



Dr. Olive Dickason Inspires at Wineguard Lecture

Saba Haider

Last week the University of Guelph hosted the Honourable Dr. Olive Dickason - Professor Emeritus from the University of Alberta, politician, historian, legal challenger of the Supreme Court, and Order of Canada recipient. Dr. Dickason is the first of five Wineguard Visiting Professors to visit the university this year. On Thursday, Dr. Dickason spoke to students on "The Role and Importance of Treatises for Amerindian Societies."

Dr. Dickason is an extraordinary woman. She was raised on a trap-line in Northern Manitoba, and she received her high school diploma through the completion of correspondence courses. She has worked as an award-winning journalist; earned a doctorate from the University of Ottawa at the age of 57; and challenged mandatory retirement at the age of 65 in the Supreme Court of Canada. She is currently Professor Emeritus at the University of Alberta. Dean of the College of Social Sciences, Dr. Marta Rohatynskyj describes Dr. Dickason as being a "Metis activist, committed scholar, and a founding figure in the development of her academic specialization. She is an elder of the Metis nation."

Dr. Dickason began her lecture saying that, "Treatises and alliances have been an important aspect of human affairs as long as people have lived in organized societies." She went on to say that both before and after the arrival of Europeans, "Numerous treatises were entered into for a wide variety of reasons."

Dr. Dickason spoke with devotion, sincerity and fluidity. She discussed various Amerindian treatises, agreements, and annuities. She noted that the idea of "land for strictly Indian use" was an idea of the "Indians put forward to the British," however, "the British did not agree to it immediately."

The fundamental purpose of a treatise is "a reciprocal exchange," said Dr. Dickason. Consequently, "the take-it-or-leave-it approach applied by the government allowed Amerindians very little room."

Dr. Dickason then spoke of the "importance of Natural Law". She distinguished the relationship or differences between Charter and inherent rights to self-government. According to Dr. Dickason, Charter rights are concerned with individuality while inherent rights are primarily concerned with collectivity.

Dr. Dickason explained that, "In pre-contact Canada, a principle function of these agreements was to stabilize relations between aboriginal nations while in post-contact Canada, they were an important factor in controlling the spread of European settlements...not only were they (treaties) of major importance when they were entered into, they are still in the forefront of Canadian Amerindian Politics."

The lecture proved to be an informative and memorable experience for all present. Dr. Dickason is a woman of utmost accomplishment. There is no doubt in that Dr. Olive Dickason; profound, sincere and gentle, stands as an inspiration and hope to all who had the opportunity to hear her speak.

