

A&S COUNCIL ADDRESS FALL 2015

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First, let me say thank you for your warm welcome. I am honored and delighted to have joined the Duke team. And yes, you may have heard, Coach K himself gave me Duke athletic wear at the academic advisor convocation. He even suggested that perhaps I should wear all of it at the same time in order to fully indoctrinate myself into the richness of Duke blue.

I am especially thrilled to speak with you, the Arts & Sciences Council, to share my thinking in my first semester here at Duke. I value the strong faculty governance culture here in Trinity College, and I look forward to working with you as a team. To Anita and to all of you who serve on this Council, and therefore serve our colleagues and the university in numerous ways, thank you.

In a recent meeting with my very astute colleagues in the Program in Education, I made the comment that I absolutely loved being chair of the Department of Chemistry at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC). Until now, it was the best position I had ever had. After a pause, someone astutely asked: if that was your favorite job, and you were only in the third year of a five-year term, why did you leave it to come here?

I think this a fair enough place to start my conversation with you today. To answer this question, I need to give you a little bit of background information first.

I am an organic polymer chemist. I had the privilege and responsibility of teaching 200–250 undergraduates in each one of my organic chemistry classes over the last 16 years. You can wake me up in the middle of the night to teach, and I would do it with joy. And, I would tell you that there is nothing better—until you ask me about my graduate students and research.

My lab is still operating at UNC and there is a thrill for me in watching a budding scholar move from uncertainty to command of material and methods. To be able to think creatively and take brilliant risks that advance their field. Here again, I would say that there is nothing better. Until I tell you about my colleagues, not just in chemistry, but also in the social sciences and in the arts and humanities.

I have had the opportunity to learn from and serve with people from diverse academic backgrounds at all levels of university administration. From undergraduate and graduate student recruitment and retention to developing curriculum and advising—my experience has been that diverse teams inherently bring a rich base of perspective and experience to bear on any problem. This is true whether I'm working on a foundation board, a strategic planning task force, a conflict of interest committee or an interdisciplinary research development advisory committee. And I would tell you that there is nothing better than the opportunity to collaborate with my faculty and staff colleagues. It is a privilege to help advance their scholarship and careers.

So when the opportunity arose to be dean of Trinity College of Arts & Sciences at Duke, you can see why I was interested. And it was not, as Coach K jokingly suggested, just because I already lived in Durham. Duke is a place where excellence is the expectation and goal. It is now my privilege to imagine the possibilities for talented undergraduates, budding graduate students and postdoctoral researchers—and make those possibilities happen. And it is my role to serve and develop faculty and staff across many different disciplines. I will tell you now that for me, it does not get any better than this.

As I develop a vision for the college, I have found it useful to start with three simple questions to frame what will become the guiding principles of our work together. They are as follows: Why are we here? How do we behave? What are we going to do?

Why are we here?

We are here to deliver a world-class liberal arts education in a leading research environment. My attraction to Duke is driven in large part by Duke's history, understanding and commitment to a liberal arts education in this context. My

own liberal arts education included courses such as ethics, sociology and art history. These were the classes and experiences where I had to pause long enough to question what I thought that I knew. I learned to make room for new perspectives and to imagine the situation of another human being. My liberal arts education taught me intellectual empathy and the habit of critical thinking that I now draw upon each day. I believe that we are transformed as faculty, students and staff when we fully embrace the idea that we will learn the most from the people with whom they have the least in common. In the classroom and lab, in art studios and concert halls, in other countries immersed in another language—we benefit when we step outside of the familiar and embrace the unknown. In fact, this is the mission of Trinity College:

- To provide a superior liberal education to undergraduate students. This means attending not only to their intellectual growth but also to their development as adults committed to high ethical standards and full participation as leaders in their communities.
- To advance the frontiers of knowledge and contribute to the national and international community of scholarship.
- To promote an intellectual environment built on a commitment to free and open inquiry.
- And to foster a deep appreciation for the range of human difference and potential. This includes developing students' sense of the obligations and rewards of citizenship and a commitment to learning, freedom and truth.

This is the power and the purpose of a liberal arts education. This has been my personal experience. I believe that this is the Duke experience. And this is why we show up every day and attempt to make this place even better.

How do we behave?

Our mission calls for a culture of service with a clear commitment to faculty and staff colleagues and to our students. It calls for a commitment to the entirety of scholarship: teaching, research and service. It calls for a willingness to listen carefully and to participate in new collaborations. It requires us to identify, prepare and support leaders. It necessitates communication that is honest, straightforward, transparent and clear. It requires us to recognize, value and capitalize on our differences. And finally, it requires a clear perspective that the achievement of excellence is an imperfect process. So we

come to work every day taking the job seriously—but not ourselves too seriously—understanding the privilege of being here and enjoying every day.

These are among the principles and values that the dean’s leadership team have chosen and have been cultivating with me since mid-May. And I must tell you that our agreement on these ideas has made it a pleasure to come to my office every day.

So given that mission and those operating principles, what are we going to do?

First, I had the privilege of spending numerous hours with Laurie Patton before her departure. It’s been my pleasure to meet with students and student groups, other deans across campus, and directors of centers and institutes. The divisional deans and I have also been meeting with individual department chairs, listening to their thoughts on the state of their department, needs, strengths and their directions for the coming years. My goal is to hear how you see your departments can be excellent. This goes beyond maintaining today’s status quo (even if it is now excellent)—but strategically and uniquely becoming even greater in the future. As you know, we are not going to grow the faculty overall, but we are going to change. So thorough and thoughtful conversations need to occur to make every change as meaningful and impactful as possible.

The people with whom I have spent the most time are the dean’s leadership team. Let me tell you that this is the best gift that Laurie left for me. We have outstanding leadership in Dean Powell, Dean Kiehart, and Dean Burton, Dean Baker, and the entire staff. And, I cannot do anything without my Czarina of Trinity College: Mary Jacobs.

In the Dean’s leadership meetings, we are talking through what we have been hearing from the chairs and our departmental meetings. Thus far, based on what we have seen and heard expressed by you, we are focusing on three areas: 1) future excellence in departments in teaching, research and service, 2) leadership training and faculty mentoring, and 3) diversity as a key tenant of new ideas and creativity.

Future Excellence

Over the next several months, we will be asking you to consider and articulate how departments can advance towards their goals of excellence in teaching, research and service. We will be asking:

- What is unique about my department or where should be preparing to lead in the next decade?
- What is going to make the very best faculty, students and staff choose to come to Duke? How can we advance—through commitment to our overall mission of teaching, research and service—such that people remain here as leaders in their fields and examples for a new generation of scholars?
- How will the curriculum, research, civic engagement, centers, institutes and other experiences at Duke contribute to or be an integral part of this conversation and goal of excellence through the next decade?

Leadership Training & Faculty Mentorship

Cultivating our people is one of the best investments we can make for a thriving future. To do this means we have to step back from the endless details of day-to-day management and spend time on big picture thinking. We are hearing that there is a desire for leadership training and faculty mentoring. It benefits us greatly to train and support those in leadership positions and to identify and develop future faculty and staff leaders. This has short and long term benefits for the college. We need to have colleagues who are prepared and supported as they help us develop visions and plans for departments, centers and institutes. This is what it means to nurture a community.

Training and mentorship promulgates a strong culture of service back to the university through leadership. It also supports the recruitment and retention of the very best faculty. That, in turn, enables the delivery of a unique and transformational student experience. To begin this change, we will implement chairs' training and ongoing leadership support. An important element of this program is that chairs will meet with me each month as a group—enabling us

to share perspectives, best practices and challenges more broadly. And we will develop support and training for new chairs as well.

I have noticed that when I say that I loved being a department chair, the responses I get from people here are quite varied. For me, it was pretty simple. First, we knew what we existed to do, and we hired and retained people who understood our purpose. We agreed upon a set of values and principles and generally operated by them on a daily basis. Chairs were trained and supported in ways that ensured we would not get too bogged down in the necessary, but potentially unending management details. We had the intellectual space and support to look up and out and focus on where we as a department could achieve even greater excellence. That was exciting, and I want to see greater excitement about this here as well.

It may be hard to believe, but I envision a leadership culture for us that would inspire each faculty member to want to be a chair. To inspire you to want the opportunity and privilege of taking your department and your colleagues to another place. I'll just tell that for me, there was nothing better.

We will also be talking with you and your chairs about mentoring assistant professors. We anticipate these conversations will include individual meetings with divisional deans, and group meetings with me and the divisional deans.

In addition, I want to emphasize that we are looking at mentorship and leadership training for the associate professor ranks as well. Earning tenure is a rite of passage into a new relationship with the university. The rank of associate professor and the privilege of tenure come with both the responsibility and opportunity to deepen engagement with, and give back through service to the university and our teaching mission.

And finally, we will also address the career advancement needs of our non-tenure track colleagues. So expect that this will be an ongoing conversation for us all.

Diversity as a Driver for Creativity

Finally, I want to address the need for diversity in all that we do. To be a truly educated person, you must embrace and practice an appreciation for different

disciplines, thought processes, modes of expression, and histories. This is the very core of a liberal arts education. Therefore, our students may have depth of training in a particular discipline or two, but the end goal is for them to engage the full range of knowledge that a liberal arts education provides. This is what prepares them not for what they can imagine, but for the possibilities that they will create in an unscripted world. We are educating them to tackle the challenges they cannot see today, and for the multiplicity of human beings with whom they will interact, influence and to whom they will seek to be of service. This requires a fundamental understanding of, and willingness to take risks.

I am a fan of how philosopher Martha Nussbaum frames risk taking as a decision to intelligently resist the power of blind tradition and authority. I highly recommend her eloquent book “Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities.” It is a practice, as Nussbaum puts it, of “connecting experiences of vulnerability and surprise to curiosity and wonder, rather than to anxiety.” And it is just such intelligent resistance to which Steve Nowicki, our vice provost for undergraduate education, spoke in his recent undergraduate convocation speech entitled “Question Authority.”

We know that no problem or person is one-dimensional. Each may be impacted by language, art, history, religion, economics, chemistry, biology, psychology, and communication. So how do we create an environment first for ourselves and then for our students where we pause long enough to question what we thought we knew and to make room for a new perspective? And how do we cultivate that?

More specifically, let us ask ourselves, “How can Duke lead the conversation on inequality whether the focus is on race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender or economics, as a part of the preparation of students and delivery of this liberal arts education?”

Duke has a unique position and I would say an obligation as an elite university, in the South, in Durham, North Carolina—with our university and community history—to be a national leader in higher education on these issues. We must coordinate and take advantage of our scholars. Engage our centers such as the Center for Documentary Studies. And use every educational resource available

to lead and to frame these issues in a new, productive and scholarly way.

These three themes of excellence, leadership and diversity may amount to what seems like a tall order. But it is one that we should gladly own and I am confident that together we can make progress. I need you to move forward. I ask for your patience as I listen and learn more from you. I ask for you to partner with me to make your experience and that of our students extraordinary. And I ask for your tolerance of an imperfect process that nonetheless I am confident will lead to progress towards our collective goals.

In closing, let me say again how very honored I am to be counted as your colleague and champion for Trinity and its mission. I look forward to working with each of you.