



First-Year Commencement Remarks, 2015

Dr. Ramona Lumpkin, CM, President & Vice-Chancellor

Commencement Ceremony

Sunday, September 6, 2015

Seton Auditorium A & D

3:30 pm

Good afternoon and welcome to your first year as a Mount Saint Vincent University student. Our Commencement ceremony celebrates a beginning, the formal start of your time here with us at the Mount. The robes you're wearing today signal that, in spite of all the diversity and individuality represented in this auditorium, you now share something in common-- you are **all** Mount students. And in just a few short years, many of you will be seated in this space again, attending Convocation as new Mount graduates. Once again you'll be decked out in academic robes, but at that future time you'll share in common with your fellow graduates the successful completion of your university degree.



So, in the years between today's ceremony and your graduation from the Mount, what should you look forward to? I'd like to start by giving you a high altitude, panoramic view of the community you've chosen to join. To begin with, the Mount has a long-standing commitment to social responsibility and social justice, extending from our founding in 1873 right down to the present day. The Sisters of Charity who founded our university fought to build an institution that would educate women for full citizenship and economic independence, and that was at a time when women had very few opportunities open to them.

Over the years, as more fields opened up to women, the Sisters broadened the Mount's programs accordingly, and they also worked to make the Mount affordable by offering students scholarship and bursary assistance. Before the practice became common in Canada, the Mount introduced televised courses—the first university in Nova Scotia to do so—and in time television was replaced by on-line offerings as technology evolved. In addition, evening and weekend courses made the Mount accessible to part-time and working adult students, giving them pathways to learning and participation in the workforce.



While these innovations were directed at the women whose educational needs the Sisters wanted to meet, they have also benefited the many men who have enrolled at the Mount since the late 1960s, when we became co-ed. In the Mount's current mission statement, we reaffirm our commitment to the advancement of women, and at the same time we recognize that the Mount's focus on access and on a high-quality student experience is good for both the men and the women who study with us.

We seek to make education accessible to those historically denied an education—including women, marginalized groups, and those who face barriers to attending on-campus classes—and we strive to provide supports and services that will ensure the success of every student who attends the Mount. We aim to carry out our mission within a climate of respect for the dignity of every human being, and our vision for all our graduates is that they leave the Mount prepared to be socially responsible global citizens.



Many of our faculty members engage in scholarship focused on critical social needs such as food security, child development, healthy aging, and gender equity, and their research is often carried out in collaboration with partners from the broader community. Students, staff and faculty engage actively with community partners as well, devoting countless hours to projects that advance social well-being. Our responsibility, indeed, reaches beyond our campus to the societies in which we are situated – locally, nationally, and internationally – and to the natural environment whose sustainability we’re charged to preserve.


As a student, you’ll have many opportunities to join societies and take part in projects that contribute to social well-being, starting with the Shinearama drive that’s part of Orientation week. Mount students have a proud tradition of sleeping out for homelessness; collecting books for a school library in northern Canada that lost all its holdings to mould; raising funds for kids at Phoenix House; nurturing a community garden; tutoring kids from low-income neighbourhoods – the list is long, and you’ll find ways to add your own projects to the tradition.



As a Mount student, you'll also find the world of ideas and books opening up to you, as you take classes from professors who are passionate about the subjects they teach and want you to share their excitement. You'll read poems, conduct lab experiments, debate politics, puzzle out the meaning of historical events, analyze human behaviour. Every class you attend can give you a new perspective, a fresh thought, another way of looking at the world.

And of course, you're joining a community of other students, from more than 60 countries around the world, and you'll find opportunities for friendships with those who are a lot like you, and those who are very different.


Last week I met with the residence life staff, upper-year students who will be Dons and Residence Assistants for those of you living in residence. I'd been thinking about what I should say to you all today, so I asked each of the residence life staff members to tell me one thing they wish they had known when they started university. They were very generous in sharing their insights with me, and I want to pass



along to you some of what they said. I found many common themes in what they said to me, and a lot of wisdom in their words.

Lesson One: **It's okay if you're not sure about your major yet:** you *will* change your mind and that's just fine. Interestingly, a recent survey of Nova Scotia Grade 12 students revealed that 70% of them said that their future career is their most important reason to go to university, and only 23% said that *learning* was their most important reason. But what I heard from our residence life staff was that, as they attended classes and learned about exciting new subjects, they changed their minds about their future career plans. What you **learn** here, in your classes at the Mount, will quite possibly change your mind about what you want to do after you graduate – and that's perfectly okay.

Lesson Two: **Don't be afraid of who you are.** In fact, university is the time to figure out who you are and what's most important to you. Love and appreciate yourself and use your time here to keep growing into who you want to be.




Lesson Three: **Find the thing you're most passionate about and don't be afraid to go for it.** That includes both the subjects you love to study and the activities that make your heart sing.

Lesson Four: **Be open and vulnerable to the wealth of learning about to happen.** Don't think you have to plan your whole life right now; go with the flow. You will change, and so will your goals.

Lesson Five: **Get out and meet people, reach out to classmates, take part in as many O-Week activities as possible.** This advice is from a shy person who wants you to know that it does get easier, and that many more doors will open to you than you ever thought.

Lesson Six: **Don't try to fit into a group where you don't feel you belong.** Be yourself. There's room for lots of different selves at the Mount, and the best thing is to be the self you are and find out over time where you belong.



Lesson Seven: **Relax.** Give yourself time to adjust. Everyone else is in the same boat, and it's okay not to know everything, and perfectly all right to ask questions. Be patient with yourself on this new journey.

Lesson Eight: **Get to know your professors** (who really want to meet you; that's why they're here). Turn up for office hours, ask questions, show that you're interested in the subject and eager to learn.

Lesson Nine: **Call your parents or significant family members**, because even if you're not homesick, they miss you.

And finally, Lesson Ten, which is a message I heard from every one of the residence life staff and sums up the most important thing they want you to know: **Take care of yourself.** If you do this, as one staff member said, "the future you will thank the past you." Don't be too hard on yourself. We all make mistakes, and you will too, but again, in the wise words of an upper-year student, "every one of those mistakes will make you who you are later in life."



This is a time to figure out who you are and what matters to you. That journey in fact never ends, we're all still on it, and I'm very happy to welcome you to the Mount as you join us on your journey.