Dr. Steven Murphy
Installation Speech – May 8, 2018

Welcome and thank you to our Chancellor, Board Chair, Governors, fellow Presidents, distinguished guests, our Senior Leadership Team, Deans, faculty, staff, students, colleagues, family and friends. I am truly privileged and honoured to be the fourth President of UOIT.

This is an important day for our university. And by extension of who we touch and our vision, it is an important day for post-secondary education and research in Canada.

The world is moving at a fast pace and we are witnessing profound technological, social and geopolitical shifts. We live in an age where autonomous vehicles and buses -- some tested in our very own wind tunnel --safely drive themselves down busy roads –and we explore renewable energy sources like solar cells and hydrogen as we rightfully lead away from fossil fuels. We investigate aquatic ecosystems to explore the impact of toxins, and analyze big data sets to learn more about health, security and information technologies. Our scientists and thinkers are examining phenomena that change the way we think and live our lives – from biomechanics, to criminology, to mobile education.

In each of our pockets today is a computer that is faster than the original super-computers that took up a whole room. It has become an inseparable part of our daily lives – for good and for bad. It helps us be more connected to each other, and our planet, than we have ever been before. Yet, paradoxically, in many ways we have never been further apart.

Our students and children report levels of mental illness we have never seen before. And since it is mental health awareness week, it is a particularly poignant time to recommit ourselves to ending the stigma of mental illness that our students face.

We live in a society where misinformation has become the norm — and facts seem optional – and evidence-based decision-making is seen as an expensive luxury to some. It would be hard for me to overstate the stakes when democracies are threatened and valued institutions are under continuous scrutiny.

We have never been more polarized in our views. Think about the last time you heard someone say 'Wow, you know, I never thought of it that way before. I may need to rethink my position'. Our world wasn't always this polarized. All too often in this worldview, people either share our way of thinking or they are labelled as Neanderthals who just don't get it. Achieving common ground appears to be the goal of the very few.

Across the western world, cities have become more and more left leaning while the vast swaths of rural land become more and more right leaning. We are becoming city-states with little understanding of the implications of this duality on our collective futures. It is now more tempting than ever to simplify life into us versus them categories.

As universities, we are struggling to find our feet in this ever-changing playing field. Some organizations are looking to reshape education, using technology to mass produce degrees, treating students like an assembly line. They are looking to teach more students, not teach more effectively.

Artificial intelligence is poised to change all manner of jobs, even those we once thought safe. At Georgia Tech, a tutor named Jill was named Teaching Assistant of the year -- she was eventually uncovered as AI. Jill was so efficient in answering questions that they had to build a lag into the programming so that students wouldn't be suspicious. The implications are far reaching…what can we deliver of value and where does technology fit into our campus?

Lectures are often pre-recorded so that students can view them at their convenience, coming together on campus to apply their understanding. We must understand our value proposition in a changing world.

New education models have students earning MBA's at a fraction of their normal cost, while traveling the world making for intense competition.

Institutions are building outposts to offer American/Canadian/Australian/etc. branded degrees overseas for a fraction of the cost of being an international student and missing out on what our countries have to offer.

Perceived intellectual elitism undermines the very real and practical breakthroughs being made on our campuses. As a microcosm of society, there are dominant narratives on every campus juxtaposed against the voices of those who feel left out.

We live in a time where providing a platform to engage those who wish to divide us must be carefully balanced with psychological and physical safety. Not a week goes by where universities in Canada aren't embroiled in 'scandals' implicating donors, alumni, internal stakeholders and ultimately our reputations   In these times, it is tempting to draw the blinds, close the drapes and retreat back into our academic silos.

But, it is at these profound moments of social change where universities have historically shone brightest in how we respond to the challenges around us. Today is no different than the social movements of the 1960's and 70's. As an aside, I recently was at a forum where the former Chancellor/President at UC Berkeley spoke about how they juggle safety concerns with free speech issues, and it was heartening to remember the role Berkeley has played in social change and the price it continues to pay to foster the core principle of free speech.

We must work to find a balance between the opportunity of technology and its risks by embracing those technologies that allow us to teach our students more and more effectively, not just teach more students. We need to be responsive and relevant and assume our role in building an inclusive and expansive society.

We need to be an open tent; we need to make sure that everyone feels welcome in our community. Fostering diversity, equity and inclusivity is an active process reflected on an hour-by-hour basis by how we act, think and lead. We must inspire and nurture divergent thinking, especially when it threatens our own worldview. I believe that these are the core values of what it means to be a university in a western, liberal democracy. We are privileged to inhabit these spaces, but these spaces take a lot of courage and hard work to maintain. It is a privilege to work at a university; a fundamental truth that we need to acknowledge every day. We can have controversial points of view, we can debate, we can study, we can learn, we can teach.

BUT – and I don't use that word very often…BUT for those to whom much is given, much is expected.

As a white male leading a university, I feel the burden of that responsibility every day. By serving a higher calling or life purpose that extends beyond our own self-serving interest, we are all better off. We are able to play a role in shaping society by influencing the next generation. We can share our platform and amplify the voices of those who are still being marginalized including but not limited to women, LGBTQ2+, visible minorities and our aboriginal communities.

There is no better example for society than a high-functioning university. One with vigorous and respectful debate.

And, in our context, one that pushes the boundaries in technological breakthroughs. And one that understands that with every technological accomplishment comes an equally crucial set of questions around security, privacy, ethics and social justice.

I have spent the vast majority of my first 60 plus days listening and, with each passing day, I grow more and more excited about the potential of our university. I have listened to the hopes and aspirations of our students, staff and faculty. I have taken note of the stories of support from our donors and friends. I have had long conversations with alumni on multiple continents.

I have heard only optimism about our future.

I have also discovered that our human and physical capital are second-to-none. UOIT was built with a vision to be the MIT of the North. I want us to be the best technological university in Canada. As you heard, we are fortunate to have all three previous presidents with us today: Gary Polonsky, Ron Bordessa and Tim McTiernan. We stand on the shoulders of those who come before us.

Thanks to Dr. Gary Polonsky, from the outset, the bar was set very high for those who joined. They were lured here not because of our legacy, or our history, because we had none. Instead, they were drawn in by the vision, to be a part of something great. To be a part of a university with students, staff and faculty who aspire to change the world through technological enhancement and understanding. The result is a very interesting mix of entrepreneurial academics who were willing to take a chance on a new place.

Amongst our stellar faculty, we have 11 Canada Research Chairs, 2 Industrial Research Chairs and 2 honorific chairs. Our faculty received over $11 million dollars in funding from research grants and contracts last year. We may be small with 200 faculty and 10,000 students, but we are mighty. We have faculty that use their expertise to research, to enlighten and inform.

And we have some of the most interesting and unique research environments. The STEAM 3D maker lab, the Applied Sport Science Lab, the GAMER Lab, ACE wind tunnel with our recently acquired rolling road, the Asset Lab, the Aquatic Toxicology Lab, Decimal Lab, and a Class II Nuclear facility, plus 'a crime scene house'. These facilities allow our students access to cutting-edge learning environments while our researchers conduct their work in a technologically advanced environment.

We have built a tremendous foundation, but we need to get our story told, and our acronym, UOIT, doesn't help us – we need to do something about it and we will. We are a powerful technological university and we must own that space and get the message out – reputation building is a key priority for my presidency.

With a 15-year history, we have not yet accumulated the baggage to think and say, "we've always done it this way", and yet we are at an important juncture in the institution's mandate. If we continue forward, we face the very real danger of looking like most other comprehensive universities. Yet, our history, our people, our spirit and our culture is so different from other universities.

I am a builder – I am not a caretaker – and this fits with the collective desires I have heard since before I was your president and that have been reinforced as I listen around our campus. Nothing gets done unless I have people who believe in this vision and can see a place for themselves in it. So, I thank faculty, students and staff for embracing my ideas as I speak and listen to the community.

I see a university poised for greatness. I see a university with an undeserved inferiority complex.

I see an institution that is still nimble enough to rally behind a technology-focused vision and with a strong foundation in infrastructure to do just that. That is so rare and needed in our sector.

We are an institution that can deliver on our mandate of producing tech-literate graduates for 21st century careers, an environment that will require a comfort with technology, but also an ability to adapt our skills as the job market continuously evolves.

The most crucial and informative question that I ask faculty, staff and students is "How well are we living up to our technological moniker?" The abbreviated answer is we could be doing so much more.

In my view, to be a glorious technological university we need to execute in a few key areas. We need everyone on our campus to think through the lens of technology – from teaching through research, through student-supports and the student experience – while understanding and supporting academic freedom and the freedom that attracted our colleagues to this institution. We need to foster the entrepreneurial "can-do" spirit.

We need to challenge ourselves to integrate technology into learning and be a pioneer in both content and delivery. We need to reexamine every blindly accepted tenet of our system. There is no magic in a 13-week semester. There is nothing sacrosanct about a 3-hour lecture. There is nothing real about largely limiting higher education to the ages of 17 and 25. There is no reason that education has to be focused around a podium, a microphone and an audience. (I recognize the irony of what I'm saying here.)

These are the vestiges of an old, outdated model of post-secondary education. The sage on the stage is being usurped by an active, open, and dynamic learning environment. So let's see how disrupting the system could better meet the needs of our students, and disrupt it from the inside out.

To become one of the great technological universities, we must learn from the lessons of their model. I have been studying the most highly ranked and regarded technological institutions, and a few patterns have emerged.

These institutions engage with industry while guarding the academic mission and maintaining the crucial role as independent arbiter of knowledge. Many, like MIT, have incredibly strong (or the strongest) Faculties of Arts, Humanities and Social Science, because in achieving technological advances, we will have failed without the insights of our colleagues in social scientific and humanities disciplines. They shine a bright light on the issues of privacy, security, ethics and social justice that are inherent in the very technological breakthroughs that we make. Most tech institutions admit to trying things and failing – something usually only espoused in entrepreneurial circles.

But, if you look at academic life, failure is a part of everything we do. We are more used to rejection than arguably any other profession if we are honest with ourselves. From failing to publish research that took three or four years of our lives in the A* journal; to having a grant rejected by the Tri-Council or some other agency; to trying something in our classrooms that bombed -- the one thing that unites all academics is failure and the second is resilience.

We know that the path to new discovery in research is never direct. It is a twisting and turning journey with unexpected and sometimes insignificant findings. We know how to get back up on the horse and try again. We know that the difference between massive success and failure can be one grumpy reviewer who projects his insecurities onto our work rather than provide a scientific assessment. But alas, I digress.

So, let's embrace failures. Let's institutionalize the notion of trying new things, knowing it is okay if we fail. To quote Henry Ford, "Failure provides the opportunity to begin again, more intelligently".

One of my favorite comedians talks about skateboard kids. He points out how much time and effort it takes to learn a new trick. The kid will skin a knee, roll an ankle, bruise their ego, but after weeks of failures -- and some antiseptic -- they have something to show for it, they have mastered a new trick. The punchline is "those skateboard kids are going to be okay" because you can see their tenacity and their resilience.

I'd like us to be the skateboard university. We can't be afraid to fall down. We can't be afraid to fail, because boy oh boy, when we get something down we will have a story to tell. And we need to tell that story. We need the Durham Region, the GTA, Canada and the world to know about what we do and why it is important. And, as your president, I will not rest until the message is delivered and far better disseminated.

When I spend time with our students, I can see in them that skateboard kid mentality. They have ideas for how to shape society, how to create a business, and how to bring a technology to market. They are going to do it regardless. That spirit lifts me up. We need to adopt their energy and willingness to fail and learn from our failures.

Let's make entrepreneurship a priority on our campus. We will nurture and support the innovative ideas born out of a sheer will and determination to succeed. Let's think big – entrepreneurship ventures that include industry, government, and not-for-profit, all leveraging our students from every Faculty and faculty members for innovative solutions to vexing problems – this can be a big part of our future and unite the campus.

We need to engage our students in their world, while showing them ours can be kind of cool. We must build a "sticky" campus, a place that students want to "stick around". This will involve some real work around creating inviting spaces, a new coffee shop and pub, the addition of men's and women's varsity basketball, and intramurals, and more job opportunities on our campus. The student experience drives EVERYTHING I DO. I want to integrate technology throughout our campus and reexamine our processes to see how we can best serve our students.

Let's acknowledge that high school grades alone are a poor indicator of success in life. We need to be the university that also measures our students by their work ethic, resilience and potential. And while that might have been logistically daunting in the past, we can now use technology to test for resilience at scale. Let's lead the way in redefining accessibility by rewarding resilience.

Let's break down the barriers that can keep students from campus and use technology to become even more accessible and inclusive. I want to acknowledge that education is a lifelong process. Our students shouldn't leave with their degrees and not look back as alumni. We want to be with them for the whole life journey, helping them to meet a career future that will

require continual adaptability and refreshing of skills. We need to make our university a welcoming place for people who work 9 to 5 but want to update their skills while maintaining their jobs.

I want to continue on our mission to attract the best faculty, the brightest researchers and to offer novel, technology-focused programs. For example, you can get a political science degree from nearly any Canadian university – the public would expect the UOIT model to be differentiated by technology – which means talking about the role of social media in elections and in a democracy – deeply understanding how technology interfaces with our oldest institutions for good and for bad.

I want to continue to develop world-class research environments so that our students and our faculty can work at the leading edge of technology.

I want to build on our shared campus with Durham College – and I'd like to thank Don Lovisa, DC's President for attending today and being so generous with me. Together, let's build a joint campus where getting a degree and then a diploma, or a diploma and then a degree, or laddering into programs, is made much easier. This is what the Province, the people of Durham and our students expect. We have many more success stories in our collective future.

We need to strategically build on our international partnerships. We need a coherent international strategy and we can do so while strengthening our ties to school boards, hospitals and organizations in our own back yard. We can walk and chew gum. Let's align ourselves with the world's great technological universities. Think of the potential if we are linked with MIT, Stanford, CalTech, KAIST (Korea), UTS and Australian Schools, Nanyang, HK, Technical University of Munich and Technion as a few obvious examples. The company we keep will speak volumes about our quality.

We must, and we are, forging grassroots partnerships with these schools. Because through those partnerships our institutions will become truly entwined, and not just symbolically linked. I am not looking to simply sign MOU's; I am looking for substantive partnerships in both research and education.

We must become the eastern anchor of the ever-growing tech-hub that is the Toronto-Waterloo corridor. Did you know that the GTA is one of the most educated urban spaces in the world, tied with Silicon Valley? We have some folks from the DMZ and MaRS here today and even Communitech. Let us learn from those examples but plug in, in our own unique way, owning our strengths.

Every CEO, from every sector of the economy, is looking to make their culture more tech savvy. Let's seize the moment and build our strategic partnerships with industry. Let's seize that opportunity to give all our students exposure to real world problems, early and often. Already, 90% of UOIT students have an experiential learning component. Let's make our goal 100% of students and let's make experiential education throughout their degree the new normal.

I want to introduce work-integrated learning in a whole new model that sees scaling of corporate partners in lockstep with the development of entrepreneurship. Respectfully, the days of rushing to build the next accelerator or incubator might be behind us. We need to solve complex social problems with industry, the public and not-for-profit sectors today.

Our students, staff and faculty are rightfully proud of their young institution. I think of our university as a gangly teenager. We are at an important juncture in our long life. Let's not wait passively for disruption on our campus, let's be the disrupting force. Let's explore the messy reality of highly experiential learning spaces driven by students for students, and sticky campuses. Let's reimagine our classes, our classrooms, our libraries and our campus through the lens of technology and meet our students in the world they already inhabit.

Let's continue developing unique research environments that help us to engage with industry and foster entrepreneurs and the creation of valuable intellectual property. Let's prepare our students to be resilient in the face of technological upheaval and give them skills that can keep them agile in the career market. Let's halt our march towards a run-of-the-mill comprehensive institution and instead re-focus on the vision of being extraordinary.

This is the vision I am asking you to embrace. This is the vision we can achieve together. I truly believe our time has come. We are poised for greatness. We just need a little push.

Thank you for celebrating the start of an incredible ride with me today.