

American Council on Education: The Atwell Lecture

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I am honored to give this lecture in Bob Atwell's name. Bob has been a leader in higher education for decades; generations of students will flourish because of his commitment to access to higher education. ACE address: The Atwell Lecture.

I was tempted to use this occasion to give advice, in their absence, to this year's brace of presidential candidates. But although I believe that academic leaders should speak truth to power, a more pressing task is to speak truth to ourselves. If we think more clearly together about what higher education needs to do to face the challenges ahead for our profession, that will surely involve thinking more clearly about the challenges ahead for our world.

There are many fascinating paths one might explore in keynoting a conference on higher education in the 21st century; there are two important speeches on this topic that I am *not* going to give. One is about the international dimensions of our topic; the other is about information technology. I will make several references to the latter topic -- indeed, it would be weird to ignore it; but it is not my major theme.

Powerful forces, both economic and intellectual, are moving us in the direction of greater reliance on new information technologies. They offer much that is good, as well as substantial pitfalls. It is in any case abundantly clear that a large proportion of higher education in the coming decades will be offered through new delivery mechanisms and new consortia of providers. My goal is to help us step back from such trends, so we can better choose from these exciting new techniques and partnerships the ones most likely to be fruitful for our students.

I have chosen to talk about *American* higher education, even though I am convinced that one of our most pressing needs is to throw open our windows to the world beyond these shores, build real partnerships with universities in other countries, learn from best practices elsewhere. The most common international reference in speeches about American higher education today is a complacent reassurance that we have the best system of higher education in the world. Perhaps so --but that statement has become a shibboleth, and may soon, in some respects, be out of date. That, however, would be another speech.

As a practicing political theorist, I will use a particular prism to help focus our attention on higher education in the United States: the perspective of one of the most astute of all observers of our society, Alexis de Tocqueville.

To refresh your memory, Tocqueville was a young French aristocrat who visited America in the 1830s, and was fascinated by almost everything he saw. His two-volume *Democracy in America* analyzed our politics, religion, mores, and geography, attempting to place this novel social order both within the context of history--the republics of classical times--and of the old states of Europe, with their deeply riven social classes; dominant, decaying aristocracies; and ancient, threatened monarchies. Because he was such a gifted observer, elegant writer, and unusually talented social theorist, what Tocqueville tells us about our society still resonates more than a century and a half later. Some of his predictions seem right on target; others fall wide of the mark. But even when he was wrong, Tocqueville was stimulating, and he usually covered his bases by noting features in our society that stood as exceptions to his generalizations, or as seeds for possible future change.

Tocqueville described the United States of America in the 1830s as a highly **egalitarian**, largely **homogeneous**

society, deeply **individualistic**, with a preference for **pragmatic** approaches to the world tempered by a restless faith in perfectibility and progress. I will use these four categories to frame my analysis of where America stands today, and what our agenda should be in this new era ahead.

American egalitarianism

In observing American society from a European perspective, Tocqueville was first struck by what he called the "equality of condition" (1) -- by which he meant the lack of clearly delineated social classes, relatively even distribution of wealth, and parity of citizenship on this side of the Atlantic. He saw this as the most distinctive hallmark of American society--and also what the rest of the world was likely to become as the old European states crumbled and dissolved.

Tocqueville noted one major and exceedingly disturbing exception to this generalization: the continuing presence of slavery on American soil (I:370ff). But apart from the condition of "the Negro," Americans seemed to Tocqueville largely equal in their situations. He was particularly struck by how much Americans prized equality, setting it even above liberty as a social value to be protected.

On this observation, Tocqueville seems obviously outdated. American society is marked by increasing inequality, and the world as a whole exhibits staggering inequalities both within and among societies. In 1998, for instance, 75 average wage-earners in the world's poorest country (Sierra Leone) did not collectively earn what one average American worker did (2), while here at home it took 419 average workers to equal the income of the average CEO. (3) Furthermore, Americans today rarely express much interest in equality; the word seldom appears in our public discourse. Our people have shown themselves to be far more concerned about threats to our liberties--religious, economic, or arms-toting--than about the diminution of equality.

However, Tocqueville noted that equality of condition is an unusual situation for humankind, and saw inevitable pressures towards inequality even in the America of his day. In a democracy, he said, "numerous artificial and arbitrary distinctions spring up" as individuals endeavor to distinguish themselves from the mass of their fellows: "the personal pride of individuals will always seek to rise above the line and to form somewhere an inequality to their own advantage" (II:227).

In this regard, he singled out the exceptional importance of money in American society, compared to the old world he knew. With all other distinctions leveled, the focus of Americans was primarily on getting and spending. The probable source of a new privileged class, in his view, was the power of manufacturing in the American economy. "If ever a permanent inequality of conditions and aristocracy again penetrates into the world," he said, "it may be predicted that this is the gate by which they will enter" (II:171).

Tocqueville also noted that

"when hereditary wealth, the privileges of rank, and the prerogatives of birth have ceased to be and when every man derives his strength from himself alone, it becomes evident that the chief cause of disparity between the fortunes of men is the mind." In fact, he argued that these two sources of inequality are correlated: when "natural inequality" reasserts itself, he claimed, "wealth will spontaneously pass into the hands of the most capable" (II:39-40).

So two interconnected factors -- differentiation on the basis of wealth and of mental capacity -- were the probable sources of future inequality in the egalitarian society Tocqueville observed on our shores.

His prediction might seem to be good news for educators, since our core business is honing intelligence, sharpening the minds of our students, including those most likely to wind up in positions of leadership and influence. And in many ways, contemporary life does reward intelligence; access to ordered information and sophisticated skills are crucial for success. Tocqueville would not have been surprised by our preoccupation with what we call "the knowledge society," although I suspect he would have found the grammatical construction barbarous.

But in drawing this connection between amassing wealth and natural talent, Tocqueville surely understated the cumulative advantages of wealth, and the obstacles that stand in the way of bright children of underprivileged backgrounds who want to improve their fortunes. This underscores the importance of accessibility, so that all our citizens who possess qualities of mind that lend themselves to the force of education will have the opportunity to flourish.

Yet we know that thousands of students who could benefit from a college education don't even consider it, based on their misconceptions about what it will cost them to attend and about the amount of aid available. Even more important, our long-standing commitment to access to higher education -- which is one of the most admirable and durable manifestations of the belief in equality that Tocqueville identified in us -- is now significantly eroded. Funds for aid for children of the poorest families are becoming scarcer. Support for students by the federal government has shifted away from the needs of the nation's poorest to respond to middle-class fears about the price of college. More of the funds available for aid on many campuses are being channeled to attract talented students to a particular college, rather than to make it possible for underprivileged kids to attend any college at all.

This tendency is not the result of any single fiat or decision; all the actors in this scenario are behaving rationally, given the pressures they face. But the result is disturbing -- a reinforcement of what Duke's Phil Cook and his co-author Bob Frank called "the winner take all society," in which the good things of life are cumulative for some people and continually elude others. (4)

To reinforce existing inequalities in our society by restricting access to higher education means cutting off the avenue by which generations of Americans have successfully achieved much greater opportunities, and by which our society has avoided some of the most glaring inequalities that have brought division and conflict to societies throughout history.

At this point we may feel like the rabbit in Aesop's tale who, after delivering an impassioned and eloquent plea for all the animals to have a fair and equal share, overhears the lion's wry aside: "Nice speech, but it lacks teeth."

This is precisely where I believe leaders of colleges and universities should shape the terms of our discourse, and give teeth to such ideas. We need to speak truth to *economic* power, which we have been less willing to do than speaking truth to the folks in government. Admittedly, such truths may bite much closer to home. All of us are dependent on generous support from individual donors, wealthy community leaders, foundations or corporations. All of us benefit from the richly productive economy of our country these days, and the market forces on which it rests. But this makes it all the more imperative that all of us -- not just the radical sociologists or the ethicists or theologians, but college and university administrators, too -- speak out frankly about the long-term threats to a society where wealth occupies too large a space on the social landscape. Some measure of the hunger for getting and spending is no doubt good for a society. But one of history's clearest lessons is that dramatically increasing inequality is corrosive and dangerous, especially in a democracy.

In recent issues of the *New York Times*, there were two articles on stress. (5) The first, on a sadly familiar theme, described a recent survey of working mothers, in which they spoke of the great difficulties of managing

lives in which many of them work long hours, some of them at more than one job, continually seeking decent child care, attempting to find time for their families and barely making ends meet. The other article was front-page news: the stresses felt by children of tremendously wealthy families in Silicon Valley these days. Their concerns were of a very different sort: Will my friends like me for myself, or only because daddy lets me invite them on vacation for two weeks in Switzerland? How can I hold up my head at school if we have only two houses and three BMWs, and not a single private plane?

The comparison between these worlds would give a Tocqueville rich material for reanalyzing American society in 2000, and it ought to sober us all today. Universities should be places where the culture of inequality based on wealth is regularly and eloquently called into question, where the radical inequalities exemplified by those two articles are cause for deep concern. We should reinforce impulses towards philanthropy and humanitarianism that benefit our whole society, not just our own institutions. We should also speak up for enlightened social policies, to improve the lot of our poorest hard-working fellow citizens and their families.

To those who would say that this is none of our business, we have a ready answer. Those children who languish today in substandard day-care, who learn violence from drug-addicted and despairing parents, who watch mindless programs on TV for countless hours each week rather than having anyone stimulate their innate curiosity about the world -- these children are our future students. Thus we have a strong interest in making sure that they come to us prepared to learn, prepared to take advantage of what we have to offer. This is our business, after all.

As presidents, we still command the respect of many people in our society. Our voices will be heard, even by those who may not like what we say; if we wish to be heard, we must use those voices. And if we wish to be respected, we must look to our own house as well, and resist the alarming tendency for inflated corporate compensation to spill over into higher education. Our students pay tuition, and generous donors support us, so that we can provide a better education, support path-breaking research, and serve our communities, not to bolster our own compensation to emulate our counterparts in the for-profit world. That is *not* our business, after all.

American homogeneity

Another of Tocqueville's bold predictions was that the Anglo-Americans would eventually control all the vast continent which lay before them as they pressed toward the Mississippi and beyond. "This gradual and continuous progress of the European race towards the Rocky Mountains has the solemnity of a providential event; it is a deluge of men rising unabatedly, and daily driven onwards by the hand of God" (I:414). As a result, eventually "the Anglo-Americans alone will cover the immense space contained between the polar regions and the tropics, extending from the coasts of the Atlantic to those of the Pacific Ocean."

The geography we take for granted as we jet between our coasts was by no means a foregone conclusion in 1832. However, Tocqueville spoke only of the European settlers. He was persuaded that the Anglo-Americans would preserve a definite homogeneity of customs and cultures as they overspread the continent; he failed to foresee the waves of immigrants who have transformed and enriched our population.

Our homogeneous society has become more and more pluralistic, multifaceted and diverse. There is every reason to believe that this tendency will continue and even accelerate in the decades ahead. Census predictions regularly project majorities of non-Anglo citizens in many parts of our country, and increasing numbers of such citizens in every region, within a very few years.

In the middle of the 20th century, as some of Tocqueville's intellectual heirs among social scientists strove to come to terms with America's increasing pluralism, they hit upon concepts such as "cross-cutting" and

"reinforcing" cleavages to describe what they saw, hoped for, or feared. As they observed increasing diversity, they hoped that this very pluralism might become a source of strength, if citizens of different backgrounds learned to identify with others who shared some, but not all, of their conspicuous characteristics.

Thus, for example, if Americans of different races share multiple religious affiliations, Hispanic Evangelicals might feel kinship with other fundamentalists as well as predominantly Catholic members of their cultural and linguistic group. The same could hold for socio-economic class, or any other major cleavage--at least in theory. These would be "cross-cutting" cleavages, which sociologists uniformly regard as a "good thing" in holding our country together rather than having it become deeply divided along major reinforcing lines of class, race, or religion.

In practice, however, our citizens have shown a disturbing tendency to align themselves with "none of the above." Hispanic Evangelicals may feel a major kinship only with other Hispanic Evangelicals, or even with just the Hispanic Evangelicals from a particular home country or subculture. Latinos, Hispanics and Chicanos may feel little linkage with each other despite Spanish-speaking backgrounds, much less a linkage with, say, Anglo Catholics. The result is increasing fragmentation: nobody feels any great kinship with anybody but that small group of others who share every salient trait--some combination of gender, class, religion, race, and ethnicity.

The accompanying prescription for higher education is both simple and hard: our institutions must take responsibility for educating a diverse citizenry, preparing people for a pluralist society, by bringing to the fore those common principles of political and moral understanding that hold us together in one polity. Our principles must be made and kept explicit.

Universities and colleges are perhaps the most diverse institutions in our society; people of many different cultures and backgrounds come together for an intense and concentrated experience. We must take advantage of this diversity. Institutions of higher education are among the few venues where people can easily reach across the barriers that divide us. Indeed, our institutions consciously bring diverse groups of students together because we believe this diversity of experience prepares them for life in a multicultural world. Majority students, as much as minority students, benefit from being educated in a diverse environment. Thus, despite the many advantages of distance education, there is good reason to protect campus-based learning as well, so that real encounters among diverse people can enrich the education of each one of them. That kind of learning is hard to do in cyberspace.

Bok and Bowen are right. [\(6\)](#)

We know it from our own campuses and the students we teach. However, we have relied too long on our intuition and personal experience on campus, without pausing to be sure the public and politicians are still with us. One of the great virtues of *The Shape of the River* is the degree to which the authors have carefully documented the outcomes of our efforts to diversify. It is imperative that we educate the public better on these matters; to do this effectively, we need more such studies.

It is against this backdrop that issues of affirmative action play out. Tocqueville noted even in the 1830s that, in certain areas of the country, "slavery recedes, but the prejudice to which it has given birth is immovable" (I:373). In his view, the presence of an enslaved black population was "the most formidable of all the ills that threaten the future of the Union." Foreseeing that the bitter fruits of slavery would be with us long after the peculiar institution itself was abolished, Tocqueville would not have been surprised by the fact that our nation continues to wrestle with the long-term effects of racial oppression.

Those of our contemporaries who exhort us to do away with any consideration of race in our policies would do

well to ponder Tocqueville's insights. Racial prejudice rooted in slavery has a long life, and its effects continue to tarnish and threaten our national character and prospects.

American individualism

Another of Tocqueville's broad generalizations was his claim that our citizens were stubbornly individualistic. He defined individualism as the inclination that "disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends, so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself" (II:104). Tocqueville warned that unless equally strong forces counter this tendency it will dissolve ties among citizens and threaten the future of democratic government. "Private selfishness," as he put it, is the "rust of society" (I:295).

Fortunately, Tocqueville believed, American society contained effective antidotes to this radical individualism, most notably the amazing propensity of our citizens to associate. He noted that "Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions, constantly form associations" (II:114). These include not only commercial associations, but also "associations of a thousand other kinds, religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive. The Americans make associations to give entertainments, to found seminaries, to build inns, to construct churches, to diffuse books, to send missionaries to the antipodes."

Tocqueville's contemporary intellectual heirs have been disturbed by the increasing power of individualism and withdrawal from the civic realm in our society. The best known of these observers, political scientist Robert Putnam, asserts in his essay on "Bowling Alone" that it is precisely the decline of traditional associations, and the failure of Americans to form new ones, that leads to the domination of unchecked individualism and the erosion of civic virtue in our time. We have used up a large proportion of our "social capital," and with each passing year millions more people withdraw from the affairs of their community. (7)

Tocqueville's understanding of the powerful tendency towards corrosive individualism was right on target; but he probably overestimated the American propensity for association in the longer term. Unless we can find ways to re-establish this propensity, one may easily imagine American society sinking more and more into solipsism, and that springs of civic connection will be further weakened.

Higher education surely has a significant role to play in this arena. Campuses are natural seed-beds of associations. I sometimes think that even Tocqueville would have been surprised by the incredible number of different forms of association that undergraduates at Duke devise to accomplish their shared purposes, from Students Against Sweatshops through the Self-Knowledge Symposium and the Creative Anachronism Society to the Cameron Crazies. Such experiences go far toward combating tendencies towards withdrawal and narrow individualism, and may, we hope, instill a taste for such activities after the degree has been conferred.

Tocqueville put faith in the power of "the customs of the people," our manners and practices, as more potent than legislation and government itself in shaping civic life. In an arresting phrase that has become current among sociologists, he described such patterns of behavior and thought as the "habits of the heart" (I:310). If we recognize the importance of education in civic virtue for our students, our campuses are well designed to nurture and reinforce healthy habits of the heart.

Students on residential campuses share aspects of their lives in an intimacy they will not elsewhere experience outside the family. Such communities offer daily practical experiences in the consequences of ethical and unethical behavior. An important part of our responsibility should be to draw attention to these experiences and help students learn their lessons. We build character not by inculcating particular forms of morality or belief,

but by teaching students to think carefully about ethical choices, and providing them with the tools to do so--just as we provide them with tools for quantitative reasoning or aesthetic appreciation--and the means to sharpen those tools.

Universities also provide multiple opportunities for deliberately extending one's consciousness beyond the horizon of ego to help those in need. Although many young people may be cynical or apathetic about politics, they are reassuringly idealistic about volunteering and serving their communities. Quick to respond to children whose lives and futures are at risk, to the poverty of the soup kitchens and the loneliness of the elderly, they reach out to real people they can know and touch. Such experiences are profound training grounds for the "habits of the heart."

What about the contention that such habits may get overwhelmed by, and totally lost in, cyberspace? The jury is still out on the relation of the Internet to the propensity to form associations. Some observers contend that virtual relationships are our newest form of association, vindicating Tocqueville by the bewildering variety of linkages that are now being formed. Others say that these associations are a poor substitute for the real thing, that virtual relationships are thin and distorted, that the peculiar anonymity of cyberspace skews constructions of the personality and precludes forming real bonds. Such critics would argue that people who spend a great deal of their time glued to their screens are actually withdrawing into solipsism, rather than risking the hurts and claiming the rewards of real, messy human relationships.

We need to know much more than we now do about the special characteristics of virtual relationships, about ways in which they can be used positively and ways in which they supplant or threaten direct, positive, morally challenging relationships among human beings that help build character. The fascinations of the World Wide Web are sufficiently compelling that we may safely assume students will continue to explore it eagerly. We may try to guide them by demonstrating some of the great power and also the problems in this new form of human connection, but they are always likely to be ahead of us. Until the psychology of virtual reality is better understood, our goal should be to encourage these present and future citizens to develop their natural propensity to bond, congregate, and hang out not just over the Internet, but also in synchronous, non-virtual reality--real time and place. Encouraging people to know other people, in all their complexity, may be one of higher education's greatest gifts to the future.

American pragmatism

The fourth characteristic of the new country noted by Tocqueville was our exceptional pragmatism. As he put it, "the spirit of the Americans is averse to general ideas; it does not seek theoretical discoveries" (I:326). That was a common claim of European observers throughout the 19th century; however, given the predominant role of American science in our contemporary world, that perspective appears to have been short-sighted. Tocqueville was closer to the target when he asserted that the citizen of a democracy "cares more to know a great deal quickly than to know anything well; he has no time and but little taste to search things to the bottom" (II:235).

Tocqueville also noted that Americans were marked by an incredible restlessness, demonstrated in the eagerness to pursue gratification, and the assumption that one can always leave our present position and find a better--whether that means picking up stakes and lighting out for the territories, or changing jobs to maximize our earnings. "To minds thus predisposed," he says, "every new method that leads by a shorter road to wealth, every machine that spares labor, every instrument that diminishes the cost of production, every discovery that facilitates pleasures or augments them, seems to be the grandest effort of the human intellect" (II:46). (Boy, did he have us pegged!)

Tocqueville also mentioned a touching American faith in progress and perfectibility, though we seem to seek progress almost wholly in material terms. For our countrymen, there is always a better way, and a reward for

those who seek it.

In one vivid passage, he reports: "I accost an American sailor and inquire why the ships of his country are built so as to last for only a short time; he answers without hesitation that the art of navigation is every day making such rapid progress that the finest vessel would become almost useless if it lasted beyond a few years. In these words, which fell accidentally, and on a particular subject, from an uninstructed man, I recognize the general and systematic idea upon which a great people direct all their concerns" (II:35).

The lessons for higher education here are clear. We need to remember and advocate for the long view, the durable process, the deeper thought, the broader reflectiveness. Our campuses must encourage the cultivation of ideas that go against the grain, celebrate the unconventional, provoke the challenge. We must vigilantly protect basic research, for example, as a core enterprise not merely of our institutions but of our society. The bottom-line regimens of corporate shareholder and governments will inevitably tilt towards funding discoveries that have some probable short-term pay-off. Providing strong federal support to ensure the strength of the basic research enterprise within universities has proven to be sound public policy (as well as sound educational policy): as we continually remind our representatives in Washington, here is the engine that has driven our economy and technology. True enough; but it is important to remember that pure science is also the source of some of humankind's grandest ideas and boldest adventures.

We must stand up for the importance of the odd, oblique, abstract enquiry; of knowing for the sake of knowing; of the truly free exchange of ideas, as one of the most important services we can provide for our society and the world. In Tocqueville's words, "men living in democratic ages cannot fail to improve the industrial part of science"; therefore, all our efforts "ought to be directed to support the highest branches of learning and to foster the nobler passion for science itself" (II:48).

We must also be mindful of the importance of the lens of history, the perfection of beauty, the smooth, sharp edge of "high culture." We in higher education are more than the curators of civilization's intellectual treasures: we are the interpreters and translators who will keep them alive, the raconteurs who tell their stories, the griots who renew their magic, and the interlocutors without whose sympathy for tradition and love of innovation the culture goes grainy and out of focus. American popular culture overspreads the world like kudzu, and our responsibilities include making sure that it does not choke out all other forms of creating, thinking, and knowing.

Hence the crucial importance in the new world of the liberal arts, despite all the pressures that militate against them in favor of a utilitarian approach. The ability to read, write and converse with supple ease and interest; a familiarity with human history and diverse cultures; some understanding of the scientific method and appreciation of art; quantitative reasoning; critical thinking--these are crucial skills for men and women of any era, in any profession, in any endeavor.

Fortunately, Tocqueville counseled us that in a society where "the chief cause of disparity between the fortunes of men is the mind," knowledge becomes greatly valued as a mark of distinction. In a society where basic physical needs are satisfied, the human mind is freed to explore "the infinite, the spiritual, and the beautiful." "The utility of knowledge becomes singularly conspicuous even to the eyes of the multitude; those who have no taste for its charms set store upon its results and make some efforts to acquire it" (II:40). As a result, "not only will the number of those who can take an interest in the productions of the mind be greater, but the taste for intellectual enjoyment will descend step by step even to those who in aristocratic societies seem to have neither time or ability to indulge in them."

This observation jibes with our own faith in the importance of education for all kinds of people, of all kinds of interests and backgrounds, at all stages of their lives. No longer simply a rite of passage for the young, or a

source of credentialing for the would-be professional, education in the new era will become the staff of life and the stuff of everyman's --and everywoman's--dreams. This is one of the most exciting, and most promising, prospects that lies ahead.

Conclusion

My message today may strike you as deeply conservative. It concentrates on familiar forms of education, campus-based and provided by a community of scholars whose common purpose includes thinking carefully together about the kind of education they are offering. I am convinced that just as radio and movies survived the onslaught of TV, so campus-based education will retain a significant place in our new agenda. There are simply too many advantages of real-life engagement within and outside the classroom; the power of place is too deeply wired into our brains. Many wonderful innovations will be enabled by the Internet and successor technologies we cannot yet imagine. We should embrace them; use them wisely; do with them what was impossible before. But we need also to be cognizant of and precise about the limitations of technology.

Ideally, all forms of education in this new era will be a fertile combination of place and cyberspace. Some types of education--continuing, executive, professional--will and should rely more heavily on distance education. This form of conveying knowledge allows us to reach learners who would otherwise be disenfranchised -- thus bringing to many more of our fellow citizens the precious advantages of higher education. Distance education also offers very attractive conveniences to learners who can retain their homes and their jobs, yet still tap into the resources of institutions far from their home towns.

Other kinds of education --for example, the Ph.D.--will surely continue to depend on direct encounters and real relationships. Undergraduate education can no doubt be offered in both dimensions; still, it seems likely that many students will continue to covet the kind of campus-based community that has conventionally led to the bachelor's degree, and many families will want to provide it. The issue will be not whether high quality undergraduate campus-based education survives, but how many institutions can afford to offer it, and who gets to take advantage of it. This will boil down to who can afford both the direct cost and opportunity cost of what is, after all, a fairly luxurious and resource-intensive endeavor. The constraint -- as Bob Atwell has always understood -- will be neither desirability nor feasibility, but accessibility. One of our main responsibilities should be ensuring that the special advantages of campus-based baccalaureate education do not become once more, as they were in Tocqueville's time, the exotic preserve of the children of the wealthy, leavened by a few prospective clerics.

So these aspects of my message are undoubtedly conservative. Yet my speech may also appear radical, in that it calls for a role for higher education that is not neutral, not simply responsive to the market or social trends. I have called upon each of us to show real leadership in using our own bully pulpits--and the power of the education we provide--to speak forcefully on issues that we know a great deal about, so that society as a whole will be the better. My call to arms would not have seemed noteworthy to our 19th century precursors, who took it for granted that higher education has a moral responsibility. But it is incontestably radical today. It's time to return to that root tradition.

We are, to be sure, a diverse group of associations, and this diversity has been one of the great advantages of American higher education. I hope and expect that this very diversity will be enhanced in the coming decades as we sort out distance and online learning. There is, after all, a great deal of educating to be done, and we all stand to benefit from the testing of alternatives. But we must not lose sight of the basic purpose for which society supports us: and that is not to make a profit, nor to figure out how to package the most wisdom at least cost, but to provide the very best education we can to all those who come to us in search of it.

I shall let Tocqueville have the last word. He discusses steps to ensure that American society will remain healthy and vigorous, avoiding the deformations and pitfalls he foresaw. His culminating counsel was an eloquent and stirring tribute to the power of our profession:

Educate then, at any rate [he said] for the age of implicit self-sacrifice and instinctive virtues is already flitting far away from us, and the time is fast approaching when freedom, public peace, and social order itself will not be able to exist without education (II:132).

A tall order . . . a high calling ... and an exhilarating summons to all of us to work together to shape our new agenda for the new era that lies ahead.

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1. Phillips Bradley, ed., *Democracy in America*. New York: Vintage, 1945. Volume I: 3.
 2. Source: World Bank.
 3. Robert H. Frank, "Higher Education: The Ultimate Winner-Take-All Market?" Paper presented at the Forum for the Future of Higher Education (Aspen, Colorado): 9/27/1999.
 4.
Robert H. Frank and Philip J. Cook, *The Winner-Take-All Society: How More and More Americans Compete for Ever Fewer and Bigger Prizes, Encouraging Economic Waste, Income Inequality, and an Impoverished Cultural Life*. New York : Free Press, 1995.
 5. March 10, 2000.
 6. Derek Curtis Bok and William G. Bowen, *The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998.
 7. Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." *Journal of Democracy* 6:1 (January 1995), 65-78.

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