

The Fastest Growing Sector of Higher Education



University Canada West

Convocation

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The Fastest Growing Sector of Higher Education

Remarks by

Sir John Daniel

Honorary Doctor of Laws

Chancellor Horowitz, Vice-Chancellor Strong, Dr. Chung, President of Eminata, Members of the Faculty and Staff of the University, Graduates, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure to be here with you on this happy day. I thank the University Canada West most warmly for this honorary doctorate, which gives me particular pleasure for several reasons.

I am delighted that the award was conferred by your most distinguished Chancellor, Dr. Myer Horowitz. I first met Dr. Horowitz in the 1970s when he was President of the University of Alberta and I was a young academic in my first leadership post as Vice-President of Athabasca University. Myer was very kind to me and I learned much about university leadership and management by observing him in action at the University of Alberta and around the Province. I think of him one of my mentors although he is probably unaware of it. It is a thrill to meet him again today after many years.

I begin by congratulating today's graduates on their achievement. It is an honour to be graduating with you. You have earned your degrees by intensive study - particularly intensive here at University Canada West with its accelerated academic schedule. I commend you on your diligence and application.

You owe your achievement to your own hard work, but also to the support you have had from family and friends. I too wish to thank my family, and in particular Kristin, my wife of 42 years, for the unstinting support that has allowed me to work in four countries, the USA, France, Canada and Britain, and to travel the world extensively, on behalf of UNESCO and the Commonwealth of Learning, to help developing countries expand access to education.

Kristin and the family have always been ready to move both between and within countries, to learn new languages, and to put up with regular upheavals in order to permit me to be an academic nomad. I am deeply grateful to all of them.

This ceremony is a special delight because it is the first time that so many members of my family have been able to see me receive such an honour. As well as my wife Kristin, my daughters are here too with their husbands. Anne-Marie and Ian live here on the Island. Catherine and Yannis have come here from Vancouver for the occasion.

It is also a pleasure that our grandson Jameson is with us and I hope that seeing this ceremony will encourage him to take postsecondary education more seriously! I thank the University Canada West All for the welcome opportunity you have given us for a family reunion.

I like to give a title to every speech - even a short one like this. My title today is: *The Fastest Growing Sector of Higher Education*. University Canada West is a private university operating for profit. That makes it a rarity in Canada, where the large majority of universities are in the public sector, as they are in most of Western Europe. But elsewhere in the world the picture is very different. Across the Pacific, in Indonesia, Japan, Korea and the Philippines over 70% of students are in private universities. In Latin America 45% of students are in private institutions. Worldwide they account for one-third of all students.

Moreover, the private sector is the fastest growing sector of higher education and will account for most of the enrolment growth in developing countries in the coming years. I expect that sometime in this century the majority of all students in higher education worldwide will be in private institutions, with most of them operating for profit.

This is a shock to those who believe that because higher education is a public good it must be a public-sector monopoly. But that is a misguided view. Most countries will never achieve the expansion of higher education that they desire without encouraging the growth of the private sector. Just as importantly, private institutions like University Canada West offer particular advantages to students. Let me name three.

First, in order to be a successful business - and to stay in business - a for-profit university has to be efficient. I am not saying that public universities are inefficient. I spent 17 years as the president of public universities in Canada and the UK and I was proud of our performance.

However, I do observe that private universities are more tightly focused on success in a narrower mission.

Second, that core mission is overwhelmingly focused on teaching students rather than on conducting research. This means that private universities relate their programmes more closely to what they perceive as market demand. It is, of course, easy to misjudge market demand. A Hong Kong accounting firm recently announced that it would no longer hire people who had studied accounting at university but would look instead for physicists and arts graduates.

Nevertheless, an institution that makes the market demand for its graduates a key element in programme design is more likely to get this right than one which determines its programmes on the basis of what subjects its faculty like to teach.

Third, private universities tend to be more determined to see their students succeed, so they focus investment on making teaching effective rather than on fancy infrastructure.

I am not saying that all private universities are excellent and all public ones are mediocre. Looking around the world we see bad private institutions as well as good ones, just as we see bad public institutions as well as good ones. I am simply saying that for-profit universities offer students some special advantages.

I hope that you feel that you have enjoyed those advantages.

It is usual, in North America at least, for convocation speakers to end by giving advice to the graduates about their future lives. I hesitate to do this because it is so easy to come across as preachy, pretentious and patronising. So I limit myself to two points and, since the name of our University is Canada West, one starts with 'C' and the other with 'W'.

'C' stands for 'Continuing Education'. On your graduation day the last advice you want is to be urged to get back to the books, but we do live in an era of lifelong learning. In this time of economic turmoil I need not stress that we live in a changing world. The best way to make yourself future-proof is to continue your education and ensure your long-term employability by further developing your skills and expanding your knowledge.

In offering this advice I can at least say that I have put my money where my mouth is. I have continued to be a student throughout my career, notably by enrolling in courses in all of six of the universities where I have worked.

The best example provides another link to your Chancellor, Dr Horowitz. We have both been students at that remarkable Montreal institution, Sir George Williams University - now Concordia. For decades Sir George Williams and Concordia have done a brilliant job of providing part-time evening courses to working adults, especially newcomers to Canada. Dr Horowitz and I were just two immigrants who took advantage of that opportunity.

I hasten to add that Dr. Horowitz's trajectory as a student was more impressive than mine. I enrolled as a Sir George student in a Master's programme in Educational Technology in 1970 and did not graduate until 1995 - a quarter of a century later! But this is the era of lifelong learning.

Moreover, study in that programme was a life transforming experience. It has had a more direct beneficial impact on my career than my earlier undergraduate and doctoral studies.

So I urge you to continue your education.

'W' stands for the World. Think of yourselves as citizens of the world. Our planet is in a terrific state of flux and you never know where on this earth your talents can be put to best use. Again, I have lived this experience by being an immigrant worker in three countries: the USA, France and Canada. My first job, where I met my wife, was in the USA. Then I worked in France alongside my doctoral studies before immigrating to Canada. But then I went to the UK and recently worked in France again. Now I am back in Canada but still travelling the world in my job.

Your studies here at University Canada West should have made you citizens of the world. I encourage you to live that citizenship to the full. The world needs you.

So there you are: continue your education and be citizens of the world. I offer you my best wishes.

I congratulate the graduates; I congratulate the faculty and staff of the University and I am most grateful to the University Canada West for the honour you have conferred on me. Thank you.