

Toronto Tribute Dinner
April 7, 2009

Wow! What a wonderful group of family, friends and colleagues are gathered here tonight! It warms my heart to see the remarkable people before me, faces I have known to love, respect, and depend upon. Thanks to you all for coming. I have a great many debts in this room; let me name just a few.

First and foremost, let me thank my wife Josette. We will celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary on July 12, in Tours France, the very city where we met in 1967 when we were both university students. My success in university life rests heavily on her unflagging love and support over so many years. She has also given us three wonderful children, Eric, Leslie, and Audrey. I am thrilled that Leslie and Audrey could join us tonight—along with Eric, they have been the greatest sources of joy to Josette and me for over 35 years.

Further joy has come as Eric and his wife Karen now have four children: Evy, Eric Jr., Vivian, and John. I am also pleased that of my three sisters—Kathy, Jane, and Liz—that Liz could be with us tonight. She is here with her daughter Karen and son Josh.

My parents, Ted and Charlotte Davenport, read plays and poetry to me from an early age and taught me the beauty of language well written and well spoken. My debt to them, and to the outstanding teachers in the Summit public school system, is more than I can say. I had the most wonderful friends in those early years, represented tonight by Mike Bloomstein, Art Murray, and Jeff Hodde. Mike and Art, you brought back some wonderful memories, and it warms my heart to know that these close friends of the 1950s are the same great people over 50 years later.

The 1993 Presidential Search Committee, including five Board members and five faculty named by Senate, identified two key issues for the future President: undergraduate entering grades, which had been falling and were then below the average of other Ontario universities; and large collaborative research grants, which were becoming more important in Canada and in which Western was nearly absent. Clearly we had work to do at Western.

And work we did! We put together a Strategic Plan, *Leadership in Learning*, which focused to a significant degree on the complex determinants of entering grades and collaborative research funding. We created two new Faculties, Information and Media Studies and Health Sciences, while reducing the number of Faculties from seventeen to eleven. Our Faculties brought in new courses and programs designed to attract outstanding students. Our Senate approved a more flexible curriculum, encouraging student creativity and interdisciplinary study. We adopted the Mission Statement of “The best student experience among the leading research-intensive universities of Canada.”

The hard work of faculty, staff, and students, with support from alumni and donors, paid off: our entering grades are now among the highest in the country. Among the large research-intensive universities, we have been number 1 in student satisfaction in all seven years of the national Globe and Mail survey. And our school spirit is greater than ever. I recall an alumnus here in Toronto a decade ago, as I described our plans to increase entering grades, looking alarmed and saying, “Dr. Davenport, you’re not going to turn Western into a bunch of nerds, are you?”

On the contrary, we continue to have a student government and leadership second to none in the country: our students are number 1 in Canada in Shinerama and Terry Fox fundraising, they shine in amateur theatre and music, they have just had another extraordinary year of success in intercollegiate athletics, they donate their time downtown, across Canada, and around the world to improve the lives of others. That best student experience begins with the best students, and we have them.

On the research side, we strengthened our already fine performance in standard research grants and in distinguished publications, while addressing our problems in collaborative grants. We put additional resources into the office of the VP Research, to help faculty with large and small grants. We became leaders in the large infrastructure grants from the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, ranking 7th in cumulative grants and 5th in the last competition, thereby batting way above our weight in faculty size.

Our federal, provincial, and municipal governments increasingly understand our strengths in research and how they contribute to Canada's culture, economy, and civic society. As part of our research growth, we doubled PhD enrolment over the decade after 1996, and we are on track to double it again over the next decade.

One of the best parts of the last decade has been our ability to hire additional faculty and staff, who are at the heart of all our successes. I arrived at Western in 1994, in the middle of a decade of declining employment. In 1997, with new government and tuition revenues, the decline was reversed. Since that date our faculty and staff numbers have grown by one-third, with over 300 additional faculty and 600 additional staff. Indeed, of the full-time faculty at Western, over one-half have been hired during my presidency.

The bottom line: all of us in this room, and all who support and love Western, have much to be proud of.

A university's strength is based on its people, and that is surely true of Western. Our faculty, staff, students, alumni, and volunteers make us what we are today. I am thrilled that so many from these groups are with us tonight, so I can express my heartfelt gratitude to them. To the Deans, other faculty, staff members, and student leaders who are with us tonight, thank you for the high standards you set, your commitment to our Mission, and your support of me. You made my time here a happy one. Thanks also to our three affiliate University Colleges, represented tonight by Gerry Killan, and our outstanding health research partners in London, represented by Cliff Nordal.

Every person in this room should be thanked personally and I can not do that in a short speech. Please forgive me if I mention just a few names:

To my current Vice-Presidents, Fred Longstaffe, Gitta Kulczycki, Ted Hewitt, and Ted Garrard: thank you for your leadership, your dedicated service to Western, your commitment and strength, your support for me, and especially for your ability to work together with the whole senior team, which has been the foundation for all our successes.

To Greg Moran and Madeline Lennon: thank you for those kinds words—you both know how much they mean to me. Greg, you stood by my side as we developed our first two Strategic Plans and worked through the severe cuts of the mid-1990s—Western is a better place for your leadership and courage. Madeline, you encouraged me in my plans for a course on Paris and the Impressionists, which has become a labor of love I cannot give up—I will deliver it next fall for the fifth time at Western and for a first time here in Toronto.

To my four assistants over the 15 years: Judy, Alcina, Lucyanne, and Gayle. Thank you for making the office a cheerful place, one I looked forward to each morning, and for keeping me on time and at the right place, to the degree that is possible with an absent-minded professor. Similar thanks go to the other members of my office staff: Dalin, Anne, Marty, and Rob.

To my friends from AUCC and COU, thanks for all I learned from you and for the honor of leading each of those organizations as Chair. Two of my fellow presidents, each a remarkable leader, spoke tonight. During our years together at the University of Alberta, Martha Piper taught me the importance of aiming high in the university mission, and of using your voice as president at every opportunity to explain and win allegiance to that mission.

From Rob Prichard I learned the secret of effective government relations—to find areas where the goals of the university and the government are aligned, and to seek resources in support of that alignment. Rob also taught me the importance of charming the Minister's assistants, although to this day, and despite my best efforts, I know I don't have half his charm.

Chris Bentley has been a leading member of the Provincial cabinet since his election in 2003. He served with distinction as Minister of Training, Colleges, and Universities, and tonight he also represents Dalton McGuinty, whose Reaching Higher Plan, with its emphasis on quality and graduate studies has been of extraordinary benefit to Western and our students. I thank Chris for his leadership and friendship, and for the great vision of Premier.

Let me express my deep appreciation to the many current and past Board members, alumni, volunteers, and friends of Western who have helped me over the years. I owe a great debt to our Board, whose Chair, Michele Noble, is here tonight. The Board has given me good advice throughout my 15 years and governed with wisdom and foresight. Thanks also to the Alumni Association and its President Carol-Lynn Chambers for supporting the University and me with commitment and enthusiasm.

There are donors here who have supported teaching, research, and student aid in all parts of the University, including all eleven of our Faculties: Arts and Humanities, the Richard Ivey School of Business, Information and Media Studies, Education, Engineering, Health Sciences, Law, the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry, the Don Wright Faculty of Music, Science, and Social Science. A warm welcome to the rowdies from Sydenham Hall who created the Jean Dunlop Fund.

On behalf of all those faculty, staff, and students who have benefitted from your support, I thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Our Campaign Western, led by Bill Brock and concluded in 2004 with \$327 million, was a phenomenal success. Our next campaign will be announced in the coming 12 months and will be led by Geoff Beattie. Bill and Geoff are shining examples of the volunteers who help make Western great.

A special thanks to the former Chancellors who are here tonight--Dick Ivey, Peter Godsoe, Eleanor Clitheroe, and Arthur Labatt—and of course to our current Chancellor, John Thomson. Your advice, commitment, and especially your friendship have been critical to me throughout my time at Western.

We are in a transition at Western and on July 1 an outstanding new President will assume office, Dr. Amit Chakma, currently Vice-President Academic at the University of Waterloo. I know that all in this room, and all at Western, will give Amit the same strong support that you given me, and that he will lead Western to the next level of achievement in teaching, research, and service. He is a strong leader and a lovely person.

So how do I say good-bye after fifteen years? With one more thank you to all our faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends. Together, we have created a new Mission, made tremendous progress on that Mission, and in so doing we have made Western a different place. Working with others and making a difference are among the most rewarding of life's experiences.

Thank you all for fifteen wonderful years. I will miss you, each and every one.