

State of the University Address – Dr. Lloyd Axworthy
September 9, 2011
Convocation Hall

I want to welcome all those who have come this morning, especially those alumni who are joining us for Homecoming. Your presence here adds a special dimension to this occasion because you represent the valued history of the institution.

It is important to relate that last evening as I spent time with members of my own graduating class, what was foremost in there telling of our time together were the memories of certain professors, classes and the contribution they made to our learning and personal development.

That sense of personal contact between professor and student I believe is the enduring strength of this University and one that we continually work to enhance and retain.

But the way this work is done and the changes that have to be made to respond to new conditions, a constantly changing student body, and a different community landscape present major navigational challenges.

I want to outline how I believe the defining values of the University can be given contemporary expression and how we are engaged in a transition that is redefining the institution to meet its present and future goals.

This has been an ongoing conversation that I have been engaging with since I took on my role as President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Winnipeg seven years ago.

It begins with a belief in the importance of education as a fundamental building block in our community, as a prerequisite for the enhancement of individual talent and as an experience that must be open and available to all those who seeks its benefits.

That's what motivated the founders of Manitoba College back in the 1870's and which have been the guiding principles with succeeding generations ever since. But such beliefs are not a prescription for standing pat or being self-satisfied. At different times this place has been an epicenter of change as an institution and a force for innovation in the wider community.

It is the responsibility of this University to evolve in line with the needs of a community, and to define itself in accordance to the demands of the students and the community with which it interacts. This is what I would like to draw your attention to today, as we come to the close of one phase of development and again enter into a new conversation about where we are headed next.

A good example is from my period here when students, faculty, administration and governing regents made the decision to stay in the downtown of the city and pursue the goal of becoming an independent, self governing university offering a distinctive choice in the style of its pedagogy, the content of it's courses and the role it plays in helping to define the city, the province, indeed the country and beyond.

If there is one thread that runs through the way we have chosen it is in the many and diverse pathways made in shaping a distinctive and unique institution.

For much of our existence we were primarily an undergraduate university but if you look around you and spend any time on this campus, you'll see that definition no longer applies. We are not a mega university but, we have become a thriving active community of different learners and scholars.

This year we have enrolled over 9,500 undergraduate students, 500 to 600 graduate students, and 500 collegiate students. And then there are thousands of learners who come here for Continuing Education courses and our English Language Program.

Along with the over 3000 young people from the inner-city who we serve through our community learning and developmental youth programs, when you count the faculty and staff, we have some 14,000 people engaged on campus on a regular basis. We are molding a different kind of multi-purpose university, building a different paradigm for higher education.

This presence is having a huge impact on the downtown and on the city. Not simply in our growing physical footprint or the \$50 million that we have invested in new facilities, but in the activities that go on here. Let me outline some of the work being accomplished right now by both our faculty and our staff.

Our faculty are being recognized and rewarded for their research. **Craig Willis** in biology is becoming very well known for his studies on bats, particularly the problem of White Nose Syndrome that is decimating bat populations in eastern North America. He is the recipient of the University's first Chancellor's Chair.

Evelyn Peters (Geography) is a Canada Research Chair studying the social geography of urban Aboriginal communities. She is working closely with the Institute of Urban Studies to open the new Centre for Inner-City Research, Community Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), to be housed on the third floor of the new Richardson College for the Environment and Science Complex.

The research projects our faculty members participate in have far reaching global impacts. This past year I had the privilege of reading and commenting on **Jan Stewart's** valuable writing and work on the specific educational needs of refugees and families affected by war. Or, for example, **Melanie O'Gorman's** research in the Faculty of Business and Economics work on African economic development.

The Department of **Theatre and Film**, has one of the strongest and most comprehensive Theatre Programs in the country. We are both innovative in our curriculum while our foundations remain solid in both humanities and in Theology, a faculty celebration its 140th anniversary.

The **Institute for Women's and Gender Studies** organized a powerful exhibit called "REDress" using red dresses to draw attention to the sorry record of inattention to the more than 500 missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada.

The **Institute of Urban Studies** is spearheading a major study and mental illness and housing in the city. They have also just completed an extensive multi-year sustainability planning project in collaboration with the Town of Churchill.

We were also the only University presence at the recent Grand Opening of the new Churchill Northern Studies Centre. Our faculty and students have had a long relationship with the centre, and it has offered a unique place for research, learning and collaboration.

I was pleased to hear about an international workshop held late last year, hosting a number of prestigious scholars on the Acts of Pilate. Events such as this speak to the calibre of our faculty, such as **Zbigniew Izydorczyk** (English), which extends far beyond the walls of our campus.

Beginning in July of 2012, the Faculty of **Kinesiology** will be launched. The new faculty will be the mechanism to promote teaching, research, and programming in physical activity and sport to the benefit of students, faculty, staff, and the local community.

This new faculty will be housed in our new **Fieldhouse and Wellness Centre** located along Spence. In addition to offering a new a soccer field, the new facility will offer the campus and its surrounding community a centre for wellness that is long over due in this area of the city.

General wellbeing starts with good health and the University of Winnipeg has been entrusted, with generous public support, to house such a space.

Taking this responsibility seriously, we are also committed to drafting and signing a Community Charter, that will promote and ensure the best interests of the local community, including active participation and access to facilities and programs.

We are exploring new ways to incorporate digital learning into our curriculum. There is a new digital learning lab for high school students to explore the new applications of technology based learning, and we are able to create a “global classroom” setting utilizing our distinction as a location for Cisco TelePresence suites. There are also new courses in continuing education that use video gaming as a teaching tool.

There is a growing collaboration with indigenous communities on development projects, and a major effort to address the drop out rate of young indigenous students and bring them into the university fold.

I am pleased to report that in the past year alone, the University of Winnipeg has experienced a 24 percent increase in Indigenous student enrollment – a revealing testimony to our efforts to work in true and respectful partnership with First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and communities.

One of the reasons for the significant increase in the number of Indigenous students at the University is due to the creation of relevant and respectful programming.

We have won a place in a global network of universities exploring better ways to train professionals in development practices through our **Masters in Development Practice** with a focus on Indigenous development.

This two-year program of study consists of course work, applied research and field placements. The program transcends borders by offering online “global classrooms” that will connect students to an exclusive international network of 22 universities as well as to local, rural, and remote communities within Manitoba.

Just a few weeks ago we welcomed the very first cohort of MDP students on campus. They took part in an extended orientation session hosted by Fisher River Cree Nation and had the opportunity to learn from both faculty and local First Nations leaders on the development issues that indigenous peoples face, both locally and around the world.

We have created our own social enterprise food service called **Diversity**, which under the leadership of chef Ben Kramer, has set new standards for delicious and healthy eating on a university campus while hiring and training over seventy inner city residents and has been recognized by the Globe and Mail for its positive impact on the availability of quality food locally.

We have got a lot to be proud of. During my last State of the University Address In 2007, we set out to focus on sustainability in key areas, including recognizing our ability to act as stewards for the environment and to participate as leaders in defining the way that a university could lead in reducing its environmental footprint.

And, as in each of our initiatives, we set up for ourselves some very ambitious goals.

Each of UWinnipeg's new buildings is adding state-of the-art eco-friendly construction to the downtown. Each new building meets minimum LEED Silver standard (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design), with the Richardson College for the Environment and Science Complex working towards LEED Gold.

Older buildings on campus underwent a comprehensive facilities audit to improve energy and water efficiency. This year, UWinnipeg installed a hybrid heating system, allowing us to cut Greenhouse Gas emissions from older buildings by 1,000 tonnes a year, a reduction of almost 25%.

This contributes significantly to our goal to become Kyoto compliant by 2012 and our long term goal of becoming carbon-neutral.

We also set out to become financially sustainable. Our challenge was to find our way through using creative means. But we have benefited from the generosity of donors who could also see our vision for this campus and this impact has been significant.

We have recently entered our third track of revenue generation. We are doing this by providing organizations and private businesses access to our Cisco TelePresence capabilities, as well as developing ways to provide new services and applied research through our Community Renewal Corporation.

This includes a new entity called UWinnipeg Inc. Through this we will endeavor to find new and creative ways to use the leverage and legitimacy we have gained to become more self sufficient in the long run.

We are engaged with private partners in developing a way to manufacture medical isotopes, inexpensively without creating nuclear waste. We have also turned around already existing resources such as student housing and our food service into assets that now contribute to the economic stability of the University in modest ways.

Despite some challenges, we are succeeding in meeting most of our objectives and we've shifted the direction of this university into something that is becoming so much greater than the sum of its parts. Let me take this opportunity to go through some of these changes.

[3D Tour of Campus]

- **Wesley Hall** (starting point)
- **McFeetors Hall**
- **UWSA Daycare**
- **Richardson College for the Environment and Science Complex**
- **Buhler Centre/Plug-in Gallery**
- **AnX** (rapid transit hub)
- **Asper Centre for Theatre and Film**

- **Duckworth Centre/ Bill Wedlake Fitness Centre**
- **Proposed Fieldhouse and Wellness Centre**

Despite this physical transformation, the essential functions of our campus remain embedded in the foundations of intellectual pursuits and excellence in teaching, but they are not disconnected from the evolution that is happening around us. We have not done this in an isolated, ivory tower approach.

Beginning in September 2004 with a mandate to implement a strategic plan, The University of Winnipeg has been involved in well over 100 different consultations, including several large community meetings in the immediate inner-city neighbourhood.

What emerged out of this extensive consultative process was the concept of an educational precinct in the downtown, anchoring the west end of Portage Avenue and providing a network of related university, community, and business initiatives.

At our very foundation, our goal is always to provide students with an excellent level of post-secondary learning and confer degrees, but we needed to recognize the social and economic reality within which we were operating. We had to acknowledge the need for a relationship of reciprocity.

There were major demographic shifts underway. A historic movement of indigenous people to the city that brought with them an appetite to see their cultural rights and traditions recognized and respected, along with a desire to achieve a better social and economic place.

There has been over the last several years a large new Canadian population settling in Manitoba bringing richness of experience and a compelling demand for education. The baby boomers are now retiring in ever increasing numbers, bringing a demand for new educational opportunities, and creating a series of compelling issues on retirement, health care, pensions and political relevance.

Mary Oliver the American poet wrote a line in her poem that, “it’s not size but surge that tells us when we’re in touch with something real.”¹

They describe to me what we are experiencing here this morning - a surge forward in the onward progress of this University in achieving it's historical task of providing an excellent education for students, the most stimulating setting for innovative thought and research, and the most open and accessible system of learning possible for those with the appetite to learn from inner city Winnipeg to the northern communities of Manitoba and the burgeoning countries of India, China and the Americas.

The Greeks had a saying that first we shape our cities then they shape us. Winnipeg is coming into its own in defining a very active and forward looking place, especially in positioning us as a distinctive player in an ever increasing and interdependent global system of urban regions that are becoming the prime areas of action in the 21st century.

¹ Mary Oliver, “Little Owl Who Lives in the Orchard.”

This surge brought together men and women from the faculty, staff and administration, working in close concert with builders of excellence and designers of imagination to create a campus in the downtown of Winnipeg that adds to the rolling renaissance of daring initiatives that is making Winnipeg a City of the Future.

That is what we as a University in a downtown urban setting are now developing: a capacity to extend our hand to community and, through a variety of partnerships, to have an impact on the learning experience of a significant number of people beyond the conventional orbit of University programming.

What has been a particular lesson for me coming into the University from an outside career is the immense potential that exists within the infrastructure, and among students, staff and faculty to be an anchor or hub of innovative community related learning activities.

In a very real way we are extending our mandate as a public institution. And in the process we are substantially adding to the learning experience of our students. There is a reciprocal, mutually reinforcing, benefit.

So while we are actively engaged in refurbishing the physical space we occupy in the downtown and Spence neighbourhood, we are also creating opportunities for community learning every step of the way.

We have been especially focused on addressing the barriers faced by individuals who have not been able to access resources or whose needs are not fully addressed within conventional school and educational structures. We endeavour to reach beyond the traditionally structured, classroom-oriented, lecture-based and timetabled concept of education into one that is much more inclusive.

In recognition of the importance of early intervention, we have created an **Innovative Learning Centre** (ILC) that brings a host of young students from the inner-city and North End into the University to participate in a series of unique learning initiatives, such as the Eco-Kids on Campus program.

Over the past three years, almost 3,900 children have participated in the ILC's **Eco-U Summer Camp** initiative – the largest free day camp for inner-city and Aboriginal children and youth in Winnipeg. Campers are engaged in a full slate of activities from environmental science experiments to cultural activities.

These direct community learning activities have been augmented this past year with perhaps our most innovative and complex program: a **Model School** set up in cooperation with the University's Collegiate High School to provide individualized learning to young people who were facing challenges in the public school system. Seven students graduated in 2011 with six of them expected to continue their studies.

To deal with the fundamental issue of financial need we created an **Opportunity Fund**. There are two streams- The Opportunity Fund tuition credit accounts for students in grades 4-12 in which the University will register credit for specific academic or community achievement.

Children earning these credits can apply them toward tuition and text books at the University of Winnipeg when they graduate from high school.

The second stream is the Opportunity Fund fast-track bursaries which have supported more than 750 Aboriginal, new Canadian, and other students without the means to attend University.

This historic push forward is due entirely to the dedication and talents of no small number of individuals. The Board of Regents, volunteer stewards of the university and their associates at the University of Winnipeg Foundation, board and directorship of the University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation all gave their support and encouragement with unflagging commitment even in some of the difficult days.

And to the administration and staff and faculty who have invested themselves into the future of this institutions and the many private and public donors who have made it possible.

We've been praised and criticized in these efforts. This University holds a lot of meaning to this city, and with so many stakeholders and finite resources, we have to acknowledge that we haven't been able to please every single interest.

But this is but the beginning, and the next phase is to build on the institutional capacity in order to maintain the surge.

So it is valuable to take stock and reflect on how far we have come, from the first consultations on strategic planning, to seeing it through. The focus here is about utilizing the changes we've gone through to chart a course based on our progress and incite momentum from within.

Continuing the conversation....

In the next year we will be beginning a new process of consultation, involving faculty, staff and the surrounding communities. We are looking to create a new definition of the role that a university can play in this city and in this province.

Piece by piece, building by building, program by program, we've realized that so many more opportunities and directions are beginning to present themselves.

So many possibilities for this University, but we must remain conscious of who we serve and not to over extend ourselves. We are a University on the move, but it is still very much under construction.

It has become time to ask ourselves, in five or ten years time, when we remove the scaffolding to reveal all that we've accomplished, what vision do we want to see as we step back to admire our efforts?

In the few exchanges I have had, there are already so many ideas and interest around what is possible.

I can see placing a greater emphasis on expanding the international reach of The University of Winnipeg. We have such an excellent and diverse teaching and student base.

In order to do this we must develop more exchange programs and academic cooperation agreements with foreign universities and work to recognize the international experiences of our faculty. Right now, Rob Bend is working in China to establish a satellite collegiate.

In a very organic kind of way we have outgrown our undergraduate label and we are now proving that The University of Winnipeg can too, hold its own in graduate studies and the MDP program should prove this. We won out in an international competition, and were recognized as capable and ready to provide this high level program.

Since we have broken free of our classic definition, we have been presented with the opportunity to be innovative and creative as we develop our graduate programs further. We can be responsive to the needs of a variety of different learners, from recent graduates to established professionals.

For future consideration are the options of graduate certificates for mid-level professionals looking to upgrade, or for recent graduates who are not yet prepared for graduate school.

In the MDP program we are already take the busy schedules of adult learners into consideration, and we are offering modular style courses that can take place over the weekend or in the evening.

We will also continue to do best with playing to our strengths and building on already existing resources. This allows us to consider graduate programming in areas such as inner-city and urban housing and development.

Here we must provide leadership in how to create opportunities for employment and economic development in our inner-city and downtown neighbourhoods. We must use our resources to initiate this process, as we have done with Diversity.

We also have the opportunity to work with some of the space in the downtown Bay building, with an intention of focusing on developing an Indigenous art and cultural centre which should offer a fitting compliment to both the Plug-in and Winnipeg Art Gallery within its view as well as a new teaching and learning centre.

With our Global College already positioned as a leader in human rights education, we are also in an excellent position to work in collaboration with the Canadian Museum of Human Rights to further this end.

Our interests are complimentary and together we can create Winnipeg as an international centre for the promote dialogue and action around the topic of human rights.

For example, in my previous career, I was involved in defining and promoting the international adoption of the Responsibility to Protect doctrine. It is a phrase I am confident you have become more familiar with in recent months from the news stories coming out of Libya.

I would like to see the University of Winnipeg to take this topic and evaluate its further development and implementation. This includes possibly hosting a major conference on R2P on campus.

It is also time to evaluate our sustainability plan. We have been successful overall, and the University of Winnipeg has acted as a leader in our efforts to challenge long established practices.

Our campus has grown and we will still reduce our carbon footprint. But this will continue to be a challenge, but it is one that is worth pursuing.

At the Grand Opening of the Richardson College for the Environment and Science Complex we hosted a public forum on the topic of “Greening Our City”. We will continue to offer public lectures and discussions on the topic in an effort to keep the conversation on sustainability alive on campus.

The third floor of the Science Complex will now house the Sustainability Office, but it will also contain the Institute for Urban Studies and the UW Community Renewal Corporation, which will form the foundation of a developing think tank on sustainability and community economic renewal.

We have earned the confidence of our donors, our alumni, and the numerous passersby on the street that we can set a strategy in place and follow it through. Now we must make the appeal that this movement we have started continues to require the support of members of the community.

Through scholarships and bursaries, we are able to increase access. By funding research chairs of interest we become the fuel for innovation and the creation of knowledge.

And we must experiment and learn how to make the best use of new distance learning technologies. We have a great advantage being the home of a Cisco research site.

This is but the beginning of a conversation. Through all of these changes, at our heart we remain committed to excellence in teaching, we are demonstrating ourselves to be adaptable to the time and place and context within which we operate.

I believe this is stated best by Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown in their book, *A New Culture of Learning*: “Change motivates and challenges. It makes clear when things are obsolete or have outlived their usefulness. But most of all change forces us to learn differently.

If the twentieth century was about creating a sense of stability to buttress against change and then trying to adapt to it, then the twenty-first century is about *embracing* change, not fighting it.”²

To the alumni in the crowd, it is our greatest hope that you can look on these changes throughout your campus and feel a positive sense of connection and appreciation for all the work that we have accomplished. This remains your campus. Our success is your success and we want you to feel like the renaissance is yours as well.

² Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown (2011), “A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change”, p. 43.

The challenge that faces us is not a lack of capacity. We have successfully demonstrated our wealth of ability in such a short period of time. There is so much to be gained, and so much potential within the wall of this university. To use a golf analogy, it is time to let the big dog eat.

Thank you.