

by David Naylor
Installation Address
November 7, 2005

Your Honour and Madam Chancellor,

The full and proper salutation for all the distinguished members of this extraordinary assembly would take a very long time. And so I hope to be forgiven for welcoming you all simply as Friends of the University of Toronto....

Introduction

Through the decades, countless students, alumni, faculty, staff, volunteers, and benefactors have helped the University of Toronto come to its current position as a great public institution. We have benefited from long-term financial support from both the provincial and federal governments, and been enriched by our ties to civic and community leaders and agencies. We are strengthened by our partnerships with a very important family of major hospitals.

We have shared success with a dynamic system of universities and colleges here in Ontario and across Canada. And we are truly fortunate to be located in an urban region that represents one of the biggest and best concentrations of creativity on the planet.

I am encouraged and very grateful to see gathered today such a cross-section of all these supporters and all these constituencies.

Let me therefore begin by thanking all those who have spoken for their generous sentiments, and all those who are here in Convocation Hall for their incredible support of the University of Toronto. I deeply appreciate your participation on a personal level, but I am humbly aware that what brings us together is the commitment we have to higher education, and the huge affection that we share for this institution.

The University of Toronto matters to Canada and Canadians. It has mattered for 178 years, and it matters today more than ever.

Past Presidents

A great many academic leaders are here who have helped to build and steward our University. While they all deserve our gratitude, I have the special pleasure at this point of acknowledging the past Presidents who have joined us.

First, however, for Mrs Mary Ham in the front row with my family, a wonderful neighbour and friend from our days on Glencairn Avenue: Let us remember that James Milton Ham was truly one of the great minds and great citizens of this University.

John Evans brought to us an incomparable combination of grace, civility, passion for great ideas, and irrepressible humour.

George Connell was a brilliant strategist with cast-iron integrity and impeccable academic values.

J. Robert S. Prichard gave us the decade of the dynamo, and he has given me wonderful advice over the last few months. No one has ever loved the University of Toronto more than Rob Prichard.

Bob Birgeneau urged us to start defining and measuring our success in truly global terms. One of our own now leads the top-ranked public university in the United States.

Most recently, Frank Iacobucci brought wisdom, humanity, and impeccable judgment to his unselfish tour of duty as Interim President.

I feel very privileged and humbled to be following in the footsteps of these distinguished leaders.

I must also acknowledge my old friend, Vivek Goel, who stepped forward this summer and brilliantly managed double duty as both Acting President and Provost.

Ladies and gentlemen, it has not escaped me that, for those last four colleagues, their terms of office, counting by the month, declined from 120 to 48 to 9 and finally 3. Based on mathematical extrapolation, my term should actually have ended a week ago!

I am happy to advise that today's event heralds the end of that trend.

A Great Legacy

We can together take great pride in this University.

Our strength is in our students. And our students are extraordinary.

They are not only exceedingly bright and well-motivated. They truly draw on the breadth of ambitions in this country.

Fifty percent of our undergraduates report a total family income of less than \$50,000. 1,400 students with special needs are registered with our accessibility services. Fifty percent of our undergraduates self-identify as belonging to a visible minority. And fifty percent now speak a language other than English at home.

This diversity marks us as more than just another university.

It tells the world that U of T is our nation's most powerful springboard to great accomplishments for Canadians from every walk of life.

Our students come here because of our outstanding faculty. As just one measure of excellence, our faculty produce more publications and are more highly cited in the academic literature than the faculty of virtually any public university in North America.

Our dedicated staff have produced a remarkable environment for our students and faculty. They are the backbone of this institution, from labs to libraries, from student services to student centres.

And all of this activity is unfolding on three burgeoning campuses in the throes of aggressive renewal. By this spring, we will have opened 21 new buildings or major new facilities in a four year span. By 2007, the University of Toronto's Scarborough campus will reach an enrolment of 9,400, and the University of Toronto at Mississauga will have 10,200 students – no longer satellites, but vibrant academic entities in their own right.

Need for Diversified University System

After years in which Ontario lagged in funding post-secondary education, we are finally turning the corner. Minister Bentley, I thank you most sincerely for the remarkable \$6.2 billion 5-year investment that the Government of Ontario has made in universities and colleges.

Minister Graham, I am also delighted to salute the Federal Government for its imaginative and generous investments in university-based research.

Our governments made these investments because our leaders now understand the importance of university education and research as drivers of the nation's growth.

I would like to believe, however, that Universities have been supported for reasons that have to do with the workings of our minds and souls, and not just our markets. And I hope that both Ministers would agree with Northrop Frye who said, "the fundamental job of the imagination in ordinary life is to produce, out of the society we have to live in, a vision of the society we want to live in."

If you believe that, Ministers, then you also know that our best chance of reinventing Canada will come from educating the imagination in a way that only happens at a few places in this country.

All Ontarians and all Canadians have a stake in ensuring that a number of Canadian universities and colleges lead their peers on the world stage. We all have a stake in helping the best students in our major universities become global leaders in their fields. And this University's increasingly international and multicultural student population is an enormous asset for Canada in today's borderless world.

That is why, as the Honourable Bob Rae and his colleagues noted in their powerful review of postsecondary education in Ontario, one size does not fit all in higher education. In fact, one size fits no one.

The University of Toronto is more than ready to play an even larger role on the national stage. And we will develop an even stronger international strategy in the years ahead.

In return, we ask only that institutional diversity should be embraced and supported by all levels of government.

The Innovation Agenda

I want to thank the Governments of Canada, Ontario, Toronto and Mississauga for something else: for putting innovation on the agenda...for helping to shape a new element in our national culture that has huge promise for future generations.

Our common job now is to ensure that innovation is defined with sufficient depth and breadth so that this important agenda can have its maximum positive impact on the lives of Canadians.

By depth, I mean simply that we must recognize creativity as the parent of innovation, and be prepared to take the long view.

Consider stem cell research – a hot topic today. Jim Till and Ernest McCulloch, two of our most distinguished professors, discovered blood stem cells at the Ontario Cancer Institute almost four decades ago – but only this year received the Albert Lasker Prize in Biomedical Research, America's equivalent of the Nobel Prize in Medicine.

That time-line is by no means unique. When John Polanyi started studying infrared chemiluminescence almost fifty years ago, who could have imagined the eventual application of lasers in everything from CD players to medical devices today?

The point of fundamental research, as Professor Polanyi has said, is to "ask questions that matter". And when we ask those deep questions, we get answers that, in utterly unpredictable ways, have massive long-term impacts.

As to breadth, we must ensure that the Innovation Agenda includes the humanities and social sciences.

We have all read the statistics about the millions of engineers and scientists graduating in China and India among other places. And yes, it's absolutely true that we need to educate more engineers and scientists.

But if Canada is to reclaim its place on the planet as a trusted interlocutor between the old order and the new superpowers, we need additional skills and perspectives.

We need to teach our students to speak Mandarin and Cantonese, Hindi, and other languages. We need to teach our students about history and the vocabulary of culture and politics in the most populous countries on the planet.

We will always need the perspectives and understanding that come only from the social sciences and humanities. We need them not just because they matter to our place in the world. We need them to make sense of our world right here at home. Northrop Frye, again, put it best: "Literature is the science of human emotion...The constructs of the imagination tell us things about human life that we don't get in any other way ..."

It's no coincidence that so many world leaders and top executives have degrees in the humanities.

There's one other critical point about the innovation agenda: Integration. The ability to marshal a combination of innovation and creativity – to integrate applied research and fundamental research; the science, humanities and social sciences – that ability is reserved to relatively few institutions in Canada. This University, in depth and breadth and ability to integrate disciplines, is *primus inter pares*.

Let us also be clear-sighted about our global context: We shall need all our creativity and innovation, and all our intellectual firepower from multiple disciplines with a trans-national perspective, if we are to confront successfully the many challenges that face us on this earth.

From demographic changes to environmental degradation...

From the twilight of the petrochemical era to the dawn of the age of biotechnology...

From the global crisis of HIV/AIDS, to the decline of civility and tolerance in public discourse here at home...

From the homogenizing sweep of a technological and secular society to the reactive emergence of religious fundamentalism and sectarian strife...

This is not just about professors in the library or the laboratory. It is critically about our students. For the simple and profound reason that the challenges we face today are also their inheritance from us.

Focus on Students

Students must be the priority of this entire university – for two reasons.

First, the Canadian dream – the dream that reconciles excellence with equality of opportunity --- hinges on the principle that every student who deserves to be here actually finds a seat here.

And second, our students can lead the world in surmounting those grand challenges of the next few decades if we foster their natural creativity and imbue them with the spirit of innovation. That means a very serious focus on the student experience inside and outside the classroom.

Let's deal with those two items in turn.

Access

U of T led the country with our commitment to needs-based funding for students.

We were the first university to offer a covenant: that no student should ever leave his or her program owing to a shortfall in funding. We now spend \$150M in University-derived funds each year on student stipends, bursaries and scholarships, and other forms of financial aid.

As a result, we have made real progress in opening U of T to the least advantaged students, without compromising access for those from middle-income families. This work is not done. We want a University of Toronto education to be an investment, not a financial crisis.

Our success in breeding innovation and creativity will be measured by our openness to students who find it hardest to get here, who have felt stigmatized, excluded, or unwelcome.

Oddly, that last category has recently included some of the best of the best – secondary school students who are very high achievers in academics, phenomenally talented in the creative and performing arts, or gifted athletes. Students who belong here, but who are often drawn to other universities that offer more generous merit scholarships.

Today, I want students in Ontario and across Canada to know that U of T is going to commit meaningful new resources to bring the very brightest and most talented students here.

And here's a message to former Premier William Davis, a wonderfully loyal alumnus and governor of our institution who could not be with us this afternoon. Bill, let me repeat: that includes scholarships for great students who are great athletes.

Our success in breeding innovation and creativity will also be measured by our openness to those who need a second chance to go to University. Our flagships here include the Academic Bridging Program at Woodsworth and the Transitional Year Program. Many of these students have emerged from very difficult personal circumstances. We are privileged and inspired to have them among us.

We have long welcomed adult learners from every discipline and every walk of life. One group of adult learners, in particular, has become increasingly important and needs our attention. New Canadians --- those who bring their dreams and skills to this country. More than anyplace else, they choose to settle in Toronto and Mississauga. If we are serious about innovation and creativity in Canada, then all of us must work together to help these New Canadians mobilize their potential contribution to this country. That's not only smart social and economic policy; it is also the right thing to do.

Student Experience: Job #1

As I said, every potentially great mind that deserves to be here, should be here – regardless of personal or financial circumstances. And once here, every student – undergraduate and graduate – deserves an experience worthy of a great institution.

Let's face the evidence.

Particularly as regards the undergraduate experience, our students are giving us mediocre grades in one survey after another.

That is why Enhancing the Student Experience is the number 1 priority in the University's strategic plan. And it is my number 1 personal priority...

Chronic underfunding has steadily changed the face of this University.

Back in 1891, the Blake Report recommended that no honours class in Arts should exceed twelve students, and no pass class should have more than 30 students.

Today, the biggest single class at U of T is BIO150 at 1,527 students. There are 6 other classes with over 1,000 students.

I know that class size is not the only determinant of the student experience. However, we all recognize that contact between teachers and learners is incredibly important to the educational experience. The opportunity to engage in vigorous debate with other students facilitated by a deeply knowledgeable professor --- to receive personal feedback and mentorship --- above all, to work with a leading expert on a research project and share in the excitement of the creation of new knowledge... These are personal facets of a University education that we must not only preserve, but augment.

Today, our overall student to faculty ratio is 34 --- about 50% higher than the average for our peer institutions in the American Association of Universities. Our staff have also been very hard pressed. The McGuinty's Government visionary \$6.2B investment in post-secondary education will help us begin to correct these imbalances.

But we can and we will do more. The entire administrative team is working to help our dedicated faculty and staff cultivate great student experiences here at the University of Toronto.

Our strategy has four basic elements.

First, this University is big and complex, and it is sometimes overwhelming for new students. We must create more manageable and friendly neighbourhoods. In this respect, we enjoy a major advantage not yet fully exploited in our wonderful colleges and federated universities. We will find more ways to create smaller groups and cohorts for collaborative and personalized learning. Our three campuses will themselves become ever more distinctive places. And we will enhance student activity spaces for our large population of commuting students.

Second, we are going to reduce our reliance on passive modes of knowledge acquisition. In this, the University of Toronto has a huge advantage with our extraordinarily rich urban environment and our supportive alumni. Through our partnerships with a widening array of businesses and non-profit agencies, and the generosity of countless alumni who serve as student mentors, we are creating more and more individualized and experiential learning opportunities.

Third, we will provide more recognition and support for great teaching. Did you know that there is not a single University-wide teaching award? That most teachers are still not given systematic and supportive feedback and coaching on their in-class performance?

Starting today, the University of Toronto will create its first-ever university-wide teaching awards. And I assure every student here that your University will recognize, support, and reward effective teaching as never before.

Fourth and finally, let me come back to the issue of how we can prepare today's students to confront the grand challenges of tomorrow. From 2000 to 2004 researchers with a U of T academic appointment were involved in 26,697 journal publications captured by computerized indexing. You can bet there were thousands of others publications that were never tracked. What an unbelievable array of learning opportunities!

Fortunately, huge numbers of those research projects already involve graduate students. But curiosity doesn't start in graduate school. We can and will offer even more exciting opportunities for our undergraduate students to participate in the creation of new knowledge.

Those four dimensions frame our commitment to reshape the student experience. Initiatives across all four are underway and have already begun to achieve important successes. And I can say, with confidence, that the University's academic leaders in every division and department are committed to ensuring that each of our major decisions will be taken with a view to impact on the student experience.

Conclusion

Ladies and gentlemen, our University has a storied past and a present made vibrant by 70,000 students – more than 400,000 former students living all over the world -- and 11,000 faculty and staff.

If I ask that you re-dedicate yourselves to the future of the University of Toronto, it is not for the glory of an institution or the fulfillment of a sentimental attachment.

I ask for your support because we together recognize the enduring alchemy of higher education, and its transformative potential in the lives of our students and our society.

I ask for your support so that we can create a student experience that is even more rewarding for the talented young people who, over the course of 178 years, have come to learn and grow at the University of Toronto.

I ask for your support so that the University of Toronto, more than ever, can be a special place where creativity remains paramount, where ideas matter, where rational discourse prevails against a background of passionate engagement with the issues of the day, where fundamental scholarship can flourish unimpeded, where we can ask timeless questions, overcome intolerance, nurture the great minds of tomorrow, and together with our students, imagine a great future.

Thank you for being here today. And thank you for allowing me to help all of you steward what Claude Bissell so rightly called “the great good place”.