

**Dr. Lloyd Axworthy  
President & Vice-Chancellor  
The University of Winnipeg  
Address to the 2006 Graduating Class  
Spring Convocation, June 4, 2006**

I want to welcome everyone here to today's convocation. It is a special moment in the life of this university, the time when we undertake the solemn act of granting a degree to those who have completed their chosen academic studies and will now and henceforward carry the mantle of being a graduate of the University of Winnipeg.

It is not so much the certificate of degree that necessarily warrants distinction, although there should be pride in your accomplishment. It is knowing that this group of men and women, sitting before me, will have been recognized as acquiring the benefits of a university education and the renewing capacities it instills. This will enable each and every one of you to realize a flowering of individual potential and a nurturing of the human condition. In today's age we make much of the need of the pragmatic advantages of higher learning- of acquiring skills for future employment, and I don't question that particular value. But the purpose of this ceremony is to celebrate learning, out of which grow ideas, imagination, curiosity, judgment, and ideals that are the bedrock of human achievement and understanding.

It is also a time to recognize the contributions of those who helped our graduates reach today's important passage- family and friends for their encouragement and support, donors, governments and tax payers who supply the means for this public institution to exist because of their belief in the value of higher learning. We must also mention our distinguished faculty who have been the mentors, counselors and above all teachers of today's graduating class, And as always, the staff of the university, often the unsung heroes who keep the sidewalks clean, the bills paid, and the cafeteria stocked with gourmet cuisine.

This is also the occasion where we perform the important societal task of honouring persons of distinction- faculty members chosen by members of the university community for their outstanding performance as educators, researchers and community participants and our honorary degree recipients. In bestowing these distinctions our university is making a statement to our students and the world about the qualities of character and attainment that should be admired and emulated. This year we are graced with Dr. Allen Ronald, leader in battle against AIDS, Sheila Watt Cloutier leader in the battle to preserve the culture of the Inuit People and pioneer in the effort to combat the ravages of global warming , Reverend Yao, a spiritual leader who cares directly for the welfare of the less fortunate. These honorees in the words of the poet Stephen Spender "wear in their hearts the fire's center"

So, as you can see we have important work to do in this gathering. I hope you will find it a time of rich experience and meaningful participation. It is the high festival of the academic year.

One of the obligations inherent in this celebration is for the president to offer some remarks to the graduating class. I welcome this task because it provides an opportunity to ask what is expected of those who graduate today. How will you use the talents, the ambition, the energy and education that should be the endowment you carry with from today's ceremony.

One answer to that question was given three days ago when I was in attendance at another academic gathering, at the Catholic University in Lima Peru. Students from this university, including some members of the graduating class, had engaged in an active dialogue with their Peruvian counterparts about the meaning of democracy and how young people can help reform and change political systems to grant fair choice and equal representation. This is of vital importance not just in the divided, underdeveloped society of Peru that has had a history of authoritarian government, but in Canada as well where more young people vote in the contest for Canadian Idol than in the past federal election. These are signs of democratic systems in trouble. These students, led by Geoff Scott of our geography department, have been involved in the Organization of American States mission as international election observers. This is a pilot project of global outreach that is becoming part of the educational experience of our UofW students. From what I saw, if the performance and behavior of these young men and women is representative of the caliber of person that our academy produces then I can report that talent, energy, idealism and education are being put to good use. It was a rewarding experience to see how members of this university have taken the adage of making a difference to heart and are providing an important service in the cause of democracy in that South American country. It was a moment of pride as the president of this university to see our students engage with skill and insight with their fellow students on how they could work together to help build democracy.

But, they are not alone. In this past year, students from our faculty of education have taken on mentoring young students from our inner city neighbourhood in the newly established Wii Chiwaakanak Learning Center. Students from our justice program have taken on the new role of Ambassadors providing security on our campus and in the surrounding community. An activist group of students has spearheaded a sustainability initiative that will make this university compatible with the goals of the Kyoto agreement. Others have formed a Rights and Democracy delegation and have developed a conference involving American student participants. Members of the Uiter editorial board mounted a project to help set up communications centers amongst the chaotic aftermath of hurricane Katrina

In the academic realm, our undergraduate students have presented research papers at academic conferences and wrestled with a host of important topics affecting the world today. I can personally attest to their depth of compassion and learning. Gina took the time and patience to explain to me the workings of a quantum computer. Brad Boissell had to give up his trade as a heavy machine operator, but will apply his talents as a teacher of industrial arts, Timeyin Wilbert, a graduate in computer science from Nigeria, who noted that the small class sizes and interaction with professors made her education here

“awesome” There are also Darren Courchene and Brenna Grafton who are the first graduates of our aboriginal governance program, which I mention because this was a matter of intense interest to educators and Indian leaders in Peru. Shawnee Grimond is also graduating today with a degree in sociology, primarily taken through distant education, which is indicative of exceptional discipline and perseverance. And speaking of perseverance this class has one of its honoured graduates, Corinne Stevens, who has studied part time over two decades and who overcame a sudden disability to achieve her chosen goal of obtaining a degree.

We cannot omit our student athletes who not only performed well on the courts and playing fields but had the best scholastic average of any university in Canada. These are just a few examples of how our students, members of this class, have demonstrated accomplishment and commitment to excellence and service. In fact of the over 1000 students graduating today there are over one thousand stories of effort and achievement.

Often in the media and other commentaries this generation has been characterized as too preoccupied with career, ambition and the search for financial security, they have been called the "me" generation. My two years as president has given me a perch from which to offer a different perspective. In a class I taught this year in Canadian foreign policy, I read imaginative, perceptive papers on the future of NAFTA, on the need to protect innocent women and children against genocide, on protecting Canadians' privacy against border security measures. Many of these papers were written by students who were also working at jobs which took up twenty or thirty hours a week. They were showing a dedication and spirit of learning that has distinguished this institution from its early days over a hundred a twenty years ago where hard work and knowledge went hand in hand.

So as we gather together today, as graduates, family, friends, faculty, guests from government and the community, I ask you to pause a moment and reflect on what we bear witness to, the emerging of a new array of talent, a new pool of energy, a new source of ideas, a new infusion of ambition and idealism to freshen and enliven the world we live in. We in the university have a trusted mission, to be the force of creativity and regeneration and at convocation our best efforts are on display.

This puts the onus on the university to never stop renewing itself, adapting to the times; to continue bringing in new curriculum; to advance our ability to research the new issues; to use the new technologies of information to extend our educational reach; to insure access by direct assistance to those in need; to draw and support students from all parts of the community, the country and from abroad; to provide good services in health, security, fitness to insure personal safety; and to expand our resources to help provide the right educational environment. In doing so, we will be contributing, as we can and should, to the development of the human and physical renewal of our city and province.

Like any institution there are those who stand against such changes, who protect privileges and perks from the past, some who too often preach the gospel of special interests. But that is not the prevailing view at this university. We are in a period of renewal, looking forward to new facilities in science and the environment, broadening the

appeal of our global college, setting up new centers of excellence, and as you will see today when you walk onto Spence street, beginning a conversion to an active pedestrian mall to be shared by university and community alike. This spirit of cooperative, collegial renewal was best exemplified a month ago when under the leadership of Professor Mavis Reimer and her committee, the staff and faculty of this university oversubscribed their goal of one million dollars for new scholarships and bursaries. And to top it off the head of the university family, Chancellor Sanford Riley committed another million to launch a new National Center for the Study of Canadian History at the University of Winnipeg. We have received other gifts that enable us to send our students abroad as interns, that bring foreign students here; that enable us to renew housing and academic facilities and become a source of community inquiry and dialogue. We are being recognized as a leader in Aboriginal education, inner city studies, children's literature, and applied science.

Let me say to our graduates of this year that when you leave this place you will likely find that the names of 18<sup>th</sup> century historical figures, or the various parts of dissected frogs, may slip from your memory; but that the more profound nature of your University of Winnipeg education will endure. You will always have that sense of critical reasoning, a continuing curiosity about the world, passion for justice, tolerance for difference and a willingness to become involved. This I believe will give you the inner compass to set the standards by which your own life will be measured and by which you will hold to account the actions of others. You have an opportunity to have a voice, but you have to feel it, want it, demand and not be satisfied with all the hypocrisy, spin and superficiality that too often passes for information and discourse

I hope too you will be a continuing part of this school's enduring quest for excellence in learning, and that you will support our mission to help give the best education to the succeeding generations of students. We will need your help.

Next year we will be holding a major homecoming, celebrating our fortieth year as an university, and our one hundredth and twenty first year as a college of learning in this prairie location. We would be honoured to welcome you back.

In closing let me remind you of the words of Mathew Arnold that I used in my installation address; "that life is not having and getting but a being and becoming" This was echoed in a comment made by one of the Peruvian students, Susanne Colvillas, involved in the dialogue last Thursday night at our partner university in Lima, when she said "we must all find a special space where we can contribute" To our graduates We all wish you the best in that noble endeavour.