

President Leo Groarke's Installation Speech

Mr. Chancellor, Members of the Board, Faculty, Students, Staff, Distinguished Guests, Family and Friends. Let me begin by thanking you for attending this ceremony. I am grateful to have the opportunity to address you as the President of a remarkable university.

Though I do not have the time it would take to recognize all the people I owe thanks to, I would like to acknowledge the seven previous presidents of Trent University, with special thanks to three of them who have befriended me and done their best to warn me of the pitfalls as I look for the best way forward. These three are: Trent's founding President Tom Symons, Dr. John Stubbs and Professor Bonnie Patterson, the current President and CEO of the Council of Ontario Universities. Whatever happens in the future, you must hold them blameless for the mistakes I will make along the way.

Other key supporters of my work here are the seven members of my family who are in attendance here today: my three children, my mother, my brothers Louis and Paul, and my partner Glennice Burns, who has been patient and supportive as I navigate the steep learning curve that has been my introduction to Trent in 2014.

This mention of my family reminds me of my childhood, which in some ineluctable way made me the person I am today. I believe that I became a philosophy professor with a special interest in the theory of argument because my parents fostered a lively atmosphere of discussion, debate and disagreement on all things political, religious, personal and philosophical.

I remember the dinner table growing up as a place of loud and raucous exchanges as we debated how late we could stay out on Friday night; capital punishment; how one should vote in an Alberta election; and Dorothy Day's radical interpretation of Catholic moral obligation. When I met a friend of one of my sisters many years later, she told me that she had been afraid when she was invited to dinner at the Groarke's. Hers was a quiet family. Unlike my own, where dinner was a rowdy affair which would sometimes precipitate the pounding of the table as the issues of the evening were vehemently debated. There were times when someone walked away in disgust, absolutely flabbergasted at the preposterous notion that those they left behind were so intolerably ignorant that they refused to capitulate to the telling arguments he or she had so carefully, patiently, and clearly placed before them.

The bold and free debate of ideas I experienced growing up was wonderful preparation for a leadership role in a university – an institution which should celebrate the clash of opposing points of view. But I do not want you to have too romantic a vision of my childhood. Many years later, I believe that there was too much heat in the exchanges we indulged in, and that we can locate more appropriate limits to arguing elsewhere. The Haudenosaunee Condolence Cane which led today's procession has its origins in the founding of the Iroquois League by the Peacemaker and his assistant Hiawatha. Denis Foley describes its use as a way to promote “an ethic of cooperation based on ritual reciprocity which can mend society despite overbearing political factions or ongoing personal disputes.” The cane is a symbol of respect that minimizes the rifts and conflict between disaffected

factions who are at odds with one another in a social group. I will try to make these healing values, and their goal of peace, not my childhood tendencies, the standard I invoke during the short time during which I have the responsibility and the privilege of leading Trent.

In passing, I want you to know that the Condolence Cane ceremony that takes place when the Haudenosaunee install a new chief is a six to seven---hour ritual beginning in the morning and lasting till night. With this in mind, one gift I hope to give you today is a short speech. In exchange for it, my own attitude will be that you owe me an extra hour or two of listening somewhere along the way.

The topic I want to address today is Trent and its prospects for the future. I want to begin by asking you to note the setting of this ceremony. We are gathered on the banks of the Otonabee River, a portion of the Trent Severn – a waterway which stretches through Mississauga Territory, from Georgian Bay to Lake Ontario. In 1615, Samuel de Champlain became the first European to travel these waters. As I stand here, I am reminded that the history of Peterborough is indelibly tied to the canoe, and that two of Trent's claims to fame are its strong rowing teams and a world class Water Quality Centre.

In my own life, my favorite boat is the kayak. I have already spent a good deal of time kayaking on the waters beside us. One of the lessons I learned when I began to kayak is how to deal with threatening waves. One's natural instinct is to turn away and try to avoid them, but this is invariably a mistake. Letting an intimidating wave hit you broadside is a sure way to take a tumble. The best thing to do is to face it directly. Doing so can turn danger into an exhilarating paddle.

I note this lesson because universities are navigating stormy waters these days. I am buoyant about our own ability to prosper and sustain Trent in the midst of an almost perfect storm, but doing so requires that we begin by recognizing our challenges and facing them directly.

Like every other university, Trent's most obvious challenge is fiscal. This is a reflection of the difficult circumstances of our governments, which are wrestling with deficits and debt, attempting to put their own fiscal houses in order. In the case of universities, our current challenges come at the end of a long period which has seen the cost of university education rise much faster than the ability of universities to raise revenues.

Pension liabilities are a major component of these costs. It is a great thing that universities like Trent have pension plans that guarantee a good living for our employees when they retire. This is an accomplishment to be proud of but we must find a way to pay for it – a difficult task at a time when issues in the global economy have meant that pension investments have not kept pace with liabilities, forcing Trent and other universities to divert funds from their normal operating budgets to cover pension shortfalls.

The challenges we face because of financial pressures are exacerbated by demographic trends which have made it increasingly difficult to attract the enrollment needed to keep our universities sustainable. The base budget in all Canadian universities, including our research intensive universities, is founded on undergraduate enrollment, but the demographic group that is the basis of this enrollment is shrinking. In many cases, the result has been fiercely competitive attempts to lure new students.

As if this is not enough, universities face a more fundamental issue these days. Since medieval times, the standard format for university instruction has been in-person lectures and seminars. As the size of lectures has grown – to thousands of students in classes at some universities – many have questioned this approach. As alternative modes of communication have emerged, some have talked about the end of university, or at least the physical university, seeing our institutions as an anachronism which will be replaced by a virtual world of learning which will emphasize online education, experiential learning, and hybrid instruction which combines programmed and in person teaching.

In a provocative 2012 essay entitled “The End of the University as We Know It,” Nathan Harden boldly predicted that “in fifty years, if not much sooner, half of the roughly 4,500 colleges and universities now operating in the United States will have ceased to exist. The technology driving this change is already at work, and nothing can stop it. The future looks like this: Access to college-level education will be free for everyone; the residential college campus will become largely obsolete; tens of thousands of professors will lose their jobs; the bachelor’s degree will become increasingly irrelevant...” I think the future is not so simple, but it cannot be denied that we have reached a point where new modes of delivery will have a fundamental impact on postsecondary education. What do these various developments mean for Trent – and for other universities? How do we flourish in the midst of all the challenges? In answering them, we will not move forward by refusing to change in a way that addresses genuine risks and dangers. It would, at the same time, be a mistake to think that the challenges mean that we must wholly abandon past ideals, practices and values. The right space for us to occupy is a more creative place that lies somewhere in the middle.

In trying to respond to the challenges we all face, it is important to dispense with some current myths about university. We live in a time when education is increasingly seen as job training. This is an unfortunately narrow view, but even if one looks at education through this narrow lens, there are no grounds for dismissing universities. From 2008 to 2012, 700,000 new jobs were created for university graduates in the Canadian economy, in comparison with 320,000 new jobs for college and trades graduates, and a loss of 640,000 jobs for individuals whose highest level of education was high school. Even in a difficult economy, the job growth for university graduates continues to significantly outperform the growth of jobs for graduates of any other form of education.

If you are interested in this aspect of the postsecondary debate, I recommend to you the website of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. As it points out, one of the most important reasons to pursue a university education is that it does not, even when it is professionally oriented, focus solely on the knowledge and skills associated with a very specific job or occupation. Especially in our changing times, the best education is one which instills the general knowledge and the critical thinking and problem-solving skills that can make a student better at anything they choose to do.

What should we say to students who aspire to an education which provides them with a career? I think we must start by better understanding their perspective. Those of us who enjoy comfortable, secure jobs too easily dismiss the fact that there is a global youth employment crisis; that students coming to university in a difficult economy may reasonably be looking to secure employment; that we should aim

to provide a ladder up for the underemployed who want to better themselves; and that graduates need to acquire the skills and the background their future employers demand.

If Trent is to be a sustainable institution – and you and I share an obligation to make it one – we must offer a mix of courses and programs that attract the enrollment we need to be fiscally successful. Not because fiscal success is all that matters, but because it is the basis for other, ultimately more important, ways in which we want to be successful. In the current climate, I do not see the demand for applied programming as a crisis for Trent or any other university because I believe that the difference between applied programming and the liberal arts and sciences is much less significant than some imagine. The best applied programming will always blend applied courses with a broader education that provides students with the general knowledge and skills needed for good communication, critical thinking, data analysis and problem solving. I would add that Trent, which proudly sees itself as an institution committed to making the world a better place, must have a place for applied programming and research because they must play a central role in our attempt to create a better world.

A blend of applied programming and the liberal arts and sciences is one key to our future. So, too, is a creative blend of new and old methods of delivery. There is a place for large lectures. Among other things, they can provide a financial basis that makes room for small---group and one---on---one instruction, experiential learning, hybrid teaching, open learning, the flipped classroom, Trent's unique college experience and digital delivery. New modes of delivery can be especially powerful when they are harnessed in a way that promotes interactive learning.

Our chancellor, Don Tapscott, has written eloquently on the possibilities that the new modes of instruction and communication make possible. He emphasizes the importance of the interaction – as a philosopher, let me say the dialectics ----- that is the strength of smaller group discussion. If I had to pick one phrase that can characterize Trent, I would describe us an interactive university. This is an essential component of our past which I will be working to maintain.

Unlike many of our sister institutions, it is notable that Trent has resisted large increases in enrollment. This is in some ways a disadvantage from a budget point of view. But it is an advantage from the point of view of education, allowing us to remain the kind of place where it is easy for students to interact with one another and with faculty, staff and alumni. Our stunning campus in Peterborough and our new campus in Oshawa have both been built in a way that very consciously fosters this kind of interaction, some of the buildings here achieving what Ron Thom believed: that architecture should make love to the natural environment. But interactivity is more than personal interaction at Trent. I am especially proud that it encompasses an interaction between different disciplines. In the early days of Trent this was evident in the important, and often leading, role that Trent played in establishing Indigenous Studies, Canadian Studies, Environmental and Resource Studies, and Cultural Studies in Canada. Today Trent is forging new interdisciplinary perspectives in impressive cross---disciplinary research initiatives. Two outstanding examples are our Centre for Biomaterials Research and our Centre for Aging and Society.

A third component of interactive Trent is the way in which our faculty, our students and our alumni interact with the communities and the world in which we are embedded. I think it is particularly

significant that Trent's interdisciplinarity incorporates cross-cultural approaches to knowledge which include Indigenous ways of knowing which can, and should, incorporate the ways of knowing found in diverse traditions and cultures found around the world.

The interaction that characterizes teaching, learning and research at Trent are hallmarks of a Trent education. They make us an ideal place for international as well as domestic students. For such students, Trent provides a smaller, friendlier campus in close proximity to Toronto. This is an especially important advantage we can offer at our Oshawa campus, which can provide us with a unique opportunity to be part of the growth of Toronto East, as its burgeoning population looks for postsecondary education. The province and the government already see our partnerships with UOIT and Durham College as an important way to serve the one area in Ontario that needs postsecondary growth. There is every reason to think that this development, especially if it allows the emergence of a distinct second campus in Oshawa, will strengthen rather than diminish a different set of activities in Peterborough, including those that are founded on valuable partnerships with Fleming College.

We are a young university. Fifty years old this year. This is, I think, a time when interaction with our own past can be a harbinger of great things to come. In view of this, I want to end this speech by reminding you of the accomplishments of only a few of the members of the community of which you are a part. These members include:

- notable authors like Margaret Laurence, Linwood Barclay, and Yann Martel, the author of the Academy Award-winning *Life of Pi*;
- noted historians like Shelagh Grant, Canada's leading historian of the north;
- accomplished administrators like Robert Campbell, the President of Mount Allison University and Roy Bodden, the President of the University College of the Bahamas;
- successful politicians like Jeff Leal, MPP for Peterborough and Minister for Rural Affairs and Sylvia Sutherland, the longest serving Mayor of Peterborough;
- leaders in social justice like the Nobel Peace Prize winner James Orbinski; and Jane Stewart, the Director of the International Labour Organization's office at the United Nations;
- successful business people like Justin Chiu, known for his real estate developments in Hong Kong and Singapore, and for his integrity;
- athletes like Rob Marland, a gold medal winner in the '92 Olympics;
- and famous musicians like Stan Rogers and Ian Tamblyn.

It is equally important to say that the ranks of our alumni contain a veritable army of Trent alumni, staff and faculty excelling as teachers, lawyers, judges, international development workers, doctors, politicians, pastors, nuns, novelists, poets, scientists, activists and business people, all working to make the world a better place.

I fervently hope that you will join me as I do what I can to carry this tradition forward.