Canadian universities focus on opportunities in Brazil

Brazil was front and centre for Canadian post-secondary institutions in April, spurred on by the March announcement that the Canadian Bureau for International Education signed on with Brazil’s two major granting agencies to administer the Canadian component of Brazil’s Science without Borders Program. The program offers 101,000 scholarships to Brazilians to study, intern, and conduct research in selected nations over a 4-year period. As a selected nation, Canada’s program will initially focus on undergraduates who will study or intern for up to 12 months in Canada, with a possible 2 additional months of language study, and then return to Brazil to finish their degree programs.

This announcement helped set the stage for the nearly 30 Canadian university presidents, including President Barnard, taking part in the AUCC sponsored presidents’ mission to Brazil in late April and early May. The mission was very successful, with 75 new partnerships and scholarship programs worth over $6.7M in university and government funding announced.

An additional $10.25 million investment in undergraduate internships and graduate fellowships was also made during the mission through Mitacs. Canada’s Mitacs connects university-based researchers, including graduate students and faculty members, with Canadian companies through collaborative research projects and provides research internships to top international undergraduate students.

The University of Manitoba will invest up to $880,000 over the next five years to attract 20 Brazilian doctoral or masters students annually and help cover the costs of tuition fees and English language education. During the mission the University of Manitoba signed three additional agreements that will help strengthen relationships and provide new research and learning opportunities.

Provincial Budget Tabled April 17th

Provincial Finance Minister Stan Struthers presented the NDP’s thirteenth budget “Focused on what matters most” in the Manitoba Legislature on April 17th. The focus of this year’s budget was reducing government spending, with core government spending decreasing 3.9 per cent this year and 10 departments seeing either a reduction or freeze in funding. The Provincial Government also focused on its own operations by merging two Crown corporations, Manitoba Lotteries and the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission, decreasing government-appointed agencies, boards and commissions by 20 per cent and reducing the number of Regional Health Authorities from 11 to 5.

Of particular interest to the U of M was the continuation of the commitment in last year’s budget to increase core funding by 5 per cent annually and allow tuition fee increases at the rate of inflation. Budget 2012 also made some modest increases to student aid with the Manitoba Bursary Fund increasing $60,000 and the Medical Student/Residential Financial Assistance Program up $140,000. The Manitoba Scholarship and Bursary Initiative, Manitoba Graduate Scholarships, Loans and Bursaries and Aboriginal Medical Student Scholarship were all held at the 2011/12 level. The main research and innovation budget lines remained the same as last year, and starting in 2012, one-half of the Manitoba Research and Development Tax Credit will be refundable for in-house research and development.
Federal Budget fall out

Last month, the Hansard Newsletter provided an overview of the federal budget. Since then a number of policy decisions have been made by the federal government to meet their budget commitments that will have serious impacts on Manitoba.

NRC

The news came in April that the federal government was laying off 54 National Research Council (NRC) Winnipeg scientific staff and was planning to sell both of its NRC buildings on Ellice Avenue. The federal government is also winding down the magnetic-resonance imaging and related technology work that has been done in Winnipeg for a number of years. It is expected the changes will result in less pure research and development work and possibly more commercialization, which has become the priority of the federal government.

CRC

The Cereal Research Centre at the U of M couldn’t escape Budget 2012’s cost cutting measures, as it was announced that the Centre would be closed by April 2014. It appears no scientists will be laid off but rather relocated to Brandon and Morden research stations. Research programs are expected to continue, although some programs, like the centre’s seed-breeding program, may be taken over by industry. Despite the news, the U of M continues to work with Agriculture Canada and the Province of Manitoba to create a new Centre of Excellence for cereal research.

Immigration

The Federal Government is also closing the Citizenship and Immigration office in Winnipeg, with 17 employees expected to lose their jobs. The Federal Government also announced it will be centralizing immigration services and no longer partnering with the Province on shared settlement services. The Federal Government has indicated that its funding support will not change and the only difference will be the program will now be under federal control.

Finance Committee set to examine charitable giving policy

The House of Commons Finance Committee has resumed its hearings into charitable giving with meetings scheduled for May 3 and 8. The overall purpose of the meeting is to “ensure the most effective use of charitable donations in Canada. Several groups including Imagine Canada, and various other charitable sectors are appearing before the committee members. One consistent message will be to lobby for increasing the tax incentives for charitable giving in order to motivate greater participation among modest income donors. The University of Manitoba was one of several organizations that wrote a submission to the committee earlier this year with policy recommendations to enhance philanthropic contributions to non-profit organizations. On a related note Senator Nicole Eaton and others have raised concerns over foreign charities and foundations who fund Canadian non-profit environmental groups opposed to oil sands development. It is likely this issue will also be raised with the committee. It is anticipated that the committee will report on its findings before the summer break.
Copyright Modernization – Bill C-11 and a new agreement in place

Bill C-11 – The Copyright Modernization Act is awaiting third reading in the House of Commons and is expected to be passed before the summer recess or early in the fall when the House resumes. The bill updates the current Copyright Act to better address the challenges and opportunities of the internet and new digital forms of material. The bill also mandates a review by Parliament every five years. The AUCC presented an update on its position on the bill to the House of Commons Legislative Committee in March.

As well, the AUCC and Access Copyright reached an agreement on a model license that will enable universities to reproduce copyright-protected materials in both print and digital formats. The new license will see universities pay Access Copyright a royalty of $26 per full-time-equivalent student per year. The royalty includes what used to be a separate 10¢ per page royalty for coursepack copying, so there will no longer be a separate royalty. The agreement will be in effect until December 31, 2015 and will renew automatically for one-year terms during which any party can terminate or request to renegotiate the agreement.

Final KIP Project Officially Opens

On April 12 President David Barnard was joined by the Honourable Erin Selby, Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy; Rod Brunooge, MP Winnipeg South; and Paul Hess, director, School of Art for the grand opening of the new Art Research Technology (ART) lab. The new space is a multidisciplinary art and technology centre, for both the School of Art and the Faculty of Music.

ARTlab is one of seven Knowledge Infrastructure Program (KIP) projects completed by the U of M, and includes funding support from both the Province of Manitoba and the Government of Canada. In total, seven projects were funded at the University of Manitoba, more than any other university in Canada.

In a creative twist on the tradition ribbon cutting, dignitaries signed an original work of art from U of M student Jade Troost created during the grand opening.