

07th November 2023

Dear Parents and Guardians,

One of the approaches that makes especially the two-year UWCs different to more regular international schools is our approach to diversity. Many international schools have and rightly celebrate a multitude of nationalities represented within their student bodies, in most instances representing the nationalities of the expatriate communities around that school. At UWC, this is taken a step further: particular diversities are sought. At RBC some of these diversities arise out of different lived experiences of sustainability opportunities and challenges – this makes sense with RBC's particular focus on sustainability. RBC also makes offers to UWC National Committees in those parts of the world that experience conflict: historic, current, or with high potential for future conflict. RBC's approaches to 'deliberate diversity' does not always make for easy community building, and then living in community. But it does create enormous educational opportunity, including discovery of the humanity of people who, through our upbringing, represent the 'other' or even represent, for us individually, the enemy. Some of the educational opportunity comes through the taught curriculum. Much of it is through careful, tentative, vulnerable human interaction, sometimes facilitated by staff and hopefully supported by school structures, interaction that encourages us to think beyond single narratives.

The current, awful, war in Israel – Gaza, and the circumstances leading up to it, is one that has divided opinion deeply in most parts of the world, including in UWC and at RBC. It also has affected, directly and seriously, the families and friends of students and those of past students of staff currently at RBC. If you have a friend who has been abducted, or your family feels threatened or has had to flee, or the family of your former student has been killed, then anxiety, dread, fear, and rage are natural and justified reactions. RBC has tried to make sure that students most directly affected are receiving support from friends and staff. Students and staff have worked together for a Peace Vigil, discussion groups, a counseling session focusing on the war, letter-writing sessions. Students have been counseled on the inadvisability of expressing their strong views and allegiances through social media, as well as of the legal constraints on freedom of expression in Germany. Some students and staff have joined legal demonstrations. My sense is that there is broad consensus within RBC on the moral imperative to protect civilian populations, and for humanitarian assistance to reach affected civilian populations. Funds have been raised for humanitarian purposes.

I acknowledge that there is disappointment and frustration from several that as Rektor I have refrained from making a clear statement of political support, a statement that goes beyond humanitarian considerations. Part of the reason for my decision is to try to maintain circumstances where students from different backgrounds, and intellectual and political perspectives, feel that they can continue to receive a welcome here.

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Fall break, through which roughly half of the students stayed on campus, has finished. Clocks have returned to standard Central European Time, accelerating the late afternoon darkness by an hour. This part of the Semester typically is amongst the most pressured for most 2nd year students, with academic deadlines and the exploration of

university options. Applications closed on the 1st November for the first 'early' round of admission to many US universities and colleges. For many 1st year students, the first excitement of coming into a new, most stimulating school environment has worn off, the academic pace has quickened, and the tougher learning and also the deeper satisfaction of living and learning in a UWC have come to the foreground.

Earlier, I said I would write regarding my view of university studies - especially in the USA. A quick reminder: most students at RBC do not come from countries where there is free (to the student) university education, nor do most students come from families who can afford the financial cost of them studying at university even in their home country. UWC graduates have the extraordinary privilege of being eligible for scholarship support at one of around 100 universities and colleges in the USA, through the incredible generosity of the incentive grants (to the universities and colleges) from Shelby Davis (<https://www.davisuwcscholars.org/scholars/annual-reports>). While there are varying levels of prestige and international name recognition, there are no weak universities or colleges on the Davis list. In my experience, it is much more difficult to obtain undergraduate scholarship support (including for accommodation and living expenses) in most other countries, especially for students who are not citizens of that country. There are a few specific UWC-linked scholarships for study at particular universities in Canada.

- My first 'mantra' is that the best university/college for a RBC student is the place that admits them with a scholarship that meets their financial needs. At RBC we learn to treasure opportunities that were not necessarily our first choice!
- My second 'mantra' is for students to apply to institutions where, if they work hard, they will be in the top third of their class – not struggling to get out of the bottom third. Generally, top students at any university or college will receive many more opportunities than the relatively weaker students at universities and colleges. It is a truism that a third of Harvard's students will be in the bottom third of their class.
- My third 'mantra' is that what a student gains from their time at a university or college is more dependent on what they put into their education and social experience than on the perceived prestige of the institution.

In my opinion, the smaller liberal 'arts and sciences' colleges – a college in the US is a place that focusses on undergraduate teaching – offer very good opportunities for teaching and learning. The teaching typically is done by the professors, not by PhD students and other assistants. Very few undergraduate students at the most prestigious universities will be taught by that university's Nobel prizewinning professors! (Typically, those professors concentrate on post-graduate students and on their research and writing.) Classes at colleges generally are small. Most have excellent track records of their graduates proceeding to Master's and PhD programmes in bigger universities.

My final observation is that only a tiny, tiny percentage of self-actualized, successful people attended a most prestigious university. Future happiness, in my view and experience, is rarely linked to the prestige of the university that one attends.

Of course, students attend UWC for the 'here and now', hopefully much more than mainly with a focus on future opportunities for university study. The regular programme at RBC is rich in its offerings and opportunities for engagement. In addition to the regular academic and CAS programme, this Wednesday afternoon's 'Global Affairs' is on social media and the attention economy. Next Tuesday, RBC holds a Special Focus Day, focusing on Sustainability.

With best wishes,

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