

Speaking Notes
Dr. Gary Kachanoski
President and Vice-Chancellor
Grenfell Convocation
Friday, October 7, 2011, 10 a.m.

Good morning and welcome to fall convocation. A special welcome also and congratulations to all of our graduating students. I am honoured to join you, and your families and friends, on your special day.

Today, I am sure, is one of the proudest moments in each of your lives, and a proud moment for your families as well. Your talent and hard work has finally paid off and brought you here today – to your graduation day. So, congratulations.

We have a special guest with us this morning, one whom I'm delighted will soon join the ranks of distinguished individuals named as honorary graduates of Memorial University.

I am speaking of Kevin Major, celebrated Newfoundland author, who, for his writing and for his contributions to Memorial University and our great province, will receive an honorary doctor of letters degree. We are pleased that he is here today, and you will hear more about him and from him a little later.

One year ago, my very first address to the Memorial University community as a new president was made right here in Corner Brook at Grenfell's fall convocation.

That was more than coincidental. Personally connecting with this campus and being part of this community is important to me and, as I've said a number of times, it's important to the position of president and for Memorial University.

At last year's fall convocation, I indicated that my highest priority was to search for a new vice-president for Grenfell, and for a new pro vice-chancellor and vice-president (academic) for Memorial.

So, it is indeed a privilege for me today, to welcome Dr. Mary Bluehardt to her first official convocation as our new vice-president (Grenfell Campus), and also to welcome Dr. David Wardlaw to his first convocation at Memorial as provost and vice-president (academic).

Dr. Bluehardt and Dr. Wardlaw were here last spring at Grenfell convocation as special guests in the audience, and since starting their appointments this summer have been meeting with many people both on and off campus. If you haven't had a chance to meet them, then I encourage you to do so.

They are both proven leaders who will bring great vision to Grenfell Campus of Memorial University. I am looking forward to working closely with them and the rest of the Grenfell Campus community as we build on our past accomplishments and excellence.

And there is so much success to celebrate. Grenfell Campus is simply not the same place that it was when many of our graduating students here today walked through the doors for the first time four years ago.

We have a new academic building set to open later this year. Just last month, I had the pleasure of participating in a ceremony to mark to commencement of the construction of the new 200-bed residence for the campus. And we're going full speed ahead with plans to build new environmental labs, and research and teaching capacity.

And as Dr. Bluehardt's campus report will indicate, many new initiatives have been implemented that are designed to strengthen and grow the university campus here in Corner Brook, and we are looking to the future with tremendous optimism.

This past year we started laying the foundation for adjusting our course, and setting our new priorities and direction for Memorial for the next five years. We have completed the development of our new research strategy and our teaching and learning framework.

And over this fall and winter, we are developing our engagement framework – an engagement framework to build on our strengths in working with citizens, communities, industry and government to link teaching and learning, and research and creative activity with the needs and opportunities across the province, and beyond.

We will create a collective spirit of collaboration and co-operation between the university and our communities, a place with true partnerships and trust, and the exchange of knowledge and resources for mutual benefit.

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, flagship, teaching-research public university. A university unequivocally committed to the public good and its special obligation to the people of this great province.

And, of course, nothing symbolizes the university's success more than our convocation ceremonies.

Convocation is a special time in the life of a university. It 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 ongoing responsibilities to serve the public good.

This is demonstrated later in convocation when you will hear Chancellor Hillier say 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 we publically acknowledge and celebrate :

- that you have acquired the breadth and depth of learning, experience, and know how associated with your degree,
- that when complications and life surprise you, you will be able to understand, innovate and adapt,
- that you are prepared for the next stage of your life, whether in work or further studies.

And I can say without reservation, that in today's globally connected 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 community, country and the world.

Our success and sustainable future depend on talented people like you, with creative ideas and a passion for discovery and innovation,

That's why the last part of what you will claim today as graduates is so important – the responsibility that comes with the degree. The responsibility, I suggest, to be active, engaged citizens and to make the world a better place to live – more safe, more prosperous, more sustainable, or more interesting.

As UNESCO's World Declaration on Higher Education states: "Higher education institutions should educate students to become well-informed and deeply motivated citizens...citizens who can think critically, analyze problems of society, look for solutions to the problems of society, and accept social responsibility."

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

Only the boldest will take on great challenges, but fortune favours the brave and 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.

I leave you with the words of Nelson Mandela who said: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

So, graduands, leave here and change our world.

Thank you.