

**Dr. Robert Strang
Doctor of Science
Acadia University**

Hi, I'm Dr. Robert Strang, and it's a pleasure to be here with you today. I want to, first of all, thank Acadia for providing or offering me this honorary degree. I'm honored and humbled to accept it, but I am accepting on behalf of all public health professionals in Nova Scotia. People that I've worked with over the last year throughout this pandemic, and I'm accepting it in recognition of their dedication and expertise, and how we've worked together to keep Nova Scotia safe.

It's also a privilege to be among the other esteemed honorary degree recipients, especially my colleague, Dr. Gaynor Watson-Creed, and we worked side by side for much of the pandemic.

Also, it's a pleasure to receive this from Acadia. I have a longstanding working relationship with Acadia, worked with them on a number of issues, starting back a number of years ago with a serious alcohol-related fatality, and that grew into Acadia's leadership on a national scale, and I want to thank Acadia for stepping into that leadership role.

And it's been a privilege to be able to work alongside them on that. We also had dealt with an outbreak of meningitis as well on campus a few years ago. So I'm well versed with Acadia and it's an honour to become part of the Acadia family.

Most importantly, I want to recognize the graduating students. It's been a challenging year, a year and a half for, when I think about it, for many of you this is probably half of your degree you've achieved, while having to work through and live with all the COVID fears and also the COVID protocols.

And I know that has made a challenging situation even more challenging. So congratulations for getting through this. And I also want to thank all of you because I know across the province, we've asked all Nova Scotians, including university students to come together, to do what's necessary to keep each other safe. And you have done that. It's remarkable of how safe we've been able to keep Nova Scotia, including our campuses. So again, thank you for that.

Let me end by just a few reflections on perhaps, for consideration for the graduates, that there's a phrase that, you know, never waste the opportunity of a crisis. And certainly COVID has shown us a number of things that we need to, that is an opportunity for us to be better.

We're going to be different as we come out of COVID, but can we also be better as well? Certainly we know that COVID is a reminder that we're all connected globally. Nothing happens in isolation. And I think that's an important way to frame things.

The phrase that's out there, everybody's heard it, "think globally, and act locally", but COVID has reminded us to make sure we understand all our interconnections and that we're all together. And what we do affects everybody else around us and across the globe potentially. But locally also, COVID has shown us in our response that Nova Scotia, we have been able to remain as safe as we're able to be, simply because Nova Scotians have heeded the call to come together, to do things, to put aside perhaps our own priorities, our own perspective, and to say, what do I need to do? What sacrifices do I have to make? because it's to make my community, keep my community safe for the common good.

So I think there's really something there, as we may well face future pandemics. We certainly have a climate change crisis in front of us that, that the way we get through all of these things is big and small. That is that we put each other first and we come together as communities. And I think if we can be better at that by the lessons from COVID, we'll be able to take on anything.

And so that's lessons to learn moving forward and the last one is, COVID has clearly shown that in our communities, we're not all equal. We're not all on a level playing field. COVID has had a significant impact on those who are most vulnerable, whether it's because of socioeconomic status, race, gender, type of employment, that makes you more vulnerable. So I think an important thing that I encourage you to think about moving forward is, wherever you go, whether it's for further education, for wherever you work, is what do we do to learn from COVID and try to make those inequities better? How do we make our communities or society fairer, more just, and more equitable?

And that's something I focus on and think about as I continue my career moving forward with those perspectives in mind. And I challenge all of you to think and to carry that moving forward as well. So let me say thank you once again to Acadia. It's an honour to receive this honorary degree and let me give my hearty congratulations to all the graduates.