

# **Welcome Back Speech**

**August 23, 2016**

Bonjour à tous et à toutes.

Thank you for taking a bit of your time to join me for this Welcome Back reception.

I trust you have benefited from your vacation with the glorious weather we have had and that you are ready for another exciting academic year.

This year will be exciting and ... challenging! (like all the others have been!)

Dawson has entered into a transitional period with ongoing renewal of employees in all categories that began a while ago and that brings its share of challenges in terms of orientation and integration into the workplace.

In regards to funding, governmental decisions have subjected the College to major budget cuts in the last five years. This has forced us to use our resources with vigilance and care.

Despite this situation, our financial situation has remained in good shape, partly because of our meticulous management of funds and our capacity to generate additional revenues, notably through greater attractiveness of Dawson for prospective students.

Transition is also on the agenda with the current revision of our strategic development plan. Over the last five-year period, inspired by a vision statement that has spearheaded several educational initiatives, Dawson has gained in notoriety through innovative undertakings that serve both our students and society well.

We can be proud of recent accomplishments in various sectors, such as:

- on-going evaluation of our programs, services and actions;
- development of applied research in pedagogical approaches and active learning methodologies;
- entrepreneurship education;

- support to cross-disciplinary and extracurricular activities enriching the student experience;
- help provided to students with disabilities or with special needs;
- institutional commitment to peace education and to sustainable development;
- international cooperation allowing us to share our expertise and bringing students and faculty onto the world stage, whether it is in China, Mexico, European countries or Central America.

All these endeavours put Dawson in the spotlight as a forward-looking institution dedicated to providing relevant and high-quality education to our students, giving them tools to tackle issues and succeed in this increasingly complex and interdependent world.

It should come as no surprise that the forthcoming Strategic Plan, the Strategic Plan 3.0, will propose directions and goals that will remain aligned with these accomplishments, providing stronger coherence and greater clarity to our educational mission and to the vision of student success that Dawson is pursuing.

Therefore, the renewal of our Strategic Plan provides us with the opportunity to engage in a campus-wide dialogue concerning the way we conduct our business as educators and to deepen the significance of these fundamental questions: What is education for? Do the years spent at Dawson make our graduates better global citizens or does it only prepare them to be consumers and workers in a resource-depleting economy?

Answers to these questions are vital for us if we want to best contribute, as educators, to the development of the full potential of our students.

I am sure we all have noticed this unusually hot summer, with exceptionally high temperatures, not only here, but elsewhere, like India for instance. Following the recent report released August 2<sup>nd</sup> by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an American governmental scientific body conducting research to improve understanding and stewardship of the environment, 2015 surpassed 2014 as the warmest year since at least the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

According to this *State of the Climate* report, all the key indicators related to the global climate system are on the rise: greenhouse gas concentrations, global surface temperature, sea surface temperature, upper ocean heat content, sea level, extremes in the water cycle and precipitation, they all have shown in 2015 to be the highest on record. And, it seems we have seen nothing yet!

It is an obvious fact: this is a worldwide crisis. As stated by the SITRA in 2013, SITRA being a national research agency located in Finland: we are going through a deep and long-term structural crisis of the 20<sup>th</sup> century societal paradigm.

This crisis manifests itself in various domains:

- environmental – the energy-and-material-intensive mass-production and consumption model that is spread throughout the industrialized world has taken its toll on the Earth's carrying capacities;
- social – inequalities between the richest and the poorest are increasing;
- political – conflicts around the world are growing and protest support is being expressed more vocally, such as that in support of candidates Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in the current US presidential campaign

Something big is at stake. This why we must ask ourselves what education is for. We are standing at the crossroads: we either continue the way we have since the Industrial Revolution or we undergo a radical transformation of our lifestyle, by putting an end to an economic model that is threatening more than ever our existence on earth.

This task has been labelled as “building a greener economy” and is now known as the “circular economy”, which is defined as an economy “that does not generate any more emissions than what carbon sinks can store” (SITRA, 2015).

Clearly, policymakers have their share of responsibility. This is why the important Agreement on Climatic Change in Paris last summer raised so much hope. But this is only an agreement and countries now have to stand by their commitment and take action.

This won't be enough. As the motto goes: we have to think globally and act locally. Locally, especially in educational institutions like Dawson, we need to ask ourselves what can be done. As

suggested by Michael Fullan (2013), Professor Emeritus of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, attached to the University of Toronto, and a worldwide authority on educational reform, what is required is an extensive makeover of our education systems, shifting towards learning that fosters creativity and innovation, dislodging it from the “factory model”.

This paradigm shift, this idea of redesigning the purpose of education in this age of globalization and technological connectedness, is now what is advocated by the utmost scholars around the world: education for sustainable development, for sustainable well-being, ecologically, socially and economically speaking.

This bold notion of education has driven the last strategic development period through initiatives concretizing this new paradigm, offering activities fostering creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. We will therefore propose in our forthcoming Strategic Plan a renewed commitment to student success, encouraging students to develop as active learners and stimulating them to engaged citizenship and positive action in response to pressing social and ecological challenges.

I intend to submit for discussion this proposal of a revisited strategic development plan in the coming weeks, aiming to adopt its final version by the end of October. So stay tuned, you have a say in this process!

There are a few more things that I would like to mention.

First, we will be holding in September a series of events to commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the shooting that occurred September 13<sup>th</sup>, 2006. Beyond the tragic loss of Anastasia De Sousa and the shattered lives of other students and employees, what we wish to commemorate is the resilience the Dawson community showed in overcoming this tragedy.

Being resilient is the ability to recover and even pull strength from sudden shocks. No doubt in my mind that we, as a community, have shown such resilience and this is what we will celebrate in September by holding events that will translate our commitment to an educational mission that is bold and vibrant.

On September 13<sup>th</sup>, announcements will be made to concretize this commitment. During three days, Dawson will hold “Projects for Peace” activities. The schedule is to be released soon.

On September 15<sup>th</sup>, we will have the opportunity to welcome a French philosopher, Abdennour Bidar, whose work on Islam, the clash of civilizations and the brotherhood of mankind has gained him international reputation. The conference will be delivered in French with simultaneous translation. À ne pas manquer!

Monsieur Bidar vient au Québec à l’invitation expresse du Collège Dawson. Il prononcera aussi des conférences à l’Université de Montréal, au Cégep de Rosemont, au Collège Maisonneuve – ou il parlera de prévention de la radicalisation – de même qu’à la Ville de Montréal, intéressée par le thème du Vivre-Ensemble. Il s’agit d’une contribution significative de Dawson à la communauté montréalaise!

These three days will also provide Dawson with the opportunity to reaffirm its commitment to Peace Education.

In 2007, Dawson chose to build an ecological peace garden as a memorial, a symbol and a way to heal and build community.

Since then, the Dawson Community has experienced through various ways the restorative properties of reconnecting with Nature and how it can reduce stress and cultivate positive emotions.

According to the World Watch Institute, as a peacemaking tool, the environment offers some useful – perhaps even unique – qualities that lend themselves to building peace and transforming conflicts. Environmental challenges ignore political boundaries, require long-term perspective and extend community building beyond polarizing economic linkages.

Since environmental issues like climate change and depletion of natural resources can be seen as conflicts with Nature, we will keep collaborating and cooperating to transform these conflicts into practical peace-building by reconnecting people, community and Nature. This is what the Living Campus Initiative is about.

This initiative embodies how bold education can be: a commitment and inspiration to offer educational approaches that view the entire college as a living lab with a vision that requires tight collaboration and alignment in all sectors of College's activities. So to say, a genuine community-oriented educational project that, I'm glad to say, is getting the support of the Dawson Student Union.

This project aims at using education as an agent of change and a way of serving society by empowering people to contribute to the betterment of the world.

Over the years, Dawson has made great strides in reducing its ecological footprint. But still, we emit 2.5 tons of greenhouse gases. I am very proud to announce that Dawson will be Carbon Neutral from 2016 onwards and will be a leader, implementing sustainable practices that preempt conflict and build relationships.

On another matter, Dawson has been granted, thanks to the Model UN students and to faculty Chris Bourne and Ted Irwin, the task of hosting in March 2017 the World Harvard ModelUN Conference. This major event, held under the tutelage of Harvard University, will bring to Montreal over 2,000 international participants. This conference of high prestige is Dawson's contribution to the 375<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of Montreal. This will showcase our College as a key contributor to higher education in Quebec and abroad. More to come!

Finally, following consultations held last semester with respect to the strategic plan, it has become clear that it is time for Dawson to become a leading employer and engage on a path that will optimize development and engagement of employees.

To this effect, the Board of Governors adopted last June a proposal creating a position of Director of Human Resources. Having over a thousand employees, this position is essential to set a strong directorship that will help foster the development of what stands as our most valuable resource, i.e. you all. The search of candidates for this position will soon begin.

Before concluding this presentation, I will turn to our Academic Dean who will tell us about the some highlights within the academic sectors.

I would now like to conclude by paying tribute to two of our employees that will be leaving Dawson in the coming days or weeks. Rob Cassidy, responsible for coordinating the academic development, and Kaila Folinsbee, in charge of the research portfolio, have been offered jobs by our sister universities, which they have accepted.

Rob is going to Concordia as Director of the Center for Learning and Teaching and Kaila is going to McGill as Senior Grant Officer. Both have been in their positions at Dawson for the last three years and their contribution to the advancement of their respective portfolios has been remarkable. I would like to underline their commitment to Dawson, as much as their positive and constructive approach to the fulfilment of their duties. I wish them all the best in their forthcoming responsibilities. Rob and Kaila, thank you and don't drift away too far from us!

Finally, I wish all of you an excellent semester and remember, as educators, we are agents of change and are here to make a difference in the life of our students.

May this be an inspiration for you!

Merci et bon appétit!

Richard Fillion  
Director General