

State of the College  
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Welcome to the 2012-13 academic year! Welcome, returning members of our college—faculty, staff, and students. And welcome, new members of the 2012-14 CLA Assembly—especially the 21 new tenured/ tenure-track, contract, and visiting faculty members whom we are introducing this afternoon, as well as the new professional/administrative staff and civil service/bargaining unit staff who are here for the first time.

The beginning of an academic year is always a moment of excitement and celebration, and this year is no exception. We all have abundant reasons to celebrate the past year. And I have abundant reasons to express my deepest and most sincere thanks to every faculty member, and every member of the CLA staff for your many contributions to the success of our college and our work. Thank you.

Let me cite a few of the reasons we celebrate.

Three weeks ago we welcomed the strongest class of academically prepared undergraduate students in the University's and our college's history. The 2,550 first-year students of the class of 2016 is the first to experience two new programs designed to introduce them to the breadth and diversity of our college.

One is the online First-Year Experience that introduces them to the liberal arts and prepares them to navigate the opportunities our college provides and to plan strategically for their future. The other is a common reading for all first-year students (Kazuo Ishiguro's haunting, dystopic novel *Never Let Me Go*). It provides a common basis for discussing key issues in the liberal arts—science, ethics, and state—that will be interwoven with their class work throughout the year.

Several of our faculty have already led student discussions about the book from the unique perspective of their disciplines—from medical anthropology to dance—and have experienced first-hand the intellectual energy, talent, and excitement our new students have for the year ahead.

A second reason to celebrate: I am happy to announce that 2012-2013 will be a year of increased faculty hiring. This is thanks in part to President Kaler's allocation of 1.1 million dollars to our college to replace some of the faculty lines lost during the 2010-2011 biennium, and in part to our ability to allocate ten additional vacated lines. The result is: we are searching for twenty-one new tenured/ tenure-track faculty. Coupled with the two continuing searches from 2011-2012, we are searching for a total of twenty-three new colleagues—the largest number of CLA searches since 2007-2008.

In addition, we begin the year with a clear affirmation from the University that our college, and the success of our academic programs, both undergraduate and graduate, are essential to the academic excellence of the University of Minnesota.

President Kaler has spoken on numerous occasions about the centrality of our college and indicated his belief—one we share wholeheartedly—that this University cannot continue to advance its academic distinction without a strong and vital College of Liberal Arts. More importantly, President Kaler and Provost Karen Hanson, our colleague in philosophy, have matched these fine words with much needed resources.

In addition to the 1.1 million dollars President Kaler provided for eleven of our faculty hires, we have also received an allocation of three million dollars in recurring funds to our operational budget. In other words, we have received 4.1 million dollars in recurring dollars from Central Administration for the current fiscal year. This is in stark contrast to the loss of sixteen million dollars during the 2010-2011 biennium. It is the largest allocation we have received from Central Administration since former President Mark Yudof launched the compact budget process in 1998. This affirmation from the President and Provost is an encouraging signal, an invitation to engage creatively and intellectually with re-examining and re-thinking the way in which we carry out our academic work.

Of course, while we have much to celebrate, we are not without fiscal challenges. Indeed, not even the nation's most distinguished universities are able to return to the world of pre-recession, pre-2008 budgeting.

We live in an environment where the advantages of higher education and an education in the liberal arts are viewed with increasing skepticism. The current challenging economic climate has spawned an understandable increase in students' desires for practical training and skills acquisition. These changing student preferences have caused many institutions to recalibrate the breadth of an undergraduate liberal arts education, to retreat—understandably—from graduate education in fields with diminishing market share, and, in more drastic instances, to downsize and eliminate outright marginally attended areas such as foreign languages and literatures, classics, and ethnic studies.

As you perhaps notice, one of the ironies in this market-based thinking is that some of the fields students need most to prepare themselves for an increasingly diverse and globalized world—are the very ones now fighting a desperate rear-guard action to survive.

Within this threatening landscape, how should we position ourselves to champion the liberal arts across the arts, humanities, and social sciences? How can we continue to balance our belief in the value of a liberal arts education with the need to respond to changing student demand and interest? Last year I spoke of the need for us to actively promote the liberal arts, and the need to animate them in the face of an increasingly challenging environment. *This project is still central to our college. In fact, it is more pressing than ever.* Let me sharpen what I mean by animating the liberal arts.

First, let me be clear that when I speak about the liberal arts, I am speaking about all areas of our college—the arts, humanities, and social sciences—not just the arts and humanities. Secondly, I

do not believe that explicating the value of the liberal arts means rehearsing the by-now formulaic arguments for a liberal arts education—falling back on familiar concepts such as critical thinking, oral and written communication skills, understanding cultural differences, and acquiring skills in quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Many of these outcomes can be realized outside of a liberal arts education. In fact, many distinguished business schools, such as Wharton and Chicago, aspire to the same ambitions, and many fields across the sciences and engineering have a legitimate claim on critical and analytical thinking. After all, if engineers did not possess these skills, buildings would collapse and planes would not fly. We must move beyond these commonplaces and exemplify, through our respective disciplines and the connections that we draw between them, the unique value of the research we do and the education we provide. Nor should we confine this critical message to our own academic world.

We exist at the behest of the public—including students, families, donors, and taxpayers, and must, therefore, be visible, articulate, and persuasive to the greater community as we animate the liberal arts. We must be attentive to the questions of our friends—alumni, donors, and supporters—in both the public and private sector. If we want their support, we must make clear to them our liberal arts mission. We must share with them our priorities, and invite them to celebrate our success. We must make sure as well that they understand our challenges, and how we need and will use their help in meeting them. That said, what message should we communicate with our animation of the liberal arts?

We must show how the arts, humanities, and social sciences are essential to understanding the human condition; essential to understanding cultural norms and differences, and the values that underlie our societies and the many diverse cultures that constitute our world; essential to understanding the institutions within which we may choose—or not choose—to live our lives; essential to understanding the interaction of humankind and the natural world.

We must demonstrate that liberal arts are, at bottom, about learning, thinking, and understanding—not limited to specific spheres of knowledge such as engineering or business, or even art or history or economics—but about the totality of human existence.

In animating the liberal arts we must not lose sight of that over-arching purpose and role of the liberal arts how they are the foundation for advanced study, how our fields interconnect, how the boundaries that separate us are, after all, arbitrary, and how a liberal arts education is rooted in the totality of the human experience.

We've kept this universalist aspect of a liberal arts education firmly in mind when thinking in practical terms about how to advance the liberal arts at Minnesota.

In the fall of 2010, an extraordinary group of thoughtful colleagues assembled the CLA 2015 report. During the last academic year, each academic unit was invited to respond to it by re-examining its programs and priorities, in the light of its own perceptions of where their discipline was headed. In the discussions that followed I saw extraordinary energy and creativity among faculty and staff who are eager to engage with our overarching challenges.

Many priorities for the current academic year are grounded in the CLA 2015 report and in those discussions. Some work on those priorities has already begun, but much remains. So let us look at the direction we must follow for the next few years.

My vision is two-fold: that

- (1) CLA will be a nationally recognized leader in innovative liberal arts education, research, and outreach, rooted in academic distinction,
- (2) and that each of these three missions will bear a distinct Minnesota signature.

The CLA 2015 report speaks of signature programs. These programs must be distinctive not only for faculty accomplishment, but for their unique approach to their field.

This type of distinctiveness is hardly new to CLA: we have been pioneers in interdisciplinary feminist studies, American studies, and cultural studies; and leaders in specific areas of larger disciplines such as political psychology, macroeconomics, population demographics, creative writing, and theatre historiography. But if we are going to be a college of the 21st century, as the CLA 2015 report urges, we need to amplify our thinking about our unique CLA signature.

With boundaries becoming more porous between many of our fields, and between our fields and disciplines outside of our college, we will define CLA's distinctiveness not only by specific programs, but also by the way in which we imagine and integrate programs across the arts, humanities, and social sciences. This signature will be less a matter of structure and more a matter of intellectual alignment. It will signal that at this liberal arts college we are free—liberated—to pursue knowledge at the edges, at the intersections, at the outer limits—because we know that that is where discovery often happens. Distinctiveness, connectivity, and academic distinction—three of the CLA 2015 principles—will continue to inform the projects that we undertake in future.

Let me be clear that while those principles emerged a few years ago from a report generated in response to the severe economic challenges, we pursue them now, not for economic reasons, but because they are an intellectually sound approach to building our Minnesota liberal arts signature.

Bearing in mind the overarching vision of leadership in the liberal arts, where do we go next? Last September I shared my aspiration that CLA remain academically strong in the social sciences, as it has been for several decades, and that we strengthen the humanities and the arts. Toward that end, during the past year a small group of humanities faculty worked intensely on re-imagining graduate and undergraduate education in these fields.

Three themes shaped the discussion:

- (1) how to take advantage of Minnesota's signature uniqueness as an arts, social sciences, and humanities college;
- (2) how best to educate and prepare PhD humanities students when graduate programs are contracting along with the opportunities for academic careers in these fields, and

- (3) how best to direct undergraduates during the first two years of study towards a deeper understanding of the humanities and their relationship to the arts and sciences, and how to prepare them for more advanced work as majors in humanistic fields.

Early this term we will share the group's proposal with academic leadership and the faculty of the college, solicit comments, and design a plan for advancing this humanities initiative.

Such changes are especially timely. The issues involved have been discussed broadly in such national organizations as the Modern Languages Association, the American Historical Association, and in the specialized learned societies in the humanities. Many other research universities, both public and private, are wrestling with them as well. To be sure, the new higher education landscape is intensifying the urgency of these discussions, but I am excited by the work of this group, and can already see how it will imprint a lasting Minnesota humanities signature on CLA's intellectual base, a signature that transcends the challenges besetting the humanities in the current environment.

The CLA 2015 report also encouraged a re-examination of our current academic programs, a commitment to sharpening their foci, and to expanding their horizons beyond the current disciplinary and departmental structures.

The departmental unit plans did precisely that. Many departments refined their strengths and reaffirmed an openness to working in interdisciplinary ways, but two areas in particular emerged that we should pursue in the coming year: human rights and social justice, and the interrelationship between science and quantitative reasoning and the other liberal arts.

We have a growing number of faculty across the humanities, social sciences, and the arts whose work shows a deep commitment to social and environmental justice, equity and diversity, and human rights broadly defined: from crimes against humanity—holocaust and genocide studies—to the legal, political, social, and economic mechanisms that perpetuate such practices.

Given the strong presence of such work, the time is especially propitious for working across CLA disciplines and with colleges outside of CLA such as the Humphrey Institute and the Law School—to create a Human Rights Institute. It will be a place to support our already outstanding undergraduate and graduate programs, expand education at the graduate level, strengthen the research profile of our faculty, and build stronger connections between our college and University to the many NGO's in the Twin Cities that have brought international recognition to our state as a leader in this field. Working in concert with the Humphrey School, we will shortly assemble a planning group to establish this institute, explore the creation of a professional masters degree in this field, and heighten the visibility of this clear signature strength in our college across the University and the nation.

Another commonality that arose from the unit plans concerns the place of science and quantitative reasoning in our college. We all know that, from their inception in antiquity, mathematics and the sciences were part of a liberal arts education. But the evolution of the natural sciences into the physical and biological sciences and their many subfields has obscured the strong connections between the liberal arts and scientific thought. Yet we have exceptional faculty and students working in our laboratories in psychology, geography, anthropology, and

speech-language-and-hearing sciences; we are a national leader in statistics, one of the most essential fields for a 21st century global citizen; and we are continuing a half-century of distinction in the philosophy of science.

As you may know, few CLA programs meet the official definition of STEM fields. Yet our research in brain sciences, cognition and language, biophysical geography and climatology, and biological anthropology and paleo-archaeology address some the most central issues confronting 21st-century society. These include the study of our minds, our environment, and our evolutionary development as human beings—all hotly contested and highly politicized issues.

We have distinguished faculty in the philosophy of science, a program with many interdisciplinary connections across sciences at the University. Given our strengths in the social sciences, we are unusually well positioned to develop the ties between philosophy and the social sciences as well.

Our goal must be to exemplify the crucial scientific research and teaching that transpires in our college, and ensure that we have both the faculty strength—especially in those areas of increasing student demand—across these fields, and the state-of-the-art facilities needed to carry out 21st-century work.

Last year we were successful in securing a place on the University's Six-Year Capital Plan for a new building for psychology and linguistics that will serve as one of the anchors for the Behavioral and Cognitive Sciences District that we have proposed along with the College of Education and Human Development. In connecting these spaces both intellectually and physically, we aim to bring together psychology, speech-language-and-hearing sciences, linguistics, and cognitive sciences in CLA with educational psychology and the Institute of Child Development in CEHD, and our affiliated clinics, to create a distinctive Minnesota signature in these fields. Work on this complex project is still several years away, but CLA and CEHD are starting now to plan the new district as an exciting complement to the University's biomedical discovery district.

I have only spoken of three areas of connectivity that can enhance our current academic strength and promote a distinctive Minnesota signature. We are continuing to advance recent initiatives to shape this signature further: for example, the Heller-Hurwicz Economics Institute, designed to raise our renowned Department of Economics to even greater prominence and forge stronger linkages with units across the University.

I have identified three programmatic initiatives that we hope to advance in the coming year: (1) strengthening the humanities; (2) human rights and social justice; and (3) sciences and the liberal arts. But we will not be successful in establishing distinctive academic programs without ensuring research support for our faculty, whose creative work and scholarship are the essence of our Minnesota signature.

Last year I announced our commitment to building the infrastructure necessary to ensure that CLA researchers, especially in the social sciences, can remain competitive for sponsored funding—which, in the current national environment, is harder than ever to acquire. We must

ensure, for example, that researchers seeking external grants have the funding and support they need to complete the surveys and pilot studies required for success at the federal level.

Given the centrality of research to CLA's identity, we need further to develop strategies so that colleagues across the college will have the funding to pursue their projects and professional development, and to share their work nationally and internationally.

As we will support faculty, so will we support students.

The 2015 report made several recommendations about strengthening graduate education and research. In response, this year we took steps to distribute, on a competitive basis, additional resources in our new CLA Graduate Student Fellowship program, and provide further support for graduate student research and recruitment.

We are well aware that fellowship resources needed to recruit the best Ph.D. students to CLA and the University are considerably less bountiful than those offered by other public research universities and much less abundant than those of the leading private universities against whom we compete. However, we have several strong graduate programs, some with signature reputations, whose academic integrity must be sustained and whose resources need to be expanded. That is why one of our highest priorities in graduate education is student support—fellowships for yearlong study, summer research grants, and top-off fellowship funding. With the assistance of our development team, we will continue to seek additional gifts to support our strongest programs.

Student support remains the highest priority for undergraduate education as well. President Kaler is committed to keeping undergraduate tuition increases flat or at a minimum for the near term. Given the financial need of many of our talented students, we must find the additional resources to minimize student debt.

One way to do this is to help students advance through their academic programs in a timely way. The 2015 report called for a re-examination of our undergraduate programs with an eye to serving students better, and several departments have, accordingly, made major changes to the structure of their majors and their requirements. But entering first-year students have little familiarity with the breadth of CLA's academic programs, and while we created the new common First Year Experience in part to introduce them to the diversity of the college, we need to do much more to help them make informed choices about their majors.

A couple of things we know about how students choose their majors suggest ways in which we can help them do that. We know that about 80 percent of our students major in only 12 departments. We also know that undergraduate students are attracted to majors that have established clear pathways for them to acquire the necessary skills and plan for a range of careers. In such programs students expect first to acquire basic competencies, continue to in-depth advanced study, and then to local or national internships or study-abroad opportunities that will lead to successful and enriched postgraduate lives. In an environment in which students are already less attracted to the liberal arts, programs without such paths are especially disadvantaged.

This year our offices of undergraduate programs, external relations, and media and public relations have designed new materials to recruit undergraduate students to Minnesota. We will be extending their project this upcoming year to work with departments on defining a clear arc for undergraduate success—from the students' first two years, through the specific major, to their postgraduate lives. CLA Student Services will play a key role in reaching this important goal.

In order for this strategy to succeed, each program must define its distinctive Minnesota signature and clearly present the various paths for students to reap the academic benefits from choosing a specific course of study. The need for such communication is especially pressing for the 1,800 transfer students who join our college each year. We are committed to establishing clear paths for their transition to CLA without slowing their progress to degree.

Finally, let us turn to a curricular issue that is close to our identity as a college.

Competence in a second language is a foundational skill for global citizenship. We must offer programs that will enable all CLA students to attain a common level of proficiency, and we must also offer advanced programs for students who wish to embed their language skill even more deeply into their academic program.

Minnesota has long been a leader in second-language education: We were the first school that measured proficiency through a graduation proficiency examination rather than seat time in classes. The examination is no longer required, but the coursework still is, and it is incumbent on us to define a basic level of proficiency and demonstrate to students how second-language proficiency can be incorporated into their majors.

This year the college's standing committee on second-language education will work with departments to define paths for students who wish to integrate second-language skills into their majors.

Many CLA programs already have a deep commitment to global perspectives through curricula that expose students to cultural diversity within the United States or abroad. But there is an additional aspect of these programs we need to highlight.

Our goal is not merely to provide international or cross-cultural experiences for our students. We want them to be able to use their second-language competence in their major to penetrate the Anglophone bubble through which many of them currently perceive the world. For students wishing to attain such advanced levels of second-language competence, we must have the curricular and co-curricular resources in place to enable them to do so.

I have recently charged a small working group on second-language acquisition to establish standards for various levels of proficiency, and to recommend how best to ensure that those levels are attained. I want Minnesota to be regarded again a national leader in second-language education, and our programs viewed as models for other institutions.

I have purposely not highlighted fiscal matters in this year's address. I have seen, over the last two or three years, how our focus on budgets, though necessary, has impeded our ability to dream as ambitiously as we might about the future of the college. The current higher education



environment has, indeed, forced us to be more deliberative about our choices, and we do need to plan and advance our priorities prudently. But to be frank, this has always been so; no higher educational institution has ever enjoyed an inexhaustible supply of funding.

We do have a balanced budget this year, but we are operating with a structural deficit—a recurring imbalance between income and expenditures—and we need to be careful. We must be both wise and inventive as we face these circumstances. We must continue to manage our curriculum wisely, identify and refine clear paths for undergraduates so they can perceive where their liberal arts degree will lead, and articulate further the distinctiveness of a Minnesota liberal arts education. We must also work collaboratively with central administration to address the structural deficit, so we can establish a firm tuition base that allows for stable multiple-year planning.

As we do this, it is critical that we demonstrate that we are managing our operations well. In granting us the largest allocation in 14 years, President Kaler's administration has demonstrated strong support for our college, recognizing and affirming the centrality of liberal arts. Now we must respond boldly, and with conviction, by setting our sights high.

I call on you—faculty, staff, and students—to participate in the initiatives I have outlined today. I welcome you to engage in the discussions that will unfold around each of these projects.

Let us work together collaboratively to realize a vision of becoming a national, innovative leader in liberal arts research, education and outreach. Let us work together to engage in the national discussion and practice of the liberal arts to which we are so strongly committed. Let us work together to continue to build a liberal arts college of which we can all be proud and through which we can demonstrate with conviction to the an increasingly skeptical world the indispensability of the liberal arts to the human experience.

Thank you!