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State of the University Address 2013

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Office of the President

Mary B. Marcy

State of the University

August 21, 2013

Good morning and welcome back to your University, welcome back to Dominican! The campus community is gathered to welcome new students, reconnect, and plan for the year ahead. We are joined today by Members of the Board of Trustees including John Boneparth, Sister Maureen McInerney, and Sister Raya Hanlon.

After two years at Dominican, this summer I had my first real opportunity to read, think and reflect. I thought about the conversations we had when I first arrived, about the letters I received from faculty and staff in my first semester, and about the warmth of your welcome. And I have been on campus just long enough to also think about the things that have persisted beyond those initial discussions. I thought about the number of stories faculty have shared with me about student research or a class project. About the excitement I've seen from staff when a prospective student who is a perfect fit for Dominican commits to enroll, about the graduates whose faces light up when they discuss their advisors, about the alumni who can still recall particular teachers, staff members, and campus capers.

In the process of these reflections, I began to consider what binds us together as a campus, what is distinctively Dominican. The answer is quite simple. We are an institution that is dedicated to students – to their education, to their transformation, and to their success. This may be a simple answer, but it is also a profound one. And it is what is most enduring about Dominican.

This has been true since before I arrived, indeed it has been true since the time of our founding.

When I talk to older alumni, they tell me about dining hall conversations discussing the humanities core, about evening study sessions with students from different ages and classes, about sitting across from Sister Patrick and quietly reading as she efficiently did her work.

In the 1970s Dominican evolved the curriculum, admitted men to the undergraduate program, and became independent. But what is essential to Dominican endured, so when I talk to alumni of that era, they tell me about faculty challenging them to act in plays and then analyze the text in literature class, about the strength of their connection to students from across the campus, about listening to Sister Samuel outline a new curriculum for the changing era.

In the 1980s we developed the Pacific Basin Studies program, later to become the School of Business and Leadership, and began conversations about professional programs and the liberal arts.

And alumni of that era talk about how their faculty introduced them to the luminaries of the age, how they not only met people like Jeanne Kirkpatrick, but discussed her work with faculty and staff in the dining hall.

In the 1990s and early 2000s Dominican grew. We grew more diverse, we became a University, we added programs and facilities. And when I talk to recent alumni and current students, they echo those from an earlier era. They tell me about how they co-published a paper with a faculty member, or how their Big History course changed their understanding of their major. They tell me how, in their first week on campus, a staff member took them aside and reassured them that they wouldn't be homesick forever. They talk about their experience in the residence halls and student government. They talk as graduate students who are mentored as they conduct original research.

These are conversations that span generations. I am not suggesting Dominican never changes. Our student profile and the landscape of higher education do change. Our dedication to student learning does not. What evolves is the way in which Dominican can most effectively create an environment of student learning that transforms lives.

And so, as we more fully develop our vision for the future, we must place student learning at the center of our conversations.

If we put students at the center of our discussions of engaged learning, for example, we move from a technical understanding of credits and requirements to a vision of student development that involves the entire campus. If we put students at the center of the renovation of Meadowlands Hall, we focus on classrooms, lab space, and student

gathering spaces. And if we put students at the center of our long term campus vision, we will find the seeds for its next stage of development.

This work has already begun. When I arrived, the campus was already implementing a strategic plan. It is, appropriately, evolving, and it is now time to evaluate and focus those efforts.

One of the central features of the original strategic plan was responsibility-centered management. From that work we created a budget model that is designed to be more predictable, more aligned with clearly articulated institutional priorities, and more transparent. While we have not yet realized all of that promise, we have made tangible progress. In the last fiscal two years we have secured a balanced operating budget through the leadership of Vice President Michele Hinken and her team. We have done so with coordination, planning, and trust in the integrity of center managers. This is a significant shift from a long period of unreliable projections and multiple, damaging mid-semester reductions.

We have also reallocated our budget to focus more on the student experience. When I began my presidency, I discussed three methods for greater investment in the student experience: reallocation, fundraising, and managing the budget to a surplus. That process has begun. Last fall, we had five Vice Presidents. We now have three Vice Presidents. We are using the savings to fund support for students in and out of the classroom. Our budget surplus in my first year funded the Strategic Initiatives Grants. We have used campus conversations to share more information about the budget process, and are learning to align our budget with institutional priorities. This work is still in progress, but the progress is real.

We have also realized remarkable gains in fundraising. You know of the extraordinary gift we received from the Rolf Lewis Family. You will have a chance to see that gift in action as we begin the renovation of Meadowlands this semester. What you may not realize is how much we are restructuring the advancement office to be fully dedicated to supporting our educational mission. And the progress is exciting. In addition to the Lewis gift, we received a \$1 million gift from alumni Susan Gilardi in support of scholarships for young women. And today I am pleased to announce our most recent 7-figure gift, a \$1 million contribution to Dominican's endowment from Bernard and Barbro Osher. Their gift is in support of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute's work. Congratulations and thank you to Kathie Henderson and Dana Pandey.

Multiple gifts of this scale are unprecedented at Dominican. And they are just the beginning. Under the new leadership of Vice President Kathy Park, last fiscal year we also saw an increase of 42% in alumni giving, secured numerous gifts of more than \$10,000,

and nurtured the seeds of important legacies. The Jordan Fromm Scholarship Fund, now stands at \$200,000.

When I arrived perhaps the most ambitious, but also least developed, aspect of the strategic plan was the goal for engaged learning. Last year we appointed an engaged learning committee to consider the necessary steps for implementing this inspiring but complex idea. Their work yielded some crucial insights. They are asking us to move away from focusing on requirements to thinking about Engaged Learning as an integrative, expansive Dominican experience, an experience that includes both curricular and co-curricular activities, one which begins when students enroll and continues into their graduate work and alumni experience.

This is not a small change. But it is an inspiring one. Engaged learning embraces the most effective high impact practices in higher education. But until now at Dominican, it has been missing our graduate students and focused more on the activity than the process. We must move beyond a simple construction of engaged learning, we must evolve our understanding so that it is truly a transformational opportunity for students and for the University.

Imagine a comprehensive and integrated Dominican experience for students from the time they are recruited to their time in a graduate program or alumni status. We would show prospective students how we support their work in the classroom and in student activities. We would create orientation programs that asked our students to understand who they are, and how their skills might fit into the work force and into society. We would use older students to mentor newly arrived first years, and graduate students to model the best of engaged learning through their research, internships, and projects. We would ask alumni and friends of the University to offer networking, internship, and research opportunities. More than engaged learners, all of our students – not just the honors students – would truly be scholars in the world.

If we are able to create such a dynamic model, we will not only provide an extraordinary education for our students. We will be among a very small group of institutions transformed around a clear vision of student engagement. We would secure our future as a distinctive university dedicated to high quality student learning.

This is not only a campus conversation. You may not realize how compelling the Dominican vision for education is beyond our campus. I have met with Board members, national foundation and association leaders, elected officials, venture capitalists, international partners, and regional and community leaders. They are attracted to the idea of an education that links scholarly work and application, to students who have

developed their voice and their skills and are ready to apply them to social and professional challenges.

Let me provide some examples of what it means to transform around this vision and take our place within higher education. Provost Steve Weisler and I have been discussing the fact that there have been two parallel conversations evolving in U.S. higher education: one about high impact practices like those we envision with engaged learning, another about using technology to disrupt the educational model. Dominican is one of the few institutions positioned to link these two ideas, refining high impact practices – the programs that are becoming our signature – and aligning them with growing programs offered on-line. We do not – and probably should not – create the on-line course. What we can do is provide the intellectual integration for the student, championing what we know is the best of education.

Our vision also has great interest for international partners. Last spring when I visited China, I had meetings at several different campuses. China is hungry for educational partnerships that reach beyond research institutions and there is great interest in developing a practical integration of the liberal arts and the professions. They believe this is the next step to creating a higher education system of quality. Several campuses have already invited Dominican to explore these models with them.

These external opportunities are real. But we cannot pursue them unless we more fully develop a vision of Dominican students as scholars in the world. They must have a signature campus experience from the time they enroll to graduate school and alumni status. Accomplishing this vision will, as the engaged learning committee discovered, involve more than checking a few boxes or fulfilling some additional requirements. It will involve reimagining our support systems and curriculum to align with an integrated educational vision. Fortunately, there are few institutions better positioned than Dominican to create a signature student experience modeled on high impact practices. One of the things I have noticed about Dominican is that, although we are an institution founded on faith, our faith in continuity, our faith that we can together craft our own future, is limited. We have been too focused on transition, and on survival. We are past that era now. I ask you to join me in building the future.

Our strategic plan is three years old. From that plan we have strengthened our infrastructure and sowed the seeds for student engagement. It is now time to refine the strategic plan, to focus on those things that are central to our mission of student learning, and to do so in a way that defines Dominican's distinctiveness and charts a pathway to excellence.

This is our work, and we must undertake it together. To provide leadership for this effort, I have asked Hanna Rodriguez Farrar to chair a reconstituted strategic planning

committee. I have revised her title to reflect both the significance and the necessary focus for this role, and have asked her to become my Senior Advisor for Strategy and Planning. We will develop a charge and appoint a committee in the next few weeks.

The committee will build on the numerous campus conversations we have had and on the work of the engaged learning committee, and will begin discussions in three important areas: first, I will ask them to develop a more comprehensive and integrated view of student learning and development; second, I will ask them to help position Dominican more centrally in the higher education landscape both nationally and internationally; and third, I will ask them to help develop a strategy for establishing a more residential campus so our students have the community they need to fully become scholars in the world, and so our relationship with our neighbors continues to grow in a positive manner.

The strategic planning effort will lead to a comprehensive capital campaign. Unlike fundraising efforts that focus on a single idea or project, a comprehensive capital campaign will include the entire University. A capital campaign, along with diversification of revenue streams, will help us build the future.

But we should not do anything for revenue reasons alone. In higher education there is no substitute for clarity of vision and quality of the student experience. Education is built on ideas. If we continue to build our vision of a Dominican education, we will develop international partnerships, recruit students, support staff and faculty, and connect to alumni because of that vision. If we pursue revenue for its own sake, we will have limited and transitory success. That is why we must come together behind a common educational idea. It will challenge us to clearly articulate to prospective students, current students, alumni, and the broader community the transformative power of a Dominican education.

This process will not only transform student learning. It will provide greater meaning and value to our own work. A few years ago, I spent some time with friends who were at a similar stage of life and career. Not surprisingly, we talked about how much time we spent at work; whether this was a wise way to spend our lives. My friend said ‘it is what we do at this point in our lives. This is when we make our contribution to the world.’ I have reflected on this conversation many times. Freud had a similar idea when he talked about a common need for love and work. I agree with this notion, but I find I am increasingly drawn to the more specific idea of meaningful work. We have the opportunity not only to do work well, but to do it well in support of an extraordinary mission. Not everyone has the opportunity to work at a campus like Dominican, at a time when we can transform the University, at a time when our work and our voices are so clearly needed.

I believe in Dominican. I believe not only in the institution that is, but in the Dominican that will be, the Dominican that can articulate and fully embrace a distinct vision of student learning.

To realize this broader vision, we need to move beyond departments, divisions, schools and silos. We must become one Dominican, aligned behind a common understanding of education. When our OLLI program becomes so successful that it raises our profile in the community and secures a million dollar gift to the endowment, they are Dominican. When an art class creates a community mural that, for just a moment, knits the fractured pieces of Marin into a whole, they are Dominican. When a graduate student and an undergraduate student work side-by-side in the lab conducting breast cancer research, they are Dominican. When our student accounts office gently works with a family to help them manage their bills, they are Dominican. When our men's lacrosse team goes undefeated and our women's soccer team huddles with the phrase 'one heart, one mind, one team' and our athletics program wins the conference academic achievement award for the third year in a row, they are Dominican. When our students fan out across the county and then engage with students around the globe in a VoteSmart program, they are Dominican. When dozens of students participate in Relay for Life, they are Dominican. When the campus hears Eve Ensler speak one year, and the next year mobilizes hundreds to participate in One Billion Rising, they are Dominican. When the student life staff stays up late to serve 'midnight madness' dinner to students during dead week and the facilities crew organizes its cleaning and landscaping around family weekend and we sing 'I Will Survive' together at commencement, we are Dominican.

We are one Dominican. And Dominican is needed. Not only the Dominican of the 1950s, or the 1970s, or the 1990s, but the Dominican common to all those eras, the enduring Dominican, the Dominican that believes the way to impact the world is to educate democratic citizens, the Dominican that holds fast to values of study, reflection, community, and service, the Dominican that holds these values even while adapting to a changing higher education landscape.

I am asking you to take the next step in the good work that we have begun. It will involve new ways of working together, but those steps will be inspiring and invigorating. In the process of creating this opportunity for students, we will create it for each other. With students as the winners, we will not require others to be losers. Instead, we will craft a future together, one that holds the enduring Dominican vision of student learning while taking our place in the broader arena of American higher education. I look forward to the next stage of our work together.