

Humanities 101 - Fall Session, 2013 - Lakehead University

Final Address: Peter C. I. Ackermann

Dearly gathered people here tonight, thank you so much for being here. It is truly wonderful to be a part of this room right now.

It has taken much thinking and reflection to be able to speak before everyone, about what this program and its people have created for citizens of this community. Congratulations to all who have 'stayed the course' and are now crossing the finish line. It was with great respect that I followed the path of Humanities 101 with you. Such a sweet sorrow it is, for us to share one last evening, and for me to create these last words for you.

The true creation, however, has been the success of this program. Confidently stepping towards tomorrow will ensure the living on, of the lively and inspiring spirit that Humanities 101 had upon our room. How great it was to be part of a space full of eager people, excited to learn.

The first lecture took place on a lovely evening that was still touched by summer. Outside, rugby players were enjoying the bora lasking field. Rich rays of sunlight shone into the room. Glare was a slight problem for some, but as we near the winter Solstice such warmth and brightness is missed.

This class has been like that very glowing evening light, reaching into the windowpanes of my life. As the world outside was beautiful, so were, so are the horizons of learning. The warmth of such energy was contained, is contained in our first lecturer, to our last. Thank you for such fascinating sessions, and for taking the time to be with us then, and especially tonight.

As fall term winds down on the university, so winds down our course. The windows look out into a world covered in night. It has made me sad to think that the lights will be off in Room 1022 Bora Laskin next Thursday. But in the rooms of learning and fellowship within ourselves, I believe the light will always be on until its time to rest, reflect, and celebrate.

What I will miss the most is the unique manifestation of that fellowship which was our group. However, let that fellowship live on in all subsequent groups that will be joined. The welcoming atmosphere instantly pervading the room during the lectures, shall come forth from us: warming and lighting the meeting halls of learning, service, and change. I am proud to be a part of what was an inclusive and diverse group of teachers and learners, gathered here in celebration and gratitude this evening.

From our hearts we thank you for this wonderful chance to experience university life. Thank you for being mentors and role models... These people before you are the reason "Grandmother Spirit" said that Life was all about meeting new people.

The best encounters with someone new are those that open new doors. We are grateful to meet those who want to open the doors of education. Open, then, are the doors to being more rational, and more just - not only that: creativity and spirituality are just steps away.

Views of all kinds have been expressed in this intellectually safe space. With education we can create more safe spaces within the community at large. In the wider world must the ideals of diversity and inclusiveness be role modeled, and mentored.

Indeed, the twenty-first century has been an era of no easy solutions. We students are challenged with finding our place, our great work within this tough society. There's often little time to try to make sense of things in the ever increasingly urgent need to act.

There are some excellent academic words about the 'need to act'. I would like to thank James who introduced me to the work of one Paulo Friere, and he said "Within history, in concrete, objective contexts, both humanization and dehumanization are possibilities for a person as an uncompleted being conscious of that incompleteness."

Education of substance will lead to the creation of a strong character, capable of lasting achievement - optimistically seeking completion and reveling in its journey. It is fitting then, upon learning about humanization, that this course is named Humanities 101.

The easy-to-say and hard-to-implement 'magic' behind this program was simply committed teachers and committed students. To advance to a higher level after this course, we students must become a committed public - seeking improvement and change with fellow community members.

To truly embrace the spirit of this course, we must seek out, and we must do, not only that which is hard, but that which is necessary. Most media outlets can show headlines that speak of dehumanization in our world - it must all be critically examined and then attacked with social action, which then critically reflects upon the results. Instead of asking whether there is 'good' or 'bad' news, ask thyself if such news is 'humanizing' or 'dehumanizing'.

Love and Sacrifice exist in education- both in learning and teaching. One must love knowledge to teach or learn fully. Sacrifice exists in people giving up personal amusements to make their own humanizing news. I thank you again, dear mentors, for sacrificing your Thursday nights, and many many hours of preparation time, for our humble sakes.

I address you now, esteemed fellow graduates. You are needed- the planet, this country, the province, this city, your own families need you. In the name of our remaining chances to become a society that is fully alive we need you, individually, to become, to stay, fully alive.

To stay the course, of this great task before you, it will take great daring, and great enthusiasm. It shall require depth of spirit, and flowing creativity. On this cold winter evening, let us warmly look about us and realize how far we have come. Feel the atmosphere of this room and see how it brightens the road ahead. There is so much that all of us must do. Yet, for tonight what we must do is give thanks. We are blessed to be brought together here from all our differing lives. Soon we will return to those lives, but the spirit of this course will live on. Life, Learning, and Fellowship remain within us. Beautiful it is to see the gift-giving virtues that made this course a reality.

Dearest teachers and fellow students, I'm going to miss all of you...