
what we should be doing and I actually believe there is a version of Stockholm Syndrome that applies here, in that every meeting I go to, I find that universities are perishing the same kind of stuff. And you can understand why. From a pragmatic or an expedient point of view, if your funder uses a particular kind of language for talking about what you do, it might be in your own interest to replicate that language.

So, I’m an English professor, right? This stuff matters, and no, one should not necessarily embrace a language that is antithetical to our values. So, I don’t think you can navigate your way through this, unless you as an institution—we as an institution—have a commitment to values and an ideal of the university that excites us, that we feel with conviction, that we can argue for with conviction, and that we can want to impart to our students and transmit through our research and the energy we devote to our research. These places have a huge critically important public mission, and it’s not just the contribution of cogs to the machinery of the economy, it is certainly the contribution of people who can be working, productive members of society, but it’s a much bigger vision. The quality of our society, and our political organizations and institutions depends on us doing our job.

What should we be focusing on? I was thinking earlier on today, what’s the question I want to ask you? What do we aspire to? So, we recently --big deal-- we were reaffirmed in the same place in the Maclean’s rankings—well actually, Mac jumped over us last year, so we’re still in that distressing position which last year I thought was fabulous and this year I think is very poor. You become very forgetful in these jobs, that’s ancient history, and now I’m preoccupied with this thing.

Where are we in the world rankings? We’re in a category, 200-300 in the Shanghai Jiao Tong or the Times Higher rankings. We’re nowhere in the Times rankings for institutions’ contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN. This is not something I observe by way of recrimination or complaint, but it’s symptomatic of our not having grabbed hold of a place in the postsecondary landscape. Institutions do this, right, and often very successfully if not deservedly so. Arizona State University, everybody talks about the great success story of ASU, and it is an extraordinary example of a university reinventing itself.

So, there’s a question. What are our aspirations? What is Queen’s and where should we sit in that—do we care about the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN, for example? Should we think about the way in which imagine our program as speaking to those things, if the issue is, do we want to contribute to the world? That was, I think, the fundamental question I wanted to ask you, but there are many others. We are used to describing ourselves as a balanced academy, and I think there is truth in that. I think at Queen’s, you can say that is an accurate description in a way it’s not always an accurate description of universities. Universities like to talk about themselves being very balanced—I think it is true here, that this is an institution with a good research record and an outstanding record in terms of the student experience here. Is that how we want to continue to be perceived, and if not, how do we want to imagine that?

What about internationalization? Those international rankings do take note of your international engagements—research partnerships, mobility of students, mobility of faculty, contributions to bigger global issues, these kinds of things. It seems to me right now that we’re a bit disorganized from the point of view of how we situate ourselves on the international stage. We don’t really know what we want to do. I think most Canadian institutions have had incredible difficulty getting past the idea that internationalization is just about student mobility, mostly in-bound with high tuition fees. And that is the
model, I would describe it as Canada’s sort of parochial attempt to imitate the Australians who did this years ago in a much more effectively exploitative manner. That’s dripping in irony, by the way, that phrase, just so you don’t get confused about where I’m going.

But Canadian institutions haven’t been good at that and I would say that Queen’s at one time was looked at as the Canadian institution that understood international education. There used to be a program here for international educators every year. I think we’ve dropped from that position of influence, and I also think like many institutions, and this would include the one I’ve come from, we haven’t thought through what the whole thing looks like. What does internationalization at home look like? Does that involve curricular change that benefits those who aren’t travelling? What is the relationship between international students who are here and domestic students? Do we foster a relationship between them, or do we just have them sit next to each other in classes? There was a very distressing statistic a couple of years ago in which international exchange students returning to their country of origin were asked whether they had made a Canadian friend in their time here and the figure was astonishing. Something of 1% or 2% of students returning felt they had some kind of bond to the country and to the student body they come from.

Claudia:

Sorry to interrupt you, I figured it would be a good spot to get in. Hi, my name is Claudia and I am a graduate student. I, too, come from South Africa and I’m happy you are talking about internationalization; it’s something I care deeply about as a graduate student here and an international graduate student here, and it’s been something that myself and a group of other international students have been trying to get on the agenda for about a year. Because I think it is great to speak about internationalization and all the wonderful things that come with it, but if you are not looking at some of the structural dimensions of what international students are feeling at this university and are facing while at this university, I think that these goals and ideas of how much we could contribute are being grossly neglected or not seen. You said speak frank, so I hope that’s okay. Because I think the vast—in my view, graduate students are the core blood of a university in many regards. They’re about to become the next academics, they’re thinking deeply about the world’s biggest issues, and across the university I think graduate students in general are facing precarity and are facing work-life balance issues. Any supervisor would know that graduate students are putting in more work than study, and not because they are here to work, but because they are here to study, and somehow the system seems backwards. That is even more grossly the case for international students who are having to pay twice the fees, who have no security like other graduate students when they enter their fifth years, but have to pay again twice the fees with no security. And this means from day one when you enter as an international student you have more pressure on you to finish on time, to get that done, you’ve been told to curb your enthusiasm, don’t think as big as other students because you have to finish in four years because of the financial situation. And I’m just very thankful that this is on the table and to hear that you are here speaking about this here at this forum, and I really hope that there will be a serious conversation about the fee structure that international students are facing across the university and a consideration of what this means structurally for international graduate students. But thank you once again.

Patrick:

Thanks very much. I mean, you raised a number of really important points. Well said. I think one of the other topics I was going to say we must come to is graduate studies and the situation of grad students in
general and you raised that as well. But the particular take you gave on international grad students is extremely helpful. For me, the most reprehensible model of internationalization is the one that sees students, graduate or undergraduate, as essentially a way of funneling revenue into the universities to subsidize domestic students or to make up for the underfunding situation in the universities.

To me, any approach to internationalization in this university will have to be modeled on an entirely different set of ethics and values. It has to be about the mutual benefit that the student receives and the institution receives and there needs to be a consideration of that in the whole question of the cost of higher education. At the moment in the province, the prevailing view is that while domestic enrolments at both levels, graduate and undergraduate, are capped so you have to negotiate how many funded spaces you could have for domestic graduate students as well as undergrads, there is a recognition that the only latitude universities are being given is international students as a way of making up the financial difference.

That is not an adequate basis for making decisions about an educational institution and the work we do in partnership with our students here. So, you raised, I think, really critical issues. It's most definitely on the table, and my hope is that when we get to the end of the conversation, we will have the outlines of an approach to internationalization that is ethical, that includes a development model, that is not all about the material benefits that accrue to a place like this through having international students here. It’s a much bigger issue, and there are also issues of justice and equity that have to be addressed, so thanks very much, and grateful for the interruption because it stopped me in my tracks and now I can just take some other questions. Yes, please go ahead.

Karen Dubinsky:

Thank you. I’m Karen Dubinsky, I’m in the History department and in Global Development Studies, it’s nice to see you again. Seven years?

Patrick:

Nine.

Karen Dubinsky:

Nine years. I started the morning with many other people at the Four Directions student centre, participated in a talking circle, closed my mouth as professors don’t always do and listened, and I heard incredible, moving, sad stories, insightful stories. I think my two takeaways are that the old people in the circle, like me, who have seen racism at Queen’s for, you know, decades, everybody said this is the worst thing that anybody has seen happen. The young people in the room who, in the circle, particularly the Indigenous and/or gay and/or people of colour who were there, are scared. This is way beyond blackface at Halloween and a racist costume party, these were death threats. To call it a racist poster isn’t untrue, but these were death threats seemingly from their neighbours, from other students.

So, I guess where I go with that, is I think this needs to be a topic, an ongoing topic, not yet one more Queen’s in the news story, “those racist kids at Queen’s,” “those privileged white kids.” This has to be part of something much more fundamental, and when the investigations—in whatever form they take—happen, and when people are found guilty for this, they don’t belong here. They’ve got to get out of here.
Patrick:
Karen, thanks. Yes, I’d agree with you, it’s the worst I’ve seen in—whatever it is—25 years in these administrative roles, I haven’t seen anything that bad, and it’s extremely distressing for all the reasons you gave. So, what I will say to you, is absolutely, this is an issue that we have to talk about. And we have to talk about it in an open way, and we have to digest the reality of it. Blackface incidents and so on, distressing as they are, end up sort of managed as part of the way in which a university presents itself to the outside world.

But this is a fundamental issue, yes of justice and respect for all people, but also if we don’t address that, we don’t actually have a good place for learning and research. That poster and the threat it represents are an absolute antipathy to what we stand for here, or should stand for, which is why we need to be talking about aspirations and that is relevant. Thanks, Karen, that’s great. Please, go ahead.

Brielle Thorsen:
(Introduction in Indigenous language)
Good morning, everyone, my name is Brielle Thorsen. I’m a registered member of Saddle Lake Cree Nation which is over in Treaty 6, and I would just like to share some thoughts after talking to other Indigenous students and being an Indigenous student, and an Indigenous engineering student here on campus.

First and foremost, I think this incident is a blessing in disguise. Indigenous students on campus have been saying there is systemic and embedded racism for years. My whole career here at Queen’s we’ve been saying this and finally, we’re being listened to. So, I think we need to address these microaggressions just as aggressively as we’re addressing this huge form of a hate crime. Those microaggressions and leaving that room for those is what leads to these intense incidents that threaten death upon us students. Those microaggressions come from taking down a Métis flag or a pride flag—that in itself is a hate crime. And I think we need to address those when it happens because it leaves room for incidents like this to occur.

Having said such, I think it’s really important to listen to Indigenous students on campus. I think it’s important for allies to amplify those voices. I was also at Four Directions this morning, and it was great to have ally support, but I think in those spaces, allies need to take a step back as well and recognize their privilege. We need to use our voices. I, you know, come across as white, and I’ve been dealing with that my whole career, but by using your privilege to amplify those voices versus perhaps using those spaces to further that white privilege and to further those colonial thoughts. I guess that’s a lot to unpack, but I think it comes from understanding those spaces are for Indigenous students and they need to be supported.

As a community we’re hurt, but Indigenous students and LGBTQ2+ people were the ones that were targeted. So, my suggestion is, the condemnation is great, we need to show that we’re against it, but we need action, and I think that could start with mandatory cultural competency training. I think that Indigenous students, we are constantly facing the emotional burden of having to educate our classmates about our history, and to really talk about truth and reconciliation, we need to start with the truth. We need to start with the truth of our colonial history in Canada, we need to start with the truth of what Thanksgiving is, you know it’s these events that continue to perpetrate this colonization bias, if you will,
and we need to ensure that we can stop that. And I think that this individual, or individuals, who perpetrated this act, have found that they have a space to use that voice, and we need to make sure that our truth is shared and that we show that community that those thoughts are not okay.

Patrick:

Thanks very much, and I’m meeting a little later on today with Jan Hill and with Kandice to talk about what comes next and what kind of actions are necessary for this. I think you also put your finger on a really important issue which is, this is the responsibility of the whole university to address, but not the whole university has a right to speak to these issues. So, that’s a complex dilemma to work through, but thanks very much for your comments, that’s extremely helpful in obviously where we need to go. Other questions? Yeah, please. I shouldn’t say questions, by the way, there’s room for statements, observations, angry declarations.

Canan Sahin:

My name is Canan Sahin, I’m a second year PhD student in political studies. I express my solidarity with the Indigenous students and the allies against this violent attack. But the problem I want to, kind of, raise brings the kind of debate to the international student experience here on campus. I’m an international graduate student. So, we know that in the province, some universities have already changed their funding models like University of Toronto, Western, Brock, McMaster—the university that you used to work at. And, so, this plan that you are talking about, this putting it on the table, we kind of feel it requires some urgency. Because we know from our peers, international students, that in the past it was relatively easier to be a permanent resident in Canada but today it is much more difficult, which means that in your fifth and sixth year, you do not enter that extended period as a permanent resident but still with student visa and you have to pay twice as much as your peers. So, under that stress, most of the students try to complete their dissertation but at the same time create some resources of revenue and it’s not easy to juggle between the whole responsibilities. So, as international students, actually we are starting petitioning about this and we invite the Queen’s community, all its members, to support us in that direction. So, we demand the university administration reduce the tuition fees to the domestic levels and guarantee funding for fifth and sixth year students. Without that, I think internationalization and remaining competitive in Ontario with other universities seems impossible. Thank you.

Patrick:

Thanks. Really helpful observations and those policy questions are really major and ones the university has to wrestle with. Is Dean Quadir here? Is Fahim here? Your graduate dean is very seized of these issues and has a particular interest in international issues as well, so I’ll work with him. I mean, I take your point about the urgency of this, so it’s not just something that we get around to in two years or so, I hear what you’re saying about that, absolutely. Yeah.

Eleanor MacDonald:

Hi. Welcome back, Patrick. I’m Eleanor MacDonald, I teach primarily in the political studies department. I think, first of all, I also want to thank you very much for initiating this conversation and for the thoughtful email that you sent out, the statement you sent out to the university. As somebody who has worked here for, I’ve taught here now for about 30 years, and one of the things I’ve been reflecting on
in my research and my teaching is about the need for greater amount of critical thinking and I’m very much inspired by the work of Theodore Adorno and his—last year I gave a talk on his essay on education after Auschwitz. He has many observations but one of them is the need for everybody to be educated in social science, and by which he means a capacity to look critically at society.

So, one of the earlier commentators mentioned cultural competency training, but I think one of the things I would ask you to look at is whether or not it’s possible to have training or education in critical thinking, and especially critical thinking about what are the ways in which society and our university can educate people towards preventing or reducing instances of hatred and violence and hostility. And, I just think cultural competency is a part of that, recognizing colonial history and the need for decolonization is a part of that, but so are questions around how to introduce greater humanity into our teaching. I’ve long been an advocate of smaller class sizes and more intimacy in our educational connection with students, so that’s just something I’d like to go forward with.

Patrick:

Thanks, Eleanor. Your mention at the end there of humanity is very close to my heart. I mean, implicit in that letter I sent out was my indignation at the dehumanizing of the whole higher education process. So, people lose sight of the whole question of what is the imperative of this? It’s the realization of human potential. So, I am with you entirely on that. As I said, I think universities are out of the habit of having conversations, we’re also out of the habit of talking about critical thinking. It’s a serious issue.

I don’t mind sharing this with you. At my previous institution, we had an incident not as acute as the one in Chown, but a sort of geopolitical question came up, and 2 or 3 faculty members came to the Centre for Teaching and Learning to ask how they could help students think about this geopolitical question. And it was a program in the natural sciences or something like this. And what I was struck by is that even faculty members didn’t know how to guide their students in even the most rudimentary way to think through these challenging social and political questions.

So, I think there are two layers to this; one is that we have to make sure that is part of what we imagine is critical to a student’s education and formation; but we also have to rekindle it in ourselves, the professoriate, to assume that whether you’re teaching physics or whether you’re teaching engineering or English literature, one of your obligations is to cultivate the capacity for critical thinking in every person you interact with. I’m entirely with you there, Eleanor, in fact when I think about the big values we need to orient ourselves towards, it’s that. Without that capacity, we’re just churning out people to perform a particular role in a pre-established socioeconomic structure, and that’s not what educators are about, I assume. Yeah, please.

Hannah:

Hi, my name is Hannah and I’m a PhD student in the geography department, also an international student but don’t worry, I’m not going to be talking about that again. I just wanted to bring up the conversation, maybe, about where we’re having these kind of conversations. Just in terms of, I don’t want to make assumptions, but it doesn’t seem like undergraduate students are well-represented in this room, and it seems to me as though, again I don’t want to make assumptions, maybe a lot of the issues that we’re discussing in terms of racism, homophobia, and sexual assault and things like that, do seem to be very prevalent in the undergraduate community. So, how can we engage with those conversations
with the undergraduate community in maybe places that seem more accessible to them? Perhaps not in these grand rooms with all these old white men looking down at us on the walls, or by formal letters by email. I just wanted to open a conversation about that.

Patrick:

Thanks. Great point, great point. And in fact, so the conversation will go to students. So, there are only four formal events like this but there will be many others. So, I’m working with the AMS to go and talk to the students, and any opportunity I can find, I will take advantage of to have a conversation with students about these questions. And your point is a very good one, not everybody is comfortable coming into a place like this, let alone standing up. So, good point. And the conversation will only be as useful as it is inclusive. Yeah, please.

Nasser Saleh:

I’m Nasser Saleh, I am from the library here, and I’m going to talk more about racism because I think it’s a very hot topic now but I think, you know, from the feedback I am listening to, I think it’s a core issue that needs to be addressed. I’ve been here for 12 years, here at Queen’s, there are so many talks happening here even in this room, equity, diversity, inclusion, anti-racism. However, I think the problem we have now is the brand. There is a lot of damage happening.

Two incidents happened to me in the past, not racism, pardon me. A few weeks ago I got a call from a friend of mine, he is finishing his PhD and he is also a person of colour. And he asked me this question, “would you recommend for me to apply to Queen’s?” I couldn’t answer. The question he had now, do you think I would be able to answer in one year? And tell him, “you know what, you can be welcome here?”

The second thing that happened, my daughter is in Grade 12, she doesn’t want to come to Queen’s because I work here—for sure—and when I ask her “why don’t you want to come here?” She said, “it’s too white.” So, the brand, is that something we need to keep here at Queen’s? Is it something where I’ll have to look at this room and these portraits and feel like I don’t belong here? I mean, we want to help you. If you can get us to be engaged, and be a part of this culture, we would love to help you with that. I would love to tell somebody, “please come to Queen’s.” At this moment, I can’t say it.

Patrick:

Thank you, my hope is that you will help me deal with this issue. I do think there’s a big question mark over the brand question, and we do need to talk about that, because we do need to know not only how we perceive this institution but how it’s perceived by others, and there is a huge amount of negative stuff out there about this institution. So, to go to your first question, however, in a year’s time, yes, I hope you’ll be able to say to that person, “yes, come.” Because although we can’t guarantee you that there’s no trace of that in this community any longer, what you can say is that there is a vital discussion of these issues underway, it’s being frankly addressed, and it is being actively pursued.

In a year’s time, if we’re there, and we’re taking action and the conversation is saying, the elimination of the stuff, the alteration of the brand, is absolutely fundamental to our future—it is, by the way. So, if—and I remember when I was being considered for this job, I did talk to people about how the university is perceived both inside and outside, and the perception is “sliding”. Other institutions are displacing it,
even in areas where we had strength. So, we’ve got a problem. And it is partly tied up with the way in which the institution is perceived in terms of its whiteness and all of those things, and its cultural prescriptiveness.

So, what I can promise you is absolutely energetic commitment to addressing this question. I can’t shrink from answering the questions about the brand, because you’re exactly right there. The two questions, “how are we perceived?” and “what’s the relation between that perception and the reality on the ground?” I wish I could say it’s opposite ends of the spectrum of reality, but it’s not. So, great point, thanks. Please, go ahead.

Mona Rahman:

My name’s Mona Rahman. So, I’ve been here a long time. I’ve been here from diapers to degrees and beyond. So, my father came as a graduate student in ’68, my father-in-law apparently came in the late ’50s from Barbados. My father-in-law forbade his sons from coming to Queen’s. My father had a great experience at Queen’s because he came during the former Trudeau’s era of multiculturalism. I will say for myself, and it’s only for myself, I have never felt excluded from Queen’s. That being said, we have to remember that the university, if we look at the history of the university, it started as a hub of knowledge exchange. And we have somehow gotten away from that.

So, as I said, I’ve been here a long time. So, my frosh year was “no means no” year, for those who know what that is. Ten years later, the same incidents happened again. I’ve gone through Gulf War on this campus, with the death threats as well. So, I’ve seen the cycle as to which groups are being targeted over the years. And we do, as a university, we have responded to those, and then things get better, and then something else happens. There’s a ten-year cycle. One of the problems with a university is that we are a transient population. The students are coming with their own baggage, or faculty, wherever you’re coming from—I will blame the big cities—but they’re coming with their own views and everything. And somehow, we have lost that approach of being a hub for knowledge exchange. It’s okay to have differences in opinion, and you can debate that, but we have to start to listen to each other again. I mean, we did put into place during frosh week, and after “no means no” we had all these programs in the residences, worked great, we had a lot of good collaborations across campus between different groups, and then it—“everything was good so why are we keeping these things?”

So I think, I mean, these things are happening and they shouldn’t keep happening every 10 years, every five years to different groups. What we need to foster, again, is that culture of knowledge exchange, of acceptance and inclusivity, that doesn’t rely on which group happens to be the one targeted at that time, it should be a broad culture. And I’ve been saying this for 10 years now, and I know it’s a difficult thing to do, but I think the key first is, we need to provide this forum where we can have knowledge exchange—and knowledge exchange also within the academic setting in terms of getting different perspectives when you’re teaching students, bringing other perspectives into your teaching when we’re educating the students. I can ramble, so I will leave this here.

Patrick:

Thanks, you didn’t ramble at all, it was really helpful. But it was related to Eleanor’s point, I think. Eleanor spoke about the power of critical thinking, and here you’re talking about the thing that flows from that, which is the capacity to have dialogue and to discuss issues without discussing them from a,
kind of, point of view from a difference of opinion, it’s a reasoned debate. And I think I’d respond to that partly in the way I responded to Eleanor, which is that we’re out of the habit of doing that. And you’re right, something terrible happens and then you do it, and then when things get better you think they aren’t necessary anymore.

What I would say, though, related to this is the relationship between the university and the world outside. It’s an illusion to think the nasty political stuff out there isn’t going to come in here. It’s not a cloister, it’s not a monastic institute, it’s a public institution and the same concentration of objectionable people is to be found in a university as outside of it. So, those things—and you know, anytime there’s an outbreak of some kind of political friction on campus, there will be external bodies that are interested in what kind of interactions are happening between students around, whether it’s Israel-Palestine or whatever, you name it.

So, the relationship between the university and the world that surrounds it to me is interesting, because we do have the potential, we are not insulated, but we have privilege here, of a better kind. And the privilege is to say, “well here, we’re going to talk about stuff, here we’re going to have a debate, here we’re going to analyze things, here we’re going to reason our way through”. It’s a bit of a mistake to think you’ll never have nasty political contention, in the same way it’s a mistake to say you’re never going to have undesirable, antisocial attitudes expressed on a campus. It’s going to happen because it’s society. There is the potential, though, for us to model something much, much better. That’s why I’m having the conversation. What is that, that much better thing? Please, yeah.

Audience member:

What I’m noticing is that before people are coming into university, just that what I’m hearing from some of the teenagers in the high schools, is that that discussion that I was very glad to have when I was in high school back in—decades ago, it’s being suppressed. So, if there’s a controversial topic, they feel that they are not allowed to talk about it, and I’m wondering if that attitude is coming into the university, which—I mean, we’re supposed to be this venue where ideas flow and we can have these discussions, but if they’re not getting this discussion coming into the university, what are their attitudes? I mean, it’s very complicated, I realize, but that’s what I’ve noticed with the high schools, not all of them, but for some of them, they’re not being encouraged to discuss.

Patrick:

I would agree. I mean, I think the culture at large has lost the knack of—look at our current election, come on. You know, are positions being debated? Not really, assertions are being made and counter-assertions, but there’s no real debate. So, there is a problem in the culture at large about that. But, you know, the real problematic in that notion of universities as places of debate is the power differential, because not everybody’s on the same power footing. So, you know, you can’t have someone come onto campus with wildly provocative ideas, and you might find an undergraduate student in the first year who is prepared to stand up and debate this professor, but how likely is that, because of the disempowered position of the students?

You know the University of Chicago rules about this kind of thing are deliberately exclusive of the power differences, and I think that makes this a hugely complicated conversation. Yeah, please.

Dave Yokom:
Thank you, Patrick. Dave Yokom, Faculty of Engineering. Just building on that previous comment and given the incidents last week and some of the comments from our international students, question/comment. I wonder whether these types of questions should be asked of our admission process and the types of students that we’re potentially recruiting and admitting into Queen’s. And (inaudible) recognizing the value of diversity and cultural competence and some of those pieces. Do you have any thoughts around that?

Patrick:

Yeah, so, I have Ann at the back but I’m not going to put her on the spot in terms of admission procedures, but it’s a good enough question. You know, you can say, if you look at the demographic represented in a university, either at the graduate or at the undergraduate level, there are sort of two ways of approaching it. Do you approach it through some basic laws, rules? Do you have the grades? Are you domestic? Are you international? Do you apply through the OUAC in Guelph, and all applications are viewed in the same way? Or, do you want to be more strategic about where these students come from? And this is particularly the case if you think about international students. I mean, in most universities in this country right now, the percent of the undergrad international student body will be around 80% from China, if that low. The students are, in themselves, perfectly admirable students, but is it desirable for a university which has an international dimension to be so skewed to a particular part of the globe? Where is Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, in the international student numbers across the country? Nowhere particularly good.

But, what I know is, certainly at the undergrad level, up to a certain point it’s not possible to tell where these students come from because there are plenty of students in international schools in Canada who are visa students but they apply as domestic students. So, that’s one—Ann, am I right about that? Yeah. And then with graduate students it’s slightly different because if a student wishes to come and work with you as a professor, right, you do have an opportunity to know a bit about that person’s background. My view is that we need to be thoughtful about what the international profile of the campus looks like for, I think, good educational reasons. There are practical problems in doing it, which is not to say you can’t overcome them. At the undergrad level, there’s the whole OUAC machinery, which at one level develops a kind of equitable playing field for students applying, but on the other is kind of blind to some of these factors we’re thinking about here. And I hope I’m not misrepresenting anything.

Ann Tierney:

No, not at all. There are some specific pathways that have developed that can be advanced, absolutely, for admission and their use of the personal statement and different ways and different faculties use it differently. But I think that this is a very evident concept that we want to explore to increase the diversity of the class, absolutely.

Patrick:

That’s a good question, though, you look unhappy.

Dave Yokom:
I don’t necessarily want to rely on our international student population to champion EDI, I would even look to cultural competency, questions of equity, diversity, and inclusivity for domestic students and have they thought about that.

**Patrick:**

At the point of application, you mean?

**Dave Yokom:**

Yeah.

**Patrick:**

So, sorry I went to international just thinking about the whole principle of managing an enrolment pool. I suppose to pick up on Ann’s point, in some programs, there are more tailored application processes, where, let’s say, students have to write a statement which comes along with their application. And that can be one tool by which you can probe some of those things. This gets to the point I made in my letter, which is whether we like it or not, this is higher education on an industrial scale. And, you could have individual programs in which there is a much more tailored, carefully planned admission process, but the question is, what is practically feasible for an institution with 24,000 students? I take your point, though. I think there’s stuff that goes on in the schools, the high schools, that predispose the students either to be progressive in their thinking about these things or enlightened in their thinking or not. So, if you could reach and find those kinds of students and bring them in, that would be great, and a useful supplement to doing the work once the students are here, but it’s a great point. Please, go ahead.

**Alison Cummings:**

Hi, I’m Alison Cummings, training coordinator in Human Resources, and my area is intercultural training. So, just to counter David, I would hate to write off a kid at 17 or 18, and I think that then also diminishes our responsibility to bring that change about. They’re here to be able to deepen their thinking and to expand their minds and that’s part of our job. So, I have a little bit of hesitancy at saying, “you know what? Nope, you’re not thinking just right yet”.

**Patrick:**

Thanks, Alison. I like the point, because it goes right to the question of what are we here for? You know, someone shared this witticism with me recently that here at Queen’s, we make silk purses out of silk purses; it’s witty, but there’s also truth to it, right? What is our value if we bring in students who are high achievers in conventional assessment terms, and then we assess them conventionally and then we graduate them at the end, and say, “oh, fabulous, we got an 89% graduation rate“, or whatever it is.

So, I think it’s a good point, because so long as we’re doing that, we’re not answering the question I put right at the start, which is what are we here for? When we were founded—so, tomorrow by the way, is the anniversary of the signing of the Queen Victoria’s charter for Queen’s—that was an important day. It brought us into being as an institution. And for our earliest decades, this was an institution that sought to bring higher education to local disadvantaged folk. Right? The history of this institution is very different from the way we’re perceived now. I think of Robert Sutherland, who announced that when he was at Queen’s—the first black man to attend the university—he always said, “I was always treated as a
gentleman,” back in those years at this institution. So, it was an institution that in its early years, oddly enough, had a rather different sense of itself than we have acquired in recent years. So, I think we need to get back to thinking, in what way does this institution contribute to a better society? And I think your point is a really good one. Taking the already converted and graduating them as the pride and joy of the institution is not necessarily central to that mission. We are in the transformation business, so let’s not balk at the individuals who come in here. We’re here to supposedly educate people in the full complexities of citizenship, local and global. Yeah, time for one more.

Jennifer Hosek:

Hi, Jennifer Hosek, Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, and we actually now are teaching intercultural competency thanks to Alison who is leaving right now. I wanted to speak to the issue of bunkering that happens because the budget model gets in the way of us actually training students to be well-rounded human beings and the related problem that the humanities doesn’t have enough funding and support so that we’re graduating fach idioten, to bring up Adorno, because the students feel like they don’t have the opportunity even if they want to learn about critical thinking to understand in a social sciences kind of way, they feel like “well, it’s a five-year degree, and I can’t find any support from my professors in my major”. So, we need to change that in order to become a true institution creating citizens for this country and for the world. And I thank you for your support, I think you seem to be really, kind of on our page and I’m excited about that.

Patrick:

Thanks, I couldn’t have said it better, by the way. So, you’re exactly right. My previous institution had a similar budget model which was then treated as if it was dropped on to the earth as holy writ and can never be negotiated or changed, and the effect of it is to place disciplines into silos to discourage students from branching out. In the same way that you want students in the sciences to have the opportunity to study courses in the humanities and social sciences, you also want it to go the other way, humanities students like myself to become more numeric than I ever was. So, absolutely you’re right, and there are changes that it’s possible to make because the budget model is just a tool. It’s a complex tool but it is, but I also completely agree with the way in which you depicted the long-term goal and aspirations of the place. So, we will be addressing that, for sure.

Our time is up, I can take one more question, but I won’t think it rude if you get up and stomp out. Please, go ahead.

Ranbir Singh:

I’m going to propose just a couple of solutions because I believe with the conversation, we should have a little bit of some solutions to the problems we have. Of all the things that we sign—oh, by the way, my name is Ranbir Singh, I’m from Toronto—of all the things that we sign to become a student at Queen’s, I don’t think it’s a far stretch to have all students sign a declaration to respect LGBTQ rights and First Nation rights, maybe get students to look at a tutorial of the charter of rights and freedoms in our country and would sign off on it. I’m sure you’ll have some legal issues with that but maybe that’s something you consult with Queen’s legal team. The other thing I see is when you walk on University Avenue, you see some of the buildings here at Queen’s wrapped with the crest, which is great, we have a lot of pride and visibility just looking at Queen’s. Perhaps we should have some of our buildings
wrapped with the values that we have as a university. That not only is visibly a safe environment for those that are walking around the buildings, but it’s reflective of the values we have at Queen’s as well. It’s a statement, right? And it’s something that we’re doing, some of the practical things to the issues that we have.

Patrick:

Thanks. Can I just make an observation about this, an autobiographical observation? In my previous job, it was suggested to me that the university should engage in a branding exercise, and I was horrified, right? Typical English prof, to me, the idea of boiling down the whole operation to a stupid two-word tagline, but I was convinced that I needed to think about it. And I was convinced by the deans, who said, “yeah, we’ve got to do this”.

In the end, the exercise became not about branding in a crass sense, it became about naming those values and making those values the tagline. I’m pleased to say I had no complaint from any faculty member about this branding exercise, in fact, people were putting them up on their PowerPoint slides when they went to conferences, because there was pride in the values which were being articulated. To your point about wrapping the values around buildings, I mean, the crest is one thing and says something about our history and our traditions, naming the values we stand for is another really important way of advancing the cause. And on the other thing, very good suggestion too, I’ll certainly give that some thought. Yeah, please, Hannah.

Hannah:

I feel personally it would be somewhat scandalous, maybe, to not have this discussion without paying tribute to the fact that we are in a climate emergency, and especially when we’re talking about—you mentioned the sustainable development goals earlier and now we’re talking about branding. Why can’t Queen’s be the university in Canada or one of the universities in the world leading the educational fight, I suppose, for climate change? We have so many people within the geography department and other departments who are doing amazing research, and I just really want us to foreground that.

Patrick:

I love the idea.

Hannah:

And to know that you and the administration are putting that as a priority for everything, because there’s no point really having any of these conversations if we’re not—

Patrick:

If we’re not around.

Hannah:

If we’re not recognizing that the planet is coming to an end.

Patrick:
Thanks, Hannah. And on that really cheerful note, thanks everybody, there will be another occasion. I hope you’ll come on out.

Disclaimer: This is a transcription of the Principal’s Conversation, held October 15, 2019 at Wallace Hall. All efforts have been made to ensure this is an accurate depiction of the conversation, however it is not warranted. If you feel there is a discrepancy, please contact Mary Beth Gauthier, Communications Manager, Principal’s Office at marybeth.gauthier@queensu.ca.