

**Speaking notes for Désirée McGraw**

Village Gathering

19 May 2016

What a day! And what fantastic results – I am sure the campus has never been so pristine! Everyone has worked SO hard and not just today, but throughout this past year.

I know that you are tired, exhilarated and probably famished, so I will be brief.

First, I would invite you to join me in acknowledging the devotion and professionalism of our faculty and staff.

I want to single out **staff** – often the unsung of Pearson College – working tirelessly behind the scenes – to ensure Pearson College runs smoothly and thrives:

- Administration, Finance, HR, Admissions, Reception
- Operations, maintenance, IT, cleaning, kitchen staff
- Advancement, Communications, Community Engagement, Alumni Relations

**Faculty** – some of the most devoted faculty I’ve worked with in my years in education going back to my earliest years as I am from a family of educators, including two parents who were professors and teachers. From this experience, I know that the very best educators give all of themselves- leaving it all on the classroom floor – and are likely completely exhausted right now. I also know how particularly proud they are of all our students on this day especially.

I'd like to single out two faculty in particular: our devoted Deputy Head and Dean of Studies Mark Bannar-Martin and tireless Dean of Students Libby Mason.

**Residents & houseparents:**

- Karena & Nazim
- China & Raphael & Mina
- Jamaal & Julia & Dante
- Christy & Laura, Finn & Simon
- Mark & Becky & James
- Benoit and Anamaria
- Geoffrey & Lilian
- Susan & Bill
- Samuel & Berenice, Sarayie & Diego
- Kim & Madu
- Aziz

I would like to particularly single out Geoffrey, Samuel, Karun, Catrin, for sharing their **passion projects** - an organization, cause or activity in which faculty members or staff have been actively involved outside their Pearson role.

On behalf of the entire Pearson Community, THANK YOU for your tireless devotion to the College, to the UWC mission and to the students. We are all so blessed to have such talented and selfless individuals working with us and on our behalf.

As I look back to our first meeting here in this theatre last August, I am overwhelmed by how much we have accomplished together.

I am particularly gratified by the response to my call to action inviting all the Pearson Community to bring your energy and ideas to thinking through what our College's contribution(s) to reconciliation with Canada's Indigenous Peoples might look like.

Your collective response has been outstanding and I can proudly report that results include:

- the creation of a Reconciliation Working Group with the local First Nations, notably The Scia'new First Nation (Beecher Bay);
- the engagement of Pearson Alumni like **Clint Kuzio** who are themselves Indigenous and/or working on indigenous issues; ramped-up efforts to recruit and better support more Indigenous students at Pearson;
- Pearson students choosing to devote their Project Week to doing outreach in local high schools with significant First Nations populations – leading to establishment of a peer-to-peer mentorship program;
- the creation of a new faculty and curriculum & community support position, entitled “Indigenous Educator, Advisor and Coordinator of Reconciliation.” Who will start next year.
- A proposal to create a unique IB course in Anthropology focusing on Indigenous Issues and Reconciliation in a global context
- All culminating in the profoundly moving special event on May 1<sup>st</sup> [honouring the signing of the Douglas Treaties.](#)

That's what can happen when we all work together applying our individual skills, talents, insights and knowledge to a common project.

## Students

Last but not least, to the students – the reason we are here.

[When I spoke to you](#) at the opening Assembly last August, I said:

*I am here, above all, **because I believe in you.** I believe in your potential and your power to change the world. At the same time, I recognize that it would be unfair to expect your generation alone to solve the problems of the world – problems created by my generation and those generations before me. So, above all, I believe in working in partnership across generations, countries and cultures to create a more just, sustainable and peaceful world.*

You have more than lived up to my expectations!

You have been simply terrific this year. Beyond your participation in academic, experiential, service and sports activities, you have made thoughtful contributions to the Strategic Planning process and recommendations for a number of changes in policies and procedures.

I need only remind you of the Village Gathering on 1 March whose historic achievement was a consensus agreement to propose the introduction of WiFi in the student houses! Additional student proposals have been put forward regarding: gender-neutral bathrooms and bedrooms; and a “community recommendation model” regarding decision-making on campus.

**Congratulations to Year 42** for successfully completing your exams and your first year at Pearson!

You have earned your holiday. Decompress. Enjoy your families, your projects, your friends at home. And come back to Pearson on **Thursday 25 August** rested and re-charged. Remember, we are counting on you as the "experts"

and mentors to Year 43 during what promises to be an exciting year. (Hint: 2017 is the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Canada's confederation. There will be celebrations and festivities all across the country. 23 April 2017 is the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of our namesake Nobel Peace Laureate Lester B. Pearson, who was Canada's Prime Minister during the centennial celebrations of Confederation in 1967. I am sure we will find an appropriate way of marking that occasion!)

### **Year 41, I salute you.**

You have survived the dreaded IB exams and are starting a new journey – some to university, some for gap years and others to take up volunteer positions.

We thank you for all you have done at and for Pearson. You *have* made a difference and I particularly want to tell you how much I have enjoyed our private meetings /exit interviews this week. I hope they were helpful to you – I know I learned a lot!

I am so pleased for those who have been accepted at university; the list of institutions is impressive and as diverse as you are!

As of tomorrow, you are Alumni and as such, we hope that you will stay in touch with us at Pearson and with the network of wonderful friends from around the world, As you know, our dedicated Communications team works very hard to keep the website and social media up-to-date. I encourage you to follow our news and contribute your own updates. Come back to visit when you can, especially for your reunions.

I will conclude with these thoughts from former NY Mayor [Michael Bloomberg's commencement address at the University of Michigan](#)

*... there were many other people who helped you on your journey, so after you receive your diploma, and as you make your way in the world, remember that your greatest achievements – like today's – will owe an awful lot to the people around you.*

**I hope that you will never forget that your families are foremost among those people.**

*If there's a secret to success beyond hard work and good luck, it's that the more you say 'we', and the less you say 'I', the farther you'll go. It's something that the most effective leaders understand and take to heart. Remember: There is almost nothing we do in life that we do alone.*

**I believe that your years at Pearson living, learning and leading together have convinced you of this truth.**

*Along with the importance of teamwork the most useful knowledge that you leave here with today, is about how to study, how to cooperate, how to listen carefully, how to think critically, and how to resolve conflicts through reason.*

In conclusion: Whatever your chosen path, I know that you will always carry in your hearts and minds the ideals and mission of Pearson College and UWC.

Your education and Pearson experience have prepared you to embrace one of the core values of the College: "the importance of acting on your beliefs and taking a lead role in what you do as well as what you say." I am confident that each of you, in your own way, will be not only a global citizen, but "a force to unite people, nations and cultures for peace and a sustainable future."

I wish you, in the best nautical tradition appropriate for our beloved Pedder Bay: *Fair winds and following seas.*