

A message from Dr. Janet Morrison



Inaugural inspiration

January 21, 2021

Colleagues,

As some have observed, today is the 21st day of the 21st year and the 21st century. As I reflect on the events of this week and look ahead to the winter term that is unfolding, I want to share three events that have captured my attention on this unique day in history:

- Inaugural Inspiration
- Sheridan Wellness
- Blown Away

Inaugural inspiration

Like so many of you, I was transfixed by the inauguration poem yesterday that was written and performed by 22-year-old Amanda Gorman. Growing up in Los Angeles, she moved between more and less affluent neighbourhoods and bore witness to the stark reality of inequality. She struggled with a speech impediment that made it difficult for her to say the letter r and undermined her confidence. Her lived experience gave her a unique perspective on her city and country.

When she was asked in December to deliver a poem at the inauguration, she started researching and reading. Her reference list included all of the previous inaugural poems, text by speakers and leaders who had addressed the nation at times of great divide and uncertainty, and books on general US history. And then, in a move most would consider bold and risky, she went to Twitter and read posts about the storming of Capitol Hill -- including the vitriol that is too often present in social media about U.S. politics.

From all that work emerged six minutes of brilliantly performed poetry that captured the rapt attention of the world and effectively reaffirmed the value of the Humanities. I was stunned.

I loved hearing about Ms. Gorman's process because I live by the mantra that being a good educator demands that you also be a good learner. In that context, we study what was done before and then we study what is before us. We couple that with our lived experience and aim to put something new and meaningful out into the world. We have the power and the platform to challenge, raise sights, lift spirits, and create hope.

This, in fact, is the privilege of working in higher education. It's what happens every day in our midst and what keeps me excited, motivated and proud to work at Sheridan.

Sheridan wellness

While the inauguration provided a much-needed distraction and some hope for a better tomorrow, there continues to be troubling news about the deleterious effects of the pandemic on our wellbeing. This week, Leger -- a research company, reported that the proportion of Canadians whose mental health has been excellent or very good since the start of the COVID-19 crisis has been trending downward since November 2020, and has now reached its lowest point or 32%.

Community mental health and wellbeing has been a focus at Sheridan for a long time, but the launch of our wellness strategy next Tuesday is timely. I hope you will join me to hear my friend and former colleague, [David Ip Yam](#), talk about strategies for replenishing and renewing our energy. [Click here](#) to register for the launch event (instructions can also be found [here](#)). This is just one of the [many excellent events we are offering next week](#) for employees and students.

Blown Away

Finally, I'm so thrilled that the second season of *Blown Away* launches tomorrow on Netflix! Our talented glass students, faculty and alumni were integral to the series, which shot a year ago, just before the pandemic took hold.

Season 1 was lauded by Canadian and international media and I hope you will [join the Sheridan launch tomorrow \(Jan 22\) at noon](#). I'll be there and I can't wait to start streaming the full second season!

In closing, I hope you too were inspired by Amanda Gorman. In the face of the pandemic, the reckoning on race and the ongoing crisis of negative mental health, I'm staying focused on her resplendent words:

We did not feel prepared to be the heirs

Of such a terrifying hour

But within it we found the power

To author a new chapter

To offer hope and laughter to ourselves

So while once we asked,

How could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?

Now we assert

How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?

Be well colleagues.

Warmly,

Janet Morrison, PhD
President and Vice Chancellor

Sheridan College
1430 Trafalgar Road
Oakville ON L6H 2L1
sheridancollege.ca

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