

**A Vision for the
School of the Arts, Media and Culture**

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(delivered at the launch of SAMC, April 6, 2010)

These are exciting days! That sounds cliché, but I really do feel excitement at what lies ahead for us, and I want to share some of that with you this evening.

These are exciting days to be a professor...to be a student. These are exciting days to be launching a new school, a new way of seeing, thinking, working...a new way of engaging the world in which we all live...a new way of exploring human culture, of transforming our world.

These are exciting days to be a professor. Faculty are fascinating people: we are hungry for new things and at the same time almost bursting with the need to pass on these things to others. We are part of such a vast family: all those Mozarts and Platos and Therasas of Avila, those Emily Carrs and Shakespeares and Pavlovas, those Solomons and Mother Therasas, Martin Luthers and Stephen Hawkings... a family of men and women whose wisdom we have inherited, whose ideas we engage, and whose influences we swim in daily. Yet as the present-day members of this family of great human endeavour, our exciting role is to come alongside others—often younger—and look not only to the pages of our family history, but to those chapters which aren't yet written—chapters we are writing today, and which will be written by our students tomorrow. What will those chapters be? What will be their central themes, their subplots, their new characters and daring turns of events? It is this vast human story—half written, half only dreamed—that excites us as teachers/scholars/artists. And it is the journey alongside fellow storytellers—colleagues, students, others—that makes the days exciting for a professor.

This idea of mutual engagement of mentor and student isn't new: it dates back at least as far as Plato's *Academy* and Aristotle's *Lyceum*. In our day, however, this engagement and journey takes place not simply in the classroom, but online, behind a camera, in a gallery, under the lights of a theatre or the lights of a city street; and not simply in Langley, but in Vancouver, Ottawa, New York, England, Kiev, Kenya...wherever we as professors engage culture and ideas with our students.

As we journey together—on the streets of a town in Guatemala where professor and student engage with people and culture; on the stage, engaging with word and gesture; in a painting studio, engaging with line and colour; in a choir rehearsal, engaging with musical line and harmonic colour—stories are told and retold, and new stories fashioned.

But the world of SAMC is more than fashioning and telling stories, and here we come to what really makes the days exciting for a professor. Ultimately it isn't merely the compelling stories of the past, or even the desire to fashion those new stories for the

present. What human societies really need is the *storytellers* themselves: storytellers who are not only creative but redemptive; storytellers who can shape a future of hope, one in which the wisdom of those who have come before us is applied to new problems and challenges in ways that are not only creative but redemptive.

Are we (humanity, and here at TWU) a people of creativity? The answer from our past and our present is *yes*. Are we (SAMC) a people of hope, whose vision of humanity is redemptive? The answer, for the sake of our future, is *yes, we must be*. At TWU, in SAMC, we must continue to raise up new generations of storytellers who are, in their work and their lives, both creative and redemptive. That is our great challenge, and ultimately what is most exciting about being a professor.

And these are exciting days to launch a school. The launch of a School of the Arts, Media and Culture at TWU is really a momentous event. While we honour the efforts of our forebears at this remarkable university—who 50 years ago dreamed and prayed into being a college, later to become a university—and especially as we acknowledge the breadth and depth of courses and programs in various arts, media and culture disciplines which many colleagues in this room tonight have laboured to develop and shape over several decades—yet we now stand looking to a very different future. We stand at this turning point and say: from what we can see as academics, artists, cultural critics, philosophers, followers of Jesus, members of the human family, we need to do something different—we need a new paradigm. Not only does our ever-changing culture demand new things, but the university itself demands new things.

Our senior academic leadership several years ago embarked on a path to develop schools at TWU—academic units which acknowledge the need to address not only the academic issues of the disciplines but also the cultural imperatives of the professions represented by many of those disciplines.

Almost 8 years ago, in September 2002, then President Neil Snider assembled an independent, external task force to examine and recommend a way forward for media, communications, and fine arts studies at TWU. Tonight we want to acknowledge the expertise and wisdom of that group—their vision both called for and paved the way for the launch of this school today. Thank you to Doug McKenzie, Gerald Baron, Lorna Dueck, Jake Epp, Tim Gamble, Laurie Gillespie, and Jeff Thiessen. The recommendations in their report to the university’s Board of Governors (March 28, 2003) fell into 2 broad categories:

1. adopt a strategy to establish a School with unique curriculum, strategic relationships and innovative, flexible and comprehensive facilities to offer such programs with the highest degree of integrity, ingenuity and market relevancy.
2. the core distinctive of the proposed new School should revolve around the art and process of “storytelling” with the end purpose in mind of creating godly storytellers who are effective leaders and “shapers of culture” through their chosen and modern mediums.

We continue to work with administration and external partners towards the kind of *innovative, flexible, and comprehensive facilities* envisioned by the Task Force; and the importance of mentoring storytellers and shapers of culture has become the core distinctive of SAMC's vision.

But it wasn't simply the work of the Task Force which set our faculty on this track towards becoming a school. I want to acknowledge another key leader in this process. As dean of our faculty from 2001-2006 she inspired us to move towards becoming a school with professional degree programs. The school we are launching today is built on the foundation of her ideas, dreams, and hard work. We owe a great debt of gratitude to our former dean and colleague, Dr. Linda Schwartz.

SAMC—School of the Arts, Media and Culture—what's in a name? TWU's newest school has been named very intentionally. The arts, media, and culture...in human history this has always been something of a circle, or better yet, a Venn diagram, with areas of overlap: the various arts, in a multitude of different media, affecting and affected by culture. In a Christian liberal arts university—a place of exceptional discovery, learning, and engagement, concerned that the world may experience Christ's truth, compassion, reconciliation, and hope—SAMC becomes an imperative. A school is not a building (though facilities are vital), nor is it a set of programs (though programs are central)...a school is first of all a community. In the context and ethos of community—people in dynamic relationship—those facilities become a home, and the programs become a focal point. In the School of the Arts, Media and Culture that focal point is the culture in which we live and which we will create for the future, and the arts and media which enrich, express, and in many ways define us as human beings. We at SAMC are creative thinkers who believe in a dynamic curriculum in an ever-changing culture. This evening I want to give you a glimpse of the future—where we are going in terms of curriculum and programming.

The liberal arts have had a long history in western culture. But in the last century there arose an interesting creature in the university: the professional degree. I have one, as do many of my colleagues: an undergraduate degree almost exclusively devoted to training the student for a profession—in my case it was music performance—but with little concern for studies in other disciplines outside music. The genius of SAMC is our concern to merge the professional degree orientation with the liberal arts tradition. They are both equally vital. On the one hand you have the deep pursuit of the critical theory and skills necessary to prepare the student for a professional career, and on the other hand you have the breadth of exposure to the richness of the human story. Coming into this century we have seen a rise in concern worldwide for university graduates who are not simply skilled in a particular area, but whose learning has prepared them for the complex and interrelated challenges of a culture which is changing rapidly, and which makes demands on who they are, not simply what they know or know how to do. Leaders in higher education in North America are calling for university graduates who are knowledgeable about human culture and the physical world around them, and who possess intellectual and practical skills across a diverse curriculum, with the capacity for

critical and creative thinking, teamwork and problem solving. But they are also calling for graduates with a strong sense of personal and social responsibility who can apply their learning to new settings and complex problems. In short, they are looking for university graduates from the School of the Arts, Media and Culture!

And we are rising to the challenge. In the context of TWU's long commitment to the liberal arts, and alongside the BA degree programs which we have long offered in art, communications, music, and theatre, we are developing new professional and interdisciplinary programs to meet the challenges of our culture:

Our Communications Department has worked together with the School of Business to develop an interdisciplinary degree in Corporate Communications. Before the Minister of Education right now, and pending approval, this degree will prepare future corporate leaders to think strategically about business and communications in the growing field of corporate communications including public relations, organizational behaviour, marketing, and project management.

In our Theatre Department, another new degree pending approval by the Minister of Education, a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in Acting will prepare more highly competent actors who, with deeper actor training and the broad Christian liberal arts perspective, will be cultural leaders of exceptional character.

Waiting in the wings at SAMC—as planned facilities are developed to support them—are similar new professional degrees in Art and Music: a BFA in Visual Art and Design and a Bachelor of Musical Arts (BMA). As with the BFA in Acting, these professional programs bring together TWU's core of liberal arts studies with about 80 semester hours of study in the student's professional discipline.

As the Faculty of Professional Studies and Performing Arts (FPSPA) becomes the School of the Arts, Media and Culture I am often asked "what is different?" My answer involves two distinctions: *professional programs and orientation*, and *interdisciplinarity*: Alongside the development of new professional degrees in which students are mentored by working professionals in their discipline, we are also transitioning from a diverse group of departments with a common administration to a single school with many programmatic expressions and a greater concern for interdisciplinary connections.

SAMC has new foundational courses in place for fall, bringing students together across traditional disciplinary lines to engage critical issues in the arts and the broad history of the arts, so as to better understand their own particular discipline within a larger cultural picture. We are also working towards a set of senior interdisciplinary capstone courses, travel studies and experiential projects.

Our old Fine Arts major has become an Arts, Media and Culture major, in which students can explore a multiplicity of disciplines—their interconnections and synergies. I

believe—you heard it here first—that over the next decade SAMC’s fastest growing degree will be its interdisciplinary Arts, Media and Culture major. *Why?*

I live in Abbotsford—a city of about 130,000—which has recently been identified as the third most culturally diverse city in Canada, after Toronto and Vancouver: there are almost 60 different ethnic/cultural groups represented in this relatively small city. Imagine the value for an actor or musician in taking courses in cross-cultural communications! Imagine the value in our culture of other such cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies: the music conductor who will need to relate not just to musicians, but to an audience and a board of directors, and so studies public speaking and leadership communications; the cross-cultural communications student who recognizes that visual art is so embedded in many cultures as to be almost a second language, and so studies drawing and painting alongside communications courses.

This summer a prominent American university is offering an intensive chamber music institute for string quartets, and recognizing that these talented musicians may eventually want to make a living with their music, the program offers lessons in “*chamber music, composition, and entrepreneurship.*”

The opportunities, and the need, for cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary studies are almost endless in the culture of the 21st century. *Why?* Because of one word which is becoming the new buzz-word in both business and education: *creativity.*

The following brief fable was printed on the packaging of a toy I recently gave one of my grandchildren.

Once upon a time there lived a creature named Creativity. When Creativity was very young, he was allowed to explore the farthest reaches of his imagination. Nobody told him what noise his train was supposed to make, so he made it sound like a cockatoo. Nobody told him that his dragon was scary, so he had him over for pizza. Nobody told him what his tow truck was supposed to tow, so he used it to tow the ocean.

Then one day when Creativity was all grown up, people throughout the land turned to him for inspiration in good times and bad. Government leaders and scientists depended on Creativity to guide them. Pulitzer prize-winning authors sought out Creativity for inspiration. All the world rallied around Creativity to solve its most confounding problems.

And that’s how Creativity saved the world.

The problem with this fable is that, so often in our world, *Creativity* doesn’t grow up...it becomes forgotten. Like Puff the Magic Dragon, whose child friend *grew up* and gradually forgot about him, creativity is so very often educated out of children. Educators around the globe are calling for a return to greater emphasis on creativity in our schools. British educator and consultant on the national education system in the UK,

Ken Robinson continues to advocate publicly that *“creativity now is as important in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status...”*

So many influential educators and authors are now speaking out about how vital creativity is to our society and its future:

...people like Richard Florida, whose books on the rise in culture of what he calls *the creative class* led to his appointment as Director of the Martin Prosperity Institute in Toronto, affiliated with the Rotman School of Management at University of Toronto.

...people like Roger Martin, Dean of the Rotman School, author of books on design thinking and integrative thinking, who has said: *“We are on the cusp of a design revolution in business. As a result, today’s business people don’t need to understand designers better, they need to become designers.”*

...people like Daniel Pink, author of the influential book *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*, who asserts that *“the MFA is the new MBA.”*

Design thinking and creativity are increasingly becoming the currency of the business world, the educational world, the scientific world, even the political world. As an artist, a composer, one who devotes a considerable amount of time and energy to dreaming of things which don’t yet exist, this is wonderful news!

Thankfully we have passed through the 20th century and realized that science will not indeed save us, and now with the pendulum swinging back to a holistic understanding of what it is to be human, and what human society needs not to progress but to thrive, we are ready to embrace creativity once more, ready to embrace the wonder and beauty which is at the heart of every human being, longing to find its release. Recently I read these words by my SAMC colleague Loranne Brown: *“When anyone—child, or adult—learns to write, a silenced voice is freed to speak, or sing. When that same person reads deeply, he or she learns to hear other voices, other songs, and discovers that none of us is alone.”*

After his resurrection, just before he left this earth, Jesus told his disciples that they would be his witnesses wherever they went. One of the great things that we all give witness to is the image of God—the imago dei—in every person...the creative spark and redemptive passion which are truly transformative, transforming us as individuals and thereby also transforming culture.

All of this leads me to the conclusion that these are indeed exciting days—even inspiring days—to be a student, especially a student in the School of the Arts, Media and Culture. I have the privilege of leading a highly qualified, deeply skilled, creative and caring group of faculty and staff in the School of the Arts, Media and Culture. I honour them and bless them for all they do year in, year out in their teaching, their artistry, their scholarship and research.

With such an inspiring community of faculty mentors; with a breadth of academically and culturally relevant degrees—from traditional liberal arts majors to new professional and interdisciplinary programs; with a wide variety of challenging performance

opportunities like the festival of the next two weeks; with scholarly opportunities such as our annual fall conference on the arts, and the soon-to-be-launched journal of the arts and Christian faith; but most important of all, with the opportunity to explore together our humanity as those made in the image of a Creator God, to take risks in a supportive educational environment characterized by academic and spiritual vitality...I'm sure you will agree with me that these are indeed exciting days to be a student and professor in TWU's new School of the Arts, Media and Culture. Let's together look to the future and the things which God will do in, among, and through us all.