

Presenting Pearson College's New President

Opening Remarks by Désirée McGraw

Monday 20 April 2015

Valued members of the Pearson Community – Board members, Faculty, Staff, Supporters, and, above all, Students both past and present:

Good morning, or as we say in my native Québec, *bon matin! Je suis ravie d'être parmi vous aujourd'hui*. I'm so happy to be here and thrilled that soon I will be able to call Pearson College home!

I feel extremely privileged to have the opportunity to lead the College. I appreciate the contribution of those extraordinary Directors who preceded me – such as Tony Macoun and his wife Ann – and I truly embrace the obligation, not only to uphold the tremendous legacy of the past 40 years, but also to advance it.

I am honored that the Board has chosen me and my husband Christopher to follow in the footsteps of David Hawley and his partner, Leisa Weld. They were inspiring College leaders who have left a legacy of excellence, and a strong and healthy community on which we hope to build.

Mark [Bannar-Martin], I have observed and heard so many great things about the steady hand you have provided leading the College over the past seven months – not to mention your 27 years of service as a teacher, and more recently, Dean of Studies. I am glad and most grateful to know that you will continue with many of those duties in your role as Deputy Head of College. I'm looking forward to working very closely with you and being able to call on your deep experience and sound advice.

I want to see Pearson's profile and contribution to Canada and the world flourish during my tenure. I realize that is ambitious, but I know that there is already a team of smart, passionate and committed people on the ground at the College to help me build on the incredible accomplishments that have made Pearson the force it is in the world today. I can't wait to be on campus and truly get to know the faculty, staff and students; I can't wait to work together to make Pearson College more relevant and successful than ever.

I have to confess, I was actually secretly on campus a few weeks ago: sitting in on a full International Affairs session devoted to Mental Health; and watching your rehearsals for One World. And I was once again struck by the engagement and talent, the intelligence and idealism I saw.

As you will have gathered from watching the SAGE video clip, from a young age I learned that through hard work, through team work, through organization and passion – almost anything is possible. The fact that you all are here tells me that you know this, too.

I am here, above all, because I believe in you. I believe in your potential and your power to change the world. Since the SAGE Tour – as a student organizer, a global “youth ambassador”, an overseas graduate researcher, a UN reporter, a political advisor, advocate and, above all, as an

educator, I have devoted my life to engaging and empowering a new generation of leaders to tackle global problems. And there is no better way to build the bonds that will go the hard, long distance required to create lasting change than to have a deliberately diverse and dynamic group of young people live, learn and lead together.

Indeed, "*How can there be peace without people understanding each other; and how can this be if they don't know each other?*" These were the words of Lester B. Pearson in accepting his Nobel Peace Prize. This was the vision of one of Canada's greatest Prime Ministers, and a leader I deeply admire. As you know, Lester B. Pearson was the driving force behind the founding of this College. After retiring from public life, Mr. Pearson became interested in the United World College movement. Convinced that there must be such a college in Canada, he envisioned a place where: "*Students... will be welcomed without regard to race, religion or politics.... Students ... from all levels of society [who] will be genuine representatives of their own peoples.*" He predicted, "*This system could become a revolutionary force in international education.*" And indeed it has.

There was a time when all Canadians knew about the College and what a key symbol of Canada it was through its mission to make education a global force of change. It is still a mighty symbol for our country 40 years after our founding. In today's very different and ever more complex world, Pearson's mission is more critical than ever.

That mission – and that of the UWC movement more broadly is to *make education a force to unite people, nations and cultures for a peaceful and sustainable future.* We do so by combining experiential learning with academic excellence; by educating and nurturing the whole person – mind, body and spirit. And we do all of this in order to prepare our students to tackle the problems of the world.

David Sutcliffe – a key figure in the development of the UWC movement – poses this challenge: "*Has international education led the way – or are we simply scrambling to keep up...*" with international crises? How do we maintain our distinctive programming in a world where the International Baccalaureate is projected to have *10,000 programs and trained 60,000 teachers* by the year 2020? In a world where most of the *best schools – from primary all the way through post-secondary levels – now have community service as part of their co-curriculum?*

These are good problems to have; imitation is indeed the sincerest form of flattery. It's not the Pearson has fallen behind; it's that the world is starting to catch up. There is an increasingly crowded field of organizations and programs working to educate and engage the next generation of leaders and change agents. I know because for the last 7 years I have headed one such organization as President of Jeanne Sauvé Foundation; and I have worked closely with many other such like-minded organizations both in Canada and abroad. There is no question that institutions like Pearson are "competing" for time, talent and treasure.

Our challenge, then, is to ensure that – through our distinctive identity and approach to education – we will lead the way into the future. If we are going to continue to attract, educate and engage exceptionally promising students (like all of you); if we are going to foster your ability to think and collaborate across different countries, cultures and contexts; if we are going to hone your

leadership skills to make a difference in the world; then we must all be willing to evaluate and consider the way we do things.

We need to continually refine and improve our model so that we can have the impact we seek in the world. Yes, we're going to have to embrace change – at least where change will make the right kind of difference.

To quote UWC International Council Member Laurie Frank, *“If the educational model for UWC never changes, then it is a sign the movement is stagnant.”*

Like many of you, I consider myself to be an idealist – and a practical one. As a practical idealist, I believe to be true to our ideals, to create the kind of change the world needs, we need to work harder and smarter than those who prefer and seek to preserve the status quo for its own sake.

English philosopher Edmund Burke said that *“history is a race between education and catastrophe.”* As an educator who comes from a family of teachers, I'm placing my time, energy and confidence in the transformative power of education to change to the world.

But to win this race, our path must be paved on (a) a solid and sustainable funding base; and (b) a clear and compelling message that demonstrates our impact on students past and present; and in turn their impact on the world.

And that's exactly what we're going to do. We are going to build greater support by creating awareness of the important work we are doing, by telling our story – by sharing your stories and the stories of the 3,800 graduates who have come before you. We will spread our message right across the country and around the world. In this sense, I see my central role as that of Chief Champion for Pearson College.

Working together, we will develop and deliver an action plan that will make Pearson College more relevant and successful than ever.

I am grateful that I will be able to rely on help from Pearson's exceptional and tireless Board of Directors, Patrons, Alumni, partners and supporters. And I know that your support – the staff, faculty and students gathered here today – is more essential than ever.

But first, there is lots of listening and learning for me to do. I would invite you to think of me as a first-year student at Pearson College. Over the course of my first few months on campus, I intend to completely immerse myself in the culture and fabric of Pearson College, and get to know each and every one of you.

I have much to learn, and I look forward to learning about — and collaborating with — this incredible community that I already feel I am part of.

For me, this is not a job; it's a life and I can't wait to begin.

Thank you for your warm welcome. I feel humbled and excited by the opportunities that lie ahead. *Merci.*