# Convocation 2015: June 3, 2015 Afternoon Ceremony part 1

[BAGPIPES]

[BAND PLAYING]

DON TAPSCOTT: Good afternoon, everyone. Please be seated. My name's Don Tapscott. And I'm the chancellor of Trent University. And I'm also an alum. I'm a proud graduate. And I've had more than my share of honors over the years. But I must say I've had no greater honor than to be the first alumni chancellor of this great institution.

And I'd like to begin the ceremony today by giving a shout out to mother nature and to thanking her for this spectacular day. Could we please bring it on for mother nature right now? Thank you. [CHEERING]

I've been to many convocation sessions in different parts of the world. And I also need to tell you that there is no nicer venue to convocate on planet Earth than what you have right today. [APPLAUSE]

Now, some of you who are sitting over there may see there's a couple little puffy clouds there. But I'd just like to encourage you, be calm. Everything is going to work out OK.

I'm one of four Tapscott boys who graduated from Trent, two years in a row starting in 1970. And I hitch-hiked over from Orillia, Ontario one spring day to check out this new-- what was called Oxford on the autonomy, a small liberal arts and science school in Canada in a beautiful setting. When I got here with a friend, we decided right on the spot that we were going to come to Trent.

And flashing forward almost 50 years, students graduating this week are sharing a very special milestone with us. This convocation, of course, marks the end of the 50th anniversary year. And it's been a great year. And celebrating your graduation is pretty much a perfect way to wrap it up.

For 50 years Trent has been challenging the way that we think not just about the world, but about learning itself. And today more than ever, the good news is Trent graduates are in demand. And we'll talk more about that later. But it's all going to work out for you.

I know you're wondering, will I get a job? Yes, you will. And it will be related to your field of study. And many of you, in fact, will be entrepreneurs. We'll come back to that. But I know from firsthand experience-- it sure worked for me-- that being a Trent grad, you are uniquely equipped and qualified and prepared for the exciting challenge and future that lies ahead.

In fact, you're going to shape it. I mean, my view of the future is that it's not something to be predicted. It's something to be achieved. And with your Trent experience, I believe you have the tools to take advantage of the opportunities around you today, but also to reinvent yourself lifelong. Because you're all going to have to do that. I know you think you have a base of knowledge. And you do.

But what's really important is your capacity to think critically and to solve problems and to learn and put things into context. And that's what will do you well. It will help you achieve a life of prosperity. And by all means, as Spock said, go forth, live long, and prosper. But I'm hoping it will also equip you to live a principled life, and one of consequence.

So this is your moment. This is your time right now, today, to not only pat yourself on the back, but to imagine, to design a life that's consequential and that's uniquely your own. So heartfelt congratulations to each of you in reaching this important milestone. I now declare the convocation open.

[APPLAUSE]

LEO GROARKE: Good afternoon. My name is Leo Groarke. I'm the president vice chancellor of Trent University. I will share with you that this is my first series of convocations at Trent University. And I was doing some math earlier today just to figure it out in my own brain. I figured out that I have now been at 43 convocations, 43 university convocations. And I did want to tell you how much I am enjoying Trent's convocations.

And I'm enjoying them because I find them so personal. I am used to a situation at other universities where 500 students walk across the stage and receive their degrees. And in the true spirit of Trent, that's not the way we do things here. We have many different convocations so that we can keep them intimate and small and personal.

I'm very pleased to welcome everybody here today. Maybe especially I want to welcome visitors who've come from across Canada, and also international visitors. I will let you know that I've been talking to families after the convocations. And so far, I've talked to families from Uganda, Australia, Ireland, Lagos, Ecuador, Nigeria, the Netherlands, and the Bahamas.

Those of you who are coming from far away, I want to wish you a special welcome. I want to compliment you on your wisdom to visit us now, rather than in February. Students know what I'm talking about.

I would also like to note that the convocation is being broadcast around the world. So for people who couldn't make it, they still have the opportunity. Maybe it will be 5:00 AM in the morning. But they still have the opportunity to watch convocation.

I have a few special guests I would like to introduce and recognize. The first one is Mark Dockstator, a former Trent faculty member who's now the president of First Nations University in Saskatchewan. Mark.

[APPLAUSE]

I'd also like to introduce two people from the board of governors-- Ken Armstrong, the honorary colonel, the Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment of the Canadian Armed Forces, and Ian Lord.

[APPLAUSE]

On behalf of the university, I want to acknowledge that we are located in the traditional territory of the Mississauga Anishnaabe, adjacent to the Haudenosaunee Territory in eastern Ontario, especially in a week when Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has presented its findings on the regrettable history of the residential school system. It is important to honor and recognize the traditional occupants of this land. And I will say I'm proud to be at a university that does that and doesn't forget to do it.

[APPLAUSE]

I want us all to remember today what the ceremony is about. And looking at the graduands, I want to say it's about you. It's about your successes. It's about your accomplishments. There are days in our lives that go by that we don't notice. And then there are special days, where we're an important person and people pay attention to us. I'm hoping that this will be that kind of day for you. I want you to soak it up. I want you to not be shy and to enjoy it. Because we're here to celebrate your successes.

I would say that in celebrating their successes, we're also celebrating the successes of the families and friends and the support people that made their successes possible. To the graduands on behalf of all the rest of us, I did want to say thank you for allowing us to bask in your glory.

I'm trying in the convocations this week each day to highlight some aspect of Trent that I think is significant. I want visitors to go away understanding what a vibrant university this is. I think some of that is reflected in the chancellor's comments, this being the 50th anniversary. If you like, Trent has arrived. Trent is now an established university. And it's a place that we can be proud of.

I want to remind the graduands that there's another anniversary coming up 50 years from now. It will be the 100th anniversary of Trent University. And I'm expecting you all to be back here to celebrate. I probably can't make it. But please, have a drink for me.

What I wanted to highlight today, though, was something different. I wanted to highlight the construction of the student center. Two years from now on the banks of the Otonabee, just behind the Bata Library here, there'll be a new building. It will be the Trent Student Center.

In keeping with Trent's tradition, which is a tradition of great architecture, I can tell you it's going to be a beautiful building. It's going to hug the river. There's a real emphasis on windows so that when you're in the building, you'll see the river or you'll see the wood lot to the side.

But what I really want to emphasize today is the role that our students played in making this building possible. I think right from the start, really, the building can be built because of an initial gift from students, a pledge to give $10 million to the building. But also in picking the architect for the building and working the project through with the board of governors, there's all so many things to do there, in designing the buildings. Students have led every step of the way.

And the students today I think are in an interesting position because you have designed it and committed to it. But it will be students two years from now that start to appreciate and enjoy that building. And I can tell you they are going to thank you for what you have done in that regard.

And one last comment that I want to make to our graduands, and that is I ask you to remember that after you graduate, you're still part of the Trent family, just a different component of the Trent family. You're part of the alumni of Trent University.

That's a component which is 44,000 strong. It's international. You'll find Trent people everywhere. I hope you will keep in touch with us. We're certainly interested to hear what you do with the rest of your lives.

Now, Mr. Chancellor, I would like to call on Professor Don McCaskill to introduce a special and remarkable individual who we will be recognizing with an honorary Doctor of Laws degree. Thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE]

DON MCCASKILL: Mr. Chancellor, it's an honor and a pleasure for me to introduce Michael Thrasher for an honorary degree at today's convocation. I've known Michael as a mentor, a colleague, and as a friend for almost 40 years. He is a widely respected and recognized Indigenous Elder who is considered an authority on Indigenous knowledge, ceremonial practices, and cross-cultural education.

The 1970s witnessed the beginning of a cultural and spiritual revitalization of Indigenous people throughout Canada through the reintroduction of Indigenous spiritual ceremonies and philosophies, including the Medicine Wheel, sweat lodge ceremonies, fasting, and sun dances.

The resurgence movement sought to reclaim and to share Indigenous knowledge and to foster healing within the First Nations communities across Canada. Michael was in the forefront of that movement. His life has been dedicated to the learning and sharing of Indigenous knowledge and practice.

After apprenticing with Elders in Saskatchewan and Alberta and participating in many Indigenous ceremony, such as fasting, sun dancing, he was given the gift of a sacred pipe, an Aboriginal name, and the authority to conduct sacred ceremonies.

Since that time, Michael has delivered thousands of hours of educational activities and training workshops in cultural and cross-cultural awareness, Indigenous spirituality, Aboriginal drug and alcohol addiction counseling, recidivism prevention programs, assessment and evaluation tools for Aboriginal programs, and research throughout Canada and in Europe.

During his time with Corrections Canada, Michael was one of the first Elders instrumental in bringing Indigenous teachings and spiritual ceremonies, often being the first exposure to Indigenous culture, to inmates in federal penitentiaries thereby contributing to the strengthening of their Indigenous identity and their rehabilitation.

He has held various positions and conducted workshops for senior managers at all levels of government and industry, in First Nations communities across Canada, as well as Aboriginal organizations, schools, and universities, including, to name a few-- the Nechi Institute for Alcohol and Drug Education, the Residential School Settlement Board, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Atlantic Conference, the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program, the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centers, Sir Sanford Fleming College here in Peterborough, and universities of Manitoba, Laurentian, and Western.

Michael's association with Trent goes back almost 40 years. He's been a regular participant in the Indigenous Studies Elders and Traditional Peoples Gathering since 1978. Over the years, he has conducted numerous workshops and ceremonies for students, staff, and faculty, including one that I remember well in the late 1970s when we built a sweat lodge on the drumlin behind Lady Eaton College in January, where we had to make holes in the frozen ground for the willows to build the lodge. And we froze as we came into the lodge and left it.

He was instrumental in the formation of the Department of Indigenous Studies here at Trent. And he was among the first Elders in Canada to bring Indigenous knowledge into the formal academic setting. In doing so, he established the foundational standards for Indigenous academic pedagogy, initiating an entirely unique approach to intercultural dialogue and knowledge creation. In 1999 he was appointed Adjunct Professor in the Department of Indigenous Studies. He was also involved in the establishment of the first Indigenous Studies Ph.D. Program here at Trent where he continues to teach and supervise Ph.D. students dissertations.

He has had a profound effect on many generations of our students, many of whom have traveled out west and apprenticed with him and become leaders in their community. Mr. Chancellor, for his significant contribution to Indigenous education and community wellness, I have the honor to present to you for the degree of Doctor of Laws, Honoris Causa, Michael Thrasher.

[APPLAUSE]

[APPLAUSE]

[APPLAUSE]

LEO GROARKE: It's now my privilege to ask Dr. Thrasher to make some remarks to convocation.

MICHAEL THRASHER: [SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE]

My Aboriginal protocol expects that before all else, I will say thank you and give gratitude to our ancestors. That being done, I give my greetings and welcomes to everyone here. Mr. Chancellor, Mr. President, members of the graduating class, faculty, family, and friends. [FOREIGN LANGUAGE]. It is a beautiful day. My name is Michael Thrasher. I am Kawhawaweet. I am of the Turtle Clan. And I come from Victoria, BC.

[APPLAUSE]

I don't have time to comment on that. It's a wonderful thing to be here. It's a great honor to receive this degree. And I am extraordinarily grateful to the Elders who walked on this path before me. Their kindness, their patience, their understanding, their wisdom is the reason I'm standing here today to get this degree.

They gave me a great amount of gifts, almost daily when I was with them. I'm carrying one of those gifts today right here. It's an image of a turtle on a white background encased in a Medicine Circle. It speaks of a new beginning and a new life.

Part of a creation story of Indigenous people here speaks of a turtle, a giant turtle rising up from the depths. When it surfaces, its water washes its back clean, and this land becomes known as Turtle Island. The First Peoples there enjoyed its abundant life. And they studied diligently all of that life to build a philosophy that extended from the immensity of the cosmos down to the smallest particle of life.

This philosophy was based in an ethical, natural manner. They imaged it. They put it into practice. And it exists today. It is preserved by those bona fide traditional Elders who carried this wisdom from generation to generation. And it is their responsibility to assure that its spirit and integrity is kept. Again, I owe great thanks to them.

One of the tools for examining this philosophy is called the Medicine Circle. The Medicine Circle is a background grid through which we can examine our universe and the laws of nature that govern it. A brief examination of these two words, Medicine Circle-- "medicine" from the Latin root "mederi" means to cure or to measure. The circle or the sphere is the prime geometric shape in all of creation's universal building blocks.

Herein lies an understanding of the laws of nature, the web of life, and human interaction with it. My own journey with the Medicine Circle started when I was a very young man. And I went to consult with an Elder, a traditional Elder, highly esteemed person. We conducted a traditional lodge ceremony. And he addressed my needs in traditional terms.

Being not well educated in such traditional terms at the time, I kept asking him questions. And he kept answering in more traditional terms. And I kept asking questions. And he kept answering in more traditional terms. Finally, seeing that I was sincere, but simply an idiot, he took out a cigarette pack. And he opened it up so he'd have paper. And he drew a simple circle on the back of it with four cardinal directions marked on it.

He placed this gently in my hand. And he said to me, everything you ever wanted to know about the past, about the present, and about the future is written right here. All you have to do is learn how to read it. Now have a good life and peace of mind. And he walked away. That day began a lifelong journey for me in the search of awareness, understanding, knowledge, and wisdom through one of the most revered symbols of Indigenous people in this land.

Years later I had the opportunity to witness an event that spoke to the depth and the understanding of those teachings. I was sitting in my office with my partner, the late Eddie Belrose in Edmonton, Alberta. We had a consulting company there. We were on the reserve. One morning we were sitting there, and there was a knock at the door. Wait a minute. We're on the res. Nobody knocks. They just walk in.

But I went to answer the door. There stood an Elder. He introduced himself and where he was from. He was from close by here. And he said he had been sent to us because someone had told him that we might be able to help him locate an Elder that he was searching for. And we said, oh, certainly. No problem. What's his name?

Oh, no, I do not know what his name is. I have no idea. But I do have a description of what he will look like. Ah, OK. We heard the description. We knew immediately who he was speaking of. I went to get him, brought him back. They exchanged a few words.

And the Elder from here said to our Elder, I have a message for you. The partridge has built its nest in a tree. And we have not seen this before. Our Elder responded to him and said, that's very nice. Would you like to stay with us for a couple of days? He said, certainly.

Early the next morning in our office there was another knock at the door. I went and answered it again. And here stood another Elder from the high Arctic, an Inuk, who said to me, I've been sent here because you might be able to help me find an Elder I am searching for. No, I don't know his name. But he will look like-- yeah, OK, I'll go get him.

I brought him back. They exchanged a few words. He said he had a message for him, that the wren had built its nest on the ground. And they had not seen that before. The Elder asked if he would stay with us a couple of days. And he said, no, he was catching a return flight immediately to go home.

A couple of days later, we met with the Ontario Elder again. And our Elder told us that he would break this down for us in ways that we might understand. He said he was first supposed to meet with four pipes. Four men were coming from four different directions. Two had not shown up. That had meant that those branches of the tree had died out. However, he had enough information from what was left to tell us that the time for truth had arrived and no longer would truth be hidden. The truth would reveal itself.

The most remarkable thing about this is not those words, but the fact that these men traveled 3,000 miles to get to speak to this other man. They didn't know his name. They didn't know who he was. They didn't know that he would actually be there. But they came to an event that was planned hundreds of years ago. This speaks to the depth, the understanding, the commitment, and the responsibility of such knowledge keepers.

As my education continued in these traditional ways, I learned the meaning of a word in Cree. The word is "kanata." Kanata translated means clean place. It is so much more of a word than its translated idiom or a village upstream from Ottawa. When coupled with the Medicine Circles and the image of the turtle rising up out of the water, it becomes a worldview, a way of seeing, a way of relating, a way of reasoning, a way of doing. It is a way of being.

This way of being has some responsibilities that come with it. The responsibility of caring behavior, try to do no harm. The responsibility of clear respect, examine all things from all sides before you make decisions about what you will do. Endearing relationship, we don't own this land. We borrow it from our children and our grandchildren. And empathetic reason-- I think, therefore I am. I feel, therefore my genome continues.

If I have some words for you graduates today as you leave here, it is a reminder that your Canadian identity is rooted in the word "kanata." And it is my sincere desire that each of you as you walk through this journey of life you start on today, that you carry your kanata well. Have a good life, a long life, a happy life, prosperous life, and peace of mind.

[FOREIGN LANGUAGE], all my relations. [FOREIGN LANGUAGE].

[APPLAUSE]

LEO GROARKE: Thank you so much for those words, Dr. Thrasher. Ladies and gentleman, graduands, we're now going to move to the presenting of students for degrees. I just want to run through how this works so everybody is familiar. The students will be on my right-hand side here. A dean will read their name. They will walk across the stage, where they will meet the chancellor. Graduands, that's your moment of glory. Take your time. Enjoy that.

Then you will come across the stage further. I'm going to meet you at this side to congratulate you. And you're going to meet Tracy Al-idrissi. Tracy Al-idrissi is the registrar of the university. That means she's the official record keeper of the university. When somebody wants to know in the future if you have graduated, they're going to ask her. So treat her very, very well.

Now I'd like to ask Professor Holger Hintelmann, the Dean of Science, to present the candidates for degrees.

HOLGER HINTELMANN: We ask that you hold your applause until all graduates have received their degrees and have been congratulated by the university registrar, Tracy Al-idrissi. Mr. Chancellor, I'm pleased to present for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the Honours Program candidates whose names will be read whom the Senate has duly declared worthy of the honor, that they may receive the degree at your hands.

[READING NAMES]