President’s message – February 2017

Members of the University of Regina community,

Last week, in front of some 300 business people, donors, community leaders, elected officials, students, faculty and staff, I had the pleasure of delivering the third annual State of the University Address to the Regina and District Chamber of Commerce. The presentation, entitled “From Rugged Brat to Community Leader,” focused on the evolution of the University over the past several decades. And no, the “Rugged Brat” wasn’t a reference to me, as many people seem to have thought!

Rather, “rugged brat” comes from a speech made in the early 1970s by Dr. John Archer, who at that time was Principal of the University of Saskatchewan – Regina Campus.

Dr. Archer said:

“The Regina Campus is still a question mark in some people’s mind. This, too, will pass. Regina will be proud of this rugged brat that squats so starkly in the southeast environs of the city. Reginans have reason to be proud of it now, were they to consider seriously the great progress made in a scant ten years.”

If Dr. Archer thought the Regina Campus had made great strides in the first ten years of its existence, then he would be delighted with the state in which we find our University today. And I think it’s safe to say that those who attended last week’s presentation were quite impressed by our continuing contributions to the communities we serve.

In past years, my address focused on how the University makes a difference to our region, and the economic impact we have on the city and the province. This year, in light of Premier Wall’s emphasis on the need for transformational change in our province, I thought I would illustrate how the University is always changing, progressing and adapting. I was so pleased to share with the audience some of the shining examples of innovation and transformation throughout our history.

I told the audience that in 1966, when we were still the University of Saskatchewan – Regina Campus, our enrolment was some 2,255 students. At that time, the Classroom Building, Laboratory Building, Physical Activity Centre and Education Building were brand new, and a number of other buildings – including the Library and Campion College – were either under construction or in the early stages of planning. Believe it or not, in those days students, faculty and staff walked on wooden planks in some areas to get from one building to another. Today, by contrast, we serve almost 15,000 students and the facilities (including our sidewalks!) on campus have been considerably enhanced. In fact, we have added 1.5 million square feet of building space since 1994. That has been transformational in terms of accommodating our growing number of students and providing the best possible learning environment for them.

I also provided material evidence of how we have worked to close the gender and visible minority gaps at our University. As an illustration, I showed the audience a photo and asked
them to guess who the 26 white males depicted in the photo were. It was the 1969-70 Faculty of Administration graduating class. Next, I showed a photo of the graduating class of last year’s Faculty of Business Administration. There were 340 graduates from a large number of ethnic backgrounds, and 55 per cent were women – quite a transformation in the make-up of the faculty!

I reminded those present that in 1969, the University of Saskatchewan – Regina Campus established the first Co-operative Education Program in Western Canada and that in 1972, the Faculty of Engineering had one of only three co-operative engineering programs in all of Canada. At that time, there were 98 students in the program. As early as 1973, our annual report noted something that is still true today – that students could “earn while they learned.” In 2016, we had 772 students in co-op placements and those students earned more than $9 million in salaries, helping pay for their schooling and make connections with potential employers.

I talked of how our predecessors sowed the seeds of Indigenization and internationalization at our University decades ago. I spoke about the 1976 establishment of the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, the first institution of its kind in Canada. I relayed that the number of self-declared Indigenous students at the University and Federated Colleges has grown by 84 per cent since 2009, and now makes up 13 per cent of the student body – one of the highest percentages in the country.

I also spoke about our long history working with international partners, and how the University of Regina was the first university in Canada to formalize relationships with Chinese institutions. Our partnership with Shandong University for example, dates back to 1981, and is still strong today. I spoke with pride about our increasingly diverse student body, and how 70 per cent of our students now come from outside Regina. Our students originate from more than 100 countries around the globe – something that few could have envisioned several decades ago.

It was a great pleasure last week to be able to speak about these accomplishments and many more to such a distinguished audience. I closed my address with a quotation from our Chancellor, Dr. Jim Tomkins, from his 2007 speech when he was installed as President:

“The University of Regina is not the same institution it was ten or twenty years ago. We expect universities to evolve, but the transformation of this university has been stunning. The most obvious change is in the physical appearance of the campus . . . . Of course, what is truly important is what is happening inside those facilities.”

We all know that education has the power to make our world a better place, and those of us associated with the University of Regina are fortunate to live that reality every day. I want to thank each of you for your many contributions, and for all you do to make sure that what happens inside the walls of our University continues to be so meaningful and so transformational!

Sincerely,
Dr. Vianne Timmons
President and Vice-Chancellor