

# Professor's best advice: to embrace globalization

by Dominik Kurek  
Oakville Beaver Staff

Oakville's Martin Singer says the best rewards for any professor come from seeing former pupils succeed.

To be successful, however, Singer tells students to embrace globalization, something he has done and championed in his nearly 40-year teaching career at Concordia University and now at York University where he is dean of the faculty of liberal arts and professional studies.

When Singer became dean of the York faculty, which has more than 25,000 students, about five per cent of learners were international students. Just four years later, that number is approaching 10 per cent. Furthermore, 40 per cent of York students are new Canadians.

And when Singer gets to choose the topic of discussion with students, his mind continues to return to globalization.

"I would talk about the globalized world we live in and the need to get out of this Oakville or GTA or Ontario shell long enough to see the real world. A lot of the students I meet have never been outside of Canada and that's a limiting factor," the 65-year-old said.

Singer, for example, comes from the U.S. himself. After he completed his Ph.D. in history at the University of Michigan, the Chinese history scholar and his wife settled in Montreal in 1972 where he took a teaching job at Sir George Williams University, which became Concordia University.

In his time at the school, he travelled on an almost yearly basis to China. At times, he travelled with groups of students, other times he went alone to research or give lectures and he has even met with former Chinese international students to Canada.

When he retired from Concordia, he accepted the post at York. He and his wife uprooted and



Dr. Martin Singer, left, signs cooperative agreements with Dr. Francis Pang, founder and chairman of the Beijing Concord College of Sino-Canada.

photo courtesy Dr. Martin Singer

found a home in Oakville. At York, he picked up where he left off at Concordia and has a two-fold push to internationalize his new school.

He's working to bring more international students to York, which he said will give Canadian students a more global perspective. But, he's also working to send more Canadian students abroad.

"I believe that Canadian students in general, and certainly York students, don't have enough global perspective and experience. I want our students to go abroad to study as much as possible and I wanted to bring more international students to York," he said.

He continues to travel to China to promote his cause and recently returned from such a journey, where he visited Beijing, Chongqing and Hong Kong. There, he met with York graduates at an organized event, parents of current students, and young people considering coming to York.

After meeting two such parents on this trip, upon his return to Canada, Singer met with the children of those parents who are students at York.

Taking York global is a win-win for both international students and Canadian students, as both groups get the opportunity to gain a global perspective.

"From what our alumni say back in Hong Kong and Beijing and elsewhere, it's been a tremendous experience for them," he said.

He says the world is a vastly different place than when it was when he first started travelling to China.

"I first went to Hong Kong in 1970 and China in 1975. When you went to China, you basically went through a door and disappeared in a sense that you had no contact with people outside China," he said.

Communicating outside China was difficult. There were no fax machines then. Overseas telephone service was limited and expensive. A letter would take 10 days to get home.

Then came fax and Telex machines. Then came computers and e-mails and things never stopped progressing.

"We're living in a much more globalized world. If you turn on CNN, you'll see instant news," Singer said.

"In this kind of globalized environment, Canadians can't just be thinking about Canada because things that happen in China affect Canada and things that happen in India affect China. Canada's economic prosperity depends on its global trade. In Canada, 1970 doesn't exist any more. We're a much more diverse country."

Singer tells people that if they want to understand Canadian diversity, which is the country's strength, they have to understand the world it reflects.

"It's a much different country and it's much more interconnected globally than it was before. That's why I think students need a more global perspective or they won't be able to function, either in Canada itself or in the world around us."

Singer has an MA in East Asian studies to go along with his history PhD. He has been a professor of Chinese history and contemporary Chinese-Canadian academic relations. He joined York in 2009.

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