

**Speech for Kootenay Association of Science and Technology (KAST)  
Annual General Meeting**

**Castlegar, B.C. | June 8, 2011**

*As prepared for delivery by Selkirk College President, Angus Graeme.*

What a great thing to be asked by a friend to say a few words about a great friendship. And that is indeed how Selkirk College views our relationship with KAST at Selkirk College. So thank you for the opportunity to be the keynote at this year's AGM.

My own association with KAST goes back to 1994 when Claudia and I partnered on a proposal under the "Skills Now!" fund to deliver entrepreneurship and management skills to small business owners in the forestry consulting sector.

I have made a small and probably incomplete list of what we have worked together since then on over the past 15 years or so:

- Development of drinking water curriculum for the regional districts and local governments.
- Student summer work project for waste analysis surveys for the regional district.
- The Selkirk Geospatial Research Centre; KAST was a named partner on our successful proposal to the Canada Foundation for Innovation that has led to a very successful venture in geomatics research and advanced diploma and degree programming.
- The Regional Innovation Chair in Rural Economic Development and continued service on our advisory committee. This has now grown with the recent announcement of our partnership with Columbia Basin Trust in launching the Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute.
- KAST partnered with us to put on the successful "It Pays to be Green conference" on green technology.
- We work as a team to annually host the Environmental Network lunches where students from our Environment and Natural Resource programs meet and network with employers and begin to establish their professional relationships and contacts.
- The "Tech Village" initiative where IT and digital media professionals and SMEs have a platform to collaborate.
- The Community Science celebration; we have literally seen thousands of kids and their families come through those celebrations featuring science careers, ideas and innovations.
- Last fall we collaborated on the "Business Boot Camp" with high school aged kids focusing on the young entrepreneur.

And there have been other projects I'm sure.

The effect of this support from KAST has been substantial for us and is really quite simple to describe: without the support of partners like KAST, especially with such common purposes, Selkirk College is unable to provide the kind of relevance to students, and our broader community, so critically important and expected these days.

## **I believe that our relationship with KAST has been so positive because we have such well-aligned mandates ...**

Things like education, learning, entrepreneurship, creativity, imagination, innovation, economic and community development are at the very heart of both our organizations. And what I have appreciated over the years is that KAST and her members have looked for opportunities to build and expand rather than compete, KAST has never lost sight of its core business, while at the same time has remained fluid enough to respond to emerging opportunities.

Over the past decade, Selkirk has been working as best we can to increase our contribution to innovation and solution-oriented applied research and KAST has been there with us.

As we built the Selkirk Geospatial Research Centre and developed the Regional Innovation Chair, we were doing a couple of important things: linking our assets with our partners and linking innovation/creativity with learning.

## **A quick word about applied research ...**

Selkirk College has been undertaking applied research for awhile, but there is tremendous room for improvement. We have a great context to do this: a rural region with a changing demography and economy, an emerging workforce gap, strength in our local human capital and social capital, access to local resources and an improving technology infrastructure. We sometimes lack the financial capital, but through partnerships (and in our case working at becoming eligible for NSERC and other grants has opened up new opportunities for investment in this region) this has proven possible to overcome.

## **The federal and provincial governments are supportive of our efforts ...**

It is encouraging to note that both Federal and Provincial governments have recognized the need for localized applied, action-oriented research and innovation. This week's federal budget has allocated some \$80 million to applied research funding for community colleges across the country, so in the coming months, we will be looking to work with KAST and others to bring some of those dollars here. The federal budget is also providing for 30 applied research and innovation leaders/industrial chairs at colleges or through college and university collaboration on commercialization, support for information and communications technology needs of SMEs, and international education marketing. This is important recognition that colleges can make a significant contribution to innovation across the country.

At the Provincial level, the Government of British Columbia has recently published the Skills for Growth Strategy that cites the need for a culture of innovation to be realized to put B.C. higher up the ladder for economic and social progress.

## **Selkirk College will strategically focus on the following areas to make what I believe to be a significant contribution to the innovation agenda ...**

At Selkirk, we define **applied research** as research and innovation that *applies* existing or emerging techniques or knowledge, or new applications to solve problems or improve situations in the real-world and in particular within the region.

## **For Selkirk College an applied research program will focus on ...**

Environmental sustainability and geospatial science, including such focus areas as:

- Forest carbon management applications.
- Geomatics application development.
- Internet mapping and web-based GIS applications.

Health and wellness, including such focus areas as:

- Patient simulation training.
- Workplace safety and injury reduction.

Community development, sustainability and capacity building, including such focus areas as:

- Economic and social baseline and indicator development.
- Local leadership capacity development.
- Development of the “Learning Region” concept.

Research and development that supports the local and regional economy including such focus areas as:

- Rural economic drivers and transition strategies.
- Business and workforce development.
- Decision support and extension.
- New technologies, applications, and business incubation (D-Pace, TRIUMF).

Scholarship of teaching and learning, including such focus areas as:

- Pedagogy and adult learning theory.
- Service learning.
- Use of technology.

## **A few comments about innovation in our region ...**

There is some discouraging content out there about Canada’s lagging place in the world with regard to productivity, investments in R&D; about B.C.’s provincial and territorial rank of sixth in Canada in terms of workforce productivity; of our sometimes discouraging demographic trend and our ability or inability to meet the skills shortage, and to compete globally for talent.

And I’ve heard lots over the years about “we need to think outside the box, etc”.

I’m not convinced there is a box anymore, and I believe that educational institutions from the elementary system through to post secondary have to work to improving the cultivation of the six things in addition to content of learning: Curiosity, Creativity, Imagination, Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Leadership. These are fundamental to the contribution we can make with our partners such as KAST to make a difference in this region and elsewhere to move the innovation and entrepreneurship agenda forward: in our classrooms and labs, in the field and practical experiences, with our partner providers.

**I would like to close with a few comments on *learning* as a greater context to our work together ...**

Because I think the way we provide for and support learning in the region and beyond will really help the innovation and entrepreneurship need ...

The Canada Council on Learning talks about the concept of the *learning society* as a combination of objectives and strategies that support formal and informal learning, education and workforce transition for the knowledge economy, social capital building, and effective partnering of learning providers. The Canada Council on Learning (CCL) is bringing forward useful research and information to support a discussion about the role learning plays in the development of human and social capital in our communities and across our nation. They suggest that:

“To build a dynamic, forward thinking country we need to foster favourable conditions for building a learning society: nurturing a strong foundation for learning, providing smooth transitions between the ages and stages, and providing ongoing opportunities for individuals to learn throughout the life course.”

At Selkirk College, we have been talking with the school districts and other learning providers [and we should expand this now to our other “learning partners” such as KAST about the concept of the West Kootenay Boundary Region as a “Learning Region”. In his 2003 essay, Ron Faris writes:

“Neighbourhoods, villages, towns, cities, or regions that explicitly use lifelong learning as an organizing principle and social/cultural goal in order to promote collaboration of their civic, economic, public, voluntary, and education sectors to enhance social, economic, and environmental conditions on a sustainable, inclusive basis.”

**What if we worked together toward the West Kootenay and Boundary Learning Region?**

Learning is the great vehicle of innovation and the development of human potential. Immediate goals in this effort that come to mind are:

- Increased participation of citizenry in learning throughout all life stages.
- Enhanced collaboration of established and potential partners: KAST, private and community skills centres, community futures and economic development agencies, libraries, museums, recreation/leisure, etc.
- Heightened engagement of municipal and regional leadership in the vision of a learning region and the collaborative effort required.
- Increased opportunities for and access to literacy programming, skills development training, and seamless pathways from secondary to higher/tertiary education. This is at the heart of investment in human and social capital in a rural region in the midst of economic and social transition.

Let's keep working together! I look forward to it! Thanks again for the opportunity to speak this evening.