



## Presidential Address to the Annual General Meeting of the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences

By Stephen Toope  
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Good evening everyone, and welcome to the midpoint of Congress 2015!

I trust that by now, your minds are buzzing and you can't wait to put your new ideas to work.

This is my first AGM as president of the Federation's Board of Directors.

J'ai le sentiment d'être arrivé à un moment propice : la Fédération célébrera, à compter de cet automne, son 75<sup>e</sup> anniversaire en tant qu'une voix importante pour notre communauté et nous sommes en train d'élaborer notre plan stratégique quinquennal qui sera lancé en 2016.

I am honoured and delighted to belong to such a large, hard-working, and inspiring group of Canadians who believe fervently, as I do, in the power of the social sciences and humanities to make valuable contributions to our society here in Canada and around the world.

But — and here's the rub — I think we can do better.

Chacun de vous dans cette salle est dévoué à sa propre discipline, à sa passion et à son domaine d'étude. Votre travail individuel est assurément exigeant et important. Mais ni vous, ni votre discipline ne pouvez, de façon isolée, faire valoir les contributions collectives des sciences humaines ou maximiser leur incidence pour le bien de la société.

Et c'est précisément ce dont nous avons besoin dans l'immédiat : réaliser une incidence maximale.

We need to sustain a continuous, persuasive conversation with public agencies, governments, the private sector, civil society, and the public, and for this we need to encourage and enable our





community to work together more effectively, using the power of the whole network, to better champion our collective cause.

Tonight, I want to invite you to join a conversation about how, by working with and through the Federation, as well as other partners, we can do this better together.

Let's acknowledge that the pressure is on:

- **Enrollment in the social sciences and humanities is down.** Overall the drop is a few percentage points across Canada, which is troubling enough, but it's down by as much as 20% at certain schools in the past few years.
- **Humanities and Social Sciences are attacked, undervalued or overlooked in political and business discourse:** Leading political and business figures question the value of an arts education; and point to the need for 'skilled workers'—as if our graduates aren't that—meaning STEM disciplines or the trades. This feeds parents' and students' fears and misconceptions about value for money in their university education.
- There is increasing pressure on social sciences and humanities researchers to share a **supply of research funding** that has not kept up with the growth of our community. We have more and more strong young researchers without adequate support whose potential is not being maximized.
- **And universities as a whole are under a huge range of pressures**—from demands for greater commercialization to different intrusions on their autonomy. We've seen this in various places across the country. For example, there is worrying new legislation in Nova Scotia that potentially threatens the governance of universities on grounds of financial oversight.

The irony in all of this is that the world needs the social sciences and humanities more than ever. The toughest challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century require not one skill or approach, but problem solvers with a broad range of abilities and perspectives. The knowledge-based, global society we're building will depend on it.

STEM skills are not the sole ingredients for much-needed innovation.



A big part of developing know-how, is creating a workforce that includes people who can research not only the science of things, but the science of people and peoples: their needs, motivations, fears, limits and potential.

In *The Educated Imagination*, Northrop Frye described the interdependency of the arts and sciences: “Science proceeds by accurate measurement and description, and follows the demands of reason rather than the emotions,” he explained, whereas the arts recognize that “emotions are unreasonable: for them it's what they like and don't like that comes first.”

But, as Frye points out, the two work in concert. He goes on to say, “you soon realize that there's a difference between the world you're living in and the world you want to live in. The world you want to live in is a human world, not an objective one: it's not an environment but a home; it's not the world you see but the world you build out of what you see.”

**How do we build the world we want?** We need to showcase and strengthen our capacities and contributions at several levels. Let me talk about four areas:

## INTERDISCIPLINARITY

We need it and we have made good strides—we need to go further. We can show how working across disciplines will help bring the innovation and insight needed in so many areas.

Catherine Potvin, qui participe au Congrès, est un excellent exemple d'interdisciplinarité en action. Elle collabore, en qualité de biologiste, avec des chercheurs de 30 universités canadiennes dans un large éventail de disciplines afin de dégager un consensus en faveur d'une société à émissions de carbone faibles.

Elle a mobilisé des collègues pour s'engager à ses côtés dans une initiative collective appelée Dialogues pour un Canada vert. Ce réseau de chercheurs — qui représente des disciplines diverses allant des sciences de génie aux sciences humaines — constitue un exemple impressionnant du potentiel d'une approche interdisciplinaire coordonnée pour s'attaquer à un problème complexe de portée mondiale.

## INTERNATIONAL AND INTER-CULTURAL AWARENESS

For our researchers and our students, particularly, success now and in the coming decades requires intercultural understanding and connectivity. We must build and model the skills that enable Canadians



to function effectively within our own culturally diverse borders, and to engage with the world in a highly interconnected global society.

We must increase international mobility for our students — currently less than 3 percent of Canadian university students leave the country for educational experiences each year. And we must pay attention to ensuring that intercultural and international education starts at home.

Look at the cultural diversity of Canada’s biggest cities: Visible minority groups comprise 63 percent of the population of Toronto, 59 percent in Vancouver, and 31 percent in Montreal. Canadian universities are microcosms of this diversity. But intercultural fluency does not just happen because diverse groups are thrown together.

We must value and promote teaching, learning, and knowledge creation that derive from interacting and building relationships with those from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds on campuses.

## **BUILDING A MORE OPEN AND INCLUSIVE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY**

Many of you in this room contribute to the resilience of our society by **improving our understanding of participation, equity, diversity and inclusion.**

We must keep asking tough questions, and researching the often painful answers. For example: who is participating and benefiting in our knowledge intensive society and economy? Aggregate economic growth numbers are not enough to assess the health of our society.

In particular, Aboriginal reconciliation remains one of the central challenges of our time. The cumulative impact of residential schools is a legacy of unresolved trauma passed from generation to generation as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has just confirmed. It has had a profound effect on Aboriginal communities and on the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians. As a consequence of this history, Aboriginal knowledge is undervalued and overlooked, and Aboriginal peoples are still marginalized economically and socially.

We need to construct a new path of right relations to underpin the co-creation of Canada’s future. This past Saturday, the Federation announced its commitment to build a movement for reconciliation that includes our community. And we want to work with you to develop how we do this, going forward. Nous savons que le travail accompli par les chercheurs en sciences humaines peut favoriser de façons irremplaçables la connaissance et le respect de nos diverses histoires, cultures et visions du monde et



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## ACTIVE CITIZENRY

Finally we need to strengthen and showcase our role in **developing an engaged and active citizenry**. It is the mission of education and research to engage publics, and engage communities.

You may know about a Quebec-based initiative called Youth Fusion. This innovative program places role models and mentors in disadvantaged schools to rekindle students’ interest in learning. Using input from the students themselves to ensure their engagement, Youth Fusion began by partnering with Concordia University, hiring enthusiastic project coordinators who had academic backgrounds in areas of interest to the high school students.

These coordinators helped lead projects that kick-started student engagement— for example, those with journalism backgrounds launched youth-led newspapers, while contemporary dance students offered classes and launched dance troupes.

The project was a resounding success, and is expanding across Quebec and Canada. In the course of setting it up, what the founders concluded was that a key to the program’s success was ensuring that students were learning about subjects that interested them.

We need to remember that, and celebrate the passion that lives in so many to study arts and social sciences—and how this engages the mind and soul, equipping and enabling citizens to tackle the issues we face as individuals and as a society.

So, how to take all this on?

Together.

My hope is that the Federation can play a catalyzing role in drawing us together building on the accomplishments of the past 75 years. We want to continue important work underway, but to work more actively with you the members.

Where to start? **Congress**. How can we take better advantage of this phenomenal public and political moment, where 8,600 of us come together in Canada?



I would like to see greater external engagement at Congress, so it's not merely a meeting of like-minded people talking in our own echo chamber, but a vehicle to truly engage the wider world.

I'd also like to see more engagement and hear more voices in **policy matters**, the federal budget process, and other key decisions.

Did you know that it was the Federation's work with decision-makers and partners that resulted in funding being made available through MITACS to expand eligibility for paid internships to the non-profit sector, widening opportunities for social sciences and humanities graduates?

Other policy changes are possible but we need your support and engagement to make them a reality. We have recently had a breakthrough, with meetings set up with a range of important political actors in Ottawa over the next few weeks.

And **Big Thinking**. We all know that bringing key thinkers more prominently into the public eye, and at critical moments in policy development and debate, adds value to researchers' work and increases its public impact.

But I'd like to explore how we can improve the scope and reach of *Big Thinking* by working more with members. How can we use *Big Thinking* more strategically to influence public policy?

None of this can happen without you—your ideas, your energy, your commitment.

I invite all of you here to become more active; socially engaged both inside and outside your university walls. In doing so, I invite you to play a role not only in defending what we do, but also in articulating our value.

When high school students are inundated with the message that the point of university is only to get a job, or that the only degrees worth pursuing are technical or professional ones, they are robbed of the freedom to pursue what they're passionate about, or to explore subjects they may not even have encountered yet.

We are robbed, as a society, of their potentially significant contributions to better understanding ourselves and our society.

Our world, in other words, will become less and less our home.



In conclusion, as Northrop Frye reminded us, it is our job and our joy: "... to produce, out of the society we have to live in, a vision of the society we want to live in."

If we are successful five years from now, we will see that together we will have transformed how the Federation and its members relate to one another: from a client and service relationship, to being partners in an active and transformational network; where members participate actively to achieve our shared hopes and aspirations.

We have our work cut out for us, but I am convinced that we are up for the challenge.

Merci beaucoup.