

From:
The University of Alberta Atheists and Agnostics
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July 14, 2008

To:
Office of the President
3-1 University Hall
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta T6G 2J9

Dear President Samarasekera:

I am writing regarding my group's concern about the 'Admission' that is given at the University of Alberta's convocation. Specifically, we are troubled that the Chancellor states: "I charge you to use them [the powers, rights, and privileges of University degrees] for the glory of God." I note here that this issue has been brought to our attention by both students and faculty.

As this university is a public, secular institution, we feel that such a religious reference is inappropriate at convocation. This invocation unfairly assumes the existence of a deity in which all graduates believe. Such a blanket assumption about the beliefs of graduates hinders open discussion in the areas of tolerance, diversity, and multiculturalism. As a public institution that benefits from the privileges of government funding and public sponsorship, the University of Alberta has a commitment to the greater community and to embrace these qualities.

Invoking a god in whose name and glory all graduates are to discharge the duties of their hard-won privileges of education deprives them, *the graduates*, of the acknowledgment that they themselves have earned through their work. Further, it deprives our colleagues and professors of deserved credit for the roles that they have played in our education. Such an anachronistic assumption in the Admission unfairly links 'God' and religion with all knowledge, truth, and wisdom – a point with which many graduates, students, and faculty disagree. This is the case for many atheist, agnostic, humanist, and sceptic students, as well as for a myriad of religious or spiritual beliefs expressed on our campus. The fact that we are *commanded* by the Chancellor to glorify a particular god, rather than given the choice, is also bothersome.

A student's graduation is one of the most significant moments in her or his university life. It should be a time when students are safe, comfortable, treated appropriately, and given recognition for their achievement. Introducing a religious element into a public ceremony is completely inappropriate. We feel that it would be in the best interests of the University of Alberta to demonstrate a commitment to a diverse, free-thinking, and multicultural student population by eliminating references to religion from convocation proceedings. We note that the

University of Toronto eliminated religious references from in its convocation last year over concerns expressed by its students and we hope that you will do the same.

We look forward to your response on this issue. Members of our group are available to meet with you or with any other interested party should there be a request for further information.

Thank you,

Ian Bushfield
President, University of Alberta Atheists and Agnostics

cc. Office of the Registrar and Student Awards
Office of the Chancellor
President of the Students' Union
President of the Graduate Students' Association
The Gateway