

**Installation of the President  
Dr. Alaa Abd-El-Aziz  
September 24, 2011**

**The University of Prince Edward Island:**

**People • Excellence • Impact**

Your Honour, Lieutenant Governor Frank Lewis; Chancellor William Andrew; Board of Governors Chair Frederick Hyndman; university presidents and representatives; faculty, staff, students, and alumni; members of the community; family and friends.

It is an honour to stand before you as the sixth president and vice-chancellor of the University of Prince Edward Island.

Presidential installations are defining moments of transition for universities—points in time when we recognize that the lessons and accomplishments of our past create the foundation for future possibilities. Today we celebrate our University—all that has been achieved, who we are now, and everything we will become. As I assume this role of service to the values of higher education, as exemplified by the University of Prince Edward Island, I have much to be grateful for, and many to thank.

I first acknowledge and remember my parents, who shaped the person that I am. Their strong respect for education allowed me to pursue learning opportunities in this wonderful country of Canada. As a young international student, I selected Canada as my educational destination to engage in studies and research in the field of chemistry. My desire to learn developed into a passion for teaching, and my commitment to excellence in teaching and research is consistent with my core values and beliefs.

This summer, I traveled from one end of the Island to the other. I've begun to get to know the communities, culture, and people of this beautiful province. I have met with local authorities, business people, and members of the public, and have been received with kindness. There is a very high level of interest in our University. Islanders understand and respect the value of education and are proud of all that UPEI has accomplished. I would like to thank everyone who has openly offered their thoughts during my meetings. We have much to learn and to do.

I am delighted to become a part of this welcoming PEI community that has embraced me, my wife Valerie, and our children Ahmad and Kareem. Valerie and our sons have supported and encouraged me through this transition, and I thank them with all my heart. They are here with me today and I am happy to say that they share in my feeling

of comfort and belonging in our new home.

Thank you to UPEI's Board of Governors. It is an honour to serve as president and vice-chancellor of the University of Prince Edward Island. This is a responsibility that I do not take lightly. The trust you have placed in me is significant, and I offer my absolute commitment to UPEI's success.

To colleagues, faculty, staff, students, and alumni—your efforts, and talents define us. You are the University, and together, we will advance its vision.

Our collaborations with community partners have allowed UPEI to expand its ability to teach and improve learning, create knowledge, conduct research, provide services, expand programs, and offer scholarships. UPEI has tremendous community connections.

A university must also appreciate its history and traditions. UPEI proudly continues to honour those institutions that came before us and shaped who we are—St. Dunstan's University and Prince of Wales College. I was very pleased to have had the opportunity to speak with alumni from the St. Dunstan's class of 1961 and Prince of Wales College graduates, during Reunion Weekend this summer. UPEI learns a great deal from these alumni as they continue to be engaged with us.

UPEI's mission statement defines our University as a "community of scholars whose primary tasks are to teach and learn, to engage in scholarship and research, and to offer service for the benefit of our Island and beyond." This community is served by its leaders in pursuit of these goals.

From the tireless optimism of UPEI's first president, Ron Baker to the "raised expectations" of our immediate past-president, Wade MacLauchlan, many leaders have devoted themselves to UPEI's success. We are fortunate to benefit from their hard work—and yours—during their terms.

As I assume the leadership of the University of Prince Edward Island following Wade's successful 12-year presidency, I wish to acknowledge his accomplishments. He has been an incredible supporter and advocate for this University. I thank him for his exemplary work over many years, and for his gracious support during the transition process.

In my years as an academic, and as an administrator, I have learned the value of team-building and partnerships; of thoughtfulness and understanding; the importance of hard work, imagination, and respect for others. Qualities such as these will guide my efforts at UPEI.

During a discussion that I had earlier this year with Board of Governors Chair Fred Hyndman, I told him that my late father was a mathematics teacher who enjoyed philosophy and history. As a result of this conversation, Fred took the opportunity to

educate me about the province that would soon become my home. He presented me with a gift. It was *If You're Stronghearted Prince Edward Island in the Twentieth Century*, a book written by one of our great scholars and faculty members, Dr. Ed MacDonald.

As I read about the Island's past challenges, it became apparent that these challenges encouraged resourcefulness, creative ideas, and forward-thinking. These attributes caused me to choose the title of my speech today:

PEOPLE • EXCELLENCE • IMPACT.

These are the words we use every day to describe our University. And it is important to repeat them, in our messaging at every opportunity.

People are our greatest strength, and the success of a university depends on their engagement. It is critical that all members of our University community have the opportunity to be fully engaged, and to achieve their potential. A university must strive for excellence on all levels. UPEI has a commitment to advance and improve society through education, knowledge creation, and knowledge transfer. And UPEI has a responsibility to respect values, academic integrity, and academic freedom.

The effect of such effort is the outcome, the difference, the impact. And impact is reciprocal. Someone is doing and someone is receiving. Someone is teaching and someone is learning—that creates a team. That team may be on campus, in our community or, on the other side of the world. The impact of positive change supersedes boundaries of every kind. It offers relevant solutions to the problems of our planet.

By aligning our goals and working together, by building on the strong foundation created by the talent and effort of our people, we can make the kind of difference that improves the world.

I came to UPEI with a desire to listen and reflect, and to encourage others to do the same. This process of reflection will be ongoing, and our direction as a university will develop in collaboration with colleagues and community. I am excited about the opportunities that are before us. And I am passionate about advancing key areas that have been part of our conversations to date. Let me offer just a few examples:

It is worth repeating that people are our greatest strength—a resource to be challenged inspired, and respected.

- I am committed to our students—they are our reason for being—their engagement, leadership, and research opportunities; their University experience; their academic success in quality programs, in the classroom, in our labs, on the campus; in their co-op and work placements; as alumni in their careers; and as lifelong learners as they continue to build and contribute their skills, and critical thought, to society.

- I am committed to our faculty—their mentorship and development; support for their teaching and innovation in teaching; program success and quality; the advancement and development of their research; and the integration of their research in teaching.
- I am committed to our staff—the dedicated, supportive, and skilled backbone of our successful institution.
- I am also committed to connecting with our community, locally and globally. They share, and assist, in our projects; mentor our students, and celebrate their success and accomplishments as friends, colleagues, and employers. They challenge us to do better, to demonstrate value, innovate, and problem-solve.

I have a passionate belief in the value of the integration of teaching and research. As a professor, I found it beneficial—as did my students—to integrate my research findings into my teaching. Research creates new knowledge, and teaching imparts it. Exposing our students to new information provokes curiosity, and inspires new approaches to critical-thinking, and problem-solving.

UPEI must continue to embrace a strong commitment to sustainability by demonstrating operational integrity, accountability, and sustainability in the broadest terms. We must provide leadership in the adoption of sustainable policy and practice in areas such as infrastructure, campus operations, and decision-making at all institutional levels.

Our planet continues to grow smaller every day. The building of international relationships is critical to meeting the demands of changing demographics, providing for greater intercultural diversity and awareness in our community, and to ensuring that UPEI and PEI remain relevant, and contribute.

The advancement of an ethical society is based on an understanding of global issues. UPEI has made great strides in the internationalization of its campus. Integrating our international students with our Canadian students enhances the educational experience of all. If an international student chooses to stay in our country, he, or she, will contribute to the workforce, the economy, and the diversity of our community. Students who return to their home countries after completing their degrees become ambassadors for UPEI and PEI. Partnerships with universities across Canada, and around the world will foster student learning experiences and also open the door for staff and faculty exchanges. Such exchanges demonstrate our commitment to higher education and provide an opportunity for us to learn from such an experience. They also allow us to “give back” by enhancing the development of partner institutions.

We have many strengths to build upon that I believe can shape our identity as a destination university: outstanding facilities and quality programs, an intimate teaching and learning environment that is strongly connected to local and global communities, research excellence, and a supportive community.

We will become a destination university—a university of choice for Islanders, and people around the world. I am committed to making this happen!

I am inspired by words I recently read. They are carved in stone, on a small monument outside Kelley Memorial Building—a challenge from the St. Dunstan's University Class of 1969 to future students of UPEI. They read, and I quote: "...integrate your traditional values with the evolving trends of the global society." UPEI will continue to respect its values. And on that firm foundation will answer the call to recognize and respond to the changes and challenges of our future. I am inspired by the potential I see on this Island, and at UPEI.

PEOPLE • EXCELLENCE • IMPACT—this is P.E.I.

Together, we will succeed.