

**Lunar New Year Luncheon  
18 January 2011  
Professor Stephen J. Toope  
President and Vice-Chancellor  
The University of British Columbia**

Thank you, Carmen (Lee).

Good afternoon, everyone.

Once again, I am honoured to be here with you to celebrate another Lunar New Year; to usher in the year of the rabbit.

2010 ended on a high note for me. I was in Asia just before the holidays and had a wonderful time meeting with alumni in Hong Kong, Beijing, Shanghai and Tokyo. I had some very productive meetings with our long-standing partners in these cities, as well as some new and prospective partners from various research universities and private organizations, and signed two very important global research agreements.

During these Asian alumni visits, I reported at length on the many examples of UBC's progress toward fulfilling the various commitments and goals contained in our strategic plan, *Place and Promise*. But as

encouraging as these early results are, I think you will find it much more enjoyable to simply go on-line – [strategicplan.ubc.ca](http://strategicplan.ubc.ca) – and read our most recent annual report to see for yourself just how much progress there has been on a number of fronts.

Instead, what I would like to do today is to focus on the words, “commitments” and “goals” – the two words that are at the heart of *Place and Promise*, and that provide the plan’s structural framework.

Let’s stretch our imaginations for a moment. Imagine it is 1963, and we are at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC to hear Martin Luther King address a crowd of 200,000 in what civil rights historians have long revered as the “I have a dream” speech. Like practically everyone in attendance, we are deeply moved by the magnificent oratory.

But what exactly was it about that speech that propelled the American Civil Rights Movement so convincingly toward its desired conclusion? Was it the sermon-like delivery? Was it the penetrating eloquence of a

masterful orator? Perhaps it was the evocative phrases and powerful imagery the speech conjured.

Surely it was all of these things, but if you had to boil it down to its single most important element, what would it be? The question is far better suited for writers and linguists, but I would like to suggest that the most important element was the repeated use of the word “dream” to describe Martin Luther King’s commitment to freedom and equality... the repeated use of the word “dream” to describe his goal of a legislated end to racism... and most importantly, the repeated use of the word “dream” to exemplify his passion for those aspirations.

Indeed, one assumes that his speech would not have resonated quite so thoroughly had he said: “I have an idea” or “I have a goal” or “I am committed to changing things.” My point is not that we should try to emulate Martin Luther King when talking about UBC and the power of people, learning and innovation to invoke societal change... but it wouldn’t hurt to inject a small amount of our deeper convictions into our lexicon of thought and expression.

We don't have to look far to see the power of individuals who think big things, the power of those with passion in their convictions, the power of those who dream. Almost exactly 25 years ago to this day, a young UBC alumnus named Rick Hansen wheeled up the Great Wall of China near Beijing in his quest to circumnavigate the globe in a wheelchair. At the summit of the climb, he told reporters: "If you believe in a dream and have the courage to try, great things can be accomplished."

A year later, another UBC alumnus named Bob Lee formed UBC Properties Trust in pursuit of his dream to raise a billion dollars to secure his university's future, a dream that is on track to becoming reality with over \$650 million raised to date, and we are still counting. Thank you, Bob.

Dr. Weihong Song and his research team from the UBC Faculty of Medicine have a dream to offer new hope to people coping with the devastation of Alzheimer's Disease. We were elated to learn, just last week, that Dr. Song's team has taken a giant step toward realizing that dream. With support from the David Townsend Family, they have discovered the genetic mechanism that triggers the destruction of

neurons in patients with Down's Syndrome and Alzheimer's Disease – a discovery that now provides them with a potential new target for drugs that may forestall dementia.

And if we really want to see dreams in action, we need only talk to our students – including the thousands of UBC undergraduate students who demonstrate their passion for learning by undertaking what *Place and Promise* describes as Enriched Educational Experiences. These experiences can take the form of community or international service learning opportunities, first-year small class experiences, co-op work placements and mentorships, or undergraduate research projects – all designed to provide deep learning through practical experience and meaningful interactivity. And all designed to enable students to fulfill their dreams of fulfilling careers following graduation.

My point is that I think we all need to inject a bit more passion into our discussions about UBC. We need to match the level of passion and conviction that our students exhibit today – students who are not doing extraordinary things in order to achieve a goal, but to realize a dream. We also need to match the level of passion and conviction of our

researchers, who are doing extraordinary things in an effort to solve our most complex problems.

I learned shortly after I arrived at UBC that this alumni group represents a community of influence. And so, within your various spheres of influence, my request is that you speak with conviction about UBC, about what we, as a university community, are positioned to achieve, and about how the time is right to further build upon the strong foundation we have today. UBC is better placed than any public university in North America today to become a global leader in life sciences, in clean energy, in economics, in cold matter physics, in enhancing the undergraduate experience.

And in the back of our minds, we can fuel that conviction by being acutely aware of an exciting new phenomenon that has begun to unfold. The rise of the social sector that writer and economist Peter Drucker once predicted is becoming a reality in new and amazing ways. Some of the world's wealthiest people are now pursuing bold new dreams, not focused on building bigger companies, not on amassing further wealth, but upon distributing their fortunes in a manner that

aids human kind in the greatest possible numbers. And they are convincing like-minded counterparts throughout the world to do the same. This is an incredibly significant development because major research universities like UBC are natural partners in fulfilling these bold new dreams.

Above all, we must simply believe that we can take UBC to the next phase of the journey we have collectively charted. We can have an even more powerful engine of social, cultural and economic development in our midst – as powerful as exists anywhere in the world.

But only if we think, speak and act with conviction and with passion, and only if, when and because... we dream - - together.

Thank you once again for being here today – good health and good fortune to all.