

Keynote Speech by Senator Vivienne Poy

**Universities Engaging
With Their Social and Cultural Environment**

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Abstract:

Universities are part of society. They are not, as some would have us believe, ivory towers removed from the world. They must be continually engaged with the social, cultural, political, and economic changes taking place in the world around them. New ideas that begin in their classrooms and laboratories can effect change among faculty and students, and ultimately, reach beyond the campus to the outside world. As academic centres that produce the leaders of tomorrow, universities have a responsibility to reflect the society they serve, and to take a leadership role in producing graduates who have the requisite skills to bring about positive and ethical social change.

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. I am very honoured to be in such distinguished company both as a speaker, and participant, at this Conference. I would, first of all, like to bring greetings from the Senate of Canada and from the University of Toronto.

As the newly elected Chancellor of the University of Toronto, and an individual who has been working with communities across Canada, as well as having had a long-term involvement with various universities in Canada, I have had reason to reflect on the theme of my talk today, and that is, how universities should engage with their social and cultural environment, and the roles universities can and should play in society. I believe that universities have an obligation to both reflect, and to serve, their communities, their countries, as well as serving the global community. As the purveyors of higher education, it is the universities' duty to give intellectual as well as moral and social instruction. As the institutions that produce the leaders of tomorrow, universities play a significant role in

shaping government policies, social programmes, and the fundamental ideas that impact every one of us.

My topic today will mainly focus on Canada and in particular, the University of Toronto: its vision, its policies, and its partnership role in Toronto, in Canada, and in the world.

First, let us look at what has been happening in the world in the latter part of the last century that has had a great impact on the way we live. It is the process of globalization.

Over 30 years ago, Marshall McLuhan coined the term “the global village”. Globalisation has led to the realization of this concept as communication has speeded up, and borders between nations have become increasingly porous. Globalization is a current reality that has already rearranged our lives. There are many facets of globalization, but I will only deal with that of people and knowledge.

I believe one of the most important aspects of globalization is the increased migration of peoples, be they refugees, economic migrants or immigrants. The policy of immigration varies from country to country, but in Canada, it has changed the face of our country. According to our last Census (2001), 13% of the Canadian population was identified as visible minority. In cities, such as Toronto, my home, the numbers are much higher at around 37% since Toronto has traditionally been one of the favourite cities for new immigrants to settle in. These levels of immigration to Canada, while challenging for Canada’s collective identity, also offer potential benefits. According to Canada’s Department of Human Resources, because of our declining birth rate, by 2011, immigrants will account for all net-labour force growth in Canada. It is therefore vitally important that Canada fully utilizes its human resources wisely.

The migration of peoples from many different cultures to a geographic area makes multiculturalism inevitable. Canada officially became a multicultural country when our Multiculturalism Policy was established by our former Prime Minister, Pierre Elliot Trudeau in 1971. In recent years, Toronto was designated by author Pico Iyer in his book *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home* (2001) as the most multicultural city in the world, more so than London and New York.

Diversity, inclusiveness and equity are, therefore, important policy missions for the University of Toronto.

The migration of peoples brings knowledge of different cultures. There is no comparison between reading books and getting the knowledge first hand from our friends and neighbours by talking, interacting, and sharing food with them, and living among them. In Toronto, our schools look like a microcosm of the world. For example, in the academic year 2001-2002, the University of Toronto was already made up of over 53% of students who were not of European descent. I believe Canadians have a lot to gain by our daily interactions with those from around the world.

2001 was declared by the United Nations as the “year of dialogue among civilizations,” emphasizing that the globalization process does not only encompass economic, financial and technological aspects, but must also focus on human cultural, spiritual dimensions, and on the interdependence of mankind and its rich diversity.” UNESCO sees this dialogue as an essential stage in the process of human development that is both sustainable and equitable, which humanizes globalization and lays the basis of an enduring peace by nurturing conscience and a common basis for human existence that is rooted in history, heritage and tradition. If this dialogue had started a lot earlier, and had been successful over the years, could we have avoided the terrorist attack of Sept. 11? It’s an interesting thought.

Globalization has been accompanied by a shift in the resources that are of value to developed countries. Increasingly, knowledge, rather than natural resources, is the most significant asset to any nation, and Canada is no exception. Knowledge economies place a premium on human resources, and attracting and retaining the best possible minds has become the goal of many nations. Knowledge economies view knowledge as the basic organizing principle around which society revolves. And this is where universities have come to play an important role in the economic success of many nations.

The rapid expansion of the knowledge economy has led to potential advances in science that pose both challenges and opportunities. Many of these advances raise ethical questions. For example: human reproductive technologies now allow for the potential manipulation of the genetic structure of women’s eggs prior to implantation in the womb. Cloning, stem cell research and the human genome project, while undoubtedly advancing

scientific research and capabilities, pose complex ethical questions that need to be addressed. This is being dealt with by different governments, and in the case of Canada, Bill C-13, an Act Respecting Assisted Human Reproduction, was reported to the House of Commons in March this year, and is awaiting third Reading when Parliament resumes this month.

The advance of science is not necessarily, in itself, progress. Moral decisions need to be made about what aspects of science are beneficial to humanity. There are also questions about what should be considered public or private discoveries. In other words, what scientific discoveries belong to the whole of humanity? Which leads to questions about patenting essential findings.

The knowledge-based economy has focused the attention of governments and private sectors on universities as never before. In the case of Canada, our government acknowledges that success in the 21st century will depend on how quickly we can develop and adopt new and innovative processes and products. To cite a few examples, in 1998, our government established the Canada Foundation for Innovation that supports the modernization of research infrastructure at Canadian universities with a capital investment of C\$3.15 billion. In the same year, the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation was established by an Act of Parliament with an endowment of C\$2.5 billion to help Canadians meet the challenges of a rapidly changing economy and society by creating opportunities for them to pursue their post-secondary education. In fostering innovations that require the best and the brightest, our government provided C\$900 million to establish 2,000 research chairs in Canadian universities known as the 21st Century Chairs for Research Excellence. With these initiatives by our government, it is, therefore, vital for universities to play an important role, not only in the pursuit of knowledge, but also in dealing with ethical issues that are central to that knowledge.

So, how are we, in the university communities, dealing with the ever-changing world in the 21st century?

In the pursuit of knowledge, training in the professions is not going to be enough to prepare our students for the future. We need to stress lifelong learning and adaptability. Students should have intelligent and applicable knowledge that will help them to survive in the increasingly rapid changing world.

Aside from acquiring academic qualifications, students need to develop soft-skills such as independence, flexibility, mobility, knowledge of different languages, cultural and intercultural competencies, the ability for team work and problem solving, as well as the capacity to work under pressure.

Universities should lead the way in the recognition of the true value of international cooperation, leading to better understanding of other cultures, since many western democracies think that developing countries are uncivilized or under-civilized. For example, in 1991, the Canadian International Development Agencies funded an intellectual cooperation between Canadian academics with six normal universities in China, in which the University of Toronto was involved, with the aim of helping to upgrade the academic levels of young Chinese scholars and give them exposure to an international milieu. Such was the mindset of government officials. However, the Canadian academics knew better, realizing that China had a tremendously rich culture and educational heritage. So, instead of Canada helping China, the project became a dialogue involving mutual learning and upgrading of academic standards and the development of young scholars in both countries.

International conferences such as “Knowledge Across Cultures: Universities East and West,” which was held in 1992, and attended by scholars in science and social areas from China, India and the Arabic countries, help to bring the world closer together. Academics can and do have a tremendous influence on the policies of our governments, as well as the way we think.

An important phenomenon in the university communities in the last half of the 20th century is the gradual appearance of women in the faculties, as chairs of departments, deans and as presidents of universities in North America. However, these numbers cannot be compared to the percentage of women in the student bodies. Over the past 15 years, women have accounted for 80% of the enrolment growth in Canadian universities. In Canada, in 1995, 54% of full time university students were female, but only 23% of faculty positions were held by women and minorities, and mostly in junior posts, known as the Triple A Club of professors – acting, assistant and associate. At present, the number of women students in Canadian universities is 59% in the undergraduate level, and 51% in graduate school. So, equity in hiring is an important issue for Canadian universities.

Another important issue is the increasing equality of gays and lesbians in Canadian society. With the recent, very public, debates on the marriage of gays and lesbians, I'm proud to say that the Ontario Court of Appeal has ruled in their favour, and the province of British Columbia has legalized it as well. It is now up to the federal government to deal with it in Parliament. Similar equality issues face our universities. I will go into further details as to the policy at the University of Toronto.

So, accepting diversity, be that of culture, colour, sex, sexual orientation or physical disability, means affirming differences rather than merely tolerating them. Embracing diversity is an important asset in any society, and it is the duty of universities to take on this responsibility to educate future generations.

Ultimately, the teaching of ethics and how an individual handles moral complexities will be the most important role of universities, since knowledge in the wrong hands can do unimaginable damage to the world. In the face of new scientific discoveries and the recent disastrous global effects of lack of ethics in some corporations, the teaching of ethics must go hand in hand with the pursuit of knowledge.

How is the University of Toronto responding to these challenges?

As the largest, and one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in Canada, the University of Toronto has an important role to play in addressing the challenges posed by the dynamic changes that are taking place in the 21st century. In this effort, the University of Toronto is placed in a unique set of circumstances. Its geographic location, Canadian liberalism, the university's historic legacy, as well as its current vision make it well-placed to tackle issues surrounding globalisation, knowledge economies, scientific developments and diversity.

As I mentioned earlier, the city of Toronto is one of, if not the most multicultural city in the world, where 4 out of 10 people speak a language other than English or French as their mother tongue. Toronto is home to virtually all the world's cultural groups and more than 100 languages are spoken there.

As one of a number of immigrant receiving countries, Canada is noted as the only country in the world to have passed a Multiculturalism Act (1988) that is designed to provide a roadmap for managing diversity. Unlike the United States that emphasizes a melting pot, Canada's approach is one of gradual integration and education about the values Canadians share while recognizing the inherent cultural differences of others as a rich addition to Canada's tapestry, and a potential resource. In case some of you may not know, the third most spoken language in Canada is Chinese.

Historically, the University of Toronto has taken a leadership role in Canadian society and has produced many of the leaders of Canada in the last 175 years. Writers such as Margaret Atwood, Rohinton Mistry, Robertson Davies and Stephen Leacock to name a few, as well as two of Canada's most prominent Prime Ministers, William Lyon Mackenzie King and Lester B. Pearson. Human rights scholar, Michael Ignatieff, is a graduate. The University of Toronto has produced many leaders in the areas of business, science, sports and politics. These graduates are not afraid to challenge traditional thinking or to bring new approaches to their fields. They are the driving force behind the economy of Canada. I am proud to share such good company in calling the University of Toronto my alma mater.

The University of Toronto can also boast of its reputation as one of the top research universities in the world. Its research laboratories were responsible for the discovery of insulin, the creation of the first electronic heart pacemaker, the discovery of the gene responsible for the most severe form of Alzheimer's, and the world's first sciatic nerve transplant. Dr. Tak Mak, a world-renowned immunologist, who first cloned the genes of the human T cell antigen receptor, and whose findings have had great impact on our daily lives, is just one example of the calibre of professors that the University has succeeded in attracting.

With such a long and illustrious past, and a prominent place in Canadian society, the history of the University of Toronto is intimately bound to the history of Canada. The changes in Canadian society are reflected in the face of the University of Toronto.

So what is its vision for the future?

To be globally competitive, the University of Toronto must recognize both the challenges and opportunities posed by globalisation, knowledge-based economies, and new advances in science, as well as the diversity of

the Canadian population. None of these issues are inherently negative or positive. The outcome will depend on having a strategy, while taking into account the ethical issues arising from globalisation, and scientific advances.

As a response to globalization, the University of Toronto is positioning itself to benefit from the accelerated movement of human resources. It stresses the importance of realizing the potential of its students and Faculty members, as well as its ability to attract and retain the very best from Canada and around the world.

In July, 2000, Prof. Robert Birgeneau assumed his position as the 14th president of the University of Toronto. In taking on the challenge of positioning the university as an “international” university, policy needed to be established which can facilitate this process. He promised to be part of the transformation of the University of Toronto over the next 30 years. In his installation address, he identified three principle themes that would “define” the University of Toronto during his presidency. These are:

1. the pursuit of excellence in research and education
2. equity in its recruitment of faculty and staff
3. outreach through greater voluntarism.

Since Canada has made the transition from a “commodity-based” economy to a “knowledge-based” economy, research universities like the University of Toronto function as economic engines for the country, and as such, will need to be able to compete in the global market. Even though the University of Toronto already boasts many leading scholars and educators, in order to achieve “excellence”, their numbers need to be increased. Dr. Birgeneau believes in the aggressive recruitment of top faculty worldwide because an excellent faculty will attract both superb staff and outstanding students. Excellence in research requires a faculty that is deeply committed to the pursuit of new knowledge.

In order for the University of Toronto to achieve and sustain a world leadership position, the university must provide first-class infrastructure, research facilities as well as internationally competitive salaries. In order to attract the top graduate students, the university must be able to offer support packages that are competitive with the best universities in the US and in European. At his installation, Dr. Birgeneau announced that the fundraising campaign that was targeted at \$600 million was to be increased to \$1 billion,

and the campaign was to be extended to end in December 2004. I am proud to say that our target will have been reached by the end of this year, which means we are a year ahead of schedule.

In addressing the problems of equity in employment, Dr. Birgeneau said, "It is self-evident that we cannot achieve true excellence here at the University of Toronto unless we access fully the entire talent pool." He referred to this as "brain redistribution."

He continued, "We have, without a doubt, the most diverse student body of any university in the world. Fully one-half of our students self-identify as visible minorities. More than half are women. Close to half were born outside of Canada and about two-thirds speak another language at home in addition to English.... So far our faculty does not reflect the dramatic demographic transformation that has taken place in our student body and in our community. The responsibility for inclusion must be distributed broadly... to ensure that we hire and promote only the best faculty and that these faculty members are drawn from the widest pools possible... I am absolutely convinced that if we hire well, with excellence in research and education as our sole criterion, then at the end of my presidency, our faculty will look much more like our student body than it does at the present time and concomitantly will be measurably stronger."

Being a public university, Dr. Birgeneau believes that it is the responsibility of the University of Toronto to ensure that the students have access to a broad-based education, because they need to know "who they are, where they come from and where they are going." He called this "new liberal education." A senior Council on Undergraduate Education was set up to focus on "educating" instead of "training" the students, exposing them to a rich mixture of humanities, arts, social science, science and technology.

Because students have an obligation to give back to society, there is an emphasis on the importance of voluntarism and involvement in the community. Voluntarism and student services are integrated into student life. The University needs to be an integral part of the community, both in reaching out and serving the needy.

To cite a couple of examples, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE), offers educators in the province, and around the world, the best in teacher training programs and

curriculum development. The University of Toronto also has affiliations with nine different hospitals and health care facilities that facilitate the bridge between ongoing research and practice in the health care field.

Now, we must take stock of what the University of Toronto has achieved so far in its engagement with Canadian society as well as the world community. It is not possible to list everything, but I will attempt to raise a few points.

Global health inequities are one of the most pressing ethical challenges facing the world today. In 1995, the University of Toronto established a Joint Centre for Bioethics (JCB) in partnership with a number of affiliated hospitals, representing the largest group of in-hospital bio ethicists in Canada. It was recognized as the first World Health Organization collaborating centre in bioethics. The Centre investigates complex issues such as end-of-life decisions, ethical issues arising in emergency and acute health care, child and women's health, cultural effects, neuroethics, organizational ethics and genomics in global health.

Since genomics research is mostly concerned with the health priorities of the world's wealthiest nations, the Joint Centre for Bioethics is involved in a number of projects aiming to avert the formation of a "genomic divide" between the developed and the developing world.

While it is important to consider ethical questions in medicine, the recent events in the business world have made it apparent that the study of ethical considerations needs to be extended across the curriculum. For example, the Clarkson Centre for Business Ethics and Board Effectiveness was founded in 1988 in the Department of Business Management, which is now known as the Rotman School of Management of the University of Toronto. The Centre has proved instrumental in dealing with the lessons learned from the Enron scandal. In addition to offering awards for ethics in action, and good governance, the school has now pioneered a system that rates the effectiveness of Boards of Directors. As social, business, and scientific issues become increasingly complex, moral considerations need to be considered alongside the search for knowledge by universities in order that students can learn to apply ethics when they enter the workforce.

With respect to equity employment, the picture was actually quite pathetic when Dr. Birgeneau took over the presidency in the year 2000. The

situation has much improved, but the faculty at the moment is still far from reflecting the demographic transformation that has taken place in the student body or in the community. So, in order to make progress, equity in hiring faculty has been given the highest priority, with the responsibility for inclusion distributed from the deans, to the department heads, to the search committees, and to individual faculty. In 2002, a full time Director of Faculty Renewal position was established to develop, as well as implement, workable strategies for senior academic administrators, deans and chairs dealing with diversity and inclusion considerations as part of the faculty search process. The present University policy is intended to ensure and foster an environment in which accessibility to employment is open to all who qualify.

President Birgeneau stated last year that, “Our University’s success will in good part be measured ultimately by how representative our faculty is of student body and country.” In the recruitment of faculty, the University of Toronto is committed to the objectives of “excellence and equity.” A diverse faculty ultimately enriches the university by virtue of its background and intellectual viewpoints. When we speak of diversity, we mean that of visible minorities, women, aboriginals, homosexuals and persons with disabilities.

To give some examples, according to the university of Toronto Employment Equity Report of 2002, visible minorities represent 11 % of tenure stream faculty, and when you compare that percentage with the 53% of the student body, there is going to be a lot of catching up to do. The representation of Aboriginal persons is at 0.6 %, and 2.6% for those who self-identified as persons with disabilities.

Since 1996, the number of women in academic leadership positions at the University of Toronto has greatly improved. Women now represent 28% of all tenure stream faculty, 25.4% of Academic Directors, Chairs and Associate Deans. In senior administration position, women hold 3 out of 10 present positions. However, please keep in mind the percentage of female students enrolled in the University: it’s over 57% in the undergraduate level, over 54% in the masters level, and over 51% at the PhD level. So, in comparison, we’ve got a long way to go to achieve equality. It is interesting to note that in the conclusion of the 2002 Report, it was pointed out that the progress in the representation of women and visible minorities was in large part due to the gains made in recent hires.

Two full time positions have been created, one dealing with the health and well-being of staff, and the other with the quality of work-life. Both of these positions are charged with creating a positive work environment that enables staff to balance personal, family and work responsibilities. A series of “Early Vision” breakfast lectures for women faculty and staff started this year, giving women who have broken through the “glass ceiling” a platform to discuss their significant contributions to the institutions they work in. A very successful and well-attended conference was also held at the beginning of this year on “Equity and Excellence.”

According to the Ontario Disabilities Act, persons with disabilities have the right of full participation in public life in Ontario. Because of the general lack of understanding of persons with disabilities, the University of Toronto is focusing on proactive work on disability issues by holding half-day retreats for Human Resources staff about disabilities and best practices in dealing with persons with disabilities, and by distributing printed information and other educational projects.

One group that has yet to benefit fully in the recent diversity and employment equity initiatives are Aboriginal persons. In order to redress this issue, it is recommended that a stronger relationship with the First Nations House be established to develop a mutually beneficial relationship with Toronto’s Aboriginal communities. A number of professional faculties at the University, such as the Faculty of Law, have also set specific acceptance targets for qualified Aboriginal applicants.

In addition, the Co-ordinator for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered and Queer issues now has a 50% appointment to the Office of the Vice-President of Human Resources. Although the issues of sexual minorities are not covered under federal employment equity legislation, these issues are dealt with at the University of Toronto because they impact on the broader equity principles of inclusion.

In the Report of 2002, it is stated that it is the policy of the University of Toronto to have full minority representation at senior levels, which would provide a rich diversity of perspectives that could inspire the University to develop fresh and challenging ideas, priorities and leadership styles.

The Community-University Research Alliance was formed as an outreach group to bring together community groups and the academic

community for research and action. To further strengthen the relationships with community members, leaders, scholars and educational and job training institutions, the University accesses inter-cultural information, work-study placements and mentorship programmes, such as the Summer Mentorship Program for promising high school students from communities under-represented at the University of Toronto. “Steps to University” outreach programmes provide access to those who otherwise would not have a chance to enter university.

Relationships are also forged with agencies that deal with new immigrants and refugees. In the case of convention refugee claimants who are waiting to become landed immigrants, the University, together with the Maytree Foundation, provides them with financial support so that they can attend university. Projects and workshops are also carried out by the Faculty of Social Work’s Anti-Racism, Multiculturalism and Native Issues Centre to reach out to different ethnic communities. Networks are formed with advocacy groups for persons with disabilities and sexual minorities. From these relationships, the University of Toronto exhibits its serious commitment to diversification, and at the same time, the staff will be able to locate qualified recruits for available positions, increase its knowledge and inter-cultural skills, and learn better ways to attract and retain qualified applicants.

For students involved in these outreach activities, there is tremendous benefit. They are exposed to some of the complex questions of real-life situations that may not arise in the classroom. Students have an opportunity to learn how to interact with different communities, and may be faced with moral dilemmas that require ethical consideration. Education in the community prepares graduates with both intellectual and emotional intelligence for the workforce. With globalization, students with confidence gained from practical experience will reach out beyond Canada’s borders through international exchanges.

Outreach that begins in our immediate community, extends to the rest of the country and to the wider world. These networks that are being formed with different cultural groups, together with the policy of equity and diversity, will have an immense effect on increasing the reputation of the University across the oceans. One kind of networking I know very well is that of the overseas ethnic Chinese. There are approximately 80 million of us, and we work in every kind of profession and every kind of business

imaginable. The ties that link us together are our heritage, culture, and interesting enough, Chinese language newspapers, which are distributed in almost every corner of the world where there are Chinese, and that is literally everywhere. So, news about the University of Toronto will immediately be known in other corners of the world. I presume the same applies to many cultural groups as well.

Since September 11th, the world seemed to have become a much smaller place. Global inequities, poverty, and lack of education, are issues that can no longer be ignored. The knowledge revolution, as dramatic as it has been, has left some groups very much behind. I expect the University of Toronto will have a role to play in sharing knowledge resources.

Looking ahead, the University of Toronto will expect to be hiring as many as 1,000 new faculty members by the year 2011. The reason I use that particular year is because President Birgeneau expects his term to finish then. He is convinced that, if the University hires well, with excellence in research and in education as its sole criterion, by the time of his departure in 2011, the faculty will look much more like the student body, and concomitantly, will be measurably stronger. It will be well placed to take advantage of the positive aspects of globalization, that of human resources, and knowledge from around the world.

These are exciting times, and I feel very fortunate to be part of the Canadian government as a Senator, and to be elected as the Chancellor to represent such an eminent university as the University of Toronto. Thank you.