

LEARN, DISCOVER, CONTRIBUTE, *DISRUPT*
The Mission of the Global University
Professor Stephen J. Toope
President and Vice-Chancellor
The University of British Columbia
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“One of the great liabilities of life is that all too many people find themselves living amid a great period of social change, and yet they fail to develop the new attitudes, the new mental responses, that the new situation demands. They end up sleeping through a revolution.”

Good morning. It has been a pleasure to be here with you today, and it is an honour to have been asked to close the circle today. As I was preparing my remarks, what came first to my mind were those words from Martin Luther King Jr.—clergyman, activist, humanitarian, and peaceful revolutionary. Over the course of the past few days, you have come together to ask and to try to answer *one* question: How can the education we provide prepare Canadians to lead in a world that is changing faster than our conventional modes of understanding can grasp? Conferences. Classes. Books. Journals. All necessary; all at

least a step behind at all times. Even our newest technologies: obsolete by the time they reach our hands. What does leadership even *look* like in a world where most of us are scrambling just to follow?

It looks...like aha. [pause] It looks like insight. Like wonder. It looks more like magic than logic. More like spirals of ideas circling back to old questions at new levels of perception, than linear trains of thought en route to preset destinations. More like meditation or music than mission statements or manifestos. It is the difference—simple but absolute—between the moment one is asleep, and the next moment ... awake.

We—Canada as a nation and as a collective of individuals—and we, the heads of the institutions called to provide leadership to both—are in danger of sleeping through a revolution we did not see coming and do not yet fully understand. Greater physical mobility than ever before, though perhaps less social mobility. Globalization of every marketplace, from resources to real estate to the three Rs of education. Massive proliferation of and access to digital technologies. Globalization of

communication and interconnectivity. And yet our failure as a species, in spite of this massive expansion and acceleration, to adequately address climate change, pandemic disease, or pervasive poverty.

It can be tough to know where to start, I know. To determine where the front lines of this revolution are, to prioritize resources, pursue international partnerships, maintain network connections, remain competitive, sustain rankings and reputation. How much more can universities take on before we've stretched our resources too thin? Before we've lost our effectiveness altogether? Where do we start? And where does it end?

One answer: in the classroom. On *your* university campus, in *your* home town, in *this* country.

A provocative statement, perhaps, at a conference on international education. But let's take a closer look: The University of British Columbia is home to 50,000 students. Thirteen percent of our undergraduates, or

roughly 8,500 of them, hail from 149 countries outside Canada, and we plan to increase that quickly to roughly 17 per cent. Roughly a third of our graduate students are visa-holding. Our campuses are, in other words, visibly multicultural. So if you take just one idea away with you from this final session, may I suggest it be this: International education can begin at home, and if we are to continue to call ourselves leaders, it must.

The very best leadership is demonstrated by example. So until everyone in this nation enjoys a secure and respectful fluency of interaction with one another, including those people Canada has welcomed, invited, even solicited to live and study and work here; until we as universities have modeled that level of fluency to the degree that our students have learned and integrated it and enact it with one another, we are not leading. Period.

Universities have a calling that is unique in all the world: that is, to serve the world, through the preservation and dissemination of knowledge, the creation of new knowledge and the sharing of insight with new

generations. That is our task, and our task alone. In the face of the massive transformation our world is undergoing at this time, it is my contention today that there is a particular *way* we must now carry out this calling. It is the way of the peaceful revolutionary: to disrupt the status quo.

To disrupt: from the Latin, *disrumpere*, meaning “to break apart.” The way of the peaceful revolutionary: to break us open, to compel us to transform ourselves into the versions of ourselves that are capable of creating genuine change. Disruption: the birthplace of expansion, the beginning of compassion. Education: not the dispensing of polished wisdom into empty vessels but the complex and chaotic breaking apart of both *ewer and vessel* so that afterward, *both* are changed, mind and heart, and given new sensibilities and understanding that transcend every kind of border and boundary.

Like this:

Four small groups of students sit in a classroom at UBC’s Institute of Asian Research. In each group, there is an equal number of Japanese,

Chinese, and Korean students as well as students from other parts of the world. The three groups of Asian students have not interacted voluntarily before now, held on opposite sides of the room by decades-old conflicts in which none of them played any direct part.

Dr. Yves Tiberghien hands each group a textbook that he has brought back from Japan, and asks the Japanese students to read aloud a section of text, translating for their group. The Japanese students begin to read. The text concerns the Nanjing Massacre during the second Sino-Japanese War. Some historians claim that as many as 300,000 Chinese civilians and unarmed soldiers were murdered in the Massacre by the Imperial Japanese Army. Media around the world reported, however, that only one Japanese textbook ever mentioned the atrocities, and then only briefly and with doubts about the numbers of people affected.

When the students finish their translations, there is silence, and then the room explodes. The Chinese and Korean students are astonished that

this textbook contains clear information matching what they'd heard before, and they share the revelation with their groups. The Japanese students hear the others adding information to what they know and have just read, and begin to question what they've been taught. In the course of the discussion, they all come to understand that not every textbook has been as whitewashed as media have reported *and* that this one still doesn't adequately address the level of barbarity. Together, they destroy the outworn myths and begin to construct a common narrative, something the leaders and historians of their countries have yet to do.

And here's the epilogue: The following year, after spending the summer in China, a group of Chinese students return to Dr. Tiberghien's class, high school textbooks in hand, and ask to do it again.

I am often asked why UBC pays so much attention to developing its international capabilities. Are we using international students to balance the budget? I have grown weary of this question.

The short answer is that we need to provide our students the opportunity to work with others who are different from themselves. Why? Because massive disruption is happening at the societal level. The visible minority population in Canada has grown steadily over the last 25 years. These trends are much more pronounced in our cities, where 95 percent of the visible minority population resides. In 2011, visible minorities made up around 50 percent of the population in Vancouver and Toronto. And in both cities, over 50 per cent of the population's first language is neither English nor French. The diversity of Canada's population will continue to increase significantly during the next two decades. By 2031, visible minority groups are projected to comprise 63 percent of the population of Toronto, 59 percent in Vancouver and 31 percent in Montréal.

We need to hone our aptitudes as a society in order to function effectively in an interconnected world. We must equip our students with the intercultural understanding skills, the linguistic skills, the new attitudes and mental responses this new situation demands. We

otherwise risk an altogether unwelcome disruption: becoming a marginalized minority without the skills to effectively function in our own home country, let alone abroad.

It's clear one doesn't need to go far in this country to have an international experience. If you're headed back to the airport later today, take the scenic route through Richmond, where the majority of residents are born outside of Canada. Follow Number Five Road, known as the "Highway to Heaven" and you'll find spectacular Buddhist and Sikh temples, mosques, a Chinese evangelical church, Vedic Cultural Centre and Tibetan Thrangu Monastery, all co-existing side-by-side, inviting worshippers and visitors of almost every culture and faith to experience the sacred within their walls.

This grand display of multiculturalism was short-listed as one of CBC's Seven Great Wonders of Canada. Acceptance of other cultures is a point of pride in Canada – it's inextricably linked to our self-identity. But I wonder whether Canada—and Canadians—are really ready to take

leadership roles on the world stage? Are we even ready to deal with the challenges we face here at home? I observe a sense of complacency, almost a smugness about having gotten democracy and bilingualism and multiculturalism “right.” I perceive a comfort born of certainty that this is all there is; this is as good as it gets. In other words, I fear we are asleep.

If we were awake – truly awake – then surely we would be gripped by the dramatic irony that this nation that prides itself in embracing diversity is in the midst of a Truth and Reconciliation process with its First Nations people. The process is meant to address the losses and abuse suffered by those who were forced through Canada’s Residential School System as well as all of their family members who have been affected by that legacy. There isn’t an Aboriginal person in the country who hasn’t been touched by it in some way, and yet until now, there have been shamefully few non-Aboriginals who were even aware of it. That history was omitted from the formal education of all Canadians at all levels and we have only just begun to remediate that, and to create new narratives.

Our textbooks were not better than the Japanese history textbooks that eliminated or downplayed the Nanjing massacre.

When any nation excludes any segment of the population from full participation, full citizenship, full expression, it denies itself its most precious resource: the full complement of strengths, gifts, perspectives and diversity that lives within all of its people. We cannot hope to lead in the international realm unless and until we are playing with our entire team.

When she was here in September for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission National Event in Vancouver, Martin Luther King Jr.'s daughter, Dr. Bernice King addressed the crowd, saying: "There must be a persistent, consistent determination to see a new Canada where all people are respected and included in the culture, in the economic climate, in the forward moving process."

Shouldn't it astonish us to have heard those words? We are Canadians, after all, the ones who have gotten multiculturalism right. It's plain as day right there on Number Five Road in Richmond - the CBC told us so. Or have we really got it as right as we think we have?

When we consider the disconnect with our First Nations people, upon whose traditional lands we built our homes and universities - or with Quebec for that matter - are we really the nation of globalists we purport to be? Does the sharp division of urban and suburban areas into ethnically distinct neighborhoods suggest that we are a much more segregated society than we think we are? When we send our students abroad, are we doing all we can to ensure they are truly immersed in a different world rather than being able to merely recreate the familiarity of home? The international experience of too many of our students who choose to study abroad is limited to stays in the US or the UK or Australia and New Zealand. And within our universities and colleges, are we truly creating multicultural learning environments where safe but disruptive interactions are encouraged and facilitated?

I cannot leave the subject of intercultural connectivity without first addressing what I perceive to be Canada's—and Canadians'—greatest challenge in that regard. Leo Tolstoy said, "Everybody thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing themselves."

What needs disrupting most of all is US. We need to get it right at home. We cannot maintain the status quo and expect anyone to lead. If we haven't yet done so, now is the time to disrupt our old way of looking at education. If we can't create safe spaces for disruptive interaction now, what happens when the demographics shift even more radically?

As valuable as the technologies are that allow us to communicate and collaborate over great distance, we must never let them blind us to the necessity and benefit of coming physically together as a diverse community. People come to universities to be transformed, to be inspired, to learn how to think, to learn how to learn, and to learn how to

work with one another. For this, people need other people, and they need places to gather with those people – safe places like Yves Tiberghien’s classroom.

It’s not enough to ramp up the percentages of foreign students. We have to mix them up, create reactions, disruptive reactions. If we are seeking to define the mission of the global university, I submit to you that this is it.

Disruption can be a catalyst for change – the forward moving process. It can challenge old assumptions, spark dialogues, create action and expose new possibilities. Disruption can awaken us to new possibilities to the most difficult issues facing our global society – from the challenges of cultural diversity to the failure of fledgling democracies and the lack of civil society infrastructure in so many areas of the world. We fear disruption, but these times in which we live demand that we do it.

It is the way of the peaceful revolutionary: to disrupt the status quo. To awaken.

I leave you with the words of Dr. Bernice King, who just a short distance from here told a large crowd of Canadians: “A revolution is underway. It is up to each one of you to continue the process.”

Thank you.