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1997 Spring Convocation Speech

Conventional wisdom has it that universities are slow to change. Changing direction at the university, it is said, is like trying to turn around the Queen Mary in a narrow harbour. Managing the professoriate, goes the old joke, is a contradiction in terms, a challenge akin to trying to herd cats. Like most conventional wisdom, there is some time-worn truth in these observations. But cliches only get you so far.

This year at Dalhousie we amalgamated two universities, merged eight administrative units and two academic departments, created a new Faculty of Computer Science, added new Faculties of Architecture and Engineering through our amalgamation with the Technical University of Nova Scotia, laid plans to create new research centres in biomedical engineering and materials science, each with their own academic programs as well, started detailed planning for a new Management Information System that will transform administrative practices at the university and, in cooperation with our employee groups, introduced a major early retirement program and rationalized the collective bargaining system at Dalhousie by merging eight unions into four. That's a long sentence and a lot of change. Moreover, we managed these changes

peaceably, harmoniously and by dint of an enormous amount of extra work by our already hard-pressed faculty and staff. So much for conventional wisdom and cliches about universities.

Dalhousie's amalgamation with the Technical University of Nova Scotia on April First of this year is an event of enormous importance to our students and academic community, as well as our region. After decades of talk about this project and several false starts, we finally did it. As a result, Dalhousie now contains a new college of applied science and technology, which we call DalTech, responsible for offering our programs in engineering, computer science, architecture and regional planning. For the first time, the Maritimes now boast its only comprehensive, research-intensive university with a full range of undergraduate, graduate and professional programs.

Our impact on our region is and will be profound. With annual expenditures of \$250 million, over 80 percent of Nova Scotia's university research activity and one-third of the province's research and development efforts, the new Dalhousie is a powerful engine for change in our region. Because of the newly integrated character of our traditional academic programs at Dalhousie and TUNS, we can now offer our

students a superior education across a much wider range of interdisciplinary topics, linking engineering education to management studies, environmental studies to law, arts to architecture and the basic sciences to applied sciences and health studies. At the same time, our research capacity and its power for good in the wider community is greatly enhanced. The new Dalhousie currently earns \$41 million annually from externally funded research grants, contracts and international development projects. These competitively earned funds provide the resources needed to hire an additional 700 researchers and technicians, fund numerous graduate students, and purchase a huge array of equipment that our most distinguished scholars and undergraduate students alike use to advance their knowledge. With funded research projects in 31 countries, the intellectual and social reach of Dalhousie scholars is truly global. So, too, is our capacity to work with government and private sector partners to translate this activity into economically competitive opportunities for the people of our region to participate in the new knowledge-based, global economy. This is a big challenge for Dalhousie. It is also a huge opportunity which we intend to seize enthusiastically.

The winds of change blow briskly at the new Dalhousie, but there is a core of our efforts

that endures, and shall endure, despite the latest fads and the newest technologies in higher education. The best university education, and certainly this is our goal at Dalhousie, proceeds in a community of learners made up of faculty and students committed to testing all claims to truth, challenging all assertions of authoritative knowledge and open to discussing new ideas and values. In such an environment students learn to examine their own ideas, feelings and values, as well as master a body of knowledge about the world and its works. In the process they grow, we hope, in new and sometimes unexpected directions. Traditionally, this is what we mean when we talk about providing a good liberal education, a phrase that derives from the Latin word "liber", which referred to the education appropriate to a truly free person. This was our mission when Dalhousie was founded in 1818, it was equally our mission when TUNS was founded as the Nova Scotia Technical College in 1907, and it will continue as the mission of the new Dalhousie so long as we remain a true university.

Today is a celebration of achievement, an acknowledgement of the truly impressive accomplishments of our graduates, our honoured guests and our faculty. Three members of the School of Business Administration were appointed to

The University will match this ^{commitment} by creating a new Kullam Chair in Informatics

distinguished chaired professorships in recognition of their accomplishments: Dr. Mary Brooks to the Dennis Chair, Dr. Iraj Fooladi to the Mackay Chair and Dr. Anthony Schellinck to the Manning Chair. In partnership with MT&T and Nova Scotia Power, who have generously funded the project, the Faculty also plans to create a new Chair in Business Informatics to investigate the uses of technology to develop better ways to analyze large-scale databases. This project will help Dalhousie become a world leader in this area. Our global reach was also apparent at the School for Resource and Environmental Studies, which this year ran its fourth annual Environmental Management Seminar, attracting 25 senior officials from 15 countries to spend several weeks at Dalhousie. The national reach of our Faculty was clear in the operation of our new MBA in Financial Services, which in its first year of operation drew over one hundred students, more than 80% of whom live and work outside of Nova Scotia and learn through distance education methods. The Bank of Montreal has taken a special interest in this project and we are very pleased to welcome to Dalhousie Mr. Ronald G. Rogers, a Vice-Chairman of the Bank, who will receive an honorary degree later in our ceremony.

While we certainly are proud of the impact of our new programs and the accomplishments of our distinguished professors, we take even greater pleasure in the development and achievements of all of the students graduating today. Your hard work and determination brought you to this point and I am delighted to offer congratulations and best wishes to every one of you. I hope you remember your days at Dalhousie fondly and that in the years ahead you feel your time here contributed in some measure to the success I'm confident you'll achieve. These are times of momentous change in the world, but you are fully equipped to meet the challenge of change with a first rate education. Dalhousie is proud to welcome you into our family of alumni and I wish you every success and happiness in the days that follow this happy celebration. Thank you.