

Annual General Meeting

Nov. 1, 2006, 12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m.

UBC Robson Square

Prof. Stephen J. Toope

President & Vice-Chancellor

The University of British Columbia

Thank you and good afternoon. I am supposed to be here today to welcome you to UBC's Annual General Meeting and, I suppose, to offer a leading voice in celebration of a very good year at UBC.

One of the things that drew me to UBC was the fact that there is a strategic plan – we call it Trek 2010 – solidly in place. Its vision is strong, it is clear and it is . . . this:

The University of British Columbia, aspiring to be one of the world's best universities, will prepare students to become exceptional global citizens, promote the values of a civil and sustainable society, and conduct outstanding research to serve the people of British Columbia, Canada, and the world.

But I feel much more like celebrating my own good fortune in joining such a remarkable university with a remarkable vision at such a remarkable time.

Even as a newcomer, I can tell that UBC has been an outstanding institution for a good long time. From the people who recruited me to the community leaders who have welcomed me to Vancouver, I am constantly running into incredibly accomplished alumni. The depth and breadth of UBC's influence – its very positive influence – is obvious at every turn.

UBC's reputation is also widely known. There are only two research universities in Canada that are consistently ranked in the top 40 in the world – and when you hail from what might have been the *third* university on that short list, you can't help but notice your competitor's accomplishment.

But UBC's reputation couldn't prepare me for the reality. Very little could prepare someone for the grandeur of UBC Vancouver's 400-hectare campus – a coastal treasure that the Musqueam nation has prized for thousands of years. It is our great honour to share that land today.

UBC, already one of the world's best universities, is clearly bursting with promise and possibility. Which is befitting an institution that exists, first and foremost, to nurture a new generation of scholars, researchers and citizens of the world. Every university's most important role, and my highest priority, is to support teaching and learning – to celebrate the sharing of knowledge and to fully engage tens of thousands of brilliant new students in the task of expanding that knowledge yet further.

That being the case, I'm also delighted to be entirely upstaged today by Dr. Carl Wieman. UBC announced a couple of quite high profile recruits this year: the announcement of a new president was a scheduled necessity and I am deeply honoured to have been offered that opportunity; but welcoming a new Nobel laureate - dedicated to working with committed colleagues to further raise the quality of undergraduate science teaching at UBC and in the post-secondary environment at large – now that was a coup!

We are grateful to welcome Dr. Wieman to UBC generally and as a speaker today. Welcome, Carl.

Before we do, however, I want to say a brief word about our theme, “Without Borders.”

In preparing for this meeting, I was toying with saying something metaphorical about the importance of transcending borders. I was thinking about saying that I don’t believe in borders – in walls or fences or in any of the figurative limits that constrain the full potential of human endeavour and accomplishment. Universities, after all, are places that should know no limits to creativity and exploration.

But as I thought about it, I realized that I have spent my whole working life building and refining a particular set of borders. I am not just a student of the law; I’m a passionate believer. I believe in the power of law to bring order and hope where there is none, to assure rights when they otherwise might be abrogated. I believe that, in the best cases, *socially grounded* law that can generate the *loyalty of citizens* has the capacity to deliver equity and justice, locally, nationally and across the whole world. Law creates frameworks that actually establish a useful range of borders – strategic limits on the behavior of individuals and enabling structures that shape social action, borders that are designed to *expand* the potential of the whole group.

Our challenge, then, is not to destroy borders, but to respect them. Our challenge is not to fear or shrink from the limits and boundaries we now face, but to set them, to understand them, sometimes to redefine them – and to rise above them whenever the opportunity exists to benefit the individuals and groups that those borders were designed to protect.

UBC has enjoyed incredible success transcending its borders. We are reaching more successfully than ever into our immediate community with the University Town planning processes. We have reached into the greater Vancouver community with this facility at Robson Square, and with the remarkable UBC Learning Exchange.

We have, through an unfailing partnership with the provincial government, extended a hand into the interior with UBC Okanagan. With the support of governments, corporations, foundations, and individuals, our research teams reach across the country and beyond. And we have also transcended national borders with alliances with some of the greatest universities on the Pacific Rim.

So, thank you for joining us today, for supporting UBC. And thank you for working with us to create a world where a just set of laws and limits are so widely accepted and valued that we might truly operate without borders.

Thank you.