



**Ideas
can...**

President's Address

Arts, Humanities and the Social Sciences:
A Pathway to Progress in the 21st Century

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Antonia Maioni

President, Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences



FEDERATION FOR THE
HUMANITIES AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES

FÉDÉRATION
DES SCIENCES
HUMAINES

Good afternoon. Bonjour.

Thank you for that very kind introduction. It's such a pleasure to be back in the heart of Canada, which has always been one of my favourite places. It's an honour to be invited to speak during this important time in the university's history.

J'aimerais féliciter tous ceux et celles qui prendront part à la 100^e assemblée de demain – un moment important pour tout établissement d'enseignement supérieur et assurément une étape charnière qui mérite d'être soulignée et qui incite à la réflexion.

I would like to congratulate everyone who will be taking part in tomorrow's 100th convocation – an important moment for any institution of higher learning, and certainly a milestone worthy of commemoration and reflection.

And even as we look back on the past, I am inspired to learn of the efforts of many here to continue building for the future.

I know that in his recent State of the University address, President Axworthy spoke eloquently about this school's mission to create a new learning culture that better prepares our young women and men to succeed in today's world.

Nos établissements d'enseignement supérieur doivent impérativement conserver leur pertinence et être à l'avant-garde, sans quoi nous ne serons pas en mesure de préparer les étudiants aux rigueurs et merveilles que leur réserve le 21^e siècle.

I especially applaud President Axworthy's belief in the importance of better promoting the value of the arts and humanities – and better integrating them into all aspects of the university experience. And that's in large part what I want to talk about here today.

As a professor, I understand the challenges we face as teachers, as researchers, as students and as leaders. Cutbacks. Staff reductions. Institutional and curriculum issues. Even as we are asked to do more – to contribute further, for instance, in addressing the skills shortage that is emerging across our country – we are provided with fewer resources.

What energizes me is that our universities continue to achieve – reaching more people, creating new programs, conducting more research and evolving to better serve the needs of today's students.

I am proud to serve as President of the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences. We believe in advancing equity, diversity, knowledge, excellence and innovation. We believe that doing so helps contribute to a free and open society.

Within our federation, we try to promote our belief that “Ideas Can.” Ideas can make a difference. Ideas can move us forward. There is power in the ingenuity of the Canadian student, and in the person, leader and contributor that student ultimately becomes.

Those of us here today, we all know that post-secondary education facilitates public debate by providing important knowledge as a public good. Our universities play a critical function through supporting and nurturing communities of scholars and researchers engaged with society on issues of knowledge, truth and validity. They are essential to the quality of public debate and a flourishing democracy.

And still, there are many who see our disciplines as increasingly irrelevant to success in the contemporary world.

It’s natural to want to roll our eyes at this – to scoff at or dismiss this viewpoint. That won’t make it go away. Instead, I believe we must find our voice. We must use that voice. We must speak loudly to the virtues of the arts, humanities and social sciences and the benefits they instil in the students we reach.

We are not always our own best advocates. Luckily, there exists no end of those who could serve as effective spokespeople for the merits of an education in the arts or humanities: our graduates. Those who’ve built successful careers and fulfilling lives on the foundation of what they learned in school. Those who understand the very real benefits of what we do. Together, we can elevate the debate and, in the process, dispel some myths by addressing our contributions in both imagining and creating a better world.

There is an economic argument to be made for the humanities and social sciences.

We hear increasingly that as a society we are graduating too many BAs and not enough welders and engineers, that our universities have become particularly adept at graduating the ‘learned barista.’ For the record, I waitressed my way through college and am a better person for having done so. Also for the record, I broke my father’s heart by not going to secretarial college. He eventually got over it.

Decades later, we are still talking about these economic issues: references to skills shortages, gaps in the labour market and mentions of Canada’s current rate of youth unemployment and stagnant productivity.

We are seeing, in a way, a triumph of the tangible. If you are being educated to become a doctor, then that is a very specific thing, and you will do a very specific job, and policy makers see that as good for Canada. And of course it IS good for Canada.

But a BA, the education it requires and the beneficial qualities it helps to produce, are somewhat less tangible. We impart wisdom, we promote self-awareness and understanding, we

equip people with the knowledge and context to make decisions, we broaden horizons and make them think about their judgements and their actions – and in so doing, we contribute to the improvement of the society we share and the country we love.

Some important points to remember:

- **We must not be blinded by the immediate skills shortage.** The skills crisis is real – there are profound labour shortages that have developed over time. And universities and colleges can play a role in meeting those urgent needs. But there is also a mid-term human capital shortage on the horizon – as employers are telling us they need more university graduates. And the global competition for talent is intensifying.
- **This requires an inclusive policy response, not an either/or.** This is not about universities *or* colleges: Canada needs both to be effective. I will return to the point a bit later.
- **We must not feed the tuition/debt/jobs narrative.** Students and their parents are bombarded with three powerful messages: tuition is too high; you will graduate with overwhelming debt; and, there are no jobs. These are corrosive messages. They also happen to be unfounded. Together, they undermine one of Canada’s greatest competitive strengths.

I am especially concerned with criticisms that we have too many graduates. The truth is we still have an access issue with post-secondary education.

“We are number 20.” It’s true – Canada ranks 20th in university attainment among OECD countries. Despite universities’ recent and tremendous enrolment growth, other countries are growing their university system at an even greater pace than Canada. These countries are choosing to invest in their universities – and in young minds – as a way of sharpening their competitive edge.

Thirty years ago, Canada was a leader among OECD countries in university attainment rates (according to OECD education statistics released last month). When we look at adults aged 55 to 64, for example, we see that Canada ranked fourth in the OECD. But by 2011, university attainment rates for the 25 to 34 age cohort put Canada 20th among OECD countries. Yes, again. TWENTIETH. This suggests our competitive advantage in education is beginning to erode.

Canada is falling behind a range of developed and emerging nations including the United States, Australia, the U.K. and Korea.

So next time a politician, bureaucrat or journalist tells you that we are number one, remind him or her that Canada has a significantly larger proportion of COLLEGE graduates than almost all other OECD countries. According to the OECD, Canada has about three times more postsecondary NON-UNIVERSITY graduates than is typical for other OECD countries.

In essence, Canada has chosen to invest more at the college level than most other developed nations.

Now, that's a good thing. Many Canadians benefit – and the country benefits – from the kind of postsecondary education and credentials that colleges provide. So we don't want to change that. But it's important to recognize that other countries are investing heavily in UNIVERSITIES in order to gain the kinds of economic and innovation advantages that only a university degree can bring. Canada needs to pursue and achieve that same economic and competitive advantage.

In this context, it's logical to ask: What about the specific economic value of a BA in Humanities or Social Sciences?

The report by CIBC World Markets that hit the headlines this August did just that. It showed that there is undoubtedly long-term economic value to a post-secondary education. By their calculations, a bachelor's degree provides a 30 percent earnings premium over a high school diploma and advanced degrees a further 15 percent. Previous analysis has shown that over a lifetime, the premium translates to over \$1.3 million in additional income for a bachelor's degree, and \$1.8 million for a master's.

The CIBC report argued that students are making bad economic decisions by opting for degrees in the humanities or social sciences. But their own evidence doesn't seem to bear this out. There is in fact a great deal of economic value to a university education in the humanities and social sciences. The report showed that for a woman with a bachelor's degree in the humanities, the average return on investment is 10 percent – undoubtedly a better financial return than most portfolios. In the social sciences, the return on investment is even higher.

Now, let's drill down a little further. The 2006 Census found that there are almost 41,000 Canadians with a bachelor's degree in history. Of that group, 17 percent work in management occupations and 25 percent work in business, finance and administrative positions. This demonstrates that universities produce graduates whose expertise can be adapted widely.

These statistics are necessarily backward-looking, analyzing the earnings of past graduates in these fields. The future may be even brighter than the past as employers in high-wage areas such as finance and management recognize that humanities and social science graduates possess the curiosity, communication skills and creative insight needed in the workplace.

While the 2008 recession has hit some sectors very hard, and overall youth unemployment remains historically high, the number of jobs for university graduates has continued to grow. Since July 2008 there have been 700,000 net new jobs for university graduates, compared to 320,000 net new jobs for college and trades graduates, while a total of 640,000 jobs have been lost for high school graduates.

Now, some of our graduates are currently experiencing greater challenge in finding full-time employment immediately after leaving school. But the data convincingly show that after a few years, they have caught up to and surpassed many of their science counterparts in terms of employment and earnings, and have distanced overall college graduates by significant margins.

University graduates are in demand everywhere there is a need for critical thinking, writing and researching, problem solving, sharp and nimble thought. Yes, there is a policy challenge in facilitating a seamless move from the university halls into the workforce. That's why experiential learning is growing rapidly: 50 percent of undergraduates across Canada have now some kind of work integrated learning as part of their education. More needs to be done to improve both the reach and the quality of these experiences.

To better unleash this potential, it is important that we continue to break down the silos between the disciplines—if you will excuse my prairie metaphor! The good news is that progress is being made. Cross-collaboration and integration among universities, colleges, funding agencies and communities are increasing.

And there is something else that we should be proud to highlight: the economic benefits of universities and colleges to our cities. As someone who lives and teaches in Montreal, a city with four universities, I can attest to that.

With the talent they nurture, the young people they attract and the stature they confer, universities help make a city great. There is a very real economic, social and cultural impact of what we do as researchers and teachers.

This is very much evident here at the University of Winnipeg, in the heart of this great multicultural city. It seems like the whole world lives in Winnipeg! I have heard of your success in building and sustaining relationships, breaking down those silos, such as...

Launching the Oral History Centre and embarking on some very important projects with the First Nations and Métis community...

Partnering with the city's cultural organizations such as the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the Winnipeg Symphony and Artsfest to widen cultural and learning opportunities...

Establishing joint programs with the Winnipeg Technical College...

Forging interdisciplinary and community collaboration through the Richardson College for the Environment...

And, something I find very exciting, creating natural pathways from high school to university with the University of Winnipeg Collegiate located right here on campus.

My congratulations to the President, Vice-Presidents, Deans, faculty, staff and students for these remarkable achievements.

And so, despite all the misleading and corrosive warnings of joblessness, enrolments remain strong. Students recognize that there is value in understanding the world around them and developing the skills and abilities that will empower them to make better sense of rapid change, be adaptable and flexible in the job market and open them up to lifelong learning and employment opportunities.

This point warrants further exploration. And while a case can be made to validate the humanities and social sciences in economic terms exclusively, there's more to it than that. A university education is about more than the bottom line. It's about the complex world around us, and being able to understand and respond to it.

On a daily basis we hear economic growth framed as a series of 'either/or' propositions:

Resource Sector *or* Manufacturing
College *or* University
Basic *or* Applied Research
Teaching *or* Research

These are popular refrains. Choices framed in this way limit our scope of understanding and appreciation of the complexity of the world in which we live.

This type of thinking narrows our perspectives of what is needed, of what is possible.

I happen to believe that there is no single formula for prosperity. I would argue that society is too dynamic and that the future is too unforeseeable.

Everywhere we turn, we learn of new ideas that bring together emerging technologies and content, often from our disciplines. In this increasingly digital world, ideas abound but only some take off, and even fewer are actually successful. Understanding our changing context always matters and increasingly so does the need to connect the local to the global.

We are currently living in the transformational age, producing more data and knowledge more rapidly than in any other time of history. We need to have the nimble structures, resources and most importantly the educated imagination to match the pace of change.

In education, this opportunity is not created solely by responding to the economic priorities of the moment, but by preparing for all possibilities, even the ones we cannot yet see. Truly, this is why we must imagine a common future. Social sciences, arts, the humanities – they all will be critical in facing these challenges.

As arts educators, we should not be defensive about what we do in training undergraduate and graduate students. When we teach students HOW to learn, rather than WHAT to learn, we equip them with tools that last a lifetime. We provide citizens with the ability to face changes and to adapt to them in critical and meaningful ways.

A new challenge is confronting us. Even though universities have been the incubators of the IT revolution and even though technology has completely changed the way we communicate and conduct scientific research, our generation of researchers and teachers are still closer to the 19th century in our training and education than the generations that will follow us. How prepared are we to plunge fully in the digital society as communicators and pedagogues? And what of research dissemination practices? They flow from new technologies, new forms of delivering teaching, training, learning and research, borderless realities, and the altered experiential and career expectations of our students and those who would employ them.

The arts, humanities and social sciences provide us with pathways to the substance of thought and the shape and meaning of a good life.

Un monde sans art, sans littérature, sans histoires, véridiques ou non, n'est pas envisageable.

Nos disciplines jouent un rôle essentiel, car nous ne savons pas ce qui nous attend en tant que civilisation. Puisque nous ne pouvons prévoir l'avenir, nous devons apprendre à interpréter les courants et à détecter les signaux émergents. Nos disciplines nous permettent d'analyser les changements dans nos sociétés et de mieux comprendre comment nous nous sommes rendus ici. Elles nous permettent de former et de nourrir une imagination éduquée quant aux chemins possibles à emprunter.

The University of Winnipeg communicates itself to the world using the words: Discover. Achieve. Belong. These words speak to a growing intensity of commitment.

Let's recast our thinking to recognize the inherent importance, complementarity and interdependence of all various fields of academic pursuit. Let us say instead humanities AND engineering, universities AND colleges.

In failing to recognize contributions across disciplines we narrow our existence, we atomize worlds and diminish our abilities to empathize, to understand; and in turn, we deny ourselves that all too human characteristic - our inherent curiosity and imagination.

Together, let's change the tenor of the debate and let's imagine what a good society can look like, and the valuable – essential – contribution of arts, humanities and social sciences to its future.

Thank you. Merci. Miigwetch.