

Dr. Janet Morrison, President and Vice Chancellor Installation Address – October 16, 2018

Madam Chancellor, members of the Board, faculty, staff, students: thank you for the privilege of serving as your 8th President and Vice-Chancellor. To our guests from near and far: thank you for being here to celebrate Sheridan and my personal leadership journey.

In 1918, Veblen described institutions of higher learning as “corporation(s) for the cultivation and care of the community's highest aspirations and ideals.” I might have chosen different language, but I love that quote and think it speaks aptly of Sheridan. It also reminds me of my personal and professional obligations as an educator, advocate, and change agent.

In that spirit, and consistent with Sheridan's commitment to truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, I want to start today by expressing my deep, personal gratitude for the opportunity to be working and learning on this land.

All of Sheridan's campuses reside on land that for thousands of years before us was the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Anishinaabe Nation, Huron-Wendat and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

It is our collective responsibility to honour and respect those who have gone before us, those who are here, and those who have yet to come.

I want to extend a special thank you to the Bear Creek Singers, and Stacey LaForme, Chief, Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation for being here today. Miigwech.

Welcome, everyone, to this beautiful facility. It is fitting that this ceremony is taking place here, at the Living Arts Centre, where so many of Sheridan's 170,000 alumni have crossed the stage to receive a degree, diploma, or certificate. Graduation is, in many ways, the culmination of our work as educators and enablers. I love everything about it: the pomp, the circumstance, the sweaty palms of nervous and excited students who shake our hands as they cross the stage, and the many proud faces, especially those of the parents and partners watching as their loved ones realize their educational aspirations.

Supporting post-secondary learners, fueling their aspirations and celebrating their successes has been my passion for over 30 years. I am tremendously proud and excited to continue this work under the guise of my new appointment.

Sheridan is an exceptional learning community, distinguished by its organizational character, an unwavering commitment to academic quality, and a deep sense of accountability to learners, our funders, and valued partners. We pride ourselves on being relevant, responsive, student-centric, and forward-focused.

Since my first day as Sheridan's Provost and Vice-President, Academic in November 2016, I have felt the embrace of a strong sense of belonging and shared purpose. Like me, faculty and staff at Sheridan believe in the transformative power of earning a post-secondary credential. As a collegium, we know that Colleges and Universities matter and are fundamental to Canada's future as an economically-secure, safe, sustainable, progressive, inclusive, and equitable democracy.

In his installation address twenty-one years ago, Sheridan's fourth President, Sheldon Levy, spoke to the "big responsibility" and "noble cause" of education. He said:

"Education is not a competing public priority – it is THE public priority. All other priorities rely on great education. At Colleges and Universities, we train the teachers. We train the early childhood educators. We train the nurses, the doctors, the therapists, and the technicians. We prepare students to lead in our hi-tech world. We teach communications, design, computing, and environmental technology. We coach the poets, artists, and musicians. We train the entrepreneurs and the engineers. And then we ask those we trained to come and teach the next generation. We ask them to share their success with us – in partnerships, ventures and support. It is a vital and dynamic cycle, generation after generation."

Clearly, the positioning of higher learning as fundamental to the fabric of our national identity is neither novel nor new. With increasing intensity, however, people are openly challenging the value proposition of supporting it.

In response to this phenomenon (which is admittedly more pronounced in the US), the incoming President of Harvard University – Lawrence Bacow -- argued in his installation address last week that:

*"We need, together, to reaffirm that higher education is a public good worthy of support – and beyond that, a pillar of our democracy that, if dislodged, will change (us) into something fundamentally **bleaker and smaller**".*

Elsewhere, industry giants in the Silicon Valley and across Canada's tech sector have suggested that a post-secondary credential is no longer a calling card to entry level employment.

Drawing on my over thirty years as an educator, administrator, and leader at colleges and universities in Canada and the United States, **I am here to tell you that post-secondary education matters greatly.** This is affirmed every day by Sheridan students and alumni who honour me with stories about how it transformed their lives and the lives of those around them.

Those stories give credence to the arguments made by McMahon in his 2009 book: *Higher learning, greater good: The private and social benefits of higher education*. Essentially, his work speaks to the quantification of the combined public and private benefits of a college education.

Let me speak briefly to each in turn ...

Undeniably, the rate of economic return on post-secondary education (that is the net worth of education once costs like tuition, text books, and foregone income are considered) is significant and has continued to rise over the past decades. A twenty-year analysis of cumulative earnings of postsecondary graduates released by Statistics Canada in 2015 found that male college graduates earned about 1.3 times more than men with a high school diploma; women with a college credential earned about 1.4 times more. Simply put: college and university graduates experience higher levels of employment and make more money. This is a huge piece of the investment value proposition, particularly for learners and/or families looking to break the cycle of poverty.

But talking only about the economic benefits degrades the true value proposition of earning a degree, diploma or certificate. Drawing on McMahon's language, this myopic approach places too much focus on the *personal, market* outcomes of earning a post-secondary credential. In tandem, we must talk about the bigger picture or what McMahon refers to as the *social, non-market* outcomes that are achieved or advanced by going to College or University.

What does McMahon mean by 'non-market' outcomes? He talks about the role that our institutions play in making students healthier, more engaged and conscious citizens. These effects last a lifetime and have a huge impact on society at large.

Done right – the curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular demands inherent in earning a post-secondary credential transform learners and – by extension – families, communities and the planet.

It happened to me, and – most likely – many of you. I invested eleven years as a learner in post-secondary institutions in Canada and the United States and earned four degrees. The outcomes I value most, however, are incalculable: University gave me a *voice*; it taught me to *think*; and, it compelled me to *engage*. It sounds simplistic, but the process of earning my academic credentials inspired *who I am*, not *what I do*.

Because it matters, I'm always mindful to acknowledge my privilege. I am a white woman who grew up in a house my parents owned. It was full of books, and my brothers and I were expected to attend College or University, in part because my Mom, Dad and grandparents went before me. I didn't work during my undergraduate studies, and I lived on campus.

My lived experience is germane: socio-economic status, marginalization and obstacles to success intersect and must be acknowledged. Many of the students I've had the privilege to support do not fit my profile. They work 25+ hours a week, commute 2+ hours a day, have partners, dependents and debt. For them, getting a good job has to be the primary objective. I understand, admire and respect that.

The literature is clear, however: even after accounting for confounding influences like race, gender, parental income, and prior health status, attending college or university has a positive impact on values, attitudes and quality of life. Evidence further suggests that the influence of postsecondary education extends beyond individual graduates to their children.

What does that mean in practical terms? College and University graduates score higher on measures of tolerance, have a lower propensity to commit crime, are more likely to vote, volunteer, participate in public debate and read to their kids. They have a greater propensity to trust and tolerate others, are less likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors like heavy drinking, illicit drug use or smoking. They're more likely to engage in preventative healthcare and healthy behaviors, less likely to be obese and they cope with distress more effectively.

In summary: graduating from a college or university drives positive behaviors that make the world better. Back to President Bacow's address: post-secondary education counters the threat of becoming smaller and bleaker with an influx of hope and opportunity, not just for learners but for society as a whole.

This is why I describe the opportunity to lead at one of Ontario's twenty-four outstanding Colleges as a privilege.

Here's the thing though: personal transformation doesn't just happen. As posited by Lewin in 1936, the genesis of behavior is a function of the interaction that a learner has with their environment – inside and outside – the classroom.

Maximizing the impact of our efforts, then, demands an understanding of the Ontario post-secondary learner profile.

Being a College student in 2018 is more complicated than ever before; the challenges and obstacles inherent in getting a degree, diploma or certificate for too many learners are significant.

- College and University students in Ontario, for example, are poor: the average student in Canada is paying 45% more in tuition than their counterparts did a decade ago; in 2016-17, Ontario charged the highest average tuition fees in Canada.
- Too many post-secondary students struggle to attain or maintain positive mental health; in 2016, 46% of respondents to the National College Health Assessment survey felt so depressed it was difficult to function; 65% had experienced overwhelming anxiety; 13% had seriously considered suicide; and, a shocking 11% had attempted suicide. I find this heartbreaking.
- An untenable number of our students have lived experience with violence. An estimated 1 in 3 female learners at the post-secondary level will experience sexual violence in particular.
- An estimated 10% of all learners in the system have a disability.

Many of these identities and lived experiences intersect. Daily, I am awed by students' courage, resilience, and determination.

The significant personal and financial investment they make in post-secondary education compels us to purposefully design learning environments that position every student to 'flourish'. Fredrickson defined flourishing as "feeling satisfied with your life and also

functioning well within it". When a student is flourishing, she writes, they "feel as if they are learning, growing, and making contributions to society."

The learning environment at Sheridan propels students to flourish day in and day out. We do this through excellence in teaching across a continuum of credentials; a robust research culture; and, collaborative partnerships with industry, community organizations, and other stakeholders. **This is an amazing place.**

- My colleagues and I are driven by a compelling, ambitious vision and are proud of our unique identity. We are committed to collegial governance, academic freedom, and the ownership of intellectual property by creators. We embrace the full continuum of scholarship, research and creative activities, including the applied work we undertake with external partners to create new products and processes. Independently and collectively, these commitments drive academic quality, economic development, social innovation, and entrepreneurship. At Sheridan, we imagine and incubate great, big audacious ideas.
- We nurture the creativity our students, faculty and staff need to excel in a changing world. From recruitment processes to classroom experiences, and from research projects to space planning, we are dedicated to promoting creativity across all of our campuses and programs. Our Creative Campus commitment builds on scholarly and industry research that identifies creativity as essential for academic and career success.
- We view learning through a comprehensive lens and seek to foster growth-mindset, tolerance and respect. We believe in the value of connecting and co-creating to foster and fuel engagement, locally and globally. We are committed to internationalization, defined by Jane Knight as "the process of integrating international, intercultural, global dimensions into the purpose, functions and delivery" of our programs. We are resolved to foster and sustain learning and working environments that are welcoming, inclusive and free from all forms of harassment and discrimination.
- We recognize that student success is uniquely defined by each learner. We foster personal and professional achievement by: helping students unearth their personal and career goals; encouraging the development of the whole person; helping students master skills and capabilities; and always aiming to ignite a passion for learning.
- Each year we launch approximately 7,000 graduates into the world – many of whom find work and residency in our home communities, strengthening the economic fabric and contributing to a local tax base that helps improve the quality of life for all citizens.
- Faculty and staff across our three campuses in Brampton, Mississauga and Oakville LIVE their individual and collective commitments to student success to ensure that our 23,000 full-time, 3000 part-time, and 14,000 continuing and professional studies

students flourish, versus flounder. My colleagues are a constant source of inspiration and pride.

Since 1967, Sheridan has been and remains a trailblazer, a pathfinder and a champion of undergraduate education. My commitment as President is to ensure that we continue to lead locally, provincially, nationally, and globally -- particularly during an unprecedented time of social, economic, technological, and political change.

To that end, I make four commitments to you today, which will shape the course of my Presidency:

1. I will always put learners – their success and the student experience -- first. My first year at University was horrible; the fact that I prevailed and earned my fourth, terminal degree eleven years later can be attributed to three things: first, I had the support of a large, extended family – grandparents, aunts, uncles, godparents, my brothers John, David and Michael and my amazing parents: David & Margaret; second, I was engaged – early and intensely – with varsity athletics; and, finally, I connected with four amazing female athletes who refused to let me flounder and remain my closest friends. Lizzio's research on student success is conclusive on this point: fostering the senses of purpose, connectedness, capability, and resourcefulness. My leadership can and should be measured by the extent to which every student at Sheridan is positioned to achieve their goals.
2. I will leverage the expertise and experience of my colleagues. I learned from amazing friends, peers and mentors at York University who taught me to harness the power of consultation and collaboration. Drawing further on their influence, I will continue to find humour and joy in my work; embrace crucial conversations; and leverage Sheridan's superpower: creativity. My success will be reflected in our employee engagement scores, and the extent to which faculty and staff feel valued, respected, celebrated.
3. I will act with integrity, work tirelessly to build and maintain trust, and always strive to model Sheridan's enviable character and unique identity. These are values I learned from my grandparents; daily, I aim to model them for my kids, nieces and nephews.
4. Finally, I will boast – shamelessly -- about Sheridan and the amazing people who call this learning community home: students, faculty and staff. It's been said that Sheridan is well known but not known well. I have commenced on a mission to change that.

You can and should expect that these commitments will be reflected in our recently launched strategic planning exercise, Sheridan's advocacy to effect post-secondary system-level transformation in Ontario, and our collegial work to achieve long term organizational sustainability.

Your active participation – as an internal member of our community, an invested partner, or an ally -- is fundamental to those three priorities and Sheridan's future. Please: ENGAGE with us.

Specifically: champion the transformative impact of post-secondary education; publicly herald Sheridan's unique contributions; and, identify how you might personally fuel our ambitious aspirations through a gift of time, by leveraging your reputation to amplify ours, by connecting us to your network, or by making a contribution to one of our student support funds.

In their 2017 Courage Report, Deloitte encouraged organizations to navigate this age of disruption by being provocative and challenging the status quo; by incentivizing courageous risk-taking; and, by doing what is right. In other words: we must be bold, which requires confidence.

I love Sheridan's humility; ours is not a community to brag or boast. We must not, however, be apologetic for celebrating what we do and why it matters.

I was at a high school last year watching my amazing niece Maeve perform and was struck by a quote that was posted on the wall. Marianne Williamson wrote: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves: who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?" She goes on to remind us that "playing small does not serve the world" and that "as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

For over fifty years, Sheridan has been dedicated to "the cultivation and care of the community's highest aspirations and ideals." Together, we will continue to serve the world and be a beacon that illuminates the path for others.

Members of the Board and Madame Chancellor... thank you for entrusting me with the tremendous responsibility of serving as Sheridan's 8th President and Vice Chancellor.

Fueled by the unconditional love and support of my favourite person and life-partner Ken and my kind, brilliant, inspirational kids Bennett and Olive – **I cannot wait to get started.**