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How Universities Distinguish Themselves as Leaders for Change in the Current Climate:

A UBC Perspective

Abstract

In the wake of the global economic crisis, we have seen a precipitous rise in economic, social and environmental interdependence worldwide; and an increased, almost urgent need to differentiate ourselves competitively in the global post-secondary marketplace, in some cases in order to survive. However, remembering that a “crisis” brings both danger and opportunity, we have looked for, and found, both in the current climate.

Leadership requires immediate and prudent attention to the financial specifics, firstly, including an open-eyed acknowledgement of the impact on the institution; a clear strategy for mitigating that impact and for moving forward; and not least, open and regular communication with stakeholders.

In the longer term, this crisis is making two further demands of us: 1) That we see past the artificial barriers between faculties and departments; between fields of research; between institutions locally, nationally and globally, and collaborate to resolve the most pressing of the world’s economic, social and environmental concerns. And 2) That each of us focus in on our respective strengths as the foundations from which we may best collaborate, one uniquely effective institution with another. We can no longer afford to be all things to all people – if we ever could.

We distinguish ourselves as leaders for change by the changes we choose. But we tell the world who we are just as effectively by the way we respond to change that we have *not* chosen, our responses to circumstances beyond our control. This is the opportunity in the crisis.

We can resist change, but resistance is borne out of fear. Or we can embrace change, which means, literally, to reach out one’s arms and bring it close. Responsiveness and transparency in crisis. Collaboration over competition. And a single-minded focus on our individual strengths, to better apply our collective strength to the most pressing problems of the day.