

STATE OF THE COLLEGE ADDRESS

September 17, 2013

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COLLEGE of LIBERAL ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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Thank you all for joining us today for the inspiring introduction of our new colleagues. It is a great opportunity for us to meet and greet these scholars and artists whose presence is a wonderful sign of CLA's very bright future. Like you, I look forward to those introductions.

Today marks my first — and if all goes to plan, my only! — State of the College address!

Thank you for attending.

I view my statement of a proposed 2013-2014 agenda for the college as the opening of an extended conversation, and so will be most interested in your response. I invite you — faculty, staff, and students — to share your comments and questions at a follow-up open forum next Monday, September 23, from noon to 1:30 in the In-Flux Auditorium.

I hope you will attend, and if you can't, please consider emailing me your comments, questions, and reflections.

The College of Liberal Arts is in a time of transition. One expression of this, of course, is the turnover of leadership within the college administration.

We all look forward to the announcement of final candidates for the deanship, and becoming involved in the selection of a leader who will articulate and effect an exciting vision and plan of action for CLA.

2013-14 is also a year of transition to a year — 2015 — with symbolic significance. It represents a collective and creative effort to develop a strategy for building a truly outstanding college of liberal arts for the 21st century. The *2015 Report* was commissioned our former dean, Jim Parente. I and many others are deeply grateful to him for leading that initiative, which stands as an excellent guide for much of what we need to do this year.

But we are transitioning in other ways important ways as well. For one thing, we are moving from an era of solid financial and cultural support for liberal arts education, to one in which its value is challenged almost daily. Moreover, we may be transitioning rapidly into a strange new world of instructional pedagogies and the attendant uncertainties about how a liberal arts education is to be delivered.

Let us, then, take a moment to assess where we are today — to address, apropos our purpose on this occasion, the state of our college.

Expressed succinctly, the state of CLA is very good! Consider these facts (and please bear with me for a few minutes as I highlight just some of the ways in which things are very good):

- We are the largest college at the University of Minnesota — indeed, by far the largest college in Minnesota, public or private.
- Thousands of students from Minnesota, throughout the country, and the world apply for admission every year — far more than we can accommodate.
- Given our size and location I think it's safe to say that Minnesota is home to more alumni from CLA than from any other college. As a result, CLA has thousands of friends and supporters in the community.

Indicative of that community support, in the past year, the college raised close to \$11 million in new private donations. These gifts enabled us to disburse approximately \$8.4 million to support faculty research, graduate and undergraduate students, and academic program development. In academic year 2012-13, we awarded \$2.9 million in scholarships to 1,100 undergraduate students, an increase of approximately \$650,000 over the previous year.

By any measure, our academic credentials are strong:

- Although CLA faculty comprise just 21 percent of total U of M faculty, *our* colleagues are
 - 43 percent of all Regents Professors,
 - 26 percent of the President's Academy of Distinguished Teachers,
 - 39 percent of faculty who have been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

- In the past 12 months, our faculty colleagues have won nearly 180 external academic awards and fellowships, including a Guggenheim and the Rea Award in writing. In the same time span, they have also won 15 book awards! We have an internationally esteemed faculty!
- In FY 2013, CLA faculty members held 216 external research grants, totaling approximately \$107 million. In that same period, 111 new grants were received for \$10.5 million. Grant expenditures generated \$3.1 million in ICR – an important component of collegiate revenue.
- Some of our graduate programs receive more than three or four hundred applications for fewer than 20 student spots, and thus have the privilege to enroll an extremely select group of talented individuals.
- Over the last five years, we have placed 93 percent of our graduate students, some of them at the world's most distinguished colleges and universities.
- Last year our undergraduates won five Fulbright, two Udall and one Truman Award.
- Our undergraduate debate team competes nationally at the highest levels, as do our Chinese-language students (one winning first place in a major competition in Beijing!).

Rankings can be another marker of academic excellence. The National Research Council identifies 19 University of Minnesota Ph.D. programs as the most highly ranked in their respective disciplines. Eleven of them are in

CLA! — making it fair to say that CLA is academically the brightest jewel in the University's crown.

Last year we made significant strides in improving our physical infrastructure:

- The new state-of-the-art Kilburn Theater in Rarig is a world-class facility for research and teaching in theatrical technology.
- We built a new lab, specially equipped for dendochronology, for teaching biophysical geography in Geography, Society, and the Environment.
- And we have almost completed a facility for hearing and vision research, which will be used by researchers in Psychology, Speech-Language-Hearing Sciences, and the Medical School.

We have also added an exceptional group of new faculty who will be introduced later in this meeting. These new colleagues and the truly outstanding faculty, programs, and students already in place will continue to move CLA forward in very impressive ways.

In all of these important ways, the state of CLA is very good. But it would paint an incomplete picture to stop there. The college is also challenged in some significant, even troubling, respects.

The changing political, economic and social landscape of higher education and the liberal arts combine to create a context in which at least four controversial points present internal challenges. Within the college we can see substantial disagreement about each of these issues:

- First, is our future better defined by a reinvigorated commitment to the intrinsic value of liberal arts education or by an increased attention to career preparation for our students? The article in this past Sunday's *New York Times Magazine* titled, "How to Get a Job with a Philosophy Degree" is symptomatic of the tension, as is the recently released ranking of colleges and universities by PayScale.com based on the mid-career earnings of alumni.
- Second, to what extent are new pedagogical technologies desirable, or perhaps even inevitable? Represented in part by the debate about on-line versus in-place instruction, this controversy cuts to the heart of what we in CLA mean by high quality education.
- Third, as we become increasingly dependent on undergraduate tuition, how do we reconcile the undergraduate-education mission of a public university with our R-1 research- and graduate-education mission? That is, how do we balance our ability to pay our bills, composed largely of faculty salaries, with our responsibilities as the state's only liberal arts research and graduate education institution?
- Fourth, what is the best way to organize ourselves to produce and disseminate knowledge for the 21st century? How should we adapt to the changing frontiers of knowledge, without becoming unproductively attentive to academic fads — rushing into the next "new thing"? How do we protect the disciplinary cores while minimizing intrinsic conservatism, turf-guarding, and insularity of established units?

I believe that we risk serious harm to the future of CLA if we avoid or pretend simply to ignore these four points of tension. Part of our task this year must be to keep them clearly on the table — to maintain an active dialogue in the college's many forums, including the CLA Assembly, the Council of Chairs, administrative offices of the college, and elsewhere, about these controversial matters. The answers that we arrive at collectively will be constitutive of CLA for decades to come. I have views on each of these matters, and as part of my leadership responsibilities I will share them with you. But I will do so only in the context of unfolding collegiate conversations.

So, here we are — in a dynamic and distinguished, but challenging and troubled place. On the one hand, the college remains excellent on many important fronts. On the other, we face tensions and potentially transformative challenges as a result of the changing societal context of higher education in the liberal arts.

In this context and in my role as interim dean, Provost Hanson has charged me with two tasks: one financial, one academic.

They are strategic tasks on which we must make substantial progress this year if the college is to continue to move in a positive direction.

FIRST, THE FINANCIAL TASK:

CLA has had a several-year structural deficit. While the size of this deficit is not trivial — five or six million dollars is nothing to sneeze at! — still: it is

potentially manageable. Viewed from the perspective of our annual tuition revenues of approximately \$175 million, this remains a problem at the margins, rather than a debilitating crisis. It is only three to four percent of our total tuition revenue.

I know — you're probably thinking: "Three or four percent — on top of the cuts we've already made!"

But rather than focusing only on the prospect of additional cuts, I propose that we shift more of our attention to the opposite approach — to directing our energies at increasing revenue. There are several steps we can take to raise additional income.

These measures are unlikely, in the space of a single year, to bring our budget into balance. But taken together they may move us forward significantly, even potentially beginning to get us past the financial worry that hangs over our heads, demoralizing and distracting us from our main mission, robbing us of the joy we all wish to bring to our chosen work.

So I ask that we work together to move beyond fear, beyond anxiety, so we can be free to focus on our core missions of research, graduate education, undergraduate education, and service to our community.

What can we do to increase revenue?

The simplest answer, given our heavy dependence on tuition, is to increase the number of students taking CLA classes. Competition among CLA

departments and academic units vying to capture a greater portion of a fixed pool will not result in greater tuition revenue. Expanding the total CLA pool of students will.

One of the most obvious strategies is to retain more of our students. There are several well-known reasons for the departure of students from the liberal arts, perhaps most importantly a shortage of jobs in the current economy, and rising interest in science and technology.

But regardless of the reason, the cold fact is that too many students are deciding CLA cannot provide what they believe they need to succeed. And so they leave — taking their tuition dollars with them! I agree with the *2015 Report* that our strategy should not be to create policy barriers for our students, making them a captive audience. Rather, we must make our programs more attractive to students — to foster more vibrant forms of what the *2015 Report* calls a student-centric curriculum.

We know that a liberal arts education provides an excellent foundation for navigating the complex world that students will face after graduation. So the problem is this: how can we offer liberal arts programs that better align with the interests of today's students, many of whom are asking for different opportunities than they have in the past? Our willingness to listen carefully and respond to the student voice is a key part of the fiscal solution. Let's consider a few feasible steps:

Telling the liberal arts story

A large number of CLA students have not decided on a major when they first enter college. The first year is extremely important. Students look to what and how we communicate in order to make a decision about whether the liberal arts has been the right choice for them, and which majors they will pursue. Students look to their conversations with faculty members, advisors, and other students; they look to how great that freshman/honors seminar or introductory course was; to what sort of research and creative opportunities are available; and to what our overall sense of community is. In all kinds of subtle ways we tell our students the liberal arts story, and we must be ensure it is both compelling and relevant.

Adapting to changing student interests

Now is a great time for us to think collectively and creatively about how CLA programs align with incoming students' increased interest in science and technology. We do have this intellectual ground, whether it is through software applications, technical writing, big data (in both the social sciences and humanities), or in the arts and design as natural incubators for scientific discoveries. Regardless of discipline, we all have something to bring to this discussion.

Doing the little things that are big things for students

Students sometimes seek out courses because they fulfill University requirements, but students today also want to be deeply engaged in and excited about their courses. We know what we offer, but students don't, and they rely on the materials we give them — catalog descriptions and major guides, sample plans, and graduation plans. If we want more

students to be engaged in our courses, we must do more to make sure that these guideposts are clear and appealing to them.

Online summer offerings

Online summer courses give students the option to continue their studies while remaining close to home. What are potential new courses or innovative pedagogies that make sense in this space? Can we develop other ways to make use of summer effectively?

Interdisciplinary innovation

Within our tradition of interdisciplinary collaboration we can look beyond our own resources as separate departments to investigate the establishment of joint programs within CLA and even with other colleges to meet student interest as it develops in ways that don't map comfortably onto existing curricula.

Retaining students is an essential function and an immediate challenge for our collective action. Taking effective steps on that objective is one of my top priorities.

Undergraduate recruitment

A related strategy is to improve CLA recruitment such that we attract more of the right students — students who really want to be in CLA as opposed to CSOM, or CBS — or Macalester or Hamline.

Students who arrive at CLA not fully convinced they want to be here are students who are likely to leave. So to whatever extent we are off the mark in our recruitment efforts, we exacerbate our attrition problem.

Working with University Admissions, we must do a better job of finding and recruiting students who will appreciate CLA's unique character — the features that make us distinctive. Of course, whatever we do to shape signature undergraduate programs that speak to contemporary student interests will help us recruit the most appropriate students. But we must also do a better job of making those distinctive programs more widely understood by the broader public, prospective students, and students throughout the University. Better messaging becomes a priority for this year!

As the *2015 Report* recommends, we will also devote substantial efforts to increasing non-tuition revenue, specifically by generating greater gift-giving and more ICR through external grants.

SECOND, THE ACADEMIC CHARGE:

Dealing with the structural deficit is crucial — hence enhanced revenue generating is of very high concern. But, to echo the *2015 Report*, budgetary considerations should never become our primary motivation or our point of focus. We raise money, not as an end in itself, but as the means to perform our core missions of conducting research and artistic creativity of the highest quality, educating the next generation of scholars and teachers in

distinguished graduate programs, and providing an outstanding undergraduate education in signature programs.

Our charge for this year, then, is on one level about finances; but it is more fundamentally about who we are academically. The provost's charge to me is to take steps toward strategically targeted programmatic investments. CLA cannot be all things; we must prioritize. And until we have generated sufficient new revenue to close the structural deficit, any investment must be balanced by some disinvestment. I endorse the *2015 Report* recommendation that the College must become more focused, with fewer—but more uniformly distinguished—programs.

Moving toward that objective requires broadly inclusive participation. It is my intention to create many opportunities for college-wide deliberation about how we can capitalize on our areas of strength with increased investment, and where we might strategically disinvest.

The decisions we make here will not be top-down. We will arrive at them by working together, by determining in a collegial fashion what in the long run will most effectively distinguish our college and best serve our students.

My conversations with departments this past summer make it apparent that all of our units have need for investments. I've heard from almost everyone that their situation is dire or even desperate, and/or that they have great potential for new endeavors that are as yet unrealized. Assuming that all these claims are sound, and I do, what should we do first? What can we do *without* as we divert resources? What are our *collective* priorities?

I propose that this year we give concrete substance to the general and abstract principles outlined in the *2015 Report*, which called for strategically focused investment and disinvestment, but did not specify what should be targeted for each. Our task is to move closer to a shared understanding of what will distinguish CLA and what our areas of distinction will be. This is the third of my top priorities for this year.

To get us started, let's recall some signature initiatives on which we are already making progress:

One is the Humanistic Commons.

Last year CLA launched the Humanistic Commons, an innovation that truly bears the CLA signature — it embodies academic excellence, it is a nexus of research and teaching, and it is interdisciplinary.

This year we introduced the concept for first-year students, using new models of instruction. This year we will also begin to focus on extending it to the upper divisions and to graduate education.

A second is the Human Rights academy.

Historically, human rights have been a strong intellectual focus at CLA. In the past year, working especially with the Humphrey Institute and also with the Law School, we made significant strides in creating a human rights academy. It is an innovative and interdisciplinary endeavor. In fact, we may be among the first schools in the country to offer a professional master's degree in human rights. Our graduates will be highly trained practitioners,

prepared for leadership roles in governmental bodies and NGOs at all levels, affecting public policy and practice in this crucial field. Much remains to be worked out for the creation of this degree program, but we are definitely on course to bolster our interdisciplinary distinction as leader in the study of human rights.

A third is second-language acquisition

The most distinctive feature of CLA's BA degree relative to other undergraduate degrees throughout the University is our language requirement. This distinction is not accidental; it is based on our commitment to preparing students to function in today's linguistically diverse world. This year we will intensify our focus on strengthening second-language instruction, continuing the work begun previously by a working group of faculty from multiple departments. We will also work to integrate vibrant language instruction more thoroughly throughout our curriculum.

Other areas of focus will include, among others, growing the Heller-Hurwicz Economics Institute, further consolidating the cognitive and behavioral sciences, inaugurating a newly emerging consortium on the pre-modern world, and fostering deeper integration of the statistics department with the quantitative social sciences.

We will invest in these particular projects because they grew out of initiatives led by faculty, generally from multiple units, working together to imagine and create a more distinguished CLA.

Some are focused primarily on innovative curriculum; others are concerned more with trans-disciplinary research collaboration and graduate education. None is intended principally to recreate past strengths, or to give one or another unit a competitive advantage.

What they do share is the potential to optimize our combined strengths, and help us achieve the levels of academic excellence, interdisciplinary collaboration, and collegial decision-making to which we aspire. They are models of the kind of work I propose we all undertake — a process of reimagining a more robust CLA.

I invite you to join the endeavor.

Thank you.