



Values, Vision and Renewal

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Trent University
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Introduction

Thank you. Faculty, Students, Staff, Distinguished Guests, Family and Friends. Thank you and welcome.

Thank you to those who have spoken before me.

I would like to acknowledge my predecessors, and Trent's Founding President Tom Symons, and former Presidents Leonard Conolly and Bonnie Patterson. These great leaders honour us with their presence here today.

I am deeply grateful to Tom Jackson, soon to be our new chancellor, for his participation and support today. It is a tremendous honour to share with him this platform, and to consider the responsibilities of leadership with this outstanding humanitarian.

Presidential installations are an opportunity to *reaffirm* noble ideas, and *renew the institution*, in the form of a commitment to the future.

Today, I will build on these concepts in order to focus on the broader significance of our shared work, and the promise of *renewing* Trent University for the prosperous decades to come.

Can we imagine, together, a renewed vision that is wide enough and deep enough, to move us, our hands and our hearts, our minds, our spirits, our whole being, as an intellectual community?

Such a renewed vision would embrace the traditions of a liberal education, the reality of professional programs, community engagement and international impacts, the discovery of new science and creative performance, the exciting new undergraduate and graduate programs that are at the heart of much of the learning enterprise.

I hope you can sense the excitement, the importance, and the remarkable privilege to help build a vision for the future of an intellectual community, a renewed vision for Trent University.

The creation of something new

Fifty-two years ago, in 1957, through public discussion, the people of Peterborough decided they wanted to establish a post-secondary educational institution in their city.

The decision to create Trent University resulted in enormous momentum that catapulted the city and the region into the forefront of the most important endeavor of their time and ours; *the creation and exchange of knowledge*.

I, too, was born in 1957, and the trajectory of my life story has brought me here, on the happiest day of my professional life. I am honoured beyond measure to share this moment with each of you.

Building on the legacy

I have spent considerable time over the past year learning about Trent. Many people have been very generous of their time and have shared their thoughts about Trent – its strengths, its potential and its future. There was virtual unanimity on two points:

First, there is a deep love and passion for this place which is expressed in the work of many outstanding individuals from the community, students, parents, alumni, staff, faculty, board members, and many, many others. People have spoken with awe and humility of awakenings and connections, of developing emotional and intellectual bonds, of the moment that they became a member of the Trent family, of the impact on their life.

Now I, too, have experienced this incredible feeling of joining a welcoming community, a feeling of belonging.

Second, there is an enormous appetite for *change* and *renewal*, to prepare to meet new challenges. There is a desire to respond to unprecedented demands for change by building on the great traditions and strengths of Trent. These strengths include a willingness, a determination, to consider every facet of university life, to examine all possibilities, and to experiment and pioneer.

Above all, I perceive a great spirit here at Trent to face the challenge of the future.

I have learned much about the founding philosophy of Trent, its commitment to quality and high standards, and its approach to careful nurturing of evolving strengths. These are among Trent University's greatest treasures, and are reflected in the integrity of the institution and its leaders.

I am eager to channel the deep feelings of love and commitment, and the evident passion for change at Trent, to build on what already has been accomplished.

Defining the university

Let me try a geographical metaphor; consider the river, about which Margaret Laurence, a former Chancellor of Trent University, wrote in *The Diviners*¹:

"The river flowed both ways. The current moved from north to south, but the wind usually came from the south, rippling the bronze green water in the opposite direction. This apparently impossible contradiction made apparent and possible, still fascinated Morag, even after years of river watching."

¹ Laurence, M. 1974.

The river has its modern expression in the particular river channel you see here, the same one that inspired Margaret Laurence – *but is it the same one?* The river channel is continually being scoured and shaped, and the volume has changed in response to factors, such as geomorphology, tectonic movements, and climate change.

Changes in the river can take place very slowly, but at other times abrupt changes are introduced through processes that emerge quickly and that make fast and thorough transformations. Such processes are often, paradoxically, extremely fragile.

Millions of organisms in and surrounding the river are responding to the delicate interplay of light, water and nutrients. The river creates its own weather, begins to modify itself and to influence surrounding features.

A university is like a river. Fascinating and apparently impossible, powerful yet fragile, full of life, and a dynamism that creates and stimulates its own environment.

Let me conclude my geographical metaphor by illuminating three defining values of the university landscape.

These values have developed over time and, in my view, like the bedrock that underlies the river, today form the bedrock that is the foundation upon which we can build our future together in the university.

Commitment to academic freedom

The first value I want to identify is the commitment to free inquiry². The fundamental premise is that we are all learners.

In the remarkable environment of university creativity, all participants are involved in finding new questions to ask, new ideas to analyze, new expressions to interpret, new knowledge to share with others.

Learning is often accompanied by an intensity that can be almost overwhelming, and a desire to share that can become inspiring. Passing on that moment, being part of the learning process, this love of learning, is why many of us are here.

Learning is a way to find your calling...and to find your calling, it has been said, is “to find the intersection of your own deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger³.”

By learning, we can understand how to take our place in the world, and how to do worthy work. By learning, we can widen and deepen the context of our lives – awaken ourselves to true potential, and help others make meaningful contributions.

Often, by learning, you will find you are better than you believed yourself to be.

² Garber, M. 2001.

³ Buechner, F. 1992.

Knowledge and truth

The second academic value I want to highlight is a long-standing principle, identified first with medieval universities, but no less important today: *that knowledge is an end in itself*.

My experience has been that the university is the place in which we identify, and then fascinate, nurture and release to the wider world, those individuals who give promise of advancing knowledge.

In seeking and confirming knowledge, we are turning together toward truth – a truth we know will never be final or complete.

Such a view is not without challengers. Some consider the business of university education to be subordinate to politics, for example. In such a view, truth has a certain amount of “flexibility”.

Others believe that knowledge must be of “economic value” – sometimes the inference is that only knowledge with a defined practical use is desirable and worthy.

Still others adopt a post-structuralist way of thinking, denying the possibility of *really* knowing anything anyway, denying the very existence of truth.

Such discussion is never far from the surface in a university – the wonderful thing is that, at universities, there is respect and understanding for all of these points of view, and many more.

Engagement and community

The third academic value I want to highlight is the academic value of *engagement*.

Engagement is an academic value that celebrates the context in which our learning activities are made possible and can endure.

Engagement ensures our success in safeguarding academic freedoms, and in strengthening the important connections and commercialization of university research – engagement means that these are not dualisms to be always contrasted and set up for conflict. Instead, this larger context guarantees our very liberty as scholars and academics.

Engagement has found a unique expression through the development of community. An engaged community encompasses the full diversity of meaningful interactions between the university and the wider society.

I believe the need for community is felt by all those engaged in learning – all researchers, teachers, all students, alumni. Engagement, and community, are based on the recognition that not a single one of us is here only for oneself.

The Intellectual Community

Free inquiry, knowledge-seeking, and community engagement are *interdependent* values. These values are the bedrock over which the river of our lives flow. This bedrock ensures our universities occupy a unique place in modern society.

We live our values at the university.

The important tasks⁴ of the university are the creation and preservation of knowledge in libraries, museums and galleries; the diffusion of knowledge through scholarly publishing and creative performances; the development of collegial scholarship; and the emerging digital world; and, the promotion of lifelong learning.

By living our values in accomplishing these tasks, we live the life of scholarly honesty, civility in discourse, toleration of diverse beliefs and values, trust in rationality, and public accountability. By living our values, we make our most essential contributions to society. Ultimately, we are in the business of transforming lives.

A need for vision

The scope of the themes of academic values and the business of the university are vast. Only a few modest ideas and examples are presented here. New ideas are continually expanding at rates almost beyond comprehension, even within one single university, let alone within the larger intellectual communities from which this university, and others, derive their vitality.

This vastness suggests a need to focus, to identify strategic directions, to concentrate activity in areas of particular interest or capability. But how does a university focus energy and effort – influence and manage those forces that shape and change an institution? How will we decide what will be important at Trent University?

For this we need vision.

I encourage all of you to glance with me in the direction of Trent University's future.

An increasing number of environmental scientists, policy analysts, philosophers, and others, believe that we live at a decisive moment in world history⁵. This is a time when world view will be decisively altered with renewed awareness of the human situation, our perceptions, attitudes and values, reflecting all levels of being and existence.

The problems facing us are many, but can be boiled down to, I think, three⁶. First, our relation to the natural world. Second, the relation of humans to one another. And third, the relation of the present generation to future generations.

The natural world

First, is the natural world. I believe the environmental crisis of today is not only ecological and technological, but ultimately, moral. Can Trent University bring to bear its tremendous innovative capacity to help meet the urgent and dire planetary environmental situation?

⁴ Pellikan, J. 1992.

⁵ Orr, D. 2004; Wilson, E. O. 2006.

⁶ Sullivan, J. 2005.

It is wonderful to be in a place that has concluded, as an intellectual community, that we will not be careless participants in an unsustainable global civilization. Such a conclusion naturally flows from the unique environment of Trent University, the ever-changing river, the love of place that marks our location and our grassroots history.

There is a difference between space and place⁷, and you can feel the power of that difference here.

The human world

Second, is the relation of humans to one another. We've been thinking in disciplinary and even interdisciplinary terms for a long time, but suppose the rest of the world learns what we have always known to be true here at Trent? *Suppose everyone starts to believe we really do need one another?*

At Trent I am aware of a deep respect and commitment to the interdisciplinary scholarship that is the start of a true and lasting synthesis of different disciplines, of ecology and economics, of physics and politics, of chemistry and Canadian Studies.

Some have called this synthesis of knowledge *consilience*⁸. Consilience is the jumping together of knowledge across disciplines and across societal problems, leading to greater understanding and awareness of solutions apparently impossible – like Morag's river, now made apparent and possible.

Trent University's commitment to a powerful synthesis, to consilience and deeper knowledge, is reflected in the development of voice, of purposeful lives, of the responsibility to strive to be better, *to know in part*, and to acknowledge that there is more.

The generations

Finally, think of the challenge of time, of the relations among generations. I love the image of this generation standing as one among previous and future generations⁹. Your parents, their parents, and their parents before them. Your children, their children, and their children stretching into the future.

Trent University's vision already reflects this awareness, perhaps even a yearning, to make an impact, to make a difference. Let's strengthen this commitment – *to honour the past, yes, and to make the right things happen for the future*.

Let's agree we are here today to create a world of opportunity and joy for those who come after us.

Leadership and turning toward the future

We are charting a new course for the future at Trent University.

I believe we are fortunate to live at this turning point in Trent's history, as we approach our fiftieth anniversary in just five short years, in 2014. This is a time when new vision is urgently desired, and will, I predict, emerge in astonishing ways with increasing clarity.

⁷ Tuan, Y.-F. 1974.

⁸ Wilson, E. O. 1999.

⁹ Sullivan, J. 2005.

A renewal of vision requires a commitment to leadership at Trent University. Leadership, not from one individual or only a few, but leadership from all.

Leadership is *renewing* a commitment to each other, and our accountability to students, and to Trent as both an institution and an intellectual community.

Leadership is together shaping a future that can flow from the great strengths already in place.

Scholars throughout history have wondered about the meaning of leadership, community, and commitment.

These are not restricted themes, but are available for all to reflect on, to integrate personal experience, to influence personal attitudes, and to stimulate unique responses.

Partly based on these reflections, I have come to understand better my own need to study and work for a larger purpose, and the importance of duty (I would say my academic duty¹⁰).

And I have felt that intense sense of beauty that, for me, is suddenly revealed in completion of difficult tasks, in recalling joyous family memories, in anticipating the success of others, and in experiencing compelling environments.

I sense that the task before us is to help propel Trent University to the next level of accomplishment and aspiration. The watchwords will be academic values, learning, engagement, and leadership.

To seek a deep understanding of relationships, to respect tradition and then envision, and make possible, a preferred future for Trent. We will do this work together.

My role is to encourage, to facilitate, to lead, and sometimes, to follow.

To this work I am intensely committed, and on behalf of this great university, I will use all of my ability, creativity, and energy.

Thank you.

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¹⁰ Kennedy, D. 1997.

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