

Annual Report to the Faculty

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It is an honor to make this annual report to the faculty of the University.

This fall at Duke has seen a number of significant accomplishments and some sobering moments of personal tragedy. We have lost several colleagues from our current faculty in these early weeks of the semester. These include Professors Thomas Havrilesky of the Dept. of Economics, Frederick Herzog of the Divinity School, Edward Hill of the Mary Lou Williams Center, Vojislav Miletic of Pediatrics, and Namson Lee of Medicine, as well as a number of emeriti faculty members, including Professors J. David Robertson and John C. Angelillo.

I ask you to join me in standing for a moment of silence to honor the memory of all these colleagues.

Strategies for academic excellence

I want to begin by noting the excellent showing of several departments across the University in the recent National Research Council rankings of quality in graduate education. Many members of the Duke faculty and administration deserve credit for this accomplishment, including Phillip Griffiths, Keith Brodie, Hans Hillerbrand, Malcolm Gillis, Dick White, Lew Siegel, Bill Anlyan, Thomas Langford, and other deans and department chairs. We often use the rhetoric of a "university on the move" to describe Duke; these carefully determined measures of improvement provide some hard data to undergird that rhetoric.

We now have the challenge of sustaining this trajectory of improvement, supporting departments recognized for excellence, and making wise choices about how to invest scarce resources to bring other programs up to the same level of quality. As Provost Strohbehn reported to the Board of Trustees, these improved rankings support the wisdom of the strategy followed in the 1980s. That strategy involved committing resources to specific areas poised to take the next step in quality, particularly in the humanities, the biological sciences, and certain departments in the social sciences and engineering.

In his recent address to the Arts and Sciences Council, Dean Chafe proposed the concept of "growth by concentration" as his strategy for continuing such efforts in the near-term future. The deans of several other schools have outlined similar plans, and the Provost has put strategic academic planning at the top of his own goals for the year, with my full support.

Thus we shall in the coming months and years continue to make the kinds of bets that served Duke well in the 1980s, determining as carefully as we can where the infusion of support is most likely to be successful, which areas of the university have the greatest likelihood of cumulative improvement, or where we need to protect strong departments from decline in quality.

This does not mean that we will triage other departments off the map, by withdrawing support from disciplines or interdisciplinary programs that have been important to our core missions, whatever their current rankings. However, we will not be able to provide significant new resources to many departments that would undoubtedly benefit from such support, because the resources that would be required are simply not available.

You will naturally ask, how will choices be made about where to put our resources, where we will place those bets? and by whom will the choices be made? Primary responsibility for these strategic determinations will rest,

as in the past, in the Provost's office, in close consultation with the Deans, the Academic Priorities Committee, the department heads and councils of the several faculties, and the President.

These next steps will not be as easy as the ones taken in the past decade -- although I am sure that to those involved, those steps did not seem easy. The departments and schools chosen for infusions of resources in the 80s were largely those where a relatively small amount of dollar support paid off handsomely, in the humanities and social sciences, where hiring talented faculty and providing the equipment and climate conducive to their satisfaction and productivity as scholars requires considerably fewer dollars than equivalent steps in the sciences or in engineering, for example.

However, we need to think of excellence at Duke across the board, not in every department, but in every school and division. We cannot hope to sustain our position as one of the nation's top research universities without taking some carefully considered steps in the physical sciences and engineering. The Task Force on Science and Engineering, chaired by Dean Siegel, offered some valuable suggestions about where such support might best be provided.

Moving on this front will be made more complicated by probable declines in the federal support that has been crucial to the development of strengths in these fields at Duke and elsewhere. As Congress presses to cut the deficit and reduce federal involvement in many areas of life, the budget-cutting ax hangs over our research universities like a sword of Damocles. Continuing efforts by many members of our faculty and the staff in government relations, including John Burness, Ralph Snyderman, Charles Putman and their colleagues, have helped in the national effort to make a strong case for the importance of research. There are some encouraging signs, including recent support for the National Institutes of Health; but the struggle is just beginning, and it will be with us for several years to come.

Challenges for medical care and professional education

And speaking of struggle, as we are all aware, the Medical Center today faces enormous challenges in carrying forward its missions of research, education and patient care. Bold leadership is required, along with a readiness to accept a higher degree of risk and uncertainty than institutions like Duke have been accustomed to tolerating, and the willingness by faculty and staff to adapt with unprecedented speed and flexibility to new routines and practices. This is, of course, a painful process, particularly when past routines and practices have been richly productive as well as comfortably familiar. New affiliations, alliances and joint ventures, new patterns of medical education, patient referral and research support, are all part of our strategy for dealing with these complex challenges.

Fortunately, the leadership of the Medical Center and the faculties in its several departments have proved themselves willing to step quickly through this time of rapid change. It would be premature to celebrate success; but there is evidence that the decisions have been good, and the movements are in the right direction.

There are also some encouraging signs for several other professional schools, which have moved with similar dexterity to adapt to a different set of challenges. Perhaps the most novel and intriguing of those challenges are encompassed by the broad notion of "internationalization." Here, also, the willingness to take risks and to stake out bold new strategies is the order of the day. To maximize our likelihood of success, such choices must be wisely coordinated across the university, and implemented with a high degree of internal partnership. The Fuqua School and the School of Law have been the leaders in these endeavors, but there are international dimensions to educational programs in every school.

In meeting all these challenges, we will be well-advised to continue with a set of strategies that has served Duke well across the years: an unusual degree of interdisciplinary effort, along with sustained support of a small

number of core resources across the institution.

One of the most fundamental of our core resources is our library system. Under Jerry Campbell's leadership, much has been accomplished in libraries at Duke, including the development of a user-friendly and sophisticated technological infrastructure. His successor will face some difficult challenges, as do all librarians these days. The choices facing libraries are just as complex as those in the Medical Center or in professional education: how do we plan for the mixed use libraries of the future? How do we determine how much support to give to new technological venues and how much to the core traditional collections of books and manuscripts? What will be the practices of scholars in different disciplines in their use of serials and journals?

A Review Committee will meet on campus in December to assess the strengths and areas of need in our libraries, and help us make wise decisions about where we invest resources for the future.

Fortunately, one of Duke's distinct advantages -- our location in this area rich with other fine universities -- allows us to play from strength. The historic collaboration between Duke's libraries and those at Chapel Hill and NC State -- with the recent addition of North Carolina Central University -- has been the best of our success stories in interinstitutional collaboration. Since its inception in 1933 we have so closely coordinated our acquisition policies that there is only a 7% overlap in our collections.

Learning from this example, I hope that we will intensify our collaborative efforts in the Research Triangle. Many of our competitors around the country are appropriately envious of the potential for productive collaboration within this small geographic area that we sometimes call Tobacco Road. We have only begun to tap the rich possibilities of these affiliations. It was good to hear, in the inaugural address of Michael Hooker as Chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, a reaffirmation of the importance of this collaboration to our neighbors as well. I know this view is shared by Chancellors Chambers and Monteith as well.

The context of undergraduate education

All these efforts in support of research and graduate and professional education take place alongside, and greatly strengthen, our historic commitment to undergraduate education. We have devoted significant efforts in the past few years to improving the undergraduate experience in several dimensions. The work is still in progress -- there are some rough spots still to be worked out, but also favorable reactions to several new aspects of undergraduate life at Duke, including the housing of first-year students on East Campus.

We are indebted to the many faculty members from across the university who have volunteered for the Faculty Associates program, one of the key elements of the new residential plan. They join others who have been reaching out to students across the years -- the faculty in the FOCUS programs, faculty in residence, pre-major advisors. The Faculty Associates and students alike are still figuring out the best patterns of interaction. Intergenerational habits around things as simple as meal times and party-times diverge fairly sharply, and identifying times and appropriate occasions to get together is not always easy. But the eagerness of so many faculty members to become involved, and the responses of those students who have already enjoyed getting to know them, are heartening indeed.

It is hard for both faculty and students to break down habits of working that involve well-determined and closely guarded barriers delimiting most interaction between them to the familiar sites of classroom, laboratory and office hours, and to meet each other on less familiar turf. Yet for quite a few years many Duke students and some faculty as well have expressed a hope that such barriers might at least occasionally be breached, so that undergraduate education is enriched by conversations outside such formal settings, and by the opportunity for shared intellectual, cultural and social experiences.

In conclusion, let me touch on two other issues that have been much in the news this fall: affirmative action and the new Kenan Ethics Program.

Affirmative action at Duke today

The Million Man March in Washington and President Clinton's speech in Texas, following closely on the heels of the O.J. Simpson verdict, have thrust racial issues into renewed prominence in our nation. Such issues are never very far below the surface; close observers of American society at least since Tocqueville have warned that racial divisions are the major threat to the unity and prosperity of this nation. Last year's move by the University of California Board of Regents to curb efforts to attract a racially diversified student body, in conjunction with several major court decisions, have called into question the means to address racial divisions that have been most prominent in the past few decades: affirmative action programs.

As the recent debate in Academic Council made clear, faculty members and others at Duke hold a range of views about this topic, as indeed we do about almost any other topic one could name. In speaking today as President, I want to speak for the university in these matters, aware that I cannot claim to represent the views of all the individuals who comprise this institution. It is important, however, that the university have a clear strategy in view to chart our course in these troubled waters.

A number of justifications have been offered for programs within the broad general area of affirmative action or equal opportunity. First, that such programs allow us to make up for historical patterns of discrimination against certain groups. Secondly, that they help ensure that the prejudices and preconceptions about groups that remain part of our culture do not stand in the way of fair treatment and access to opportunities for members of those groups. For colleges and universities, two other justifications are normally provided: that education is better done in an environment where people of different backgrounds educate one another, which requires taking some notice of the backgrounds of those we admit to the student body or recruit to the faculty, to ensure a leavening mixture of people with many perspectives and experiences, including racial and ethnic background. And that in educating the leaders of tomorrow's society, we must educate leaders for all the people, for all parts of society, not just those who have traditionally been leaders in the past.

The first justification for affirmative action -- making up for historical patterns of discrimination against certain groups -- is often held to be the most tenuous. It seems unfair to hold current generations responsible for the sins of the forefathers if they do not repeat those sins; and it is hard to find any specific consonance between those individuals who happen to be advantaged by a particular policy of outreach to disadvantaged minorities and those who have actually suffered in the past.

However, it would be disingenuous for this University, historically a part of the American South, to claim that we can simply write off the past as though it did not happen. An institution that welcomed African-American students and faculty only within the memory of some persons still active on our faculty should recognize more pertinence in the call for redressing the problems of past than some of our counterparts for whom the connections are less direct. This is not a matter of compensation or legality but of conscience, of being honest with ourselves about scars that are still relatively fresh, and their implications for Duke. This honesty should lead us to be particularly sensitive to the need to reach out now to members of groups that were excluded from this University in the relatively recent past.

Some have argued that universities have bent over backward in the effort to combat prejudice and, as a result, given excessive preference to minority candidates, disadvantaging others unfairly in the process. I see little evidence that this is the case, and a good deal of evidence that stereotypes and preconceptions still occlude our perspective on merit, and make it hard for us to engage in hiring or admissions practices that would truly be

race-blind.

We should recognize, however, that the commitment to affirmative action, like many worthy practices, can be abused. Treating human beings as though they were an instrumental means to accomplish a numerical goal, or imposing mechanistic criteria that lead to the admission or employment of people by race with insufficient attention to other capacities, serves no one's interest, including that of members of disadvantaged groups who are harmed and hindered by perceptions that they could not have achieved their distinction by merits of their own, but only through a tokenist system.

We on campuses like Duke should take the lead in the discussion of these issues, facing up to problems in past implementation of policies designed to achieve inclusion, and helping people in our society understand the benefits that can be obtained by policies that are appropriately conceived. And we should see a policy such as affirmative action not as an end in itself, but as part of our larger intent to build a better community at Duke, to address the legacies of pain and misunderstanding that have accumulated around racial divisions in this country, and therefore on our campuses as well.

The Kenan Program in Ethics

Most of you have read announcements of the initial gift from the Kenan Charitable Trust, establishing a Fund for Ethics to support a new Program in this area at Duke University. We are very grateful to the members of the Board of the Kenan Fund for this financial support and for their belief in the appropriateness of establishing this program at this university.

Programs designed to foster teaching and research in ethics are multiplying across the land today. Skeptics may wonder what Duke might add to this proliferation of attention to moral issues. A great deal, I would argue: a history of attending to the spiritual as well as the intellectual dimensions of life, embodied in our motto and in our affiliation with the United Methodist Church; a commitment to service to others enshrined in the founding indenture; and a great wealth of courses and programs in ethics in virtually every school of our university. Duke comes to this effort with some distinctive strengths and deeply rooted commitments that other universities do not enjoy.

Our culture today is not marked either by ethical sensitivity or by shared ethical understanding. In such a world, our colleges and universities have an especially important role to play. To give a bit more specificity to this claim, let me draw on the arguments I made in a recent lecture in Dallas, that universities are particularly well placed to provide both educational and practical experience in ethics.

In the first place, universities are well-equipped to teach ethical understanding in the most straightforward fashion. Faculty members in several disciplines are specialists in the core materials of ethics, primarily in philosophy and religion, but also in psychology, classics, history, literature, the rich corpus from which ethical truths are distilled and shared -- great plays or novels or scriptural texts or works of moral philosophy, crucial heroic or shameful moments in the lives of nations or individuals.

I would argue that those who teach materials such as these should discuss moral issues straightforwardly in class, not in order to persuade their students to adopt a particular brand of ethical philosophy or convert them to a specific religion, but to train students to think carefully about ethics, just as we train them to appreciate music or art or to excel in quantitative reasoning.

Universities are also places where rich and productive research is being done on human beings and society, in the social sciences as well as the humanities and sciences. Insights produced by such research suggest improvements in patterns of human interaction in our governments, our families, our laws.

Beyond the classroom, a campus is a concentrated human community, in which students live closely together, sharing all aspects of their lives in an intimacy they will not elsewhere encounter outside the family. These communities give practical experience in the consequences of ethical and unethical behavior.

It is easy to understand the Golden Rule in a dormitory setting. If I refrain from playing my stereo at top volume at 3 a.m. when my roommate has an exam next day, I can reasonably expect that she will do the same in turn. No weighty tome on the truths of enlightened self-interest is needed to convince me of the benefits of this. Honor codes, athletic teams, student judicial councils who enforce rules students have helped devise -- these are excellent places to learn the habits of trust and cooperation that provide the basis of ethical behavior in complex society. We should help students reflect more specifically upon these lessons, and connect them with life in the outside world.

Finally, universities provide multiple opportunities for deliberately reaching out past one's own selfish horizons to help those in need. Community service projects are a major feature of life on many campuses these days, including Duke. Students may be cynical or apathetic about the political system; but they are quick to respond to the needs of children whose lives and futures are at risk, to the direct impoverishment of people in soup kitchens. The traditional idealism of young people is alive and well on campus, and finds its best contemporary expression in robust community service programs. These lived experiences in ethical practice touch the lives of many students, and transform the lives of some of them profoundly, in addition to enriching greatly the lives of those they help.

The specific characteristics of the Kenan Program at Duke are still in the early stages of definition. A steering committee chaired by Prof. Thomas Langford is assembling information about what we are already doing, and what is being done on other campuses, and coordinating conversations across the university about how we might achieve our goals. We look forward to enlisting the help of all of you who are interested in sharing in this work as we create a program that will be worthy of Duke's heritage, of the confidence of the Kenan Funds, and of the singular importance of the topic we have chosen to address.

Conclusion

There is a great deal going on at Duke today that I would welcome an opportunity to discuss with the faculty, and there are relatively few opportunities to do so. I look forward to hearing your reactions to the ideas I have placed before you, either in this meeting, by electronic mail or in more leisurely conversations in the months to come. And I salute and thank each one of you for your continuing dedication and contributions to the mission and progress of Duke University.