

INSTALLATION ADDRESS

DR. RHONDA L. LENTON

ON THE OCCASION OF HER INSTALLATION AS THE
8TH PRESIDENT AND VICE-CHANCELLOR OF YORK UNIVERSITY

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2017



Check against delivery

To Chancellor Sorbara, our Board of Governors Chair Rick Waugh and Senate Chair Lesley Beagrie; to our Chancellors and Presidents Emeriti; members of the Board and the Senate; to our Vice-Presidents, our deans, faculty and staff;

To our alumni, distinguished guests, and honorary degree recipients—Angela Robertson, Rudy Bratty, Ron Mock, and Vincent Tao;

To the families joining us today, including my husband, Robert Brym, and three daughters, Shira, Talia and Ariella,

and to our students with whom I share the stage today:

Boozhoo. Shé:kon. Tansi. Kwe. Bonjour et bienvenue à toutes et à tous. Good morning, and a very warm welcome to you all.

Your presence here today reflects our shared commitment to York's future.

I am honoured to be standing before you today as York University's 8th President and Vice Chancellor. Like many York students, I grew up in modest circumstances. My grandparents were immigrants and my parents worked hard to secure a better life for their children.

And because my parents never stopped hammering into their children the idea that higher education would open up a new and exciting world for us, enabling us to contribute to the welfare of others, my brother and sisters and I were the first members of our family to attend university. We worked our way through school to pay for our tuition, allowing us to realize our dreams, and those of our parents.

York students come from all walks of life and we are woven into a tapestry so colourful, so resilient, and so inspiring that our ambition to improve the world knows no limits.

Let me add substance to these lofty words. Specifically, what is York's vision for the future? And what role can we all play in achieving it?

As our mission statement emphasizes, York aims to improve society by developing people's full potential regardless of where they start in life.

We are a university that deeply values knowledge for its own sake but we are not content to stop there. We also seek ways to make knowledge serve the public good. We graduate globally educated citizens who are successful both as individuals and as public-spirited agents of social change.

We stand together at a moment when Canada has the opportunity to be a leader in mobilizing an inclusive response to the complex problems facing the world.

York can contribute much to the realization of that goal. Specifically, I believe our success rests on four pillars: access, connectedness, excellence and impact.

Consider access first.

Two-thirds of all new jobs will require higher education, yet an enormous pool of talent remains untapped because of barriers that prevent eligible students from attending university.

We cannot afford to leave such a valuable resource undeveloped. And we don't believe that eligible students should be left behind. The world desperately needs what they can offer.

Accordingly, we must remove barriers so that all bright and highly motivated people can take advantage of what the university can give them, and so they in turn can contribute to the welfare of others.

This means we have to find ways to increase our financial support for students in need. It also means that we must redouble our commitment to recruiting more mature students, Indigenous Canadians, people of colour, people with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ2+ communities, and citizens from among the world.

A diverse community enriches us culturally and intellectually. For their good and for ours, we cannot forsake them.

Connectedness is the second pillar of York's vision.

In 2010, York released a White Paper that made a commitment to building a more engaged university as a core component of our success.

We live in a world where it is increasingly important to be connected—connected to one another, to our communities and neighbours, to the world around us, and to our values.

This means improving the connectedness among our students and faculty, as well as the staff who support our academic mission.

It means connecting students with their learning by providing greater opportunities for self-directed and problem-based learning and enhanced academic support and services.

It means strengthening partnerships to support our academic programs and to collaborate on the innovation needed to tackle life-threatening issues that confront us all in the form of climate change, inequality and poverty, and the refugee crisis.

I see our connectedness as an emerging theme in York's story.

As a case in point, the new Markham campus will place us in the middle of the fastest growing region in the GTA. Our ties to York Region have grown rapidly even at the planning stage, and they will multiply and thicken when the doors to the new campus open in 2021.

No longer is it sufficient to think of the university as a distinct physical location devoted to teaching and research. We must become more distributed and more fluid in terms of how we collaborate with local, national and global partners in government, academia, the not-for-profit and private sectors, and in terms of how students obtain their degrees.

Technology and globalization are enabling our efforts in achieving that goal by collapsing barriers between people from different cultures, enhancing international exchanges and global research networks, and by facilitating pedagogical innovation in ways that will continue to profoundly impact how students access information, and how students learn both on and off campuses.

I am deeply committed to strengthening York's connectedness, and to realizing our aspiration to become known as Canada's most engaged university.

The new subway stations will make that even easier by turning the Keele campus into a midtown destination and connecting York to the GTA as never before.

However, we must do more. In the coming years, we will advance our internationalization strategy in South America and Asia, conceive of new ways to grow ties between Glendon College and the vibrant Franco-Ontarian community, and expand our presence in communities that seek better access to higher education.

Our success depends on the participation of the entire York community and toward this end I will be engaging in a new conversation about how we can work together to reach our full potential as a learning community and a place that cares about social justice.

The third pillar underpinning our vision is excellence.

Academic quality has been the overriding imperative for York for the last five years and it must continue to be so in everything we do for the next five.

We have made significant progress.

The amplification of our scholarship, research and creative activities is evident in the steady increase of our published work and Tri-Council Funding, including in particular our success in large-scale, collaborative initiatives that leverage York's well-established leadership in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary programs.

Examples are numerous. They include a \$120 million Canada First Research Excellence Fund for the Vision Science to Application initiative, which involves five York faculties and collaboration among more than 50 academic, not-for-profit and commercial partners to produce technologies that will help people live healthier, safer and more productive lives; the Canadian Observatory for Homelessness—a national research and policy initiative led by York with funding from SSHRC and involving 29 partner organizations; the development of instrumentation for the first-ever sampling mission by NASA to the asteroid Bennu; and a \$4 million Emergency and Disaster Management simulation facility to support related research and graduate education.

Plans are well underway for a campus-wide plan for innovation and entrepreneurship in a continuing effort to bridge research application and student engagement, and as part of a broader strategy to provide hands-on learning activities in every program.

Entrepreneurship activities and experiential education are offered across all faculties, including Glendon's international entrepreneurial and innovation workshop series; the Faculty of Science Business in Science workshop series; Schulich's fireside chats and case competitions; and Osgoode's universal experiential praxicum.

At an institutional level, Innovation York offers entrepreneurial workshops and we have recently established the YU Experience Hub to support new experiential education initiatives.

Over the next three years, we will increase the number of supported students and community-based entrepreneurs by 35% each year.

With new learning opportunities comes the need for more full-time educators. We have made great progress in rebuilding our faculty complement over the past five years and we will continue to make demonstrable progress for the next five years.

We will continue to develop new high-quality programs in response to emerging labour market needs, while revitalizing the humanities and social sciences, and we will continue to invest in our campuses to enhance the student learning experience.

And finally, the fourth pillar—impact.

In one sense, our impact on the world is the product of increased access, connectedness and excellence.

By opening the University's doors to all eligible students, broadening and deepening our ties to the communities we serve, and improving the quality of the work we do, York's impact will be magnified many times over.

However, I believe that our impact depends on more than just increased access, connectedness and excellence. It also depends heavily on you, our soon-to-be freshly minted graduates.

So let me close by speaking directly to you.

We look forward to hearing about your individual achievements and your contributions to the welfare of society. We also ask for your help in sharing York's story of success. You are York's best ambassadors. What you tell others about the value of your experience here will make us shine.

We also very much hope that you will stay engaged with your alma mater. How you choose to help us as mentors of new students, sources of ideas for how we can do better, as participants in our programs, and in other roles that do not yet exist and, frankly, have not yet been conceived, will help to determine our success.

Canada today is an ideal platform from which to leap into the world and change it for the better. I have never been more certain that York is the university to create and lead that change. York's motto is *tentanda via*: the way must be tried. I believe the best is yet to come.

Thank you.