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Student Address

Convocation June 2011

*Bonjour*, Good afternoon,

Here we are, sitting in Convo Mall... We aren't rushing to class today; we've gone from first-year bewilderment to cool confidence and ownership. Now we are convocating!

Today is a good day to celebrate. We are all here. We've accomplished something significant. We've worked hard: on our studies and on paying for our education, while balancing all our other projects and commitments. Congratulations are in order. And with congratulations, tremendous thanks to those who guided and supported us in getting here.

*We are grateful to the thoughtful, quirky, wise, generous Professors and TAs who have taught us and who have shared their insights and ideas; and to the advisors and mentors who have helped us navigate our way; and to our families, friends, and networks who have supported us. Merci beaucoup!*

Today makes me feel grateful to live in a place and a time where this opportunity for growth and adventure has been open to us.

I'd like to share three of my most powerful and formative experiences during my five years at SFU.

*D'abord, j'ai poursuivi mes études en sciences politique dans un programme bilingue.* It was an adventure to continue French immersion into university. In the bilingual French Cohort program, every student participates in a university exchange to a francophone university. I spent a year in France and it was exciting to study and be immersed in a different academic and political culture. Many of us, who have participated in one of SFU's international exchanges, know the value and great opportunity for growth that comes with studying abroad.

An exchange is inevitably an adventure. Being exposed to a foreign university system, we learn that it is useful to think critically about how education is organized both at home and abroad. It's an opportunity to engage with the world; in a true exchange of knowledge and culture, students bring new relationships and awareness home, enriching their communities with broader global understandings. My exchange made me feel excited about learning. I'm grateful for the adventure.

My second story is about learning *how* to learn. Each semester, students from all disciplines engage in the Undergraduate Semester in Dialogue. They learn about effective communication by *applying* facilitation and dialogue tools. They talk and they

*listen*. They work closely as a class, experimenting with how to work together, how to learn from each other. They realize the skills to confidently and curiously call up community experts and mentors. Empowered by their own creativity, dialogue students explore how to thoroughly examine a topic.

As a final project, students organize a public dialogue. Our cohort decided to base our event on the concept of *back-casting*: the idea is to first envision an ideal future; Then to work backwards from that vision, to plan the steps and strategies to realize it. We took risks to make it creative. Who knew that Bob Elton would happily help glue feathers and sparkles to a collage to illustrate a sustainable energy future? We found success in our innovation.

Dialogue is an adventure in learning: students take responsibility for the way their education is presented. It is empowering and transformative. It provides a model for learning that is engaging and innovative.

The world needs more engagement and innovation.

Third story: creativity in motion.

My education extended beyond the classroom walls to engage with the world in the Sustainable Community Development Program. It was in one of my classes that three classmates and I wrote the business plan for Shift Urban Cargo Delivery. Shift is a pedal powered delivery service using cargo tricycles. It is organized as a worker co-op. It is built on a foundation of collaboration, teamwork and community support. The project grew out of our passion for social and environmental justice.

In developing this project, the excitement of planning how to take action changed into the adventure of actually carrying it out. (Putting rubber on the road!) SFU provided the opportunity for us to be innovative and now we are realizing our vision to demonstrate a viable alternative to delivery trucks in the busy downtown core.

The most valuable part of education is putting into practice what we have learned.

(If you see me on a trike this summer, please wave.)

My university experience was valuable and formative because my education was an adventure; because the opportunity for experiential learning made me excited about learning; because interdisciplinary models and tools for creativity and Dialogue helped me explore *how* to learn; because I got to apply my learning through unique and relevant programs focused not only on research, but on action—not only the way things are, but the way they could be... the way we'd like them to be. The way education ought to be—for everyone.

However, not everyone will have the opportunities we have had. There are many barriers to education: cost, accessibility, social factors. In a world that demands a more thoughtful and innovative society, access to education is imperative, including financial

accessibility and equal opportunity, and a system that *aims* to develop creative and engaged citizens.

This year we had the opportunity to participate in the *envision* process to imagine the future of SFU. I'm excited about the emerging vision for more experiential learning, and expanded opportunities for the types of adventures that made my degree valuable. I am excited to see this vision grow and take root and to participate and witness the actions of the students, faculty and administration in carrying out this vision.

I am excited for you, my fellow alumni as you go out into the world.

Our task of envisioning the world we'd like to see is an exciting one. Creating and sharing our vision will be our adventure. Some of us will continue studying and researching to contribute to the vision... some have clear plans for a career, some (like me) will experiment with different jobs and projects.] My hope for the future is that our graduating class will go out and *connect* with the world: with hope, inspiration, and always knowing: "*We are the ones we've been waiting for.*"

*Bon courage.*