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State of the University Address 2014

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STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY ADDRESS

2014



Mary B. Marcy

Delivered on Tuesday, August 19, 2014

Good morning, and welcome to a new academic year at Dominican! The campus community is gathered to welcome new students, meet new colleagues, reconnect, and plan for the year ahead.

This summer, I spent part of the summer reading, writing, and thinking about our work, and I remembered that American higher education has often been described as having an agrarian calendar. I agree – and most of you know I am familiar with the agrarian calendar – but I would argue that we are on the agrarian calendar of the southern hemisphere.

At the end of summer, when the harvest season arrives in the fields of North America, we are welcoming new arrivals and planning our work for the year. In winter, while much of the agricultural landscape around us lies fallow, we are doing our most intense and fulfilling work with students and colleagues. And in spring, when crops are just being planted, we complete our cycle and celebrate the accomplishments of all that we have nourished through the year.

So I am happy to welcome you all back to our fall semester, but also to our spring, the time when we bring a vibrant new group of students to our community, welcome back the perennials, and begin to envision what we will build together this academic year.

We have much upon which to build. Last year we initiated a planning process that involved the entire campus community, including formal task forces and committees, along with a series of informal but focused Listenings held at Barowsky House. The creativity, innovation, commitment to student learning, and good will exhibited by the campus through those conversations was tangible. The result was a framework for a profound educational model at Dominican, one that grows from our commitment to students and embraces the best in teaching and learning. Those discussions also led to a transformational philanthropic gift, one that unites us even as it invites us to create the future together.

We also now have further confirmation that the educational model at Dominican, along with the work we are doing to create a common student experience, speaks to what is most needed in American higher education.

Earlier this year, the Lumina Foundation conducted a study of nearly 30,000 US adults who had completed a bachelor's degree. Lumina's Gallup-Purdue Index looked at the post-graduate lives of college students, inquiring about their well-being, their work engagement, and their quality of life. What they found is profound and directly relevant to a Dominican education. Consistent with prior research, they found there are two factors in the experiences of college students that dramatically influence long-term well-being, work engagement, and quality of life: first, if a student has a meaningful relationship with a faculty or staff member, and second, if a student has participated in multiple formative learning experiences – like those we value at Dominican – such as a major research project, an internship, a service learning program, or other forms of applied learning. The Gallup-Purdue Index also showed that there was absolutely no correlation between the perceived status of an institution and long-term well-being and quality-of-life. It was the experiences in college, not the name affixed to the institution, which made the difference.

This research confirms what we experience on a daily basis at Dominican: we know that our work can transform lives. What we are building together to extend and strengthen that work stands at the heart of effective higher education.

Through the support of our extended community, we will advance this ideal. Last spring, we announced a gift that, in scope and ambition, could only have come from the visionary leadership of our Board chairman, Andrew Barowsky. The scale of the gift is of course unprecedented for Dominican: from Chair Barowsky and his business partner Albert Lepage, \$17.5 million committed to our work; when matching funds are fully realized the total will be \$25 million.

What is most important about this gift is that it represents confidence in Dominican's education. And Chairman Barowsky is not alone in that faith. The extended Dominican community of Trustees, alumni, and leaders in higher education know this is a transformational opportunity. They know this a transformational institution. And, they are eager to help.

So it is time for us to refine our goals, even as we move from planning to implementation. In the words of Clement Atlee, former Prime Minister of Great Britain, "democracy is decision making by talking. But it only works when you stop talking."

Actually, we will keep talking. But we will also begin doing. We will focus on the key areas developed from our campus conversations and planning and supported by compelling philanthropy.

¹ For the report, go to: <http://www.gallup.com/strategicconsulting/168791/gallup-purdue-index-inaugural-national-report.aspx>.

First, in the area of physical campus renovations, we have made good initial progress and have exciting work ahead. In our Listenings and campus planning meetings last year, I consistently heard about the need to invest in our teaching and learning spaces, and to create more campus community space. Our physical campus should embody our educational aspirations in a lived and tangible way.

Today, in response to those discussions, I am happy to announce two modest but nonetheless significant improvements: this summer we upgraded the library foyer and lawn, adding a quality coffee and snack stand along with new furniture indoors and out. The working group of the Physical Campus Task Force worked with our architects to design this improvement. Over the summer we also completed a major renovation of the fitness room at Conlan Athletics Center, a space free to faculty and staff as well as students and athletes. Both of these spaces are a first step to create better intellectual and social community space.

We are also making significant strides in improving our academic space. We moved from identifying the need for a new health sciences center, to securing the largest gift in campus history at that time – an \$8.5 million commitment from the Rolf Lewis family – to now watching as Meadowlands becomes a first-rate health sciences complex. By this time next fall, we will be exploring a revitalized Meadowlands with newly created space that is finally appropriate to the quality, scale, and needs of our stellar health sciences program.

The renovation of Meadowlands is a beginning, and a good one; the library and athletics center will bring our spirit of community into more tangible focus. But these steps are just the beginning. They should remind us that when we imagine something together, we have the capacity to make it happen. We also have important upcoming meetings to envision the next stage of campus development.

We will transform Bertrand Hall into a signature home for the Barowsky School of Business. We must design better space for teaching and learning, and for our performing arts. We must envision the physical as well as programmatic space that will support the lives of all of our students through the Dominican Experience. We must consider the campus as a whole, securing more community gathering space, greater residential space for students, and more effective working, teaching, and learning space. We will have further programming meetings with the architects this fall, and I encourage you to join the conversation.

Second, we need to continue our essential work to update the curriculum and create a common student experience. We have developed a strong skeleton, and need to add flesh and refinement to these ideas. This summer a campus team attended an Institute organized by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. The team reviewed the information from our Listenings and planning meetings as well as the work of the Curriculum Task Force. From this base, the group outlined some specific ideas for the Dominican Experience. They integrated the four pillars of study, reflection, community, and service into the design, and considered how their model should interact with the curriculum. Their ideas will be shared more broadly, and we will continue to focus on this work through the fall. We have made significant progress,

and have much left to create. It is not as simple as wishing it to be so, or counting our current work as sufficient.

I have learned from our Listenings and other campus conversations that too often bureaucratic challenges, workload, poor communication, or lack of support are barriers to both success and innovation at Dominican. So I will commit today to some important components of campus curricular reform and the student experience. Following the lead of the Curriculum Task Force we will move to a more equitable and reasonable courseload. We will streamline our curricular model to improve student choice and strengthen retention. The goal will be to increase quality, develop a more equitable workload, provide consistent professional development, and support students' progress to degree completion.

The Dominican Experience will be a central, integrated, physically located program. It will include a faculty and staff development component, available to all faculty and staff regardless of rank or position. It will include an integrated advising center for students, a space that supports their quest to understand the relationship between education and work, intellectual attainment and life skills.

In all of these discussions we have focused on student learning and student success, and research like the Lumina Foundation's findings remind us of its importance. We know students need a personal relationship with faculty and staff. We know students learn most effectively when they move from theory to practice.

As the poet Wendell Barry has said:

Imagination thrives on contact, on tangible connection. For humans to have a responsible relationship to the world, they must imagine their places in it. To have a place, to live and belong in a place, to live from a place without destroying it, we must imagine it. By imagination we see it illuminated by its own unique character and by our love for it. By imagination we recognize with sympathy the fellow members, human and nonhuman, with whom we share our place.

This is the work of a Dominican education. It could not be more important.

Our students deserve this education. They are courageous, many are the first in their families to experience college. They are tenacious; they insist that commuting, or returning to college, or managing multiple jobs will not keep them from a profound educational experience. They are curious; they seek to understand how businesses can thrive or how malaria spreads or why the structure of a song or the meter of a poem can alter our understanding of the human condition. By providing this education, we are making our own difference in the world.

We also need to provide greater practical support to students. Student retention, particularly among junior and senior undergraduates, continues to be a challenge. This year, and going forward, I commit to a revised financial aid model which ensures that need-based aid for returning students keeps pace with costs. I will commit to making upper division scholarships a priority in fundraising, so that we can reward those students who have done exceptionally well in their first years at Dominican. As we implement these financial aid changes, we also need to carefully review the ideas from

the curriculum committee and streamline requirements so that students are able to graduate with quality degrees, and without undue hardship.

Third, we have begun to define more clearly our international work. I also have some exciting news in this area. After several personal visits, we are ready to begin a formal relationship with Hebei Institute for Foreign Languages in China. Provost Weisler has led the design of a 3+1+1 student transfer relationship that will bring Hebei Institute students to Dominican to complete their undergraduate degrees and pursue select graduate degrees. As the relationship grows, we hope to provide opportunities for Dominican faculty and students to have intensive on-site course work at the Institute campus in Hebei Province. The on-site work will be led and designed by Dominican faculty, in subjects of your choice. This idea was first proposed by faculty at a Listening last year, and has been enthusiastically received by President Ding at the Hebei Institute. He hopes to visit us on campus this fall; it will be an opportunity to formally begin our partnership and meet with you to explore more intensive site-based experiences.

Over the summer I also returned to the University of Oxford, and further international opportunities for our students are the result. This semester we anticipate a visit from Naomi Freud, a Fellow of St. Catherine's College at Oxford. After she meets with Dominican faculty, students and staff, we plan to finalize arrangements for qualified students, selected by Dominican faculty, to spend a semester or year at Oxford as part of their Dominican education.

We will also have the great pleasure of developing the vision and program for the Françoise Lepage Center for International Innovation. When I meet with Dominican's international alumni corps, they frequently have one thing in common: they came to Dominican because of the drive and commitment of Françoise. The Lepage Center is our opportunity to institutionalize her commitment to students, to internationalization, and to global understanding. Our campus planning process will be essential, and we need your engagement. We will also work with these alumni, who want to ensure a robust experience is available for a new generation of Dominican students. They are ready to help our students learn about global management, to share their experiences of entrepreneurial successes and failures, to offer internships and insights.

Finally, we will demonstrate what transformational philanthropy can create at an institution like Dominican. The newly christened Barowsky School of Business has already begun to build its program. Through the work of the advancement office and the leadership of Dean Beldona, we have secured a six-figure gift to bring eminent leaders to speak and then mentor students. Our application to pursue accreditation through the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business has been accepted, and we are hiring strong new faculty around which we can build the future.

The Barowsky School offers us a specific opportunity to create a distinguished program, and a new way to move forward as an institution. We have operated for too long as if Dominican lives in a zero sum universe – if one part of the university benefits, another part must necessarily lose. In a small institution, that mindset leads to siloed and competing interests, virtually all of which are underfunded, undersupported,

understaffed, and overwhelmed. But this is not the only, or even most effective, way for us to operate. Instead, to paraphrase Mary Catherine Bateson, I ask that we assume winners do not require that others become losers.

We have good evidence that working together can elevate the entire institution. The University endowment is a good example. In 2010, the University's endowment stood at \$19 million. Today, after some focused philanthropy, good budget management, and effective investing, the corpus stands at \$32 million, with committed pledges that will take us to \$38 million. Our endowment still needs to grow substantially, and it will. As we build it, we must do so in a way that enhances student opportunity, supports the work of faculty and staff, and reinforces the best of a Dominican education.

It is not only in the endowment where we are building on progress. The historic commitment we received to renovate Meadowlands Hall in part inspired the gift to renovate Bertrand Hall, and led to a further challenge gift to begin the Acacia Project, to transform the entire physical campus. The visibility of these leadership gifts is already inspiring further philanthropy. When the broader community sees what we do – and what we aspire to accomplish – at Dominican, they are eager to support us.

Within our broader vision, we will make some specific decisions this year. Evaluating the long-term results, workload, and costs at campuses, which have hosted the U.S. presidential debates, we will decide whether the benefits of hosting a debate align with our vision of a Dominican education and have the potential for lasting positive effects on enrollment and visibility. Using recently secured grants from several foundations, we will explore whether we can work more effectively with other private colleges and universities to increase student learning and reinforce intellectual connections across disciplines and campuses. We will fully align admissions and marketing so that our work with the curriculum and our work developing the Dominican Experience bring greater stability and selectivity to enrollment.

Much of what I have outlined captures our discussions of the last few years. Our long-term success requires long-term engagement. In the process, we should remember what we already do so very well. In 2010 the faculty held a summer retreat to create the first-year experience program built around Big History. Only four years later – just two weeks ago – this campus was the host for the largest gathering of Big History scholars in the world; the International Big History Association Bi-Annual Conference, where I heard multiple times how Dominican was at the forefront of this important idea.

This summer I received word that Dominican, thanks to the leadership of Athletic Director Brandon Leimbach and Faculty Advisor Chris Leeds, secured the PacWest Academic Achievement Award for an unprecedented 5th year in a row. This summer I also met representatives from some of the leading foundations in American higher education: the Lumina Foundation, the Teagle Foundation, and the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation. After discussing our students, our faculty, our community, and our vision with them, we have now secured planning grants from each of these foundations.

You should have no doubt that our work is important. Remember the Gallup-Purdue Index I mentioned at the beginning of my talk? The Index found that the two

factors of greatest significance for the long-term well being of college graduates are a meaningful relationship with a faculty or staff member, and participation in applied learning activities. What I did not tell you is that, of the nearly 30,000 post-graduates interviewed, only 14% had actually enjoyed those experiences as students. Connection with faculty and applied learning were not the norm, they were the difference maker.

Dominican is a difference maker. We cannot change all of higher education. But we can change lives. We can, and we will, make sure every one of our students is part of that 14%. It is our work, and our mission to ensure that a Dominican education prepares students for lives of meaning and fulfillment. I remain honored and humbled to be leading you in this work.