

Address to Arts and Sciences Council

Thursday, September 6, 2007

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Welcome and Happy New Year to all. This is my fourth annual address. A fourth year at University is commonly a time of reflection. I wish to briefly reflect on my four years with remarkable colleagues: faculty, students, and staff alike.

I have had the pleasure of helping recruit over 100 new faculty who enhance the learning environment for our students. In this process, I have had the unique opportunity to learn what motivates top scholars to choose Duke over competitors like Princeton, Yale, Stanford, Penn, and Berkeley who have appropriately lost out to Duke. Three common themes emerge that make Duke attractive to these scholars: interdisciplinarity, impact, and integral communities.

Our interdisciplinarity is supported by an environment which sustains work across disciplines and schools including such jewels as the Franklin Center, SSRI, and the new Arts Institute. Such environments are rare attractions for faculty and remain an asset to be nurtured.

A second theme cited by new Dukies is impact. However one reads recent media, one thing is clear: the world notices, and cares, what happens at Duke. Duke matters. Faculty scholarship receives major awards, our students create remarkable achievements in the classroom, in athletics, and in service. Our alumni excel in all facets of human endeavor. Duke is a place of engagement where fundamental knowledge can be used to effect tangible improvements in peoples' lives, from Carolina to Kenya, summarized in a facile acronym: Discovering the Use of Knowledge is Education – DUKE.

For example, our university-wide global health initiative rests not only on our preeminent medical researchers, but equally on health economists, anthropologists, linguists,

historians, and policy specialists who help guide the implementation of medical possibilities into culturally appropriate practice. Our students understand such opportunities well: the great majority become involved in community service, either locally or globally, through the promise of Duke Engage. That leads to the third key attractor and the focus of my remaining remarks: integral community.

Duke has prospered as an inclusive institution with multiple communities of engagement. Some communities, e.g. departments or schools, are structural, but faculty and students create networks that transcend any of these structures. We live and work in communities, whether Durham or Durban, which can engender tensions. Engaging and resolving these tensions enriches us all.

Within Arts and Sciences, I would argue our single most important community is our student community ranging from first-year undergraduates through ABD's, all guided and mentored by faculty. Our research production is animated by its presentation to students: professors need profess. In this way, Duke's most enduring legacy is the intellectual and personal growth our students experience here, and the role we play in nurturing this growth. The success of our faculty/student community depends on mutual capability, mutual commitment, and mutual trust and respect.

The capability of our faculty continue to strengthen, mirrored in numerous awards and national and international recognition. Likewise, our students' accomplishments rank at the very top of their cohort. The average Duke matriculant scores in the top (2%) of the national cohort. As we form communities of learning, these capabilities evolve to commitments. For example, on coming to Duke, I partnered with Bob Thompson to explore increased opportunities for independent undergraduate faculty mentored research. I am delighted by the response which has led to more than half of all undergraduates involved in independent work, and a doubling of undergraduate thesis work. Thus, mutual capability and mutual commitment are palpable.

There remains an area of community where, in my opinion, rededication may be needed: mutual trust and respect. Events of the last eighteen months strained bonds of trust within the Duke community. We must work individually and collectively to repair those strains. First, we must examine our attitudes. No one is advantaged by stereotypes. Trust is diminished when any student is judged by race, or class, or by social group or athletic pursuits. Trust is similarly diminished when we judge faculty colleagues on the basis of selective interpretation of a single statement or action. We deserve more, and should demand more of ourselves.

Going forward, I would suggest that faculty show leadership in building community through acts of individual goodwill. There are many ways we can rebuild trust – ranging from transparent grading to intellectual engagements beyond the classroom.

I will close with one simple example. Our students are hard pressed to make informed curricular choices beyond the major. We each steward data, in the form of course evaluations that students could use to make more informed and effective course choices. Currently only 20% of faculty share these data, fueling unproductive and unnecessary mistrust with our students.

I would urge that, today, as faculty leaders, we make individual choices to rebuild trust. “Opt in.” I have. Make your evaluations available to students. Let them know you trust their judgment. Urge your colleagues to follow your example. Trust can beget further trust. As we said in the 60’s: give peace a chance.

Thank you.