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Meric Gertler's
presidency ushered
in lasting change
at U of T

A TRANSFORMATIVE ERA

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THE SECRET OF OUR SUCCESS

It is hard to overstate how much the world has changed since 2013, the year I was given the immense privilege of serving as president of the University of Toronto. Twelve years ago, Stephen Harper was our prime minister, and Justin Trudeau was elected leader of the Liberal Party of Canada. The president of the United States, Barack Obama, was leading negotiations on the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a free-trade agreement covering 40 per cent of the global economy, while Donald Trump was best known as a reality TV star. World powers reached an interim deal with Iran that raised hopes for stability in the Middle East, while war in Europe was

almost unthinkable. The word “coronavirus” was a scientific term best known to us from the SARS outbreak a decade earlier.

U of T has changed too during this tumultuous time – though I am proud to say that we have only grown stronger, building on the brilliant legacy of past leaders and generations of faculty, librarians, staff, students, alumni and friends. Alongside our continuing global leadership in research and teaching across the disciplines and professions, we have emerged as a major hub of innovation and entrepreneurship, and we are recognized as the top university on the planet for sustainability. Our international engagement is deeper and more strategic. And our three campuses have fully embraced their city-building role in the dynamic urban region around us, making U of T an even more powerful engine of social mobility and progress.

These very positive developments have all been made possible by our enduring twin commitments to academic excellence and accessibility to all qualified students. The commitment to accessibility was enshrined almost three decades ago in the Governing Council’s policy on student financial support, which guarantees that no domestic student “offered admission to a program at the University of Toronto should be unable to enter or complete the program due to lack of financial means.”

We have made good on that promise. When I took office, U of T had 80,000 students and we provided \$150 million in financial aid to those in need, over and above the support they received through government sources. Today, we are as accessible as ever – our student population has grown to more than 100,000 and in 2024-25 we earmarked \$380 million in financial aid to ensure that the best and brightest can study at U of T, no matter their financial means. And, despite the fact that Ontario’s support for higher education continues to lag other provinces and U of T has only a fraction of the financial resources enjoyed by our global peers, we are routinely ranked among the top 10 public universities in the world, alongside Oxford, Cambridge, University of California, Berkeley and UCLA.

In fact, U of T’s commitment to “excellence at scale” increasingly distinguishes us from our global peers. I emphasized this point in my installation address and have repeated it frequently since. From my regular meetings with international university leaders, I can attest that U of T is admired around the world for our ability to deliver on this dual mandate as well as we do.

Simply put, the University of Toronto is an elite institution with respect to its academic excellence, and we are an inclusive community with respect to

LEGACY, LEADERSHIP AND LESSONS LEARNED

*A farewell conversation with
U of T President Meric Gertler*

**BY
SCOTT ANDERSON**

**PHOTOGRAPHS BY
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