

Valedictory Address
Margaret Carlyle, BA (Hons.)
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79th University of Winnipeg Convocation

Your Honour, Madam Minister, Mr. Chancellor, Mr. President, distinguished guests, fellow graduates, ladies and gentlemen.

Writing speeches like these is difficult. I initially wondered: what distinguishes this particular graduating class? I could say most of us witnessed 9-11 and its aftermath, enjoyed the tuition fee freeze, or protested the war in Iraq. Yet rather than suggest that one significant event marks this year's group of Arts and Theology graduates, I am here today to offer something of our shared student experience - what our time at the University of Winnipeg has been, and what it means for our futures.

Making it to convocation has required tremendous commitment, calling on vast resources – mental power, physical stamina, and a generous dose of morale. How many of us remember: Downing cup after cup after cup of coffee in the hopes of writing that brilliant, over-due paper – overnight? Reading in a library study carrel only to slump into a deep deep sleep? Trying to schedule the flu or that long postponed break-up for winter break, not term time? Feigning nonchalance when flipping to the last page of a graded assignment? Organising your student group's mixer without mixing up your test dates?

Now, perhaps, we can fondly recall these harried moments of desperation and fatigue which, at the time, made us want to sleep, weep, and call it quits. Yet, we can equally recall the little joys that helped us get through more difficult times: lunching with classmates in Riddell Hall, running into an old friend, claiming our favourite table in the buffeteria, finding an encouraging comment on an assignment, tuning into our favourite radio station (CKUW, of course), or coughing up the cash for a library fine only to find it had mysteriously been erased. (Thank you computer gremlins!)

Our constant companion has been a single-mindedness that has allowed us to begin to realise our potential, enliven our curiosities, and develop previously untouched dimensions of our personalities. But being a University student goes beyond scholastic commitment; things are complex.

Today's student regrettably requires more than the renewable, perhaps infinite reaches of the human mind, but also the financial resources not only to subsidise tuition and, as we have seen in the last few weeks, ever-increasing ancillary fees, but also books, supplies, living expenses, child care, or simply money not earned during time spent in the classroom. A lucky few have received scholarships or bursaries, while others work part-and full-time, take on debt, or decide not to pursue post-secondary education at all. That we have made it and made ends meet is not only a credit to our own perseverance and luck, but also to the support network on which we have drawn time and time again – from friends and family to cleaning and maintenance personnel to department secretaries to faculty members. Although education is a fundamental right, not everyone is so privileged.

Now, look towards the future. In this increasingly competitive age, where mass duplication and credentials are demanded, now more than ever the inventiveness and analytical abilities that have been stretched and reshaped in our years here will be called to the fore. Recall your essay-writing days, and glance at your first year work: it will remind you of how far you've come. We have learned how to strike a balance among all the powerful tools we have acquired here, and we can transfer the intensity of these

exercises into our lives as we move in new directions. We will surely find a way to work in the world while also retaining our principles and independence. Let's be the graduating class that does not look back and say "When I was in university, when I used to care..." The structure of our lives might change, but the people we have become and are becoming can remain.

This liberal arts approach to developing the mind has too often been criticised. Without job-specific training, we appear destined to become yet another group of so-called "McArts" graduates. When faced with such discouraging non-truths, many of us undoubtedly questioned the wisdom of coming to the University of Winnipeg at all. But, fortuitously, we did come – despite such critics. There is employment for us that will provide not only a living wage, but also a sense of fulfillment. It will not be easy to find, and it will take time and possibly more education or work experience, but rest assured that all of us here today can carve out a place from which to contribute something meaningful to our world.

Horizons are at once widening and narrowing, and it is up to us to help dictate where movement, lateral and vertical, occurs, identify small fissures and large gaps, design solutions to mend them, and illuminate as yet unknown ground. With our knowledge and skill, personality and charisma, we will endear ourselves to our future colleagues, whether they be partners in work, play, love, life. Ripe is the time to take stock of the meaning of our individual University experiences. This exercise will hopefully leave us with pleasant memories of time spent here, and the definitive act of graduating gives us all something to celebrate today.

On that note, congratulations graduates, enjoy the festivities, and best of luck in the future.