

Doane College: Providing an Education for the New Frontiers of the 21st Century

Chairman James, Members of the Board of Trustees, Mayor Foster, Emeriti Presidents Heckman and Brown, Father Timothy Lennon, delegates from colleges and universities, distinguished guests, devoted alumni, faculty, staff, and students, family and friends...welcome. And thank you for joining me on such a wonderful day.

I especially want to thank our amazing staff whose hard work and attention to detail made this event not only possible, but very special. And thanks to our students in band and choir for the beautiful and stirring music in the program. Come to think of it, everyone who works at Doane has contributed to this day. I am grateful to you all!

I extend a special thanks to my friend Jane Alexander. Her accomplishments as an acclaimed actress, producer and author are equaled only by her tireless advocacy on behalf of art—helping to ensure that theater, art, dance and music do not disappear from our schools and communities.

And to my friend Chuck Carr. Your gifted writing, inspiring leadership and indomitable spirit in defense of nature has protected and preserved several of the world's most valuable rainforests and coral reefs, ensuring that wildlife from Jaguars to Sea Turtles will not disappear from this earth.

And to Doane students...who inspire me every day with their academic achievement and community engagement demonstrating through their actions that no goal is too great to achieve, when as the poet Langston Hughes reminds us, we hold fast to our dreams!

This inauguration is a celebration. But it is more than that – it is an event with symbolic significance. Symbols and traditions are the cords that bind us all together, as one community, one college, as one Doane. On one hand, the pomp and pageantry of the ceremony are there to reassure us that even though Presidents come and go (and some do so on horses), the college's mission and values endure, passed down from generation to generation like a treasured family heirloom. But this is also a time of optimism and expectation. This day brings forth not only a new President, but the hope of a new beginning for the college, where spirits are lifted and history is made.

It is a privilege and honor to be installed as the 12th President of Doane College. But I'm also aware that I stand here today on the shoulders of those who came before. Consider for a moment, the founding of the college. When in 1857, a small group of New England Congregationalists came to Nebraska to create a liberal arts college in the tradition of Harvard and Yale. This was a time when people came here from the east by the thousands. Some came by steamboats. Others by railroads. Still more by Prairie Schooners. Even by Indian canoes. Pioneering men and women drawn by the government's promise of fertile farmland and homesteads—all for the purpose of opening up new territories and settling the West.

Fifteen years later, one of the New Englanders, a local pastor named David Brainerd Perry (who later became Doane's first President) and his good friend Thomas Doane, chief civil engineer for

the Burlington Railroad, joined forces to acquire land on this hill, where a small literary academy was relocated and reborn as Doane College on July 11, 1872. It was President Perry who established the mission of the college when he wrote: “this Frontier College has to do with the growth and development of a new State. . . . So needful is its’ work—that in the westward march as territory after territory falls into State lines, the descendants of the Pilgrims repeat the early experiment of Harvard and Yale. . . .” With these words, our foundation as a uniquely American liberal arts college was firmly established.

The Harvard-Yale “experiment” that President Perry hoped we would repeat had more to do with the philosophical reflections of Thomas Jefferson than the scientific tinkering of Benjamin Franklin. For the great experiment he was referring to was not scientific in the Newtonian sense, but rather an experiment of freedom and democracy. What was at stake in Nebraska was freedom. And nobody understood better than Thomas Jefferson the vital role that education would have to play in making this experiment a success.

Like Jefferson, President Perry and Thomas Doane understood that this new form of government would only take root on the prairie if its citizens were well educated, informed and engaged in their communities. And to be well educated at Doane College meant to have studied the best that had been written, thought, created or performed throughout all history.

But how we teach and what we teach at Doane has changed in some remarkable ways since these earlier times. From a little known local but classic liberal arts college, where ringing bells meant Chapel, language studies meant Latin and Greek, and running water meant drawing it by buckets dipped in the spring behind us, we’ve developed into one of the best liberal art colleges in the region. From a college in the 19th century offering students only a few programs of study, we have grown to offer over 40 majors in our School of Arts and Sciences along with an equally impressive set of programs in our School of Graduate and Professional Studies...all generously infused with liberal learning.

From a landscape once dominated by prairie grass, dusty roads, and a few modest buildings, we’ve created a beautiful campus. Historic architecture is surrounded by an Arboretum that is home to flowering gardens, stately trees, ponds adorned with white swans (that seem determined to chase our students around the campus), fountains, rippling creeks, wooded nature trails (with raccoons who are equally determined to chase our students), and this wonderful outdoor theatre. A place so lovely and inspiring that it defies description, except perhaps by none other than Shakespeare when he wrote “when beauty pleadeth—orators are dumb.” Thomas Doane and President Perry would swell with pride if they could only see the fruit born by the seeds they sowed on this hill so many years ago.

But our work is far from finished. Because while we are strong by many measures, we are not immune to the winds of change blowing in our society. How Doane responds at this time in our history to challenges – ranging from affordability and access to the disruptive influence of technology – will bear on our ability to succeed in the coming decades.

Higher education is going through a period of transformative change unlike any before since the dawn of colleges in medieval times. In the decades ahead, many colleges will fail while others will prosper. That is to be expected. For this generation is not bearing witness to the end of

learning, but rather, we are living through the beginning of a new era...of how knowledge is acquired and delivered. These are revolutionary times for teaching and learning.

Doane College will not only be part of this new beginning—it will be a leader. In part because we have a well thought out plan. But also because we can draw on the experience of our hard scrabble beginnings as a frontier college on the Great Plains. Out of the sheer need to survive, we were instilled with a pioneering and entrepreneurial spirit. This spirit remains embedded in our character, repeated in each successive generation like so much DNA, giving us the unflinching confidence and competitive edge to not only succeed in the 21st century, but to excel.

I think by now you have a good sense of our humble beginnings as a little college planted on the Great Plains of Nebraska. So let us take a moment now and look at a few highlights from our emerging strategic plan – our blueprint for the future – and what exciting things lie ahead for students at Doane College.

Let's consider for a moment our commitment to academic excellence. Close your eyes and imagine a campus...where every student upon arrival will receive not only a challenging lecture from their professors, but an iPad and a MacBook Pro. And the technical help and wireless infrastructure to support their use anywhere on campus and in our centers in Lincoln, Grand Island and beyond.

Imagine a teaching and learning environment that goes well beyond the confines of a traditional classroom. Encouraging widespread use of mobile technology. Deepening critical and creative thinking through new and innovative teaching strategies. Decreasing costs for students through the use of e-texts and by reducing the need to build more traditional classrooms as we build virtual ones in the clouds of the World Wide Web. Imagine a place where Socrates himself would find his famous method of teaching enhanced, not diminished, by instant access to information.

Imagine a campus where students find themselves deep in thought, sifting through conflicting ideas and weighing evidence from the philosophical to the scientific. A place where students will be called upon to know fact from fancy, truth from lies and faith from disbelief. A college where students are offered an education that integrates the traditional liberal arts and the practical arts of the professions. So they will graduate not only with the skills to get a particular job, but also with the knowledge and confidence to create new jobs.

Now imagine these same students with diplomas in hand, at home or at work, using the experience and knowledge acquired at Doane to make a difference – not only in their own lives but in the lives of others.

Clearly our focus going forward will be on academic excellence. At Doane, I like to say that grey matter...matters. But this is not the only priority receiving our attention. We are also making a strong commitment in coming years to sustainability, diversity and globalization.

Sustainability is an important value. You see, we believe the abundant resources of our economy and environment, that have enriched the lives of our generation in so many ways, should be renewable and passed along for future generations to enjoy. We believe that a good economy and

good ecology are inextricably linked together. Whether it be our financial resources or our natural resources, we believe both should be sustainable and managed wisely.

Doane students, faculty and staff are already leading the way with a variety of innovative green projects. Students recently established a Green Fund that is used to support a variety of projects on campus to improve energy efficiency. Another group of students developed a community garden for the residents of the town of Crete. And our Biology Department has designed a project that engages students in decision making about how to increase the capture of standing carbon on campus, so it doesn't find its way transformed as a harmful gas into our precious atmosphere or oceans.

Increasing diversity is also a high priority for the college. We only need to look around campus to recognize that our faculty, staff and student populations are limited in racial and cultural diversity. We not only need to prepare our students for the diversity they will experience in the world upon graduation, we need to do so for the diversity they will encounter right here in the heartland—in towns like Crete, Grand Island, Lincoln and Omaha.

And we will prepare our students not by setting quotas for minorities, but rather by creating a welcoming community based on the core values of equal opportunity and equal treatment for all of us as we learn, work and live inclusively. If we do this successfully, we will not only recruit more minority students to our campus, but we will make it more likely they will stay with us through graduation.

We also recognize that achieving this goal will require a sustained commitment to action and an investment of new resources. But we are anxious and ready to begin. There are already many ideas on the table – ranging from the creation of a Latino Studies Center in partnership with the Crete community to innovative partnerships with Nebraskan Indian tribes to help them build more effective pathways to college for their youth as well as adults.

And we will always take care to link our efforts to increase diversity to areas of existing academic excellence and strengths. For example, we know that job opportunities abound for careers in sciences. According to U.S. Labor Statistics, scientific fields are expected to add 2.7 million new jobs by 2018. Reports by the National Academy of Sciences said underrepresented minorities represent an untapped pool of American talent that could help fill the coming wave of jobs in the sciences. Of college-educated Americans, people of racial and ethnic minorities—including African, Hispanic and American Indians—represent only nine percent of those in science occupations. This figure would need to triple to reflect the share of minorities in the U.S. population.

These are the facts. But it is also true that Doane College has one of the best undergraduate science programs in the country. And, in fact, our leadership in the sciences began back in 1883 when we built the Boswell Observatory. Originally it was used for the teaching of astronomy and weather service reporting for the state, and included an eight-inch equatorial telescope. Our leadership in science education continues to this day as our Chemistry Department received funding from National Science Foundation to purchase and install a 300 MHz nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy instrument, or NMR. It is used by chemists and biochemists in research

laboratories around the world to investigate the properties of organic molecules—the building blocks of life itself.

I know from experience that it is a rare thing indeed for undergraduates to have direct access to such high quality analytical scientific instruments. But they do at Doane College! So if you are a high school senior anywhere in the country considering a career in the sciences, we are an excellent choice!

By expanding opportunity and various kinds of support for minorities seeking to study in the sciences at Doane, combined with reaching out to minorities in grades K-12 as well as community colleges, we will not only increase the national representation of minorities in scientific fields, we can increase their representation in the Doane community! And by doing so we create an opportunity...for all our students to not only learn in the classroom, but to learn how to live and work in communities that are made up of different cultures, races, values and nationalities.

Finally, we have a commitment to global learning. One need only to hop on a plane or connect to the web to realize that as the world community gets smaller in space and time, it also grows larger in importance to our students. A good example is right here in Nebraska. The corn milled in Crete is just as likely to be exported to Africa as part of a USAID food program as it is to St. Louis to make Bud Light beer. The soybeans grown in Crete are probably going to be sold to the Chinese. And the center pivots manufactured by Valmont Corporation in Omaha are just as likely to be found watering crops in the deserts of Kuwait as they are in the prairies of Nebraska.

Each of these major industries employs Doane graduates in various capacities. Given these realities, there should be no doubt that our students must have exposure to ideas, cultures, language and experiences beyond the borders of the United States. In light of this reality, we will be seeking to expand our efforts to include new initiatives, specifically designed to attract more international students; to integrate global awareness more fully into the curriculum; and to attract more international visiting scholars, lecturers and performing artists. We will also seek to promote more opportunities for our faculty to teach and study abroad. And last but not least, we will begin planning towards the development of an international campus somewhere yet to be determined in this big wide world...as Doane College truly goes Global.

The vision I have shared with you today is certainly big, bold and ambitious. It has to be in order to match the challenges and opportunities before us. But it is also a reflection of our potential and capacity as a college to move from good to great. It is not a plan for the weary heart. But that's just fine with us. For we look forward to the hard work ahead – confident in our abilities and optimistic about our future. However, we cannot make it happen alone. If I learned anything in my years as a marine biologist, it was that it is far better to know somebody with a boat than to own one!

We need partners; partners in business and in local, national and international communities. We need partners in research laboratories, hospitals and public schools. On campus, we need to invest in our faculty and staff and increase support for students in and out of the classroom. We need philanthropic support to increase the endowment for student scholarships and faculty

chairs, and to enrich the academic experience. Yes, we have many needs. But what we need most is all of you.

And with your help we will rekindle the frontier spirit of Doane's pioneering and entrepreneurial founders, and adapt this spirit to the new frontiers of the 21st Century. For students enrolled at Doane College today, the frontier is no longer the Great Plains of Nebraska. It expands ever westward in the continent and beyond to the world at large. Our students will explore and prosper in this century, not in horse-drawn covered wagons, but on the wireless transmissions of the World Wide Web...limited only by their imaginations!

Although many seasons have come and gone on this hill since our beginning, we should never forget that we are, in a very real sense, still a young college in spirit, energy and purpose. And that this uniquely American liberal arts education will never grow old – will always be needed—and under my leadership as President, will always be alive and well at Doane.