

15th Annual UBC Okanagan Learning Conference Keynote Closing Remarks

May 8, 2019

UBC Okanagan

Thank you, Ananya, for your kind introduction. Good afternoon, and thank you everyone. It's an honour and a privilege to be with you today.

It's definitely an exciting time to be part of UBC, especially UBC Okanagan.

I'm sure you're aware of the excitement about the UBC Okanagan 2040 plan, and I hope you've seen the fly-over video. The plan is a bold vision for the next 20 years of transformation for UBC in the Interior region. You can find out more information — and view the video — on my blog at president.ubc.ca.

Since it opened in 2005, UBC Okanagan has established itself as an innovative hub for research and learning, with a deep commitment to Indigenous partnerships. Now, the UBC Board of Governors has set a long-term course toward even greater service to the people and communities of B.C.

Today, I have as much to learn from you as you will learn from me. Everyone here has a commitment to teaching and learning, and I am very interested to hear your stories and reflections. We'll make time for that.

Conference attendees have just spent two days thinking deeply about teaching — their own experiences and practices, and how those experiences will impact their future practices.

And this afternoon, we are celebrating some of our best Teaching Assistants, Undergraduate Tutors, and Course Instructors.

In my view, teaching is not just a profession; it is a calling. I would even go so far as to say it is a labour of love, and a calling to serve others.

What makes a good teacher?

A passion for their subject area, of course. Being good at planning and delivering their courses. Creating opportunities for their students to learn by doing. Communicating expectations. Holding a high standard for their students ... and much, much more.

But how do good teachers become *great* teachers?

In my opinion, good teachers are on their way to becoming great teachers when they demonstrate three traits:

Having the confidence to be themselves with their students;

Empathy and caring for their students, and being willing to listen;

A love of lifelong learning, for both themselves and their students.

I think everyone in this room understands that learning is a long, long journey, and it takes a lot of courage to be a teacher.

We are all on this journey together, for all of our students — urban students, inner-city students, Indigenous students, rural students, immigrants, and refugees.

All reflect the world we live in, and we want all of them to flourish at UBC and beyond. They come to us from every part of B.C., every province in Canada, and almost 160 countries around the globe.

UBC's message to each and every one of our students – *the potential is yours*. You will be given opportunities to learn, to create and share knowledge, to be inspired and to shape your future.

As a globally recognized university, I'm proud to say that UBC continues to excel in international rankings. The influential QS World University Rankings puts UBC among the top 10 universities in the world in four different subjects, amongst over 1,200 international universities.

UBC's Library and Information Management subject was ranked the best in the world, making it the only Canadian university to rank number one overall in any subject.

UBC also ranked first in Canada in a total of ten subjects including sports-related subjects (third overall in the world), geography (fifth in the world), mineral and mining engineering (ninth in the world), earth and marine sciences (12th in the world), agriculture and forestry (15th in the world) and psychology (16th in the world).

I'm very proud of these impressive results and the contributions of the entire university community.

As a university administrator, I sometimes have the opportunity to engage with students in the classroom, and there's nothing I enjoy more.

Students today have progressed far beyond the passive recipients of information they were in the old days. For example, the '**School Strike for Climate**' we have been hearing about in the news. This is an international movement of school students who are deciding not to attend classes, and instead take part in demonstrations to demand action to prevent further global warming and climate change. Normally I would not encourage students to cut classes of course, but when it comes to climate change, sometimes decisive action is needed.

Today, we are called to go beyond the traditional methods of teaching and learning, and create the right environments for students to acquire information in a number of dynamic ways.

We are preparing our students to meet the challenges of a world very different from the one encountered by their parents and grandparents.

Post-secondary educators – whether university, college, polytechnic or trades – all aim to create an environment in which students are exposed to a variety of ideas, and acquire the knowledge and skills that will enable them to achieve their personal goals and become responsible members of society, regardless of their choice of job or profession.

This is reflected in UBC's purpose – "Pursuing excellence in research, learning and engagement to foster global citizenship and advance a sustainable and just society across British Columbia, Canada and the world."

Our strategic plan – *Shaping UBC's Next Century* – represents a roadmap. It sets out our collective purpose, goals and strategies to achieve our vision, "To inspire people, ideas and actions for a better world".

It guides our decisions and actions in four core areas – People and Places, Research Excellence, Transformative Learning, and Local and Global Engagement.

UBC has considerable strength – and exciting new activity – in all four core areas, but I will focus on Transformative Learning.

UBC has a long-established track record in teaching and learning excellence. We have invested in program innovation, included blended, online and interdisciplinary models of education, for many years. We will continue to develop our practices in these critical areas.

We want to further enhance learning through evidence-based teaching, mentorship and enriched experiences.

The majority of undergraduate students attend UBC, in part, for the anticipated research experiences. One of the many strategic plan projects that was approved for implementation this year is PURE – the Program for Undergraduate Research Experience.

The goal of PURE is to enrich the undergraduate research experience by providing students with the ability to apply their learning and contribute to the creation of new knowledge.

An open call for PURE projects was launched in early January. All faculty, staff and students across both campuses were encouraged to apply, and all projects had to have an element of undergraduate student participation.

A total of 95 full applications were submitted. Seventeen of these projects were funded, representing a total funding allocation of \$1.3 million over two years.

We also recognize the importance of “transferable skills” and competencies in today’s world and will sustain our efforts to integrate these more purposefully into program design.

Thousands of students participate in experiential or work-integrated learning each year.

We offer programs for career professionals who want to broaden their technical perspectives and learn new business and leadership skills.

Working through UBC *Extended Learning*, we will expand online and other accessible offerings for working professionals and lifelong learners.

We will also continue to focus on the student experience – both inside and outside the classroom – and create opportunities for students to feel more engaged and better supported during their time at UBC.

We want to give them a sense of belonging, predicated on personal growth within smaller, diverse communities in the context of a large and complex community.

Shaping the Next Century focuses on three priorities that I believe are critical to society today and reflect what we think the role of public education in society should be – inclusion, collaboration, and innovation.

I won’t list all the strategic plan’s goals, but they include ... partnering with indigenous communities; ... leading globally in research, discovery, and sustainability; ... building a diverse culture; ... and inspiring students through excellence in transformative teaching and the student experience.

The strategic plan identifies key areas that we feel have significant transformational importance ...

Great people – attracting, engaging and retaining a diverse global community of outstanding students, faculty and staff.

Thriving Communities – supporting the ongoing development of sustainable, healthy and connected campuses and communities.

Inclusive Excellence – cultivating a diverse community that creates and sustains equitable and inclusive campuses.

Collaborative clusters – enabling interdisciplinary clusters of research excellence that focus on critical problems facing society today.

Student research – broadening access to, and enhancing, student research experiences.

Education renewal – facilitating sustained program renewal and improvements in teaching effectiveness.

Indigenous engagement – supporting the objectives and actions of the renewed 2018 Indigenous Strategic Plan. This area also represents our shared commitment as a university community that forms UBC's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

One theme that consistently emerged in the planning process was the need to engage more and in deeper ways with regional communities.

Expanded engagement will include more co-op programs and internships that embed UBC students in businesses and communities throughout the province.

It will also include a stronger presence in clinics, schools, community centres and organizations across our communities and indeed the province.

One example of important community engagement is UBC Okanagan students working on designing safer donation bins. The professor behind that project, Ray Taheri, presented at this conference. Thank you Ray for this important contribution to both education and social wellbeing.

Another example is a study by UBC Land and Food Systems for the Greater Vancouver Food Bank on their clients' long-term reliance on the food bank system.

Aspects of our strategic planning that pertain to Indigenous peoples and communities are of high priority. There is much that needs to be done, given the long-lasting legacy of colonization.

For example, UBC received funding for a pilot community-based delivery of all four years of its Indigenous Teacher Education Program in Williams Lake / Quesnel to about 20 Indigenous students.

Other groups have faced exclusion, too, based on gender, race, religion, sexuality, age and ability. UBC has made positive impact in inclusion to date, but we must redouble our efforts to make sustained progress.

The very nature of a campus environment is a place to foster diversity, where students encounter people whose views and backgrounds differ from their own.

Our motto is *Tuum Est – It is Yours. It's up to you.*

This means it's up to each individual student to take advantage of the opportunities to step out of their comfort zone and grow – intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally.

Attending university is an amazing opportunity, but it can also feel like a lot of pressure sometimes. We need to provide resources to help students connect, build coping skills, learn to recognize early when they may need assistance, and get help when they need it.

We will continue to create opportunities for students to feel more engaged and better supported during their time at UBC. We want to give them a sense of belonging, predicated on personal growth within smaller communities in the context of a large and complex community.

We also want students to learn how to think critically and creatively, and collaborate to find solutions to complex problems.

Courses in many areas, such as law, medicine, and engineering, are often case-based or problem-based, requiring students to work collaboratively in teams to find solutions.

The traditional barriers between disciplines are disappearing as we try to prepare students for the demands of the working world. So, for example, a student in Applied Science can twin her studies in hydraulic engineering with a program in entrepreneurship, so that she is prepared for the post-university challenges of commercializing and monetizing her skills.

The Arts and STEM subjects are now beginning to intersect in ways we could never have predicted a few years ago. Such interrelatedness is essential if we are to give our students the kind of preparation that will prepare them for a profession in an increasingly technology-oriented workplace.

The huge expansion of digital tools has revolutionized the business of teaching and learning. Many courses now take a blended approach, mixing face-to-face presentations with online or video presentations.

The world is getting more and more interconnected, and universities need to do the same if we are to serve our students, and our communities.

Domestic students are encouraged to study abroad through **Go Global**, where we partner with over 200 universities and institutions worldwide for students to study abroad for a semester.

Leaving home to study in another country, students learn to approach different situations and people with respect and sensitivity, to remain humble, to make the effort to learn things about other cultures, and to become aware of their own biases.

I am proud to say UBC has been named one of the world's most international universities. There are several reasons for this, including our commitment to student mobility and our involvement with global research initiatives.

In carrying out my duties as the president of UBC, I can say — with humility — that I am proud to support faculty, students and staff in our collective aim to make a positive contribution to society.

We are on an amazing journey together, shaping our next century!