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PRESIDENT'S REMARKS, SPRING CONVOCATION

June 2016

TORONTO, ONTARIO

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. Chancellor, esteemed colleagues, proud family and friends, and graduating class of 2016—welcome to York University for our Spring Convocation.

As we celebrate you today, graduands, we also celebrate a year of excellence, impact and achievement across our University community—from SSHRC Impact awards for research on refugees and youth homelessness to the CIS Men’s Soccer Championship, from the appointment of 15 York alumni to Canada’s Parliament to the opening of a new Eco-Campus in Costa Rica, our faculty, staff, students and alumni continue to lead in advancing our core values of academic quality, social responsibility and global and community engagement.

Graduands, let me say a few words to you. In a few moments, you will have your degrees. Congratulations—you made it.

I know you did not do it alone, so please join with me in thanking your parents, partners, friends and professors who helped bring you to this stage today.

Now that you have reached this milestone and obtained your degree, I have an important question for you: what will you do with it?

I realize this is the same question your parents may be asking you, but for different reasons...

I ask because the university—today and for centuries past—has a high public purpose. Our mission is to provide an education of the highest quality, to build knowledge and understanding, to cultivate excellence, and ultimately, to prepare you, our graduates, to go out and make the world better than you found it.

I am proud that York has a tradition of producing graduates who are engaged in doing just that. Today, you are joining a community of nearly 300,000 alumni living and working around the globe who are using their York educations to do truly amazing things.

Take, for example, Barbara Hall, who graduated with her LLB from Osgoode Hall Law School in 1978. In addition to serving as Toronto’s mayor from 1994 to 1997, and as a Toronto city councilor for three terms, Barbara was chief commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission from 2005 to 2015. Known as a “Mayor of All the People,” Barbara’s civic leadership throughout her career exemplifies the values of inclusion, community engagement and social responsibility on which this University was founded.

Or consider Lilly Singh, the YouTube sensation also known as ‘Superwoman,’ who graduated with a BA in Psychology. When her parents suggested she consider grad school, she told them what she really wanted to do was to make videos about her experiences and share them with others. Today Lilly is a motivational speaker, a stand-up comedian, a rapper, and she is on on *Forbes’* list of the World’s Highest Paid YouTube Stars.

What do these York alumni have in common?

Building on the broad education they received, they have made meaningful careers by experimenting and taking risks to achieve what was most important to them. They have also done something that your generation does very well, which is to translate what they learned in one context to another.

The jobs of the future will look nothing like those of my generation, so this ability to think across systems, to communicate effectively, and to adapt to change will be critical for you.

There is a good reason that the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has called your generation the “torch bearers.”

Indeed, Prime Minister Trudeau was right when he said recently that university graduates are not the leaders of tomorrow—“you are leaders today.”

So the next time someone asks you what you will do with your degree, I hope you can tell them that you are already doing it—that you are testing your skills, building something new, learning to lead.

As York’s newest alumni, I hope you will continue the tradition of giving back to your communities. Above all, I hope you will live by the light of your own torches.

I know you will make our world a better place. Congratulations.