

UNIVERSITY NEWSBEAT

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President Macdonald welcomes new students to York University

The following statement combines remarks addressed by President H. Ian Macdonald to the Induction Convocation for New Students in Burton Auditorium on Sunday, September 11, and his speech of welcome at the Glendon College Convocation for the Admission of New Students on Wednesday, September 21, 1983.

In welcoming to York University our incoming students, I want to stress that, while we in the University are proud to be taking into the fold such an outstanding group of well-qualified students as you are, you have reason to be proud too. You are joining a community in York that has made notable progress in a very short period of time. Today, we are the third largest university by head count in the country (some 35,000 students), but more importantly, we have achieved world-class stature in just over twenty-three years. In my own experience last month, in representing the University at the Quinquennial Commonwealth Universities Congress in Britain, I found once again as so often before that York University, throughout the Commonwealth nations, attracted instant recognition and immediate respect.

As you know, world recognition is one important facet in measuring the greatness of any university, but now let me turn to another such facet — the testimony of a university's alumni.

Deep affection of alumni

If a university can inspire the deep affection of its alumni, if it can make them act spontaneously and selflessly on its behalf, if it elicits their voluntary support throughout their lives, then we have another measure of a university's greatness. There is ample evidence that York University is increasingly having just such an effect upon its students.

We get many supportive letters from our alumni, but let me read to you from the recent letter of a York alumna to the Minister of Colleges and Universities. It reads:

I am prompted to write by news that York University has had to reject applicants because of inadequate provincial government funding. My letter is intended to urge upon you and your ministry a reconsideration of the mode of funding by which York appears to suffer. My plea for York is a very personal one. It has to do, first, with the quality of my experience there as a post-graduate student, 1978-81. I enrolled as a teacher of long standing. I stayed on, because I found that what I was learning was changing and deepening my life.

But I also was aware from the beginning that what mattered to me as a mature student was access. York's policy had enabled my husband to enroll as a mature student of linguistics, ten years before; recently, a daughter graduated in Honours English from Glendon after a university career spread out over several years and three universities; my son-in-law was recently awarded a fellowship for the summer in inorganic chemistry, his university career having started at Atkinson College after years of working at Ford and Toronto Hydro. My elder daughter enrolled at Glendon in January of 1982, after ten years' working as a translator. It was her first full-time university experience. This Spring she was placed on the Dean's Honour Roll. One of my sons was a night student at Glendon last year.

There isn't one of us with a standard university entrance history,

yet each one of us was welcomed at York and flourished there. I can't place my finger on just what qualities and ideals engendered this openness in York as a place of learning, but I wanted you to see one woman's view of the present funding policy in the light of what York offers, and what York has meant in one family's university history.

I could provide no better testimony of the meaning and substance of York.

For that reason, it is more in sorrow than in anger that I have noted some of the unfortunate and unusual commentary about this University emanating from one of our sister institutions over the past year and from other sources as well. There have been denigrating buttons circulated, articles written, and statements made that criticize the enrolment policies and practices of York University.

Under strong pressure

In the course of these events, I have been under strong pressure from my colleagues, from our students and from friends of this University, to strike back in retaliatory language. I have stubbornly refused to do so for the following reasons: First, I believe that the stature of this University will not be enhanced by engaging in ill-tempered mud-slinging. Second, I believe that the best answer to such criticism is to be found in the accomplishments of our faculty and the record of our graduates. Third, I believe that not only is such criticism directed by one university against another unprecedented, but the escalation of such verbal warfare can only result in the diminution of all of us in the public eye and the loss of public respect for the magnificent university system which we have created in this province.

My practice in speaking about the university system of Ontario has been not only to point with pride to the notable successes of this University but to state at every opportunity that we have enjoyed a great benefit from being a neighbour of, and in so many academic areas a collaborator with, the University of Toronto; that in having small regional institutions such as Trent and Brock we provide a significant alternative in the form of small-scale residential universities; and that in having two universities in Northern Ontario we enhance the richness of the cultural life of the whole province.

Variety, diversity and excellence

We are indeed fortunate to have a system of such variety, diversity, and excellence. Moreover, it has been my experience that people or institutions of small accomplishment are not noted by anyone; the bars are aimed at the great and I am pleased that our recent exposure has confirmed the place that we occupy in the university system of this province.

On the matter of accepting or rejecting students, what you should know is that this University has been a leader in meeting the objectives of accessibility in Ontario. Over the past six years, York has provided some 25 percent of the new student places in the provincial system as a whole. Approximately 50 percent of the students at York pursue their studies on a part-time basis.

In the process, this University has earned the gratitude of the public for such efforts. I use the word "efforts" advisedly because on a per-student basis there is not another university in the province that is funded at a lower rate than we are and these great numbers of students are being

taught here because my colleagues and I believe in the importance of educational opportunity in this country, and because they have been prepared to extend their efforts to an extraordinary degree to accommodate the great numbers of students who have come here.

In my view, that is an accomplishment of which this University can be rightly proud. Along the way, the debate has been broadened to suggest that the longstanding admission level of 60 percent is a guarantee of inferior quality and a diminution of excellence in the universities of the province. However, to those who have come to this subject recently, let me remind them that when I was an undergraduate from 1948 to 1952 at the University of Toronto, the minimum admission level was 60 percent as it was throughout the ten years that I subsequently taught in that institution and, as far as I can recall, that has been the case for years in Ontario. May I also say that

ground and ignore the undeserved insults that may come your way. Help me to prove that my course of action is correct by demonstrating through your success that our critics are wrong.

In setting forth, therefore, as students in York University, let me assure you that you have before you all the opportunities that are to be taken from the great storehouse of knowledge. I believe those opportunities, in today's world, are more fascinating than they have ever been before, because of the advancement of the so-called "technological age".

Achieve moral vision

In the stimulating but often confusing times ahead, we want to provide you, our students, with an education that will give you the best background from which to succeed in the new age. I want to stress, always, the importance of the univer-

moral way. Do not be satisfied merely to know what is wrong; instead, know and feel what is wrong, and let the higher awareness lead you to action against what you perceive to be wrong.

Need for conscience

I sometimes wonder if the confusing and difficult times that we face today may not lend an unaccustomed urgency to the need for conscience and for a perception of greatness. Such a vision, perhaps, might allow us a better sense of perspective as we advance further into the so-called "technological age" and its consequent social change. Our adjustment to technology will certainly be made more easily if we never lose sight of human supremacy over the devices we have created. No matter how much our computers may give the appearance of thinking and remembering more clearly than we do, we must keep in mind that they will never be able to feel; they will never have the most rudimentary conscience—let alone the higher conscience that leads to action; and they will never be able to make moral decisions. And so, while the computer may do many clever things at our command, all that is creative and moral in the arts, the humanities, and the fine arts belongs to the less ordered, and more fallible workings of the human mind.

This truth should be self-evident, but given the degree of resistance to and suspicion of technology, we can assume that it is not. As educated people, however, who understand that human creativity is one of the noblest of human mysteries, you never need fear the advance of technology; rather, you may look upon it as but a further advancement of human ingenuity for the service and betterment of us all.

In working toward the betterment of humanity, there are numerous important issues upon which we can and should proclaim ourselves as enlightened citizens in a troubled world. Therefore, I hope you will learn, above all, in York University, that you must recognize immoral acts and violations of truth for what they are. It is a courageous and sometimes difficult and dangerous thing to proclaim against such crimes, but that is what your University will always strive to do, and what your University will try to inspire you to do.

Also a place of fun

On a lighter note, may I say that York is and always has been, not only a place of seriousness, but also a place of fun. I do hope you will enjoy the social side of life here — that you will have fun as well as hard work.

Indeed, I am reminded of a recent visitor to the campus. It appears that, this past summer, a chimpanzee escaped from the Metropolitan Zoo and found its way to the library. One of the librarians saw him seated in a study carrel surrounded by books, and ventured forward to see if she could be of assistance. She noted that in one hand he held a copy of the Bible and in the other a copy of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*. When, asking him if she could be of any assistance, he said, "No, thank you very much. Before I return to the zoo, I hope that I will have been able to decide whether I am my brother's keeper or my keeper's brother!"

Whatever the answer, he recognized that, in York, we have great riches to share with you — the riches of the mind and the knowledge accumulated over centuries. Today, we hand you the key to that treasury and urge you to use it to open as many doors as possible during your time here which, I trust, will be happy and fulfilling.



NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES WEEK OCTOBER 2 - 8

York will be joining universities across Canada in observing National Universities Week, a celebration of higher education, from October 2 to 8.

The purpose of the event is to acquaint the Canadian public with the role of universities in community, regional, and national development.

A number of activities will be sponsored by York during National Universities Week. For further information, contact the Communications Department, S802 Ross Building, telephone 667-3441.

some of the most notable of my contemporaries in terms of the success that they have enjoyed in their subsequent careers were among those who could not have been in university were the entrance standard much higher.

Intellectual equipment

Finally, in a university such as York, which has extended such efforts to cater to part-time students, mature students, and students who come from various backgrounds, we are much more interested in the intellectual equipment which our graduates take away with them than we are in that which they bring with them. As I observe the graduates of this young institution moving into areas of influence throughout the nation, I have no doubt that our University has served them well.

Moreover, the last time that I examined this question, I discovered that some 80 to 85 percent of our students came from homes where neither parent had been to university. And it is true that parents want their children to go to university for one of two reasons: either because they went themselves or because they did not. One of the great glories of this University, in my opinion, is that we have made it possible for so many to come whose parents did not precede them.

And when I conclude my presidency the thought that will give me greatest satisfaction is that this University has fulfilled that mission so successfully. So, I say to you, our incoming students, keep to the high

city as a place that provides for the assessment of morality and the development of leadership on moral issues. With moral training comes the dimension of human feeling as an essential part of learning — because it is the combination of thought and feeling, in moral vision, that gives us supremacy over all things. York University cannot give you moral vision in your studies; instead we hope to provide you with the means by which you can achieve it for yourself.

In his 1867 *Inaugural Address as Honorary President of St. Andrews University*, John Stuart Mill distinguished between two degrees of conscience. The first, and most common, degree is conscience as restraint, conscience as the negative power that keeps us from doing wrong. But a higher conscience, and a less common one, is a power that directs our feeling and thought to act for the good of others. It is a positive power; instead of restraining us from doing what is wrong for us personally, it prompts us to think of and do what is right for the sake of others. It is this positive, higher conscience that opens to us a perception of that which is noble or great in the universe.

It seems to me that, as educated people, it is both your privilege and your duty to continue to make intellectual enquiry a lifelong pursuit — and, while thinking about the multi-disciplined questions that interest you, to let feeling, and a perception of what is great or awesome in the universe, guide you so that you may act in a fitting and