

Spring 1999 Convocation Address

Friday AM

Convocation is a time of celebration and reflection. For, you, our graduates, as well as your families, friends and teachers, it is a well-deserved moment of triumph. Your hard work, late nights preparing papers and studying for exams, your financial and personal sacrifices have truly paid off. Today we confirm your standing as Dalhousie's newest graduates. The platform party, the faculty and staff of the university are delighted for you. On their behalf, I congratulate all of you.

Convocation is also typically a time for reflection. For, you, our graduates and your guests, it usually involves both fond and difficult memories of the struggle to get here. Thoughts about your future, I'm sure, also loom large for most of you. For the Dalhousie community, this occasion also elicits the same concerns about where we've been and where we're going as an institution. Allow me to take a couple of minutes to share Dalhousie's story with you. Since it's an adventure story, let me tip you off at the outset that we follow the time-honoured conventions of the genre – trials and tribulations at the start of our tale and triumph at the end.

Dalhousie's story starts out as part of a larger national tale. Canada is extremely fortunate among nations to have created an excellent system of higher education, but during the 1990's the academy has faced some stern challenges. As government

priorities shifted, real government support for education dropped by almost 20%. Inevitably, across the country tuition fees rose sharply to offset reduced funding and maintain quality, but even with tuition raises of 70% in recent years, fee increases only offset half the universities' losses in government funding. To the south our US neighbour and greatest competitor took a different tack. While our governments cut funding, theirs increased support. The gap between Canadian and American funding per university student has increased by 50% over the past two decades. I fear that the implications of this growing gap will soon come back to haunt us. In universities, as in other areas of life, you get what you pay for. Think about what that means for a moment in the context of the development of the global knowledge economy. As someone put it, if you think education is expensive, imagine the costs of ignorance.

These developments threaten the quality of our national education system and the long term competitiveness of our economy. Over the past decade university enrolments have increased significantly while the number of professors in our universities have fallen sharply as a result of funding cuts. For our students, the result, obviously, has been a significant rise in class sizes. Eventually, unless something changes, this will result for some students in less personal attention, less time for assignments and evaluations, less time for individualized instruction. It stands to reason that an 11% reduction in the number of professors in Canadian universities at a time when enrolments have been rising sooner or later must have an impact on the quality and capacity of our national education system. To

make this point a little more graphically, the 11% loss in faculty numbers equals 2,000 professors. If we exclude Dalhousie, that's more than all the professors combined at all the other universities in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.

Let me add one other ingredient to this mix and then I'll draw a couple of conclusions. Our faculty teach and do research. Their work as scholars enables them to bring the latest discoveries into the classroom for their students. That's the link between cutting edge research and education. It's also the link between the university and national economic development, since it is these discoveries that provide the foundation for new industries and new jobs. So how are we doing with research? The answer is "it depends". It depends on how you look at the matter. After a decade of cuts, the Canadian government recently restored research funding to the same level they supported in 1990. That's the good news. Unfortunately, even after this renewal, Canadian researchers receive only one-third the level of support of their American competitors. The next time you read a story about the "brain drain" to the United States, or learn about a famous Canadian researcher who has sold his ideas to a foreign company and moved to an American university to pursue his work, you'll know why.

The consequences of all this are pretty obvious. Over time, it will get harder to maintain the quality of our excellent university system. Education will suffer. Our buildings will deteriorate. Researchers will become less productive. The transfer of new technologies to the economy will slow. Innovation and

competitiveness must slip. Our economic prosperity and quality of life inevitably will deteriorate. In sum, our story will reach a crisis point.

At Dalhousie we've refused to sit back and accept this picture as our inevitable fate. Quite the contrary. Despite all the difficulties involved, we're pushing ahead in a pretty impressive fashion. Over the past few years, following our merger with the Technical University of Nova Scotia, the new Dalhousie has added faculties of architecture, computer science and engineering to our united academic strengths. We've also created a host of new programs to improve our students' academic and career choices. We've started up new research centres, too, focussing on some of the critical areas of national concern. All of this, of course takes money, lots of it. So, five years ago we launched a national fund raising campaign to help finance these initiatives. The result has been our greatest success ever! Over the five years our alumni, friends and corporate supporters have contributed or pledged \$80 million to help us move forward at Dalhousie.

How will we use these funds? For a start, we're increasing our scholarship support to help us continue to attract the best students in Canada. This year, Dalhousie students had the fifth highest entering grades of any university class in Canada, a clear indication of Dalhousie's reputation in a very competitive educational marketplace. Good students motivate each other and ensure strong academic standards. It is essential that Dalhousie remain competitive for the best that our region and our country

produce.

We're also using new funds to rebuild our faculty numbers and support their research activity. Over the past five years we've created 29 new faculty positions with money from our endowment and capital campaign. These appointments will open new initiatives in petroleum engineering, women's health issues, business law, biomedical engineering, informatics, research into treating schizophrenia, computer science, forest genetics, ocean research and forensic psychology to name but a few. At the same time, our faculty members continue to work at the forefront of their research fields. Last year, Dalhousie professors attracted over \$54 million of external research support from government and corporate sponsors enabling the university to hire over 800 additional research staff, technicians graduate students and support personnel to work on projects. These Dalhousie projects account for one-third of all the research and development work carried out in all sectors, private and public, in Nova Scotia. In a knowledge economy this matters more and more each year.

Finally, as you probably noticed when you arrived on campus today, we're also working on renewing our campus with some of the resources we've raised. Our new computer science building across the street from this auditorium will be open this Fall. Down the road a short distance, at our DalTech campus, we're working on a new home for Industrial Engineering and the Continuing Education Department that will also be ready this Fall. And of course, last week we started construction on a new building for our Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences just next

door to where you're sitting. When we open its doors to the Class of 2,000, we plan to host a special celebration of the arts at Dalhousie to mark the occasion. The long term impact of these projects on Dalhousie will be profound. New science, language and computer labs, new high tech classrooms, offices and common rooms, -- in short, the very environment where we pursue the Dalhousie educational experience, will be greatly enhanced.

In a word, despite lots of stresses and strains, Dalhousie is busy renewing itself. Certainly this is true for the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Dentistry and the School of Dental Hygiene, whose graduates we're celebrating today. In Medicine, the research record of our faculty is growing rapidly. This past year, Dalhousie applicants to the Medical Research Council had the highest success rate among medical schools in Canada. Much of this research focuses on basic issues in the health sciences. Applied research efforts also are expanding. Clinical trial funding from the pharmaceutical industry has grown by over 60% in the last three years to \$8.5 million annually. Recently, these efforts have led to new attempts to commercialize our research findings, with two new companies being spun off out of university research labs. More will follow. Research programs of this quality, of course, require superior facilities. This year, we were pleased to open two new labs in the Tupper building, an imaging facility and a Laboratory for Vision Research. We are grateful to the Dalhousie Medical Research Foundation for their generous financial support of these projects.

Improvements to our facilities did not neglect student needs. The Faculty opened a new Learning Resource Centre in Fenwick Towers equipped with labs and examination rooms where students can practice examination skills with simulated subjects as well as their interventional skills in suturing and casting. A variety of simulators provide the opportunity for students to learn and practice their skills and assist faculty in the standardized evaluation of these skills.

These innovations speak to the commitment within the Faculty to keep Dalhousie at the forefront of medical education and research. This goal could not be achieved without strong leadership within the Faculty. For the past seven years, John Ruedy has served as Dean of Medicine with great distinction. (John would you please stand because I'm going to say something nice about you.) Dr. Ruedy's commitment to the research mission of the Faculty and his dedication to curricular reform have provided the impetus for his colleagues to move the Faculty forward dramatically in its mission to serve the health care needs of our region. I also wish to acknowledge his tireless efforts to persuade the provincial government that these are goals that merit strong public support, a campaign that has finally begun to bear fruit in recent years. Dr. Ruedy's retires from his post as Dean at the end of June. I would ask you to join me in a warm round of applause in appreciation of his outstanding contributions to the Dalhousie Medical School.

In Dentistry, the commitment to innovation and renewal is equally strong. Over the past five years, the Faculty has pressed

forward with their fund raising campaign to secure support for improved scholarships and to refurbish our teaching equipment and facilities. With the generous assistance of alumni and industry partners, the Faculty has exceeded its \$1.5 million target and now has the resources to establish a wonderful new Continuing Dental Education Centre. These facilities will benefit both our students and dental professionals in our region for many years to come.

But the Faculty of Dentistry has not limited itself to the needs of our region alone. Today we are celebrating the graduation of the first Malaysian students who came to Dalhousie several years ago under the auspices of a cooperation agreement with the Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. Dalhousie Dentistry's commitment to improving dental education in Malaysia has taken several forms and I am pleased on this occasion to recognize the presence in our audience of the Malaysian ambassador to Canada, Mr. ----- , who has come to Dalhousie today to celebrate the results of these efforts. Mr. Ambassador, will you please stand. .

The Faculty has also taken a lead in developing a unique new two year qualifying program for foreign trained dentists who wish to practice in Canada. We have also welcomed exchange students from Hong Kong, England and Scotland in our elective programs. And finally, through an agreement with Yousei University in South Korea, the graduate program in Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery has its first exchange student in Reconstructive Facial Surgery.

These projects take life because of the commitment of our faculty. In particular, this year, I'd like to commend the contributions of Dr. Derek Jones, who was appointed Professor Emeritus upon his recent retirement in recognition of his career filled with achievements. I'd also like to congratulate Professor Terry Mitchell from the School of Dental Hygiene upon being named the 1999 recipient of the W.W. Wood Award for Teaching Excellence in the Faculty. And finally, I'd like to single out Professor Michael Lee, whose vision and dedication to the importance of biomedical engineering has led to the recent establishment of a new Dalhousie School of Biomedical Engineering linking together the talents of faculty in Dentistry, Medicine and Engineering.

So that's our Dalhousie story. A lot of challenges, a few crises, but in the end we're moving forward with increasing momentum. If that's the story, why is it important?

To answer that, let me return to the heart of the university, our students. From personal conversations and surveys, I know that our students graduating today came to Dalhousie for a variety of reasons, -- to broaden your experience and your outlook, to pursue career goals, to meet new people and expose yourselves to a different environment. At the end of your studies, whatever their subject matter, and whatever your original motivation for coming to Dal, we're confident that you have changed over the years as we've worked together to master course content, develop your minds and improve what Thomas Mitchell calls "the mental skills of speech and communication, reasoning and

analysis, creativity and imagination, and moral discernment. These are the capacities," he says, "that represent real brainpower; they are our best hope for enlightened progress." If we've been successful in helping you achieve these goals, whatever your discipline and your career plans, we've helped you become active learners, good problem solvers, responsible citizens ready to use reason to test, question and explore the mysteries and challenges of the world. In short, we've helped you renew and expand yourselves. This, of course, is the same challenge Dalhousie faces, to renew our university and expand its capacities the better to serve you, your fellow students and our community. The skills we cultivate and the talents we nurture at your university matter a great deal, -- they matter to your personal chances for success and they matter to the future prosperity and vitality of the communities that have supported your studies.

Every good story has a beginning, middle and end, with a crisis and its resolution along the way. The Dalhousie story certainly has that. The best stories, however, even as they end, also leave you wanting to know more about what's going to happen to the central characters with whom you've spent time and for whom you've learned to care. Now, of course, I'm talking about you, our graduates. At this point, it's your turn to write the next chapter. As you move forward to the next stage in your lives, we wish you every success and much happiness. We're very proud to admit you into the distinguished company of Dalhousie graduates. thank you & good luck.