



**Speech of Ronald Bordessa  
on the occasion of his installation as President and Vice Chancellor  
of the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, November 17, 2006.**

Chancellor McLeod; Chairman McNeil and members of the Board of Governors; Honorable Minister Oda; representatives from provincial, regional and municipal government; representatives from the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada and from the Council of Ontario Universities; colleagues from sister institutions; friends and distinguished guests and members of the UOIT and Durham and Northumberland County communities.

As I listened to the President's address at the first installation I attended over 20 years ago, the furthest thought from my mind was that I might one day stand in a similar place. But here I am to say, first, how very proud I am to stand before you as President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, and second, how impressive is the momentum achieved by UOIT in so short a period of time.

Before I launch into my remarks about UOIT and its future, I wish to give recognition to the past and to acknowledge debts accumulated along the way. I was blessed with loving parents who sought little more than fulfilling lives for their children, making sacrifices to ensure that my brother Dennis and I were able to gain an education. In that time and place this was not an easily achieved goal but their wisdom embraced education as the key to our futures. I am pleased to welcome Dennis and Anne here today to share this moment with Mari and myself. Mari's dedication to education mirrors my own and I thank her for her support both as a colleague and as a loyal partner in life. Our joys, sorrows and shared hopes in life flow forward into the next generation and I am happy to know that Daniel is here today, while Emma, Merike and Carina are here in spirit.

My debts to a succession of teachers, colleagues, friends and leaders from the number of institutions I have served over the years are all beyond repayment. I am happy to see a good number of you here today, going back to high school and undergraduate days through to my many years at York University and fewer at Royal Roads University.

UOIT itself has debts to acknowledge and these I am pleased to discharge. We owe much to the individuals behind the forces that brought the university into being. Before the concrete notion of a university in and for Durham Region and Northumberland County had flickered to public consciousness, it was already aflame for Dr. Gary Polonsky, subsequently UOIT's founding president and now president emeritus. Without Dr. Polonsky's vision, UOIT could not have come to life as it has.

Over the years, courses offered here by Trent, Ryerson and York served as preludes to the unveiling of UOIT. And without the great desire for and willingness to mobilize in support of a university by the citizens and officials of the region, the wise men and women of the Ontario legislature who made the decision to create the university, may not have arrived at their Rubicon, which we can be grateful they crossed.

And so as we contemplate UOIT today, let us thank Dr. Polonsky, our sister universities, the citizens and officials of Durham Region and Northumberland County and those at Queen's Park who made it possible for us to be here. Let us also extend our heartfelt thanks to the great generosity of the donor and philanthropic community which has supported UOIT so well since its inception.

The academic year 2003-4 saw the beginning of our bold project, when the first students and programs arrived at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology. While knowledge itself is at the heart of universities and also of institutes of technology, historically each has brought a distinctive emphasis and orientation to its purposes.

The second half of the nineteenth century delineated the distinctive philosophies of education which have been carried forward to today. In that period, Cardinal Newman's seminal work *The Idea of a University* framed thinking for many about the value of liberal education, a discourse that continues to underpin the activities of many universities today.

Within two or three decades of Newman came the establishment of several now world renowned institutes of technology. These institutes transferred emphasis from the cultivation of individual, liberally educated minds to a focus on a rapidly industrializing world and to teaching and research that was relevant to real-world problems. If it can be said that universities look to thought and institutes look to action as their principal guiding inspiration, it has always been true that thoughtful insight is grounded in an adequate grasp of real-world contexts, while effective action requires deeply thoughtful prior reflection. Just here in the confluence of thought and action we find the added value of the commingled particular sensibilities of universities and institutes of technology. UOIT is such a place of confluence, where contextualized thought and informed action are brought together and graduates leave as competent thinkers and doers, aware of the reciprocities of these two disciplines of life.

What may appear comfortable and immutable today is already shifting under our feet. The status quo will be undermined and the academy of tomorrow will indubitably reflect the continuous unfolding of the world. Yet beneath these changes, disciplined habits of mind, critical thinking and expressive skills and ability to work well with others will endure as the necessary bedrock for legitimate alternative orientations to educational philosophies and practices.

At UOIT we celebrate our position at the confluence of traditions, and look forward to our task of teaching, learning, research and service at the dawning of the twenty first century. That task is defined for us by abiding human values and their validation in

educational traditions as much as by the realities and complexities of the world today. Our best hopes for the future of the world lie in places like UOIT, in educational institutions that can bring the world back into equilibrium because we focus on knowledge as both means and end, as well as on gaining the wisdom that is required to improve human life.

Such an expansive vision for UOIT provides an inspirational context for the journey, but the road to excellence must be taken one step at a time. We are proud of the steps we are taking and recognize the importance of making clear what they are. For this reason our university recently engaged the services of communication experts to advise on branding and the projection of positive images of our values, our intentions and our activities. We are not alone in wishing to stand clearly before our publics and to stand out from our competitors – universities worldwide from the most traditional and prestigious to the most recent and aspiring have followed the same route.

That branding is now such a commonplace characteristic of universities is ample evidence that effective business practices, competitive imperatives and a clear eyed understanding of audiences have brought private enterprise and the public sector into closer alignment with each other. Universities today realize that the needs of students and those who work within the academy as well as the needs of public and private supporters and funders must all be met if they are to remain successfully at the centre of intellectual life.

The four letters UOIT serve as a brand for our university. They stand for authentic and powerful attributes that define a leading technologically sophisticated, teaching focused and research intensive university. They also create a platform from which we can build our new university into a lasting, distinctive and distinguished new star in an already brightly shining galaxy.

The UOIT brand has further identified three words that capture the essence of our aspirations to make UOIT more than just an incremental augmentation to an already fine post secondary education system in Ontario. These words are: *challenge, innovate and connect*.

I want to dwell on these words, to reveal the complex sense of the university concealed within their spare simplicity. These words energize the efforts of the UOIT community to break out from incrementalism into a bold revisioning of a university well fitted to the modern world, which is currently grappling with the problems of its post industrial, knowledge driven realities.

Nothing less is expected of us by the legislation that brought UOIT into being. Among the clear terms of the Act are the following directives, from which I quote liberally.

‘It is the special mission of the university to provide career-oriented university programs and to design and offer programs with a view to creating opportunities for college graduates to complete a university degree.’

The primary focus is to be on undergraduate and postgraduate programs ‘that are responsive to the individual needs of students and to market-driven needs of employers.’

These programs are ‘to advance the highest quality of learning, teaching, research and professional practice.’

And finally the university is ‘to contribute to the advancement of Ontario in the Canadian and global contexts with particular focus on the Durham region and Northumberland County.’

These directives invite a response which is energized by our eagerness to *challenge, innovate and connect*. *Challenge, innovate and connect* are, in fact, a translation of the will of our legislators into touchstones that act to guide the policies and practices of the university. The movement forward of the university is thereby ineluctably joined to the legislative vision of the needs of future society. The particular role to be played by UOIT in educating citizens of the world and in stimulating the development of Ontario is made manifest in the statement of our special mission. UOIT is not only a creature of the legislature but also its instrument for ensuring that its hopes for the economic health and social wellbeing of Ontario can be fulfilled. Let me hasten to add that none of us is deluded enough to claim that we occupy any more than an appropriate contributory role in building the future of Ontario society and economy. But we do claim we have been given an explicit role by the legislation, a role that requires government and university leaders to be always cognizant of their responsibility to support the special mission and objects of UOIT. This truly unique objective brings the Government of Ontario and UOIT into a relationship from which ‘the advancement of Ontario in the Canadian and global contexts’ can be launched.

Universities, in most instances, are fettered by only the most general of legislative guidance. By contrast, UOIT unreservedly takes on the *challenge* of delivering career-oriented programs that meet the individual needs of students and the market-driven needs of employers. Precision of mind, an attribute universities have long sought to cultivate, is integral to the meeting of this challenge. Even to decipher just what the needs of students and employers are is a daunting task in itself; to go further and to design and deliver the teaching and research agendas of the university so that they actually match these needs is a further task of extraordinary complexity.

These challenges of definition and design are often dealt with by inattention to their existence; but that is not the case at UOIT. We face them squarely, just as we face up to our responsibilities to students who have chosen us because they are clear about what they want, and just as we face up to our responsibility to advance Ontario through technology enriched teaching and research. All of this will make our graduates attractive to an increasingly knowledge based world. Like racehorses who have been fitted with blinkers to focus them and make them perform better, UOIT also benefits from our own focus on education for careers, the market-place and advancement in a global context. And when blinkered horses are not racing they can shed their prop to success and gaze

more widely upon the world. At UOIT we too know that our challenge to be focused on our particular special mission is assisted by the time we take to gaze more widely on the world. UOIT faces the challenge of meeting the needs of employers for graduates who serve them well in their particular marketplaces, without overlooking the equally important individual needs of students for their own development as broadly educated human beings.

At UOIT we must be prepared to *connect* in many ways and we must recognize that it is imperative to think and act both locally and globally simultaneously in order to serve the needs of our students and their future employers. The local communities of Durham Region and Northumberland County are connected to UOIT with an intensity that would be the envy of universities worldwide. We must ensure that UOIT, as their university, lives up to their hopes and dreams, that it provides a place for their families to obtain high quality education, and that it acts as a catalyst to guarantee the future prosperity of the region.

When we look beyond the region to Ontario and the rest of Canada, we note the alignment of our mandate to the social and economic agendas of the nation. And when we look beyond Canada we are pleased to note that UOIT has already taken its place as a destination for students from around the world, attracting them from close to 50 countries. We also know that our graduates will soon be working in other countries, spreading the lustre of UOIT and making the connections that are so critical to the well being of Canada.

We are proud of our special educational partnership with Durham College, one which connects students in their programs to degree completion opportunities at UOIT, and UOIT's graduates to career specific Durham certificates. Durham College and UOIT are working together to make accessibility to postsecondary education a priority and reality.

In the yet more globalized world of the future, education will become an even more competitive business, and it behooves UOIT to make its connections and take its place among those institutions which are reaching for top quality teaching and research performances. Already, in just a few years, the breathtaking vision and what has actually been achieved at UOIT have made connections with universities, institutes and colleges throughout the world. And those connections will only get stronger as we continue on our path towards a well earned reputation for excellence.

Excellence is predicated on purposeful orientation to the future – and to *innovation*, the third watchword for UOIT. Much attention has been focused recently on research and innovation as areas in which major investment is both essential and wise. Nowhere is this attention needed more than in science and technology, and we are fortunate indeed that our Federal and Provincial governments are alive to the importance of innovation and research in these areas.

At UOIT innovation has been a driving force from the beginning. As the only laptop based university in Ontario, we provide every student with a technologically enhanced

education, which engenders more and deeper learning and also ensures that our graduates will leave with high levels of comfort with whatever technologically driven innovations they might encounter later. UOIT's innovative mobile learning system recently won a major 'Canadian Information Productivity Award,' a clear vindication of UOIT's willingness to articulate its philosophy and learning system to the vision of a technologically grounded institution, charged with readying its students for the work environments of their futures.

Research has been relegated to the margins at most new universities founded around the world in the last decade or so, but not at UOIT. Here again a bold vision sought to realize a research intensive university from the beginning, and remarkably we have succeeded by all measures. UOIT is, in fact, innovative in its organizational structure, its program offerings and in the research it conducts. This is indeed an attractive place for researchers who seek a vibrant and risk embracing environment in which they can collaborate with like minded colleagues. And so it has been: accomplished researchers from every corner of the world have been attracted to UOIT and the track record of their successes in grant competitions and achievements in their research areas is quite exceptional. UOIT has very quickly established a critical mass of research and is now investing in infrastructure to take research and innovation from the laboratories, classrooms and work offices through commercialization processes and into the market place.

Only innovative impulses and actions can take our university forward and establish it on the university landscape of Ontario. UOIT is bursting with the energy, the expertise, and the willingness to liberate our innovative impulses for the benefit of our community and province.

Let us briefly review how some of the activities at UOIT have been constructed with 'the advancement of Ontario in the Canadian and global contexts' in mind. Information on teaching and research activity at the university is a click of a mouse away, and it is not my purpose to review it all here. However, I do want to highlight activity that is particularly germane to the advancement of Ontario, with particular focus on Durham region and Northumberland County. These activities are precisely coincident with the government's own policies on economic growth and development.

The energy and automotive industries are critically important to the well being of the province and both of them are anchored in this region. UOIT has already built a strong partnership with General Motors of Canada. Significant investments in the Automotive Centre of Excellence at UOIT are a model of how public and private resources can be brought together to ensure that research and innovation in this sector take place at UOIT. The faculty expertise required to capitalize on the investments made has flowed to UOIT because they find here in Oshawa both the automotive industry and a university that provides an environment that is conducive to their teaching and research programs. Oshawa is automotive territory and UOIT is dedicated to ensuring that this region becomes a leader in research, development and manufacturing in this industry.

The nuclear power generation industry is also concentrated in this region and affords a second opportunity for UOIT to fulfill its mandate. UOIT set out from the beginning to build superior strength in energy systems and nuclear engineering. The nuclear power industry will be relying on UOIT more than on any other institution in future. UOIT is also deeply involved in energy systems research, a focus that takes us close to the heart of the climate change discourse that now preoccupies the world. The creation of hydrogen from steam produced in the nuclear reaction process promises a partial release from reliance on carbon based, global warming fuels. UOIT is leading the way in hydrogen production research, the success of which would underwrite a leading role for Ontario in this new economy.

The automotive and nuclear industries are the backbone of the region's economy but they need augmentation if the projected rapid population growth of the region is to enjoy the workplaces, cultural venues and public services that characterize the most desirable communities. Again UOIT has anticipated these needs and created teaching and research programs focused on, for example, environmental toxicology, forensics, and pharmaceutical biotechnology; entrepreneurship in the information technology environment, especially in gaming; internet security; and the social bases of crime and conformity. Knowledge in these areas leads not only to better foundations for community building, but it also creates new economic opportunities for the region. Moreover in the areas of health sciences and education we find both leading researchers and the next generation of technologically enriched practitioners to serve our growing population.

Today we are six months away from the convocation of UOIT's first four year program graduates. From its standing start to 30 programs, 4300 students, 125 faculty and numerous awards for excellence, UOIT has come a long way. There is of course a long way to go, too, with no clearly defined end in sight but with the next set of goals firmly in mind.

These next goals build on the strong undergraduate program beginnings, and the strong research culture at UOIT. Additionally they respond to the claims made on the university by a variety of professional practices. A research intensive university cries out for a vibrant graduate program presence, and preparations are being made to roll out a range of graduate programs in the near future. These programs will be either research intensive or focused on the enhancement of professional practice for the lifelong learners of tomorrow. These are the next phase of the journey towards a mature university that is comfortable with its particular mandate and is bent on earning its respected place among those great universities of the world that understand and burnish the trust that they hold.

I thank you all for being here today, for your interest in and support for the UOIT we see before us. I pledge myself to dedicate my entire efforts to ensuring that the marvelous infancy of this university is followed by many successful years of growth as we build a university we can all be proud of. To the Board of Governors I express my gratitude for your confidence and trust and to my colleagues throughout the university I say thank you for the warm welcome you have extended to me and my wife Mari. As for the UOIT of

tomorrow let us all hope that the gods shine upon us, so that we may shine upon and illuminate the world.