

President's Message – February 2013

A great deal has taken place on campus since the semester began in early January, and it's hard to believe how quickly February has arrived.

One of the events held on campus last month – and which I was pleased to see was very well-attended – was the open dialogue on January 15, at which we discussed many issues facing the University of Regina. Following the dialogue, I was asked by several members of the University community if there are ways they could support the University in terms of publicly communicating the importance of post-secondary education. There are a number of ways we can all play a role in this, and I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight one of them which I believe to be particularly important.

We all have positive stories about our post-secondary experience – studying or working at universities elsewhere in Canada or the world, or right here at the University of Regina. From my perspective, for example, I can see that a university education has had a tremendous impact on the lives of my five siblings and me. Having grown up in a small, isolated mining community, we were fortunate that attending university provided us with the opportunity to feed our passion for learning, develop new interests, learn about world issues, make life-long friends, and launch fulfilling careers both in our home province and in other parts of Canada. Our time at university was one of self-discovery, and ultimately, of transformation.

My story is in no way unique, because all of us have had similar experiences. As students, we may have been inspired at university by professors who, to paraphrase Plutarch, saw our minds as fires to be kindled rather than merely vessels to be filled. As faculty and staff, we have taken pride in the work we do to help the next generation of leaders in our communities prepare themselves for the future. We may have seen the lives of friends or family members be completely changed by their university education – or even by someone else whose education gave them the tools to make a difference for others.

At a time when issues such as budget concerns and the level of appropriate public funding are top of mind both at our University and at others across Canada and around the world, it can seem like an insurmountable challenge to communicate the overall value of a university education. Things like CBC's recently aired "Generation Jobless" documentary certainly don't help in that regard. It is heartening, though, that for every argument such as that, there is a counterpoint like an article from the Toronto Star last year that publicized a study on the financial benefits that come from funding post-secondary institutions:

<http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/article/1128781--investing-more-public-dollars-in-post-secondary-education-pays-dividends-b-c-report-finds>

Of course, the financial benefit of investing in universities is only one part of the picture – which is why it is more important than ever for all of us to publicly communicate the benefits of post-secondary education on which one cannot place a dollar value. We see everyday how what we do can help change students' lives. We see students thrive in our classrooms, grow through international educational experiences, become community ambassadors through varsity sport,

and perform ground-breaking research with their professors. In short, we see them graduate as people who are both inspired and trained to make a difference in the world.

Going forward, I encourage you to reflect on your personal experience in post-secondary education, and take every opportunity to talk to your friends, neighbours, and public officials about how we serve our students, our communities, and our province. These are the stories we need to tell about our University to help encourage the public not just to support investment in higher education, but to push for it.

That support is alive and well on our campus, even in difficult financial times. Earlier today, we announced that the Family Campaign has raised more than \$800,000 for the renewal of College Avenue campus – something that has meant a financial sacrifice for many people in our University community, and sets a strong example for the public of how committed we are to our students' education, and how forward-thinking we are as an institution.

We must continue to be forward-thinking, and place a priority on planning for the future. To that end, over the coming months I will host a number of “dialogue breakfasts” in which I will meet with approximately a dozen faculty and staff at a time to hear your perspectives on our University, and answer any questions you may have. Should you wish to participate in one of these dialogues, please contact Cheryl Sweet at cheryl.sweet@uregina.ca to co-ordinate.

In closing, I would like to reiterate some of what I said in my January message. We are all in this together, and I know that everyone at this University works hard to ensure that our students have the best educational experience possible. In difficult times like this, it is more important than ever to pull together for the sake of our shared academic mission.