

University News Beat

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President H. Ian Macdonald's Convocation address

York must plan long-term goals, relevant programmes

The following are edited excerpts from the President's Installation Address delivered at the Atkinson Convocation last weekend. Anyone interested in obtaining a full text should contact the Department of Information and Publications.

It is a well established custom in Canadian universities to arrange a separate ceremony for the installation of a new President. However, I am delighted that the Chancellor and the Chairman of the Board of Governors accepted my recommendation to perform this ancient rite at a regular graduation ceremony. Our purpose is not simply to save money... Rather, I believe a Convocation is a spiritual occasion in the life of a university, an occasion when the constituent parts of our community are called together in recognition of the fundamental role of the university in society — the exposure of young minds and an increasing number of older minds to an objective examination of the meaning of truth in whatever discipline it may take place.

I have suggested that the true York University community is represented here today in all its constituent parts. Any one part might survive without every other but it cannot flourish. But all can flourish from a recognition that our constituent parts form more of a Copernican universe than a corporate pyramid. We have a founding deity at Queen's Park which determines the outer limits of our universe, a Board of Governors overseeing the movement of our planets — the Faculties, stars of the senate to illuminate our way, meteoric students occasionally streaking across the horizon, and of course, our own solar hot-seat — the Office of the President. Hopefully, elements of lunacy occur only at infrequent intervals. Would that our finances were as astronomical as my metaphor! But we also have an interested group which is not only affected by this universe, but is also entitled to participate in its operations. I refer to the general citizenry and, particularly, the community that supports this University...

TOUGH DECISION

This University along with most public institutions in Canada today faces tough decisions, and the battle for a higher place on the public scale of priorities will be arduous and demanding. Much has been written recently about the bloom being off the educational rose in Canada, with the universities in particular showing signs of frost-bite.

I do not believe that the prevailing sentiments of the people of this province are anti-education. During the past few years, my responsibilities have taken me to numerous corners and various crossroads in Ontario, and I believe that the essential respect for education is as strong as ever. This is particularly characteristic of so many families who are newly arrived in this province in recent years. These new arrivals have increased the number seeking university education, and enhanced the cultural diversity of this university in particular. What the public is seeking, however, is reassurance that the universities have clear goals and objectives, and that they have equipped themselves to perform effectively and responsibly in meeting those objectives.

In this province at this time, the cost of existing services is multiplying, while countless new claims are being pressed upon the public purse. The universities face a severe problem in maintaining their position on the ladder of public priorities and in competing for public funds. Therefore, I see three major and overriding priorities at York:

- 1) to plan our long-term goals and objectives and to present them clearly and forcefully to both the public and governments;
- 2) to develop a long-run financial plan for the University to ensure adequate support for our goals and objectives;
- 3) to provide the capacity for qualitative enrichment and creative development of our programs, particularly in the case of those relevant to our social goals in Canada.

COMMON PURPOSE

We at York need to define a common purpose rather than defend our parochial interests. While they may have different roles, I see no advantage in students opposing faculty,



President Macdonald addressed graduands of Atkinson College, their families, special guests, and members of the York community Saturday, September 28 at Tait McKenzie.

faculty restless with the administration, and the Board of Governors uneasy about the University. The task for York University at this time is to define its goals and objectives and to plan its policy in a manner that will achieve those goals most effectively. My pledge is to work in that direction and my plea is for your support in ensuring our success...

I believe that a modern university, in its development, should not only reflect the character of our country, but should also be a positive instrument of national self-determination. And let me add that I use that term not in a chauvinistic or gunboat manner. Just as the quest of any individual is for self-determination in a manner consistent with a stable society, so a nation should develop its own intrinsic talents for the sake of the contribution it can make to mankind. This is a sensitive human question that must avoid extremism of any kind. Whereas I trust that York University is a place where Canadian-born faculty and students will always find opportunities, should Beethoven be reincarnated, I trust we will never deny him a place in our Faculty of Fine Arts. Perhaps, after all, it is less important whence we come than what we become!

I believe that we should consider what we want this University to become in relation to the opportunity that awaits Canada in the modern world. I recall, as a student in Oxford over twenty years ago, that Canadians were wont to display a sense of uncertainty, even inferiority, about themselves. Perhaps this was because we tried to compete on unfamiliar grounds, failed to identify our distinctive qualities, or both. Today the opposite danger exists that we become smug in view of the evidence that other nations face relatively greater difficulties than we do. Canada can be a leader to the world in terms of creating and maintaining a "sane society" and a "compassionate society." We have the opportunity to plan our society and design our landscape in a manner to make us the envy of the world - an industrialized metropolitan society that is also humane, tolerant and unselfish.

CREDIBILITY

To be credible, we may be obliged to limit the growth of our cities to ensure that they remain livable and orderly; we will find that some of us must be willing to accept more people within our smaller communities in order that not all future Canadians begin life in the high-rise stratosphere; we may find it necessary to accept the possible inconvenience of public transit in exchange for cleaner air and less dirty linen; and we must accept the fact that law and order is a uniform task for all and not just a task for those in uniform.

But, our greatest challenge in the remainder

of this century will be to reconcile our increasing hopes for a society in which a pleasant environment takes precedence over unquestioned growth with the reality of the rest of the world, where millions starve and live in squalor for want of development. For Canadians to contribute to the solution of the problems of the rest of the world, while providing a model of change and development within our own boundaries, is our unique opportunity.

In turn, I believe that the universities have a major responsibility to contribute to that process and that York in particular has much to offer...

L'ESPRIT BICULTUREL

Canada is also a bilingual nation with a multi-cultural society, and I believe that we have reason to be proud of the peculiar genius of Glendon College. Discussions of Glendon College remind me of controversy about Quebec in the 1960's; when we asked: "What does Quebec want?" Now I hear the question: "What does Glendon want?" Glendon College is a noble experiment. After all, it is not exactly located in the heartland of Franco-Ontario! To answer the critics of Glendon, I draw on Sir Winston Churchill who said that any fool can tell you what's wrong, but it takes a wise man to tell you what's right. We badly need in English-Canada reminders of the glorious heritage which we have in French-Canada, and I salute those who believe in that cause at Glendon; it is surely right for our time. To my colleagues of Glendon, may I say: "Bien que je sois unilingue, j'espère avoir l'esprit biculturel!"

York is also well-equipped to play a part in Canadian development as the result of the character and emphasis of its Faculties. The traditional Faculties of Arts, Law and Science are well fortified to contribute both to scholarship and to society. The newer Faculties of Administrative Studies, Environmental Studies and Fine Arts have already made an impact on the broader social paths of Canada, and I believe that the Faculty of Education will be a significant force in the important process of teacher education.

COLLEGE SYSTEM

A university attains pre-eminence for its contribution to the mind, but it must also contribute to the heart and to the spirit of each and every member of its community. John Ruskin suggested: "Fine art is that in which the hand, the head and the heart of man go together". The product of that process is an old-fashioned word, but I am not ashamed to use it: character. Compassion, concern for others, generosity of spirit and self-sacrifice cannot be taught, but they can be absorbed. For those reasons, I believe that the "College

System" at York is part of its distinctive quality. Not only should a college serve to give each student an individual identity, but it can provide a degree of education beyond the formal walls of the library or the laboratory.

I believe that a large metropolitan university such as York has a particular responsibility to ensure Cardinal Newman's objective, stated over a century ago: "A University is an Alma Mater, knowing her children one by one, not a foundry, or a mint, or a treadmill". That York has been so remarkably effective in that direction is in no small measure due to the College System. The chief function of a residential college is to make a notable contribution to the intellectual atmosphere of the university. The success of a residential college, therefore, must be judged primarily by academic achievement in the widest sense. Residence life should provide a format of intellectual activity for the students of the College as a whole; as an instrument of education, it should certainly rate second only to the classroom. But if we believe that the College System has value, then we must behave as if it does and those who contribute to that part of the University's life must not be permitted to do so only at the sacrifice of their academic careers.

PRIMARY PURPOSE

In speaking of the contribution of the University to the wider community and of its responsibility for the development of the 'whole man or woman', I do not wish to suggest any diminution of the primary purpose of the university which remains, as Tennyson said, "to follow knowledge like a sinking star, beyond the utmost bound of human thought". Nor, do I believe, are research and teaching competitive parts of the academic process. Indeed, teaching without the accompanying process of continuous intellectual inquiry and challenge to accepted theory and interpretation can, at best, become an incantation of mindless platitudes and, at worst, an imprisonment of conventional wisdom. The New York Times once asserted, with the language of infallibility, that man could never walk on the moon!

However, just as those responsible for academic programs must continuously question their appropriateness, so must we assess the balance of resources between undergraduate teaching and graduate study. I believe consideration of that balance to be a high priority within the academic community of York University. Our continuing task must be one of ensuring the academic quality of our work. Ultimately, success will only be attained by devotion to the highest standards of excellence.

I am delighted to find strong support for my views that tinkering with the machinery of governance should be a secondary pursuit. Our job is to make York work, not just to redesign it, and I am determined to see that it does work. If I am doing it wrong, I hope I will be the first rather than the last to hear.

If we have problems, I hope we will be open about them and not pretend, for whatever reason, that we cannot solve them. There are those who say that universities are a creature of the past; I will argue that universities can still guide the future. But they must earn their place — it will not be given to them!

Nor are universities alone in this situation in the world of education. I believe in the essential unity of education and the same problems face the colleges of applied arts and technology, the high schools and the public schools — maintaining their traditional values, while still being relevant to modern needs. That delicate balance will not, I believe, be effectively achieved anywhere other than within the institutions themselves. That in turn requires first, that we know ourselves, second, that we be capable of explaining ourselves to the public at large, and third, that we welcome the public to participate in the process. I hope that York — this intellectual fortress on the northern frontiers of Metropolitan Toronto — will always keep its drawbridge down for its neighbours to secure ready access.