

President's Convocation Address 2020

Draft Script, 5 min running time

Greetings graduates of 2020. Kwe. Bonjour.

I am so happy to be here with you. I know this special moment has been a long time coming. As your President, I am both humbled and honoured to have this opportunity to celebrate your resilience and success, at a time that is unique in the history of the College.

Graduates, this is your day – congratulations!

On behalf of the Algonquin College Board of Governors, I want to welcome you — our graduates, faculty and staff, family and friends – to our first ever Virtual Convocation Ceremony. While we cannot come together under one roof this year, we CAN come together as one College community.

With the world changing at a pace never seen before in human history, we often hear that it is more important than ever to seek out moments of joy, of happiness.

Today is truly one of those moments... a joyous celebration for you..., your family..., your friends..., your classmates and your mentors. It's also a day to thank those who supported you along your academic journey, by expressing your gratitude to family and friends, and paying it forward.

Amidst the events reshaping our global reality, be they the pandemic, climate change, the fight for social justice and equality, or automation and the world of A.I., we come together to celebrate your incredible achievement, which is all the more remarkable given these extraordinary times.

In this age of great uncertainty, I can be certain of one thing.... The steadfast determination you have displayed will serve you well in the new environment being shaped so rapidly before us.

The world you are entering, upon graduation, looks nothing like the world from even a year ago..... yet along with the challenges that lay ahead ...

the future holds promise and opportunities the likes of which have not been presented to any generation for a long time.

The door is open for you to really change the world, and not in a clichéd sense, but in real and tangible ways, emboldened with fresh ideas and new perspectives.

It also stands ready for your generation's champions of social justice, to address issues of inequity, and the lack of diversity and inclusion that recent events have brought to the forefront in ways that can no longer be ignored.

Whatever your path forward, you will have the opportunity to help lead a true transformation.... to recalibrate the socio-economic inequities for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour on a scale never seen before. And to reshape the modern workforce and break new ground in your chosen field.

As you prepare to unleash your potential during these times of great unpredictability, you can take comfort in knowing you are not alone. Not only do you have family and friends, from which you can draw great strength, but you are also now part of an extended family of Algonquin College alumni – as we also celebrate reaching a milestone of 200,000th graduates this year. I encourage you to explore the many opportunities our Alumni & Friends Network now offers you to stay connected.

We go forward today with a renewed sense of these connections, with respect and caring for each other... two of Algonquin's core values.

Embracing our community will hopefully be one of the enduring legacies to emerge from these times, and you will be the ones to pass this on to the next generation.

Education, in its many forms, is a significant touchstone. It helps form the solid ground beneath our feet. It allows us to adapt, pivot and anticipate rather than merely react when change inevitably challenges our lives.

The knowledge and skills you have acquired here at Algonquin College are now part of your “tool kit”, helping to “future-proof” your career.

I want to borrow now from my colleague, Ron (Deganadus) McLester, Algonquin’s Vice President – Truth, Reconciliation & Indigenization. He often uses the metaphor of arrows in a quiver.

An arrow on its own will snap easily, however when they are bundled together, they are strong and resilient. Having many arrows in your quiver provides strength, and will enhance your confidence when faced with the many challenges set to come your way.

So ... going forward ... be inspired to learn new things and develop new skills. Fill your quiver with more arrows and make your mark.

Likewise, when I think about the road ahead at Algonquin, I am confident we are well positioned as a world-class post-secondary institution. We have a solid foundation beneath our feet and many arrows in our quiver, offering so many possibilities for learners to refresh and add new skills.

We have so many reasons to be inspired and be proud, whether it is the new ideas coming to life in our MakerSpace and our Social Innovation lab, how our regional campuses in Pembroke and Perth connect creatively with their communities, or how we help those less fortunate with our many program fundraisers.

Everything of value starts with an idea. What ideas are you preparing to share with the world? What script are you about to write?

It's no secret that I am a huge fan of the author, Neil Gaiman, and I'd like to borrow what I think is an appropriate quote from his book, *Art Matters*:

"It is easy to pretend that nobody can change anything, that society is huge and the individual is less than nothing. But the truth is, individuals make the

future, and they do it by imagining that things can be different.”

So, when you think about your future, where does *YOUR* imagination take you? The world needs your creativity, your energy and your resiliency more than ever before.

It needs you to dream big dreams, and to go forward and be fearless.

Be unafraid to fail and to learn from your missteps. To borrow again from Neil Gaiman:

“Now go, and make interesting mistakes...Make glorious and fantastic mistakes. Break rules. Leave the world more interesting for you being here.”

History is filled with the stories of entrepreneurs and leaders in every field whose ideas met with initial dismissal, failure, and seemingly insurmountable odds before they achieved success.

So let opportunity be what defines you. I know you already possess the determination, imagination and innovative spirit to overcome any obstacles in your path.

Your goals have already been tested by adversity this year. Your strength and resolve have prepared you well for the journey ahead... and you should be proud of what you have accomplished, particularly in these trying times.

I wish you every success, and once again, graduates, congratulations!

Miigwetch. Thank you. Merci.