

Convocation Remarks

By Chad Gaffield

On the occasion of the awarding of an Honourary Degree

June 7, 2007 – Thompson Rivers University, British Columbia

Chancellor Greene Raine, President Barnsley, Provost Evered,
Graduates of the Class of 2007, colleagues and friends, ladies and gentlemen

I am deeply honoured to be here today, and wish to thank you so much for allowing me to join the graduating class of 2007 for Thompson Rivers University.

Convocation is a truly special moment; one that invites us to reflect on the years gone by, to celebrate the present and to imagine a better future.

Universities play many roles in our society but I think their key role is as a place where people come together in an effort to make a better future, for themselves and others; for their own generation and for the next, and the one after that.

While there may be other institutions that play this role too, the distinctive characteristic of universities is that they bring people together to focus on advanced education - on advancing knowledge and building understanding about who we are, where we have been, where we might go, and how we might get there.

In emphasizing that universities are places where people come together in an effort to make a better future, I am stressing the collective character of individual initiatives and achievements. Educational systems (like much of

western society) evaluate, and sometimes honour, individuals but all of us know that, as individuals, we are really only representatives for our communities, especially family and friends and all those who support us. For those of us in the class of 2007, maybe some of the members of our community, our team, are here today. In my case, it is so appropriate that Pam Gaffield is here with me to celebrate this special day. In two weeks, we will be celebrating our 36th wedding anniversary, and my best hope for anyone is that they be as lucky as I have been since I first met Pam standing in line as we registered on campus for our first-year university courses in 1969. Aren't universities great multi-purpose institutions?

Why I am so honoured to become part of the Thompson Rivers University Community is that this institution is pursuing the distinctive and long-standing characteristics of universities in innovative ways in keeping with the changing times.

For me, the central concept of this innovation is connections – connections across disciplines in which specialization is combined with broader contextualization; connections between the campus and the larger community through which universities are becoming the heart of our developing knowledge-based learning societies; and connections between teaching and research through which a transmission-of-knowledge is being combined with learning-through-doing, learning-through-discovery and the construction of new interpretations and understandings, new technologies and techniques.

It is wonderful to see how Thompson Rivers University is using the new cyber tools to enhance these connections – although Pam and I hope that on-line registration has not undermined one of the many important roles of universities!

E-learning is indeed connecting the disciplines, the campus and the larger community, and helping us move beyond the false dichotomy of teaching

and research. A shrinking and flattening of the world is certainly underway and innovative universities like Thompson Rivers are poised to play important roles that are local, regional, pan-Canadian and global, all at once.

*By focussing on advanced technologies and their applications in everyday life;

* by focussing on environmental sustainability in a trans-disciplinary way;

*by focussing on health, community, and human development;

*by focussing on literacy and the changing ways that we communicate both verbally and visually;

*by focussing on creativity, on culture, on who we are and how we express ourselves...

In these innovative ways, I think that Thompson Rivers University is pursuing the historic role of universities in keeping with the needs of today's students and communities, here in Kamloops and around the world.

- From learning how to design and construct a house, to learning how to create a community
- From developing new strategies to improve the academic achievement of children, to using cultural and artistic inquiry to enhance our understanding of citizenship and cultural diversity
- From studying ecosystems, to developing guidelines and solutions for wastewater treatment

Thompson Rivers University's students, professors, and partners are demonstrating that knowledge is indeed powerful, and when used appropriately, underpins prosperous economies, healthy societies, and moral, just, and ethical communities.

I am proud to note that the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada has invested over \$1 million during the past five years in response to research grant applications that were evaluated by independent expert committees and ranked among the best and most deserving applications. Many congratulations to the successful students, professors and partners.

It has often been said that the present is a partnership between the past and the future. The ideas we promote, the choices we make, both emerge from previous experience and influence the contours of our destiny.

Are we learning from the past? Are we helping to create a better future? Will our role in the great partnership between the past and the future be seen as positive, as helpful, as reflecting the true potential of all of us to do our part for the generations to come?

What an appropriate place here at TRU to address these questions. Here in Kamloops where rivers and humans have come together for thousands of years. Here, where tradition and potential converge.

My sense is that under Roger Barnsley and his team, Thompson Rivers University is indeed seizing the day.

So, my bet is that History will indeed look back favourably on Thompson Rivers University. It will be praised for having helped re-invent universities for the 21st century. It will be praised for having helped all its graduates contribute to the making of a better world, for themselves, for their communities and for the generations to come.

So, many, many thanks from Pam and me, and many, many congratulations to all of you.