WE ARE LIVING in troubling times, with levels of protectionism, populism and xenophobia on the rise around the world. These sentiments are enacted in the tightening of national borders (disrupting global supply chains and impeding the resettlement of those trying to escape from persecution), the development of divisive policies (pitting people against one another) and a general suspicion of that which is different (eroding trust in our key institutions and across our society). These responses are not, we believe, the answer to today’s international challenges, nor are they consistent with the values we espouse at Gustavson.

Solutions should and can emerge from being open to different ways of thinking, connecting more with others and giving rein to our entrepreneurial spirit, rather than by following the calls to retreat to narrowly defined self interest or a mythically aggrandized past. Positivity, open-mindedness and a willingness to embrace diversity are the themes we seek to understand, practice and teach at Gustavson as the means to creating a better future.

International knowledge, cross-cultural awareness, socially responsible leadership and collaboration across disciplines are priorities for our school, all reflected in our “Crossing Boundaries” strategy, which is woven throughout our program design. You see it in the extraordinarily high percentage of our students who are developing their global understanding through direct international experience while at the school, and the awards our international curriculum continues to attract. You see it in the partnerships our faculty build with colleagues around the world, producing research insights that are relevant to resolving contemporary challenges. And you see it in the sustainability and social responsibility content that is integrated into 90 per cent of courses at the school, and in our commitment to carbon neutrality.

Our partnerships with First Nations are bearing fruit, too, as graduates of the Aboriginal Canadian Entrepreneurs (ACE) program are creating new opportunities in their communities. We have already delivered this training to over 20 cohorts and are currently rolling out a province-wide entrepreneurship competition for Indigenous youth.

And perhaps most relevant for this issue of Business Class, you see these values of diversity and social responsibility reflected in the lives that our alumni build after graduation. Whether building a career in social entrepreneurship or simply showing up to work every day with an open mind, empathy and strong collaboration skills, the achievements of our alumni speak volumes about the culture of inclusiveness and diversity we foster at Gustavson, a culture that is at the heart of our desire to make a positive contribution in the world.