

**Imagine UBC Vancouver**  
**6 September 2011**  
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O Canada. It's a beautiful anthem, isn't it? I think it practically qualifies as a 'pop' song now, thanks to Mark Donnelly. Nobody sings it like him. No one else has ever made it cool for us all to sing along the way he has. And we do! Most of us know all the words ... and you international students will soon learn them.

Do you remember, by any chance, when you *first* learned the words to "O Canada?"

Maybe you were actually living somewhere else in the world, and heard them on television, maybe even during the Olympics. Maybe you were in the process of becoming a Canadian citizen. Or *maybe* you were six years old when you first learned those words, sitting cross-legged on the floor of your elementary school gymnasium with what seemed like thousands of other kids, half excited, half scared, everything new, nothing familiar—your very first student assembly.

Words. They're funny things. Some words, the more you use them, the less they mean. Like "awesome," or "synergy," or "like, whatever." Other

words, like the lyrics to “O Canada,” take on new and deeper layers of meaning the longer you live with them.

Two such words, words that I think may be among the most powerful in the English language, are IMAGINE and CREATE. Why? Simple answer, really: Because that’s what we’re here to do. And I don’t just mean today; I mean for the whole of your university career. Some might even say it’s what we’re here to do *with our lives*.

Imagination and creation may be the only two skills we’re born with, that we don’t need to be taught or trained how to use. Your parents unpack the new 22-inch TV, you spot the empty carton and see ... a race car.

They can’t afford the Barbie Dream House® so you make one out of shoeboxes and toilet paper rolls.

The park next to your school is a magic forest. Your back porch is a Broadway stage. You write stories, rehearse shows, play in a band, draft plans, build forts, train every morning at dawn, look at the world through a microscope, the universe through a telescope, build a car from the engine up, shoot movies, learn codes and languages, invent iPhone apps ... all to get ... *here*. To IMAGINE. To CREATE.

We call this first day at UBC “IMAGINE” in Vancouver, and “CREATE” in the Okanagan. The names signify that *here*, at this extra-ordinary time in your

life, you're about to put your skills into practice at a whole new level. The two events have different names because you can't have one without the other.

Picture it: Imagination without creation stays forever in the realm of fantasy. It leads to frustration. And creation without imagination lacks vision and forethought and power. It leads to mediocrity. But together, they are the foundation of every triumph, great or small, that humankind has ever achieved.

So how do you get from IMAGINATION to CREATION? Well, for me, it's a short flight on a very small airplane. For you, the answer is ... *play*.

That's right: *play*. Surprised? You thought I was going to say "hard work," didn't you? Well, that starts *next* week. Psychologist Carl Jung said, "The creative mind plays with the object it loves." *Today* is a reminder to follow your passions during these next few years—in the classes you choose, the clubs you join, the questions you ask, the people you meet, and the new ideas and perspectives you make your own. To the degree that the hard work of the next few years becomes play, you will find yourself able to take what you imagine and make it real in the physical world. Let me say that again: You will be able to take what you imagine and make it real. It sounds like magic, doesn't it?

You might be wondering at this point what a university president is doing talking about play and imagination and creation and magic. Maybe you're asking yourself, *Is this a West Coast thing? Should I have gone to U of T after all?* But before the future engineers and physicists and commerce students get too worried, let me share just a few more powerful words from some other powerful voices:

Physicist Albert Einstein said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge."

Business leader Peter Drucker said, "The best way to predict the future is to create it."

World-renowned educator Sir Ken Robinson said, "Creativity is as important as literacy."

And artist Pablo Picasso said, "Everything you can imagine is real."

What university is for, *this* university in particular, is to give your mind every opportunity to play with the objects it loves. Ideas, theories, questions, problems, philosophies, blueprints, equations, formulae, stories, symptoms, statistics, songs. We call UBC "a place of mind" and a world of worlds is about to open up for your mind to play with. So dream big! Today is meant to give you a taste of what you might yet create if only you let your imagination loose. Look around you! This is your playground, and all of

us are your co-creators. These people will inform your ideas, challenge your ideals, and *change* your mind. You will do the same for us.

When I was your age, a young man wrote a song about coming together to imagine a better world. All these decades later ☺ it is still the *anthem*, the “O Canada” for all those of us who are committed to creating that world.

You probably know the words:

*Imagine all the people*

*Living life in peace*

...

*Imagine no possessions*

*I wonder if you can*

*No need for greed or hunger*

*A brotherhood of man*

*Imagine all the people*

*Sharing all the world*

In whatever your chosen area of study, in whatever your chosen field of work ... imagine *that*. Choose *that*. Create *that*.

I wish you every success with your studies, and look forward to the day we’re all together again, upon your graduation. Welcome to the University of British Columbia.

[pause for applause]

And now, I am pleased to introduce to you your Alma Mater Society  
President, Mr. Jeremy McElroy.