

8-18-2015

State of the University Address 2015

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Recommended Citation

Marcy, Mary B., "State of the University Address 2015" (2015). *President Mary Marcy | Speeches*. 1.
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STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY ADDRESS

2015



Mary B. Marcy

Delivered on Tuesday, August 18, 2015

Good morning, and welcome to a new academic year at Dominican! And a particular welcome to the new faculty and staff, and to members of the Board of Trustees who are joining us, including John Boneparth, Sister Maureen McInerney, and Sister Raya Hanlon.

As you know by now, like many of you I spend part of my summer getting the basics done, and part of my summer reading, reflecting, and planning for the year ahead. This summer I read a thoughtful article by Matt Reed, the Vice President for Learning at Brookdale College. In one of his essays, Matt reminded us of Tolstoy, writing:

Tolstoy once claimed that there are really only two stories, and we keep telling each of them over and over again: a stranger comes to town, and a hero goes on a quest. In higher education, we live those two stories continuously.

Every semester, a new crop of strangers comes to town. And every semester, we set a new group of heroes off on their respective quests.

That's our job. It's what we do. It's about the students.

I am never sure I agree with Tolstoy, but I do agree with Matt Reed: it is about the students. That is why our work is a privilege as well as a responsibility, a calling as well as a career. And at Dominican, we have a rare opportunity to work with students who look like California, and like the future of the United States – they are diverse, many are the first in their family to attend college, they are both aspirational and inspirational. As we welcome our new crop of strangers to town, as we send others on their quest, we are reminded that we re-create our Dominican community every year.

And yet, it is an ongoing community, one built on traditions old and new. This year marks the 125th anniversary of the founding of Dominican College in California. It has been 125 years of growth and transformation, and 125 years firmly grounded in the Dominican values of study, reflection, community, and service.

And new things keep happening at this 125-year-old institution – it has been a productive and exciting summer. Two years ago I stood on this stage at my State of the University address and announced that work would begin that fall on the renovation of Meadowlands. Today, Meadowlands is fully and beautifully renovated and the proud new home of our strong Health Sciences programs. It is the largest building project ever completed on this campus that is entirely debt free. The generosity of Rolf Lewis, matched by leadership on our Board of Trustees and numerous alumni and friends, along with focused work by our development team, has made it possible. Our facilities and IT staff worked intensely to ensure it would be open for the start of the academic year, and it is indeed open! We will celebrate this building, which meets LEED Silver standards, and the people who made it possible, together next month.

I also learned a few weeks ago that Dominican is one of only five universities in the country selected to receive the New York Life Civic Engagement Award. In October I will represent Dominican as we are honored at the National Press Club. I also received another invitation to the White House Presidential Summit, this time to discuss community and civic engagement. Both of these invitations are a direct result of our commitment to building the student experience, to our vision for developing the most effective educational model for our diverse student body.

Thanks to the leadership of Chris Leeds along with the strong coaches and staff in athletics, Dominican has once again earned the PacWest Academic Achievement Award. Dominican's athletics program is also the first California campus to win the Make a Wish award by raising funds to grant a wish on campus.

Over the summer we have continued our discussions with the Commission on Presidential Debates. We plan to ensure that any participation Dominican has in the debates will bring great opportunity to our students, great visibility for the institution, and will be fiscally manageable.

And of course, along with these projects and announcements, for many of us the most dramatic news of the summer was that we successfully negotiated a change in food services. Along with you, I look forward to working with Epicurean.

The exciting news of the summer and the opening of Meadowlands are a direct result of our planning work together. When we collaborate and envision the future of Dominican together, we are able to realize that vision. Consider what has already happened.

We moved from an ambitious but vague notion of engaged learning to an integrated–but equally ambitious – working plan for the Dominican Experience. From that vision we launched the first campus-wide research conference, established a life skills course to prepare students for life beyond Dominican, and are initiating a student peer-mentoring program this fall. We will send our first students to Oxford this year, and are pursuing programs with Hebei Institute for Foreign Languages in China. Last spring we announced a major \$2 million gift to create a Center for Civic and Community

Engagement and a Learning Commons in the library. The profound opportunities created by this gift, including scholarship support for students and dedicated resources for civic engagement, will begin immediately; in January we will introduce the very generous friends of the University who have made this work possible. These efforts will accompany the inspiring leadership gift that will create the Boneparth Center for the Dominican Experience. To lead these efforts we have a new Dean of the Dominican Experience, whose position is supported by our philanthropic success. Dean Finley's remarkable expertise will lead us in integrating our best aspirations for student learning.

Academic excellence is a cornerstone of our planning. Last year someone quite reasonably asked what the alternative might be. We are talking about academic excellence not only because it sounds better than academic adequacy (although it does), but to invite a serious conversation about quality. What do our faculty need to do their best work? What pressing questions and problems should we address as an academic community? How can we work more effectively across schools and disciplines?

To be sure, these are not new conversations. But I believe they are conversations that benefit from regular renewal. We will begin this afternoon at the faculty retreat, where we will discuss institutional learning outcomes for our students. It should mean something to be a student at Dominican, rather than a student at another institution. We must express not only what students will do while at Dominican, *but why they are doing it* – what we expect every graduate of Dominican to know or be able to do.

Along with today's faculty retreat, we will initiate focused discussions this semester to identify and support your best ideas for teaching and learning. In my first year, we created a set of strategic initiative grants to support ideas that aligned with the strategic plan and advanced our educational work. The response was phenomenal, and many of the projects – from malaria research, to instructional technology development, to new service learning partnerships – have been enduring.

We now manage the budget much more effectively, and have already redistributed the excess funds that were in administration in my first year. But we now also have a successful and growing philanthropic capacity, and the outcomes of important planning discussions to support and focus our work. We will provide the necessary faculty development, strategic support, and fundraising effort to refine and bring the best of our ideas to fruition. To initiate the process this fall, I will host two conversations at Barowsky House, followed by a series of project development meetings hosted by the Deans and Vice President Pitchford. We will identify the most innovative and promising ideas, and design them with a view to raising funds and piloting the efforts next fall. We already have support from the Mellon Foundation to begin work on a common curricular investigation of Democracy and Equity. We will begin with that discussion, and expand our conversation. These discussions will more fully refine the portion of our planning work devoted to academic excellence, and will guide our fundraising efforts in that area.

As an additional focus of building academic excellence, Vice President Pitchford will continue her leadership in setting faculty salary targets that are competitive and address serious issues of both equity and compression. Similarly, we will start the process of updating staff salary targets relative to market. And we will work with the newly formed bargaining unit of SEIU to develop a strong contract with adjunct faculty. While there are certainly areas where our ideas are divergent, we are all in agreement that adjunct faculty should be compensated in a way that reflects their importance to the University and their valued membership in our community.

We also need to elevate our excellent graduate programs and refine our vision for the schools. We have some exceptionally strong graduate programs; we need to build on their strength. The nature of graduate study is focused and sometimes isolated, yet the work of our students and faculty in this area should be more well-known and more integrated within Dominican. The university-wide research conference was a good start; graduate students not only displayed their original work but modeled academic inquiry for the campus and for undergraduates. As I host conversations this fall to invite strategic ideas for development, we will ensure that graduate programs are fully at the table.

Finally, our planning work is also focused on the physical campus, on what we are calling the Acacia Project. Meadowlands is certainly a dramatic testament to what we have been able to create together, and we will do more. We have recently sent requests for proposals for architects to bid on designing both the Boneparth Center for the Dominican Experience and transforming Bertrand into Barowsky Hall. The University has a considerable debt load, and we will not build unless we have secured the philanthropic support to make them a reality. As we have shown with Meadowlands, we can secure that support. We already have a substantial portion of the funds necessary for creating the Boneparth Center and Learning Commons, and with an inspiring architectural design we will be able to secure the additional funds needed to begin Barowsky Hall. I will also prioritize finding a site for additional student housing. More space for students to live will increase the quality of our residential experience for undergraduates, and improve our ability to recruit graduate students both internationally and around the country.

With these three planning frames – the Dominican Experience, Academic Excellence, and the Acacia Project – we will continue to build on Dominican’s strong history, while adapting to a changing higher education landscape. The reason for these titles is not only for simple reference, it is the frame we will use to develop Dominican’s first comprehensive capital campaign. In order to realize, and not just imagine, this work, we will need the financial support of Dominican’s many alumni, friends, and community leaders. Framing Dominican’s future through enduring values, the best of our faculty’s work, and the profile of our students, is work that has resonance far beyond our campus. And the larger community knows and embraces this vision. Along with the planning areas I discussed, we will build support for student scholarships and the endowment.

In fact, we already have. We have raised over \$4 million for student scholarships in the last four years, and nearly \$11 million for the University's endowment in that time.

These gains illustrate the potential at Dominican. They also illustrate that philanthropy can help transform an institution, but it is not a quick or simple transformation. Our scholarship gains mean more students are able to attend and stay at Dominican, yet we still have a large gap between their need and our ability to support them. Our endowment growth has meant a more stable long-term financial picture, but is not robust enough to support the faculty and staff salaries that we aspire to and deserve.

I believe the progress we have made is the beginning, not the end, of our capacity. Our own Judy Halebsky, in her wonderful book *Tree Line*, writes that "we grow as big as the space we are given." For our faculty, for our students, for our staff, for our community, we will build an intellectual space equal to our ambition, a student experience space equal to our traditions, and an educational space that will endure for the next century. A Dominican education is one that builds both intellect and character. A Dominican education honors aspiration more than entitlement, and aspires to equity in the midst of our diversity.

We will create a partnership with our students to embrace this learning opportunity. That partnership will not be with one student, it will be with every student. We will develop engaged learning experiences not for some students, but for every student. We will provide mentoring not for some students, but for every student. We will do this because we are a Dominican community, because our faculty and staff are deeply qualified to offer this experience, because our students represent the future of this nation, and because it is in our 125-year-old DNA to put students at the center of our work.

Tomorrow some strangers will come to town. Let us begin their quest in the Dominican tradition of study, reflection, community, and service. Let us begin their quest together.