

This is the consolidated text of reports to convocation delivered in St. John's by Dr. Gary Kachanoski, president and vice-chancellor

**Tuesday, May 24<sup>th</sup> – Friday, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

**Good afternoon and welcome to spring convocation. A special welcome also and congratulations to all of our new graduands. I am honored to join you on your special day.**

**Congratulations also to your parents, your families, friends and professors who have a part in the success that you have achieved today. They have each played their role in supporting you, opened your eyes to new ways of looking at the world, offered their direction, guidance and encouragement.**

**But, ultimately, of course, it was your efforts and talent that got you to today's convocation, so congratulations.**

**Every spring and every fall, the Memorial University community gathers together for convocation, which has become synonymous with graduating from Memorial University – and yes, that is one of the most important tasks we undertake today.**

**But university convocation is more than that.**

**Convocation is an assembly of our university community and, together with our extended community, we gather to not only celebrate and rededicate the university's primary responsibility, the success of its students, but also to re-affirm and express our on-going responsibilities to serve the public good.**

**This is demonstrated later in convocation when you will hear these words: "I admit the candidates to these degrees and confer upon them all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities associated with the degree."**

**Graduands, I want you to take a moment to think about what that means.**

**Today you are being admitted and welcomed as a part of the Memorial University convocation and you become part of a family of alumni that now numbers almost 70,000.**

**Today you earn the rights and privileges from claiming to your name the breadth and depth of learning, and experiences and know-how associated with your degree.**

**And I can say without reservation, that in today's globally connected, competitive, and complicated, world, the value, benefits and importance of your learning, your experiences and "know-how" have never been greater; never greater for you personally, but also never greater for your family, for your community, country and the world.**

**That's the responsibility part; the responsibility to be active, engaged citizens and to make the world a better place to live – more just and safer, more prosperous, more sustainable, and more interesting.**

**So as we take this opportunity to acknowledge your achievement – the rights and privileges you have earned – let's also re-affirm the responsibility that comes with your education.**

**With that sense of responsibility in mind, I am very pleased to welcome our honorary graduand, Dr. Patrick O'Flaherty. He is being recognized for his scholarship, his contributions to Memorial University and the community and for his significant role in the development of Newfoundland and Labrador studies. We'll hear more about him, and from him, later in convocation.**

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I'd like to welcome our honorary graduand, Dr. Eric Morgan, who is a graduate of Memorial University and has had a distinguished career in science. We'll hear more about him, and from him, later in Convocation.

I'd like to welcome our honorary graduand, John Ralston Saul, who is being recognized today for his contributions to Canadian society, as a writer and a thinker. We'll hear more about him, and from him, later in Convocation.

I want to acknowledge our honorary granduand, Elinor Gill Ratcliffe, who is receiving a doctor of laws degree for her generous contributions to many cultural and social causes and for reshaping the nature of philanthropy in Newfoundland and Labrador. We will hear more about her, and from her, later in Convocation.

It is a privilege for me to officially take part in spring convocation for the very first time. In just over one month from now, I will mark my first full year as president and vice-chancellor.

It has been an incredible year of accomplishment and success as Memorial continues its upward trajectory.

Many of these exciting initiatives and accomplishments have been summarized in our "*Gazette*" publication, in our "*Research Matters*" magazine, in The President's Report for 2010 titled "*Wish You Were Here*", and of course on our web site.

I encourage you to learn more about the exceptional people, places and programs of Memorial University.

I suppose when you live with THIS university in your own backyard, it's easy to forget that "world class" applies to the home team... There is so much to be proud of in the quality of our graduates and our faculty and staff, and in the quality of the work we do...we are leaders in so many areas.

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**And establishing the senior leadership team for the Memorial University community has been a high priority for me this past year.**

**In late January, we announced the successful conclusion of an extensive national search with the appointment of Dr. David Wardlaw to the position of vice-president (academic) and pro vice-chancellor of Memorial.**

**Dr. Wardlaw is currently the dean of science at the University of Western Ontario. He brings tremendous experience in academic administration, a strong background in science and science promotion, together with a commitment to student learning initiatives and community engagement. He will join us in August.**

**As we welcome Dr. Wardlaw, it is also important to acknowledge the contributions of our vice-president (academic) pro tempore, Dr. Evan Simpson.**

**Last September, we called Dr. Simpson out of retirement to provide leadership and stewardship to Memorial, while we searched for our new vice president (academic) and pro vice-chancellor.**

**His dedication and thoughtful contributions to Memorial as a long-serving administrator, teacher, scholar, and his wise counsel to me this past year have been invaluable.**

**So Dr. Simpson – Evan – I want to extend to you my personal thanks, as well as our collective thanks on behalf of the entire Memorial University community.**

**In early February, we were also pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Mary Bluehardt as our vice-president for the Grenfell campus in Corner Brook. Dr.**

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Bluehardt, is currently the dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology and will start at Grenfell in July.

At the Grenfell campus convocation last week I had the opportunity to fully thank Dr. Holly Pike for her leadership and service as acting vice-president (Grenfell) and I want to acknowledge her and extend my thanks again here today.

Dr. Wardlaw and Dr. Bluehardt are both proven leaders who will bring great vision to Memorial. I am looking forward to working closely with them and with the rest of the university community as we build on our past accomplishments and excellence...*and chart our new course forward.*

The time frame for Memorial's existing "*Five Pillars*" strategic plan (2007 to 2012) is coming to an end. In that plan, growth was a primary assumption and an institutional goal.

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And despite challenging provincial demographics with declining K-12 enrollment and significantly fewer grade 12 graduates, Memorial has had and continues to have significant demand for its quality programs and significant enrollment growth.

And that's great news for the province because today's globally connected, competitive, and complicated world is fueled by brainpower.

Our success and *sustainable* future depends on talented people with creative ideas and a passion for innovation, and many of those people are in the audience graduating today.

Memorial is the largest university in Atlantic Canada. Our student population this year is almost 18,000, up 2.5 % from last year and is expected to increase again next year.

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**Graduate enrolment now exceeds 3,000 students with over 500 PhD students. We are up 11 % over last year, on top of 10% growth the year before, and similar growth is expected this coming year.**

**The significant increase in graduate students reflects Memorial's trajectory of research growth and our on-going transformation as a research-intensive university.**

**Through all of this growth the provincial government has consistently recognized the importance of university education by fostering access with low tuition fees, while providing annual increases to Memorial's operating budget to offset increasing costs and launch new initiatives.**

**And in recent years, including this year's budget, that level of support has been simply outstanding.**

**And of course through all of this growth, as the only university in the province, Memorial remains rooted to its special obligation and social responsibility to service all of the citizens of Newfoundland and Labrador.**

**In the past 5 years, our budget allocation for innovation in teaching and learning through the delivery of distance programs and courses has grown by 36 % and distance now represents almost 15 % of Memorial's overall registrations.**

**Memorial's Distance Education, Learning and Teaching Support division, DELTS partners with all of our campuses, schools and faculties to deliver over 400 courses and 24 distance programs – courses and programs that can be completed by Newfoundland and Labradorians, regardless if they are in Forteau or Conception Bay South.**

**This growth in distance capacity and learning innovation by Memorial has been recognized with more than 50 international, national and provincial awards.**

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**It serves as an example of how we are trying new innovations to meet the ever increasing demand for our programs from all learners in the province and beyond.**

**And that is a good thing since our determination and success in meeting the demand for our programs has strained our physical infrastructure to beyond its sustainable capacity.**

**This is particularly acute here on our St John's Campus where this year we mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its official opening. Today in St. John's we have an inventory of some new modern buildings and facilities, and signs of the start of renewal (cranes in the air). But we also have a significant number of the initial older buildings that are well past starting to show their age.**

**And our space crunch is already limiting enrolment growth and access, and impacting our learning and research environment.**

**For example, the demand to get into our engineering program has never been higher, and the competition has never been more intense. Last year we received 654 applications and accepted 230, which is all we could accommodate.**

**And that's more than we have ever accepted in any one year before. Yet, despite the increased enrollment, the average for students entering Engineering has risen from an average of 81 % in 2003 to almost 87 % last year.**

**Our programs in Kinesiology have a similar story. Despite significant increases in enrollment intake, the average for students entering the program from high school is 85%, and we accept 1 student for every 3 qualified applicants.**

**So our growth and success comes with consequences, and we have lots to discuss as we set out to formulate our new academic plan.**

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**This past year we have started laying the foundation for adjusting our course, and setting our new priorities and direction for the next 5 years. We have completed the development of our new research plan and our new Teaching and Learning Framework, and soon to follow, we will start the development of a new community engagement framework.**

**The new research plan is based on broad consultation and engagement with internal and external audiences. With a focus on research excellence it identifies research themes of strategic importance, and goals and objectives for enhancing Memorial's research environment.**

**This reflects the evolution of the research culture at Memorial and our international status in a number of research areas. Our tremendous research growth has been directly associated with community engagement, partnerships and collaboration and our continued growth will also be rooted in this.**

**The new Teaching and Learning Framework highlights our aspirations for our students, articulates the vision, core values and principles of our teaching and learning and describes the characteristics of a vibrant teaching and learning community at Memorial.**

**It establishes criteria for evaluation of teaching and learning, identifies gaps and needs, and suggests key approaches we need to pursue to better celebrate and improve, teaching and the learning experience at Memorial University.**

**The Framework's foundation statement "... to connect learners and educators to each other, our community and our world, in the service of knowledge generation and exchange and the advancement of society" explicitly acknowledges the interdependence and connections between our primary activities of teaching and learning, research and scholarship, and community service and engagement.**

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**And it is through this foundation, that we will work together to adjust our course, set our new priorities and fulfill our mandate as a nationally competitive, flag-ship teaching-research public university. A university unequivocally committed to the public good and its special obligation to the people of this great province.**

**And to our new graduates, about to write a new chapter in your lives, I know that you will take to heart the responsibilities that come with your degree and make your mark in Newfoundland and Labrador and across the country and the world.**

**Today is your time for celebration. Tomorrow you get down to the challenges that lie ahead, and in meeting your challenges, you will be bolstered by your education, your knowledge, your family, and your university.**

**You will be part of the 70,000-strong family of Memorial University alumni – that means your university will always be there for you.**

**I wish you all the best in your future and great success whatever your path.**

**Thank you**

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