



Open House, October 15, 2022

Closing Remarks of President Bill Lahey

I know you heard about how life at King's begins with our matriculation ceremony, pictured here behind me. It is one of our "Harry Potter moments", when we get all dressed up in our gowns and pretend we are speaking Latin.

In addition to being cool and different, Matriculation is where the university and our students make solemn promises to each other and where students make a solemn promise to each other. It is where our relationship as members of a community we build together symbolically begins in each academic year.

At the core of those promises is the commitment to abide by "the precepts of communal living and learning". What is crucial about these words is the emphasis they put on learning that comes from living together in community and how they recognize that this is how learning happens, in a vision that sees each classroom and tutorial as a community that exists within, and is supported by, a larger community that embraces students and faculty but also staff and administrators, alumni, our neighbours and, in our case, Dalhousie.

At our best, this is what King's does as well or better than anyone: we live together purposefully, knowing that learning is deeper, richer, and more holistic and transformative if it happens in a friendly, supportive, fun and loving community. It is through the creation and sustaining of such a community with and for each generation of students, that our students learn who they are and what they can accomplish and contribute not only at King's but beyond King's. It is how being a student at King's – and likewise a president of King's - prepares each of us for a life of purpose, value and meaning in all the communities we will belong to.

In that context, I want to briefly touch on a question some of you (perhaps some of you parents) may have – does a King's and Dalhousie education prepare students for a successful career?

The answer is yes, recognizing that successful careers depend not just on the education you have but also other factors. There is an abundance of data showing that students who have a first degree in the liberal arts, which we define to include the sciences and journalism when they are taught as they are here and at Dalhousie, have successful careers. While that data shows that students from more vocational educations do have an advantage in the early years of their careers, it also shows the advantage recedes as careers progress and the advantages of a broader first degree in the liberal arts start to come into play in an economy and world that rewards those who are

flexible and can think deeply, learn whatever they have to learn, communicate clearly and bring imagination, creativity and values to their work.

Our information about the careers of King's graduates shows that they have done as well or better than graduates in the liberal arts from other universities. You can see profiles of many of them on our website under the "alumni community" tab which is under the "alumni and friends" tab. They are employed, enjoying fulfilment and making a difference in every professional field imaginable, including (as you might expect) journalism and education at every level, but also in every field of entertainment and throughout the arts and culture sectors, in medicine and other health professions, in information technology and the digital economy and many other fields of business, in advocacy and the not-for-profit sector, in politics and public service at every level of governance from the municipal to the international, in research and scholarship, in communications and in my own field of law and all of the other learned professions.

We are very proud of them all, especially for what they are accomplishing and contributing in all of these and many other fields. They are leaders doing work that makes a difference for their organizations, colleagues, communities and our society and planet. In diverse ways, their careers are about making their parts of the world more equal, fair, sustainable, beautiful and just. And if asked, every one of them will say that their success comes from their education at King's as much as it does from the further and more professional education most of them have had.

The success of our alumni stems from many sources we cannot claim credit for. But it is obvious to me there is a golden thread in the success of our graduates. It is what they learned and how they grew here at King's by living out the precepts of communal living and learning in their studies and in every other dimension of their life as a King's student.

On the theme of community, I want to touch briefly on another important characteristic of the King's of today and tomorrow: we are a community in transition. We want to be a more diverse and accessible community than we are or have been historically. We understand that to achieve that goal, we must make inclusivity a defining quality of who we are. We also understand that achievement of our goals requires action.

That is why we are very excited about our new partnership with the Mi'kmaq communities of Nova Scotia to create a cohort program for Mi'kmaw students in our undergraduate journalism degree in response to the recognition in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of the fundamental importance of journalism to reconciliation. Under this initiative we will also be creating an Indigenous space on campus, creating an additional Indigenous Student Advisor position and cooperating with Mount Saint Vincent University in providing Indigenous students at both universities with an Indigenous Auntie.

This initiative, which includes tuition waivers for Mi'kmaw students in journalism, builds on our other efforts to make King's more inclusive. I won't take your time by mentioning them all here. One that is particularly important

is changing the face of the people who work at King's so that students from the Black, Indigenous and other underrepresented communities see themselves represented in our faculty and staff. Another is supplementing the support available to all our students at Dalhousie with additional support here at King's. For example, we have hired a full time Equity Officer, a Student Support Advisor and we will soon appoint a full-time accessibility officer. This summer, we became probably the smallest university to commit to implementing the Scarborough Charter On Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion in Canadian Higher Education. And we are doing serious work under the leadership of Sexual Health and Safety Officer Jordan Roberts to address and respond to sexualized violence, which we understand is not only a safety and well-being issue of the highest importance but also an issue deeply interconnected with equity, diversity, accessibility and inclusion.

You can read more about our EDIA and Reconciliation initiatives, and our work on sexualized violence, on our website. The point I want to stress is my confidence that our efforts will be successful because although we have lacked diversity, I think inclusiveness is in our DNA, especially on the part of our students. They have pushed for the changes we have and are making and they have been crucially involved in every one of them. I think this also is an example of how our matriculation oath, to abide by the precepts of communal life and learning, reflects the values of our community and of how our students want inclusiveness and belonging, the underlying values of that oath, to be put into action not only for those who are here, but for everyone. I am in full agreement with them.

Matriculation is one of our traditions that some would say shows how old fashioned we are. I think it represents our understanding that the greatness of any university in the past and in the future lies in the greatness of the community that exists among those who belong to the university. It symbolizes how our very identity at King's is defined by our mutual commitment in every generation and across all generations to being a community defined by friendship and belonging that embraces everyone and our common mission of learning with and from one another.

These are the "precepts of communal life and learning" that I find most inspiring in my own commitment to King's. As I said at our most recent matriculation, they call on us, and everyone who comes here, to be kind and to put kindness into action by extending the hand of friendship to those around them and by taking it when it is offered so that all can enjoy that feeling of belonging and togetherness that is in the very fibre of King's. They call upon us to aspire to being a loving community despite all the difficulties, events and obstacles that can sometimes prevent us from being our best selves in our relationships with each other, in and beyond university.

I hope you have had a great day and that you decide to make King's, and Dalhousie through King's, your university. But even more importantly, I hope you find the university that is best for you in helping you to have a great career and even more importantly to become the extraordinary human being we all know you are in the process of becoming.