



# President and CEO Installation Speech

Dr. Jodi L. Abbott, President & CEO

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Thank you to our stage guests and to all of you for joining NorQuest on this very special day. I am grateful to Treaty Six as NorQuest enjoys providing rich learning experiences on your native land.

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Imagine...

A community college based in Edmonton ... that has earned the respect and reputation of being **the best** in Canada.

A community college that **inspires** adult learners of all ages to learn new skills ... **empowers** them to become valuable contributors to our community and economy ... **instills** within them a passion and enthusiasm for life-long learning.

A community college that is the **first phone call** for business and industry leaders seeking practical, workplace-specific solutions for today's economic challenges. A community college that employs the most skilled faculty and staff ensuring the college remains **relevant** through the eyes of its learners and its partners. A community college where a business leader can grab a quick bite. Where a mother can take a break between classes spending time with her child.

This is what **I imagine** when I think of all the possibilities that exist at NorQuest College.

And today I present to you an invitation. An invitation to imagine right along with me...

As a student – imagine a college community that reflects your values, goals and aspirations

As a faculty member - imagine a college where your expertise and passion strengthen our foundational and post-secondary programming

As a business leader – imagine a college providing solutions to workplace challenges.

Can you imagine that?

I do!

When I look at the NorQuest of the future, I imagine an amazing **transformation**. Programs that allow students to achieve, excel and fulfill their dreams. A college that transforms the way people **access** education. Technology that reaches learners wherever they are while leveraging the expertise of skilled instructors and staff. A college that transforms regional communities. Ensuring these communities remain **viable** to the people who live, work and learn in them.

Together, we will create that college.

Now please take a moment to imagine **Gerard's journey**.

Gerard was born in the Congo and his family left the Republic due to the Civil War. He lived in refugee camps under the most brutal conditions. His family lived in refugee camps under brutal conditions moving to Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, and Mozambique. Gerard finally, at the age of 12, attended school in South Africa. Assessed at a grade two level, he shared the classroom with kids half his age.

Now imagine the day that Gerard's parents received a telephone call being welcomed to Canada. Within 24 hours of that call, September 24, 2008, Gerard and his family arrived in Edmonton. Gerard quickly found NorQuest's **Youth in Transition** program and in 2011, will complete his academic upgrading. Gerard credits NorQuest counselors for guiding him toward his future. His goal? Employment in marketing and public relations.

I recently sat down with Gerard to ask what the word "imagine" means to him. This is what he told me. "You create big things for yourself in life – who you want to be. If you think the right thoughts, have a plan, and stick to that plan, you can imagine your destination and it takes you there. You must **plan** your **future**. I imagine one day, that I'm an important person who helps others." When Gerard said "**Plan your future...**" – his words hit home for me. Because that's exactly what our students do when they **choose** NorQuest.

NorQuest is part of **their plan**. Acquiring knowledge, relevant skills, achieving their personal and professional goals.

Imagine that!

NorQuest also has a **plan** for the **future**.

In 1965, NorQuest began as Alberta Vocational Centre. Working with young adults who had not completed grade 12 - working to get them off social assistance. **45** years later we have an amazingly strong foundation and continue to build on our world class reputation. Over this time we have provided thousands of students from hundreds of countries with language skills training. Allowing them to bridge to foundational programs, skills training and career courses.

International students bring with them culture, skills and knowledge from around the world – They share it with the rest of the college community, who benefit from having the opportunity to learn through an **international lens**. Indeed our graduates come from all over the world. They work hard to get ahead, and contribute greatly to Alberta's **knowledge society**.

The Knowledge Society is vital to all Albertans. During the last economic boom, a large percentage of Albertans were **unqualified** for the jobs of today. NorQuest is changing that. Our foundational programs lead to career programs. These programs lead to the

jobs of today and tomorrow. They are fundamental contributors to Alberta's knowledge society.

You only have to look at a NorQuest graduate to see the **power of education** at work. Let's take a moment to reflect on Lincoln's journey to NorQuest.

Lincoln has a story that begins like many successful Alberta stories. Lincoln worked in the oilfield industry. However, in 2001 he was diagnosed with Neurosarcoidosis. After several years of searching, Lincoln registered at NorQuest as **this College** was one that would ensure his visual impairment would not be a barrier to learning. Elders advised him "go where you want to go Lincoln". Lincoln is close to completing his Social Work diploma and will continue his journey to a Masters Degree. Lincoln is an articulate inspired man who says "Imagine means no boundaries, the sky is the limit. While I have limited sight, I have a great sense of vision".

Deborah has a similar view of the word imagine. She says "Anything is possible. I am living proof that everything is possible". Deborah just completed a certificate in Mental Health Rehabilitation. She has every right to be proud; yet she is incredibly humble. Deborah left school when she was 14 to care for her disabled brother. NorQuest opened a new chapter in her life. She has a long list of accomplishments including being Student and Academic Council Reps, Anti-Racism Multi-media Award Winner, Outstanding Achievement in Mental Health, and was a member of the Presidential Search Committee (thank you Deborah!).

With these stories in mind we will continue to be student-focused. Shaping our programs and ensuring students find that their credits and credentials are highly regarded and sought after.

This is about **quality**. It is about shaping ourselves around the needs of the students of today and tomorrow.

Today, NorQuest is "**Edmonton's regional community college**". A designation received by the provincial government in 2009.

**Regional communities** are benefiting as we continue to **expand** our **post-secondary** diplomas and certificates and one day applied degrees. These programs are based on the needs of those communities. This means increased access to courses, the latest technology, and collaborative partnerships.

Today, NorQuest is transforming the way education is delivered to Albertans. Evolving as a community college means becoming part of the **fabric** of the community. In addition to reaching communities throughout the region, we are committed to opening the doors to our consolidated **downtown campus** in 2015.

The **North Learning Centre** will be a focal point of Capital Boulevard allowing consolidation into one, **sustainable**, learner-focused campus. The North Learning

centre will offer a place for inquiry and concentration. Classrooms and labs designed to support the diverse needs of students. It will ensure that NorQuest remains a **relevant partner** in post-secondary education for decades to come. The North Learning Centre will allow more opportunities for **applied research**. Research that matters to business and industry by providing practical solutions to today's workplace challenges.

We're already on our way to doing this! Through our **centres for excellence** in print media, aboriginal learning, intercultural education, learning supports and continuing care education. Imagine the differences we will make through the investigation, discovery and innovation spear-headed by these centres.

However, to remain relevant and responsive, we must look ahead and anticipate the trends and opportunities. We **must** work with industry, employers and community partners to look down the road ... see what's coming ... and be able to respond quickly. It is about being externally focused and internally motivated.

"You may say I'm a dreamer... But I'm not the only one..."

When I look around the room at all of the important people I know you will be there to support NorQuest in moving forward. More importantly, I know you will be instrumental in helping us get there.

As President and CEO of NorQuest College, this is **my vision** for this very special and vital learning institution.

I can truly imagine all this and more ... Think about being in grade 10 and being told you would never go to University, that you would not succeed. Imagine starting in a small community College and in 1996 graduating with a PhD. This is my story.

And just like our students do each and every day with their vision, dedication and perseverance ... I look forward to making our dreams a reality.

Imagine.

Thank you!