

# Academics Without Borders to host an information and fundraising event, October 19 at McGill's Faculty Club

By Peter Kerr

Steven Davis loved his job as a Professor of Philosophy at Simon Fraser University, but was forced to retire when he turned sixty-five. He then moved to Carleton University and subsequently retired at 70. He wondered what kind of organization was providing for University-level education programs similar to what Doctors Without Borders was providing for health care in developing countries. After an exhaustive search, Davis realized that he couldn't offer his experience as an educator and university departmental administrator to an organization that didn't exist. And then the penny dropped...

"I was astounded that there wasn't an organization to assist in providing university-level and post graduate programs in developing countries. So I set one up; and called it Academics Without Borders. We started 11 years ago on December 5, 2006. We achieved our charity status, and we have been involved in 100 projects in 17 countries and 27 academic institutions – all in developing countries."

"There are several good reasons to help universities in developing countries to develop their programs. It costs a lot less to teach computer science or train a doctor in their country of origin. There is also the very real brain drain issue, that once trained in Canada or another developed nation, the graduate decides to stay in his adopted home, and their talent is lost to the developing country of origin."

"Academics Without Borders (AWB) is implementing vital, practical projects to improve higher education in poor developing countries so that they have the skilled professionals, such as nurses, teachers, doctors, engineers and computer scientists to build a brighter future. This helps to improve healthcare, education, inclusion and infrastructure. Thus, AWB provides long-term solutions that lift communities and countries out of poverty."

"The need is real and pressing. There were only twelve cardiologists in Ethiopia and seven gastroenterologists when we started working in that country. Ghana did not have a doctoral program in computing science. Audiologists were needed in Indonesia. Nepal had a pressing need for doctors in the countryside. We helped to start a university in Rwanda."

Academics Without Borders only works in poor countries, and requires the governments and institutions to be committed. "The initiative has to come from the country – that way we know that they are



**Steven Davis is the Founder and current Executive Director of Academics Without Borders**



**Engineering students at Royal University of Bhutan**

committed. The NGO organizations focus on basic learning, which is necessary – but only part of the solution. Those schools need to have properly trained teachers, and they need to be educated in a university. But the universities and their programs had been neglected for twenty-five years."

"We have to explain to our donors that the results aren't immediate. It takes ten years to train a doctor." That said – it's of vital importance to the city or community where that doctor will practice, and contribute during their studies.

Academics Without Borders has a low cost to operate. A university program can be started for as little as \$4,000, and \$2,500 to post a volunteer academic. "Virtually all of our funds are directed into the program; our head office is right here in my home. The host country and institution look after our volunteers' living arrangements. We have a network of twenty-one Canadian Universities and 180 – 190 volunteer academics who are ready to operate in developing countries."

"The Canadian Chapter of Academic Without Borders is the largest in the world, and our international impact is real. The program gives the participating Canadian universities an international stature. It's an expression of 'soft power'. When we help a country, they will look on Canada favourably when they have a large engineering contract or purchase to make."

Academics Without Borders has a Board of Directors and an Advisory Council. Montrealers Stuart (Kip) Cobbett and Manon Vennat are Board members. Phil Gold, Louise Frechette, Paule Leduc, Stephen Toope, and Marc Renaud are Montreal members of the Advisory Board.

The presentation on Thursday, October 19<sup>th</sup> will be moderated by the award-winning journalist Lysiane Gagnon. Founder and Executive Director Steven Davis will provide a short history and overview of Academic Without Borders. He will also introduce the incoming Executive Director, Greg Moran. Dr. Kenya Bracken is an Associate Professor on the Department of Family Medicine at McMaster University in Hamilton, and she will speak about high maternal mortality in Aceh, Indonesia. She has taught emergency obstetrical skills in Tanzania and other developing countries. Most recently Dr. Bracken volunteered at Syiah Kuala University in Indonesia where she worked on a program to improve maternal health. Dominique Van de Maele will discuss his extensive international experience representing Canadian Universities, and his experience in designing workshops, forums and presentations in Canada and abroad; and his activities as network manager for AWB.

The future looks bright with Greg Moran taking on the position of Executive Director. He has extensive university experience as an educator, researcher and senior administrator at Western University, Aga Khan University in Nairobi and most recently he was Director of Special Projects at the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. Greg has recently moved to Montreal, and the AWB Head Office will be transferred to his home.

*The Academics Without Borders Reception and fundraiser will take place on October 19 from 5 – 7pm at the McGill Faculty Club, 3450 McTavish Street. To reserve a place, please contact Mindy Gordon at [mgordon@awb-usf.org](mailto:mgordon@awb-usf.org)*



**Incoming AWB Executive Director Greg Moran**



**Adam Cohen (right) with Mohammed J.L.S. Conteh, a University of Liberia Faculty Member**



**AWB volunteers T. Smith, B. Campbell, and A. Bartlett at the University of Namibia in 2011**