

Speaking notes

Imagine UBC

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Professor Stephen J. Toope

President and Vice Chancellor

The University of British Columbia

Thank you Brian (Sullivan).

Good afternoon! Congratulations! You've arrived!

I am so pleased to be here to once again welcome so many of the best and brightest high-school graduates and transfer students from around British Columbia, across Canada, and from 143 countries throughout the world. It gives us great pride to know that you have chosen UBC over so many other institutions that were similarly eager to have you as students.

Welcome to Vancouver, welcome to your new university, and welcome to this brand new facility that in just five months time will be the venue for women's hockey and sledge hockey during the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games!

Today, I want to briefly discuss four different topics – topics that are perhaps as pertinent to Olympic athletes as they are to new students, and these are: *plans... expectations...hopes...and fears*.

First, plans. It occurs to me that some of you have come here with well-charted *plans* in mind for your education, and perhaps also some clear aspirations for your subsequent career. If that is the case, excellent – well done.

Some of you, on the other hand, may not have charted a course as clearly defined as that, but you certainly have *expectations* about what you want to learn, experience and achieve during your time here. You too are to be commended, for your foresight, and for taking ownership of your learning experience.

And no doubt there are some of you who are not yet clear on what to expect for your university education, let alone have a plan for how it will unfold and where it will lead you. But at the very least,

you have *hopes* – hopes that it will be a positive, rewarding and enjoyable experience that will help you to identify the next steps you will take in your journey.

If you are in this category, congratulations! In many ways you stand to have a particularly enriching experience, because you are naturally open and receptive to the vast spectrum of intellectual wealth and stimuli you will encounter here.

And finally, some of you have arrived here gripped with *fears* – maybe even outright terror!

If you fall into this category, rest assured you're not alone. In fact, I can assure you that every one of the people with plans, expectations and hopes are also struck with at least some measure of fear. My advice to you is to take a moment to remind yourself of your outstanding success to date, and how your talent and efforts

have qualified you for admission into a university that ranks solidly among the top 35 in the world.

At the same time though, it might be a good idea to make as many friends as possible with people in the “hopes” category. You might be surprised at how quickly the fear gives way!

But irrespective of which category - or combination thereof - that you fall into, you are all to be congratulated for what you have achieved in the course of your formal education. Your challenge now is to ensure you make the most of this rare and precious opportunity. To that end, I want to make the following recommendations.

First, strive to link your experiences in the classroom, library or lab to the wider world. During orientation, you have already heard about the many opportunities that UBC offers to enrich your

learning experience through programs such as Co-op, Work Learn, and Community Service Learning.

Take the time to consider carefully which of these experiential learning opportunities will further enhance your academic experience, and provide you with that additional “margin of excellence” in the years ahead.

The second recommendation is to make meaningful connections with as many of your fellow students as possible during your time here. In particular, I urge you to resist the temptation to seek the comfort of associating primarily with students from your own home town, or your own academic program, or your own housing unit. The connections you establish with a wider range of students will not only contribute to a greater sense of community on campus, they will also serve you well in the years to follow – even a lifetime.

The third recommendation is to participate in a wide range of activities, and to generously share with your fellow students the precious gifts that each of you bring – and that is your ideas and your unique understanding.

There can be no doubt that the addition of thousands of new students reflecting the thoughts and experiences of so many of Canada’s best and brightest – not to mention those of countless cultures from throughout the world - will infinitely enrich the caliber of dialogue that will take place here, and which are among the most essential elements of an education that is truly global in nature.

So having talked about plans, expectations, hopes and fears, I want to introduce a fifth topic, and that is *change*.

The Irish poet and playwright, William Butler Yeats, once wrote:

“education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”

What Yeats probably intended to symbolize with the phrase “the lighting of a fire” is the discovery of a passion, or in other words, the process of finding out exactly what it is that truly excites and energizes you.

It also occurs to me that “the lighting a fire” is most likely to occur when we encounter – and when we are open and receptive to – new and compelling ideas, new and profound experiences, and new and intriguing people. In so doing, we open our minds to new curiosity, new interests...and yes, new ambitions.

Even those of you who have well defined plans or clear expectations for your education may be surprised by how those plans and expectations can be affected – indeed, how they can be changed – by the new ideas, new experiences and new people that you will encounter here.

And so my final recommendation is to not lose sight of your plans, expectations and hopes, but at the same time *do not fear change*.

And above all be open and receptive to the newness that surrounds you here.

Think of this place we call UBC as a place of complete openness – of openness in all its forms.

A place of physical openness that lends itself equally to vibrant human interaction, and quiet solitary reflection.

A place of international openness – a hub of global connectivity on the edge of a continent.

And most important of all, a place of intellectual openness – one that welcomes and inspires diversity, innovation...and *change*... and from where great things will continue to emerge to affect local communities, and entire populations throughout the world.

Before I conclude, I want to show you more precisely what I mean.

You are about to be the first-ever audience to view a short video that we have created – one that is based upon two years of consultation with students, faculty, alumni, and community members.

This video is intended to launch a whole campaign, one that we hope will aid us in telling our UBC story, to explain exactly what it is that has solidified our reputation among the great universities of the world; what it is that empowers us to try anything, to be anything, to carve our own path, and to learn, discover and contribute in our own way.

At the end, I will have a small task for you, so those of you who are carrying cell phones, please have them ready.

Lights dim – video rolls

Resume text while lights remain dim

UBC is a unique place, *a Place of Mind*. I challenge you to think about what this means to you, and to think about what you can achieve...*From Here*.

Those of you with cell phones are about to be linked to a new community site, powered by you. Please share it widely with fellow students. It's a place to learn, discover, contribute, comment and get involved.

(pause)

Add your voice. Volunteer. Tackle the big issues. Challenge your peers to do the same.

You have arrived at a place where open thought, open expression, and open minds to new ideas can change the world...and indeed, already have.

What will you do here at this Place of Mind?

Where will you go From Here?

(pause)

Have a fabulous week, and good luck to you all!