

Address to Arts & Sciences Council

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As a new year opens, I have much in common with the other first-years, including not only our students, but our president – we are all excited to be at this great university. (Like some others, I turned down Princeton to come to Duke!) We have come to a crossing of paths, and as the widely quoted American philosopher Yogi Berra once said – when you come to a fork in the road, take it! We are finding Duke even more remarkable than we could have imagined. Unlike many other first-years, I have some sense of just how much work has gone into creating this community of scholars, and am grateful to all of you for investing your professional lives in making Duke the exciting community that we share. Thank you.

In a very real sense, we are all starting a new chapter, as the Arts and Sciences Council has been reinvented in a thoughtful new format, due in no small part to the tireless efforts of Kathy Ewing. I think it appropriate that we acknowledge the work that she and her colleagues have done to bring us all together today.

While I am relatively new to Duke, I benefit greatly from the experience and wisdom of my colleagues in Allen. As the Hebrew saying goes “The work of the righteous is done by others.” The Dean of Trinity College, Bob Thompson, and three outstanding divisional deans, have long served Duke as teachers, scholars, and leaders: Gregson Davis, Dean of the Humanities, Susan Roth, Dean of the Social Sciences, Steve Nowicki, Dean of the Natural Sciences. They work together as a team, alongside the other faculty and staff to help support both the present, and future of Duke. I recognize I have much to learn. Fortunately I love

learning, and look forward to thoughtful guidance from the faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community. In that spirit I would like to share some early observations.

First, Duke is a wonderfully complex university, with world leading colleges of Business, Divinity, Engineering, Environment, Law, Medicine, and Nursing. We benefit in many ways from our interactions with these sibling schools, and we will work to strengthen such interactions. However, it is Arts and Sciences that provides the heart, and soul of this University. (I parenthetically note two dissenting voices: Dean Kristina Johnson, who swears basketball is the soul of Duke, while Maureen Quilligan acknowledges that Arts and Sciences is not only the heart and soul of Duke but also the hands, feet, and guts! On this issue, I confess I am inclined to agree with Maureen.) How, then, should we express our centrality within the family of schools that make up Duke?

First, we are working together as a family. As just a few examples: We are working with the School of Medicine to jointly recruit a world leading geneticist to Biology; with Fuqua to recruit a leading economist; and with the Nicholas School to hire a top environmental chemist from the West Coast. We are grateful for such partnerships, which allow Arts and Sciences to create additional recruiting opportunities, and allow us to compete for the best scholars in their fields.

I have come to understand that Duke is remarkably adept at working across boundaries. The Franklin Institute offers an outstanding example of facilitating dialogue across the disciplines. Our experience and commitments can spread from Arts and Sciences to our sibling schools.

Central to our college are the dual roles of research and education, especially undergraduate education, which is the sole province of Trinity and Pratt. As a great research university, I believe we as a faculty owe it to our students, and to ourselves, to open more opportunities for undergraduates to experience the unique pleasures of the life of the mind. My colleagues and I believe that a key opportunity to this end is afforded by mentored undergraduate research. We seek to build and sustain communities of learning, including undergraduate students, graduate students, fellows, and faculty whose common purpose is the discovery, and interpretation of our human experience and knowledge. Duke students are self characterized as a “work hard – play hard” community. We can help them learn that these need not be exclusive. To work hard on an intellectual passion is a source of great joy.

Currently only 12 percent of our undergraduate students complete a degree “with distinction,” which connotes a substantive accomplishment in scholarly research. Our goal is to double these numbers. This goal, when accomplished, will make scholarship for knowledge’s sake normative among our students, and thereby create a greater possibility for shifting the intellectual climate than any other single change. Having focused first on a key student learning initiative, I wish to briefly review my evolving sense of our resources, both the physical and financial resources which sustain our mission, and the intellectual resources which define the mission.

At the Chairs’ retreat two weeks ago, Provost Lange presented his analysis that as part of the Strategic Plan of Trinity College, we grew beyond a steady state sustainable size. Thus a net reduction in the current size of the faculty is mandated by the Provost (who approves all hires),

to a steady state number of 480. (There are an additional restricted 32 lines by endowed chairs and about 50 research faculty supported by external research funds).

The assumptions in his analysis may change. For example, my colleagues and I may raise new resources which mitigate the overall financial constraints. What is clear is that it is critical to insure that all the faculty have the best possible support to thrive as leaders in our fields. It is arguably time to consolidate the gains of the past few years and insure that each new hire supports a broader strategic vision for our centers and departments, rather than a “business as usual” model.

In a universe of limited resources, those opportunities which offer the most strategic advantages may prevail: for example, our ongoing commitments to faculty diversity, or to Duke’s signature strengths in interdisciplinary dialogue including cross-departmental appointments. How might such investments be visualized across the nominal landscapes overseen by each divisional dean?

Let me close, then, by briefly commenting on opportunities in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. First, the humanities, Gregson. We have a great humanities faculty that are among the world leaders in many fields, from religious studies to literary theory. However, we have developed a mismatch between the richness of intellect and experience our faculty offer, and the students who choose to experience this rich intellectual tapestry. This is a challenge which is unlikely to be addressed by adding a random appointment to one department or another. We must provide a sense of Duke to our students and ourselves as a place which honors arts and humanities as a central part of learning to be human. Duke should be not only a

doorway to a fulfilling career, but also to a fulfilling life. To that end, and with the support of the provost and president, we will invest differentially to create a nationally visible arts community at Duke. This commitment recognizes the strategic value of the infrastructure investments already made in Nasher and the Arts Warehouse. We seek not only to create more robust visual and performance communities, but also to create more opportunities for our students and faculty to engage in critical and historical analysis which is central to the dialog in humanities. There is likely a role for student recruiting in this process, but there is an even bigger role for us, as faculty, in helping students understand the wealth of intellectual experience that we offer them.

The Social Sciences, Susan, are arguably the strongest overall unit at Duke both in student engagement (more than 60 percent of all majors) and in overall scholarly accomplishment. A key challenge lies in protecting that investment, by making Duke a place where young scholars can pursue continuously their highest aspirations, and established scholars sustain the intellectual ferment that characterizes Duke. We are deeply invested, through Susan's commitment, in supporting dialogue across the disciplines, through consortia like the SSRI. I have been delighted to learn that Duke is almost uniquely adept at promoting scholarship and learning across disciplines, and we will continue to support this remarkable strength.

Finally, Steve, I turn to the Natural Sciences. Duke is completing an unprecedented round of investments in infrastructure to support the natural sciences and engineering. While I had no impact into these decisions, I believe that they were critical for Duke to remain competitive, and are already resulting in a greater ability for Duke to compete for the best

available faculty. Our differential competitive opportunities in the sciences are further shaped by the extraordinary strength of our sibling school of medicine. In the post-genome era, some of the most compelling questions about the nature of life, from protein architecture through cognition, must now involve not only biologists, but also chemists, physicists, mathematicians, and computer scientists. One signature opportunity for Duke is to build bridges between these physical disciplines and the life sciences, taking full advantage of the strengths afforded by our sibling schools.

Strengthening our faculty is a challenging and not inexpensive task, and the president and I are committed to obtaining new resources for this purpose. However, it is critical that these resources be used strategically. The need to make choices is a good thing. Duke has leap-frogged many of our peers by taking risks by creating new forms of dialogue across disciplines, by recognizing and rewarding young talent; in short, by turning necessity into virtue. We are good at this, and this gives me great reassurance, and hope for the future.

Mary Jacobs has asked me for my “title” for this talk. I demurred, as a titled talk seemed uncomfortably close to a sermon in the most Methodist of traditions. However, if forced, I might have paraphrased Matthew, “Blessed are the poor—for theirs is the southern part of heaven.” I look forward to working together to secure a blessing on the Duke of the present and the future. Thank you.