

Looking Inward and Outward: The Year Ahead

Fall Convocation Address
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It is a great pleasure to welcome you to a new academic year at Geneseo—and a special pleasure to welcome our new faculty and staff. I hope you all have had a refreshing and productive summer. One of the oldest—and least useful—paper topics that used to plague many high school and freshman English classes is “How I Spent My Summer Vacation.” I must admit, however, that my remarks today grow out of one of the things I did during my summer vacation. At the end of July, I attended a seminar that brought 15 college presidents together for freewheeling discussions based on classic texts in the liberal arts. Along with several of our spouses we chewed over readings that ranged from Plato and Alexis DeTocqueville to Virginia Woolf and Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as more recent articles on education and society. As someone who has enjoyed teaching versions of Humanities I and II over the years, I looked forward to the week—if only as a sort of busman’s holiday for a college president and sometime English professor. But I was gratified to learn once again how exciting the texts were and genuinely surprised at how relevant our discussions were to my work as president and our common enterprise as a public liberal arts college. As I sat in the seminar I would often think ahead to today’s talk, and, as you will see, some of the readings and conversations from the seminar have flowed over into this Convocation. As I think back on my experiences this summer, I am once again reminded how valuable our Humanities

requirement is—I am glad that it continues to play such a central role in a Geneseo education.

I.

I think many of you will agree that last year was one of the most challenging and difficult years in Geneseo's history. In my remarks today, as is often my habit, I shall look back on the previous year. Without minimizing the difficulties of our current situation, however, I want to focus predominantly on the future and speak about three general initiatives that, even in the midst of difficult times like these, can take us closer to the ideals of excellence in liberal arts education to which Geneseo aspires.

If there ever was a year that would, in Wordsworth's phrase, "teach the philosophic mind," the 2001-02 academic year was it. Three weeks into the fall semester we were confronted with the tragic events of September 11, and three weeks from the end of the spring semester we suffered the seemingly senseless loss of one of our students, sophomore history major Jeremy Byrnes. We continue to mourn his death. SUNY Geneseo responded to both of these tragedies, I believe, by coming together as a community. In that we can take pride—in our students' desire to reach out and serve others after September 11, in the general absence on this campus of recriminations against people from countries or groups associated with the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center, and our individual and collective efforts to wrest some positive meaning from monumental loss. To mark the anniversary of September 11, two events are planned. The College will participate in a memorial sponsored jointly with the Village of Geneseo, on Main Street, followed by a simple ceremony of remembrance for the four Geneseo alumni lost in the World Trade Center, to be held on the College Green.

With the assistance of Vice President Levison and the leadership of the College Senate, I am hoping to plan a series of discussions on how the world and American life have changed in the wake of September 11. If we fell short in any way in our response to the events of that day, perhaps it was in not providing enough opportunities later in the year to reflect on the significance of the events, raise questions about their implications for domestic and foreign policy, and place them in some sort of historical context. Perhaps we were all too close to the events themselves to accomplish this. As a public liberal arts college, however, we have the opportunity—indeed the responsibility—to provide forums to understand, to analyze, to criticize, and in general come to terms with an important historical moment like this. This is an important part of what we do as a teaching and learning institution.

To be sure, 2001-2002 was a year tinged by great losses both personal and national, here at Geneseo and in the world at large. Despite these losses, 2001-02 was also a year of significant achievements for the College. It was a year of accreditation visits and a year of affirmation of our academic quality. In October, a ten-person team from the Middle States Association arrived on campus. Their report affirmed our planning process and praised our self-study document. With one exception, the visiting team report's comments about every major aspect of our College operations were highly laudatory. In March the Middle States Commission on Higher Education renewed our accreditation for a full ten years, with the request that Geneseo "document further progress in the implementation of the plans initiated by the institution regarding diversity" when we file our regular mid-term report in 2006-07. On behalf of the College, let me thank the more than 100 members of our community who served on

various committees for the self-study. I know I thanked you last year, but now that the results are in you deserve thanks again.

Another confirmation of the high quality of our programs came in April, when the Jones School of Business was granted initial accreditation by AACSB International (The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business). Here, again, a visiting team of experts offered high praise for almost every aspect of our programs in business and validated the Jones School's distinctive mission as a professional program that draws its strength from its position in a public liberal arts college. It is a pleasure to recognize the efforts of Mary Ellen Zuckerman and all of her colleagues in business in securing this great success. Geneseo is one of only thirty-six undergraduate-only programs in North America with AACSB accreditation and the only such program in the Rochester area.

Our last set of visitors represented Phi Beta Kappa, the oldest and most prestigious academic honors society and the most distinguished advocate for excellence in the liberal arts. For their visit, we were asked to prepare extensive materials on the quality of our faculty and students as part of the final stage in our application for a Phi Beta Kappa chapter on campus. I am very pleased to report that the visiting team enthusiastically recommended approval of our application and that the national Committee on Qualifications endorsed our application in May. The application now goes to the Phi Beta Kappa Senate for action in December and, if we are successful in that forum, on to the triennial Phi Beta Kappa Assembly meeting next summer. Though nothing is certain, the positive recommendation is itself a major validation of our mission and identity as a liberal arts college. I would like to thank Professor Doug Baldwin and the Phi Beta Kappa faculty and staff who were responsible for our

application. All three of these visits confirm—from the perspective of nationally recognized external bodies—the very high quality of our academic programs and the educational experience we offer as public liberal arts college. Let them stand today as markers for all of our efforts to achieve academic excellence—a precis of our various academic successes in the past year.

Again, in the midst of a difficult year economically and politically, we continued to recruit a highly talented student body. More than 10,000 students applied to Geneseo. Freshman applications increased by 12 percent, and transfers by 10 percent. Although we enrolled a significantly larger freshman class, their mean SAT scores were 1230 (a new record), and their mean high school average was 92.5 percent. Seventy-six percent of our freshmen come from the top twenty percent of their graduating classes; 13.2 percent are members of underrepresented minority groups. In all probability Geneseo will continue to be the most selective SUNY campus this year.

Speaking of students, a key indicator that impressed several members of the visiting teams was the extent and quality of student-faculty research at Geneseo. Last year two Geneseo biochemistry majors, Summer Raines '03 and Matthew Fleming '04, were awarded Goldwater Scholarships in the sciences, bringing our campus total to 10 in the 13 years since the program began—a number exceeded by only one other undergraduate college in the state (Vassar). Another student, Bethany Lipa, working with Wendy Pogozelski in Chemistry, received a coveted national summer fellowship from the Council for Undergraduate Research—one of only 15 such fellowships; and in another national C.U.R. initiative four Geneseo student research projects were chosen for the annual Posters on the Hill session in Washington, D.C.—more than any other college

or university in the nation. Plainly, these continuing successes are tributes to the excellent mentoring and research activities of Geneseo faculty such as the teaching excellence and research award winners we have honored today. As almost goes without saying, I choose only a few suggestive examples to represent the multitude of superb scholar-teacher-mentors on this campus.

Beyond the classroom, we can look back on highly positive accomplishments by our students and their mentors in Student and Campus Life. Our student-athletes garnered three All-American designations, Geneseo captured SUNYAC titles in seven of our nineteen intercollegiate sports (Women's Tennis, Men's and Women's Cross Country, Men's Indoor Track, Women's and Men's Swimming, and Women's Softball), and eighteen of our teams saw post-season tournament play. Five of our coaches (Paul Duffy, Mick Woods, Liz Monte, Jim Lyons, and Tony Ciccarello) were named Coach of the Year in their respective sports. Geneseo's GOLD Leadership Program involved a record number of faculty and students and was identified as one of two model "best-practice" programs nationwide by the National Association of Student Activities. Plainly, we are achieving our goal of providing a rich co-curricular experience that contributes to student learning.

The past year also saw notable improvements in physical facilities and campus services. Most notably, the Saratoga Terrace Townhouses, our first new residence complex in thirty years, were completed and fully occupied by the end of the fall semester. Genesee Hall was fully renovated last summer, and extensive renovations on Allegany and Wyoming Halls will soon be completed. After a national search, Mr. Edward Abbott, Sr., joined us as Executive Director of Campus Auxiliary Services. Ed

has already brought a wealth of new ideas to CAS, including new meal plans and a closer integration of the Big Tree Inn with student dining services. More than 80 staff members in facilities services, along with a user advisory committee representing all areas of the campus, have been working on a complex Facilities Services Reorganization and Improvement project that promises improved maintenance, better response to departmental needs, and the data necessary to assess operations more objectively and improve them. This is difficult work, and I am very grateful to everyone who has been involved.

II.

Among the tragedies and the achievements of the past year—and I have sketched only a few of them today—there was another process going on. Because of the loss of life and property incurred in the World Trade Center disaster and because of the weakening national economy, New York State tax revenues declined sharply throughout the year. In consultation with the College Budget Committee, the College administration spent much of the year preparing for serious shortfalls in this year's budget. Now that all the numbers are in, those shortfalls total some \$1,461,700, which we have had to find, either through base-budget reductions or accumulation of cash reserves. Through careful planning and prudent management, we have balanced the budget without drastic cuts to programs. Normally, I would spend a good deal of my time discussing our budgetary prospects and advocacy efforts. I shall not do so today, in part because I plan to present a detailed written report to the College community in early September, but also because I

want to focus on the future and the ways in which we can all advance the College's agenda in the coming year despite the gloomy economic environment in the state.

Strange though it may seem, I began thinking about the SUNY budget as we were discussing one of the readings in the summer seminar I attended. Many of you know the Allegory of the Cave in Book VII of Plato's *Republic*. In that famous passage Plato compares the great mass of human beings to prisoners in a cave, chained in place so that they can only see the flickering shadows of objects reflected in firelight on the wall of the cave. In some of our preoccupation with the year-by-year fluctuations of the SUNY budget and the annual skirmishes over funding, we too may run the danger of seeing the shadows rather than the reality of the sunlit world outside the cave. I'm not saying that we should ignore budgets or politics, and I don't wholly accept Platonic idealism or the elitist view of education implied elsewhere in the allegory, but it is salutary to keep our attention focused on the lasting reality beyond the cave and (for today's purposes) the long-range goals that we share as a public liberal arts college. Taking as my point of departure some of the excellent work of our Strategic Planning Group last year, whose members sifted and refined objectives designed to achieve the six over-arching goals identified in our Long-Range Plan, I want to lay out three general initiatives that will bring us closer to realizing our vision of Geneseo as the premier public liberal arts college in the country in the coming year.

The first initiative is obvious—and, frankly, quite unPlatonic. I refer to Planning Goal 5 and the four objectives identified by the subcommittee who worked on that goal in 2001. "Expand funding for institutional priorities and initiatives through public and private support, grants, and entrepreneurial activities," Goal 5 reads. As we have known

all along, given long-term state budget trends, Geneseo must aggressively pursue increased external support of all kinds. Even in relatively good times, such support is absolutely critical to foster excellence and ensure our continuing development as an outstanding public liberal arts college.

We are therefore working on three general fronts to expand funding: strengthening philanthropy from alumni and friends, increasing sponsored research, and exploring entrepreneurial initiatives appropriate to our mission that will generate additional revenue. Much has been accomplished in the past year. Gifts to the Geneseo Foundation totaled \$1.6 million in 2001-02, short of our ambitious goal of \$2 million, but a nine-percent increase over 2000-01 in the midst of a horrible year for charitable fundraising. Vice President Art Hatton and his colleagues in Advancement have made changes in staff assignments to increase major and planned gifts from alumni. Last year, 360 benefactors (out of some 9000 donors) contributed \$995,000—two thirds of all gifts received—illustrating the importance of planned and major gifts. In addition to annual and endowment gifts received, planned gift commitments (in the form of bequests or gift annuities) grew to nearly \$2 million. Philanthropy is obviously essential to much of what we do that makes our college special. Last year, for example, 130 faculty members were awarded professional travel and research grants, supported professorships, summer fellowships, and academic enrichment funds totaling more than \$450,000 from the Geneseo Foundation. All of this work is related to the first objective under Goal 5: “to implement a comprehensive five-year plan to increase private support for the College.” You will hear more about major fundraising plans in the coming months.

The past year has also seen good progress toward our objective of increasing revenue from sponsored research to at least \$1 million per year. Thanks to the efforts of faculty researchers and the hard work of Doug Harke, research expenditures rose to \$700,000 last year, the highest total ever. A record 51 grant proposals were submitted, for a total of \$5.6 million. New awards totaled \$1.164 million, and, most encouragingly, committed funds for this year rose to \$1.3 million. We are very close to achieving our objective of \$1 million in revenue in the coming year, with notable successes in major grant projects in areas ranging from international business to neurobiology to medieval history and culture. All of these grants not only provide much-needed resources to benefit faculty and students; they also advance the teaching and learning process, and lead to the creation of new knowledge.

Perhaps the most promising initiative for the coming year involves the third area labeled entrepreneurial activities. I must confess that the term “entrepreneurial” bothers me somewhat, both because it has become a buzz-word used in all too many contexts and because there is some danger in thinking about our educational endeavor only in commercial terms. As used in our planning document (objective 4), however, the term signifies something much broader and more creative—a concept that covers a wide range of activities that serve our mission as a liberal arts college and at the same time yield revenues to support students and faculty at Geneseo. Most sponsored research is entrepreneurial in this sense, as are many of the support functions of our Auxiliary Services Corporation. In January, I appointed a new College Resource Development Team—a group of faculty, staff and administrators from all areas charged with looking at ways to increase grants and expand entrepreneurial activities. They have urged us to be

much more strategic and focussed in our efforts to secure major grants (“entrepreneurial” activity that advances research and scholarship), and they have suggested priorities for one or two large targeted grants to support projects at the heart of our mission. They are also looking at several ideas—most notably a summer enrichment program for talented high school students—that are entrepreneurial in the general sense I have outlined. Although we may not be able to create a new administrative unit (as called for in the planning objective), the Resource Development Team functions as a steering committee to coordinate our efforts to seek external resources of all sorts. In the coming year, the College will provide support and seed money for several of the ideas generated by this group, and I look forward to the results.

III.

Goal Number 5, as some of you may have been thinking, is instrumental. It involves *means* rather than *ends*. Although some of the objectives identified for the goal involve central college functions such as research and instruction, the main intent of the goal is to secure funding for college priorities. Resources are vitally important, but I can almost hear Plato saying, “Dahl, you are still in the cave looking at the world of shadows. Get out into the pure light of eternal truth and wisdom!” The two general initiatives that I wish to discuss in the time remaining are closer to the deeper reality of our mission as a public liberal arts college. Both involve vision. Both look toward the long-range development of Geneseo as a truly outstanding liberal arts college. One cluster of activities involves looking inward at our teaching and learning process; the other looks outward at the world beyond the College.

First, in the year to come, I believe we must look inward as a College. The cluster of activities comprising the inward-looking portion of our agenda centers on the work of the Task Force on Faculty Roles, Rewards, and Evaluation, which was created and charged last Spring and began its work over the summer. Although the charge to the Task Force involves faculty—what they do, how we evaluate it, and how it is recognized and rewarded—the issues the Task Force will address are central to our mission and therefore to what all of us do at Geneseo. They are inextricably bound up with the first four overarching goals for the College (providing an outstanding education, ensuring the human development of a diverse community, integrating curricular and co-curricular programs, and expanding relationships with the wider community). Geneseo has changed a great deal in the past two decades. We have become more selective, we have focussed in on our mission as a liberal arts college, we have changed the way we teach, we have increased our expectations of students inside and outside the classroom, and at the same time our students’ expectations of faculty (and professional staff as well) have changed and expanded dramatically.

The time has come, as the Senate Faculty Affairs Committee concluded in Spring 2001, to step back and take a long, careful look at faculty roles and rewards at Geneseo. As its primary charge, the Task Force is asked “to consider faculty roles and rewards” and “design a system of evaluation and faculty development that is more closely aligned with the mission and identity of the College in the first decade of the twenty-first century.” This will mean careful study of the literature, a needs assessment for faculty development, consultation with nationally known experts on evaluation and professional development, and investigation of best practices at other colleges and universities. The

Task Force will need to address such issues as student-faculty research, service learning, the new connections between curricular and co-curricular activities and then design a system of evaluation and professional development that accounts for the multiple and changing roles faculty play in the teaching and learning process. I have asked that the Task Force report on its progress to me and the Faculty Affairs Committee of College Senate at the end of each semester and submit its final report by December 2004. With a project of this magnitude, it will take some time “to get it right,” but I hope that the Task Force will involve as many members of the College community as possible in their discussions of the issues of general interest related to teaching and learning that they raise. And, as the work of the Task Force progresses, some of the experts they bring in may also be available for general presentations or lectures to the College community. Indeed, we shall have the opportunity to hear one of our own alumni, Leo Lambert, a nationally known expert on faculty roles and development this fall, when he receives an honorary degree from Geneseo.

Accomplishing all aspects of this ambitious charge is a major undertaking, and so I am delighted that Professor David Geiger has agreed to chair the Task Force. He will be joined as co-chair and administrative liaison by Provost Dixon. Every member of the Task Force, which is broadly representative, enthusiastically accepted appointment, and I believe we can look forward to thoughtful consideration of issues at the heart of our mission and purpose as a public liberal arts college. Continuing dialogue on teaching and learning is itself part of the introspective side of our work as a college.

In the cluster of activities related to the charge of the Task Force are two further initiatives for the coming year that I want to mention. Both are connected with specific

objectives under Planning Goals 1 and 2. To foster faculty development, even while we consider the complicated issues of roles and rewards, we have already established a center for excellence in teaching and learning under the leadership of Professor Becky Glass. We shall continue to move ahead on this project in the coming year. Under the terms of a SUNY system grant, we are seeking to expand the number of first-year seminars (another key objective under Goal # 1: academic excellence). I am pleased to inform you that the College will also be involved in an initiative on the first-year experience that will bring together all of the courses and activities that help to acculturate our students to the liberal arts experience. This is another important way of looking inward at the teaching and learning process in its broadest sense.

IV.

Important though the teaching and learning process is to our mission, we all know that a great liberal arts college—and especially a great *public* liberal arts college—must look outward as well as inward. In this regard, two continuing College initiatives will take on added significance, I hope, and gather new momentum in the coming year. As many of you know, a team of Geneseo faculty and administrators have been involved in a collaborative engagement on strategic community partnerships with Franklin & Marshall and Washington & Jefferson Colleges and Michigan State University. We have learned a lot in the process, and we can point to a number of successful partnerships that were either in place or developed during the consultation. Our continuing work at the Xerox Center for Multicultural Education and the recent establishment of the Lockhart Gallery on Main St. are good examples of such partnerships. This year, I would like to expand

our community partnerships, involving more faculty members in work in the community and connecting students' community service more closely to traditional liberal arts courses. Many people on this campus are already involved in community service, and many have excellent ideas for partnerships. To provide support for these initiatives, I am appointing former Dean Tom Greenfield as part-time Special Assistant for Strategic Community Partnerships. He will help us think about the issues involved and be available for assistance in preparing grant proposals and project descriptions. Although he has been liberated from the confines of Erwin Hall, I am pleased that he has agreed to serve in this capacity, working with our Strategic Community Partnerships team and the College Resource Development Group. If we are to develop “socially responsible citizens with skills and values important to the pursuit of an enriched life and success in the world,” we need to involve our students more fully in the community, and all of us—students, faculty, and staff—need to work together to foster the sort of thoughtful civic engagement required for successful participation in the richly diverse society of twenty-first century America.

As a great public liberal arts college we need also to look outward to the multicultural, global society of which we are a part. And here the continuing work of our Commission on Diversity and Community is absolutely vital. I strongly agree with the conclusion of our Middle States self-study and the recommendation of the visiting team that we must continue and enhance our efforts to build a diverse and welcoming community at Geneseo. This, too, is a hallmark of an outstanding liberal arts college. We have continued to expand the enrollment of international students—there will be 85 on campus this semester, an all-time high—and we shall continue our efforts to recruit

and retain a diverse student body. Professor Beth McCoy (English) and Dean Leonard Sancilio will again chair the Commission on Diversity and Community, which will present a statement on diversity for consideration by the College community, report the findings of excellent recent research on campus atmosphere, and offer recommendations on building community this fall. Working with the Commission and the Strategic Planning Group, the vice-presidents and I will seek ways to make our diversity efforts more strategic and better coordinated in the coming year. We can do nothing less if we truly wish to achieve excellence as a public liberal arts college.

Yes, this will be a challenging year on the budgetary front. But even in the midst of challenges and constraints there is much we can do together to reach our goals as a College. We can garner some of the resources we need by our own intelligent and creative efforts, and we can look beyond the immediate present to some of the enduring values of a liberal education. By looking inward and looking outward in the coming year, we can achieve great things in the areas I have discussed, even if we cannot count on large infusions of resources from the state.

My summer seminar ended with discussion of an article entitled “Liberal Arts and Justice,” written by Nicholas Farnham, the head of the Educational Leadership Program and founder of the seminar program many years before at the Christian E. Johnson Foundation. It suggested to me some of the reasons why looking both inward and outward is so important and why the integrated education of the whole human being we seek to provide at Geneseo is so vital to our society and our world. I would like to close with a few words from the article. In order to foster justice, Farnham argues, a professional education that focuses on intellect alone is not enough. We must be

concerned with both intellect and emotion, and we must be involved in the world. “The real intention of liberal education,” Farnham writes, “is precisely the development of right intellectual reasoning of the kind from which justice, in terms of fairness and humanity, can be said to be the result. In a world such as ours, which separates intellect from emotion, the true value of liberal education is often disguised. It is frequently argued that its purpose is to train individuals to think, to discriminate, to look for and examine alternatives with disciplined exactness. The usefulness of these intellectual activities to the practical world can be easily demonstrated.” But such intellectual activities are not enough to ensure justice of the sort we need today, Farnham says. “Properly conducted,” he argues, “liberal education represents the only reliable assurance that we can have, that fair decisions in our businesses, professions, and institutions will take place. The curriculum for any particular liberal education program should never been seen as purely intellectual judgement. It must itself be the result of right intellectual reason about human experience. If liberal education can acquire confidence in this mission, the dilemma in which we find ourselves—a society increasingly doubtful in the face of complexity about our ability to order ourselves—may possibly be alleviated” (Farnham, 310).

In the year to come we are here to make the world a better place. As we look inward, ponder the teaching and learning process, and ask the right questions about how we bring new members into our intellectual community, we shall be taking the broad view of liberal education that Farnham calls for. As we look outward to the world of service and human diversity, as we seek to link learning to service in the community, intellect with feeling and action, we shall be working as well for justice. By looking both

inward and outward we can successfully contribute, in a unique way, to the project of liberal and liberating education at Geneseo. I invite you to join in the exciting process.

REFERENCES

Farnham, Nicholas H. *Justice and Liberal Education*, Liberal Education 72 (1986), pages 305-311.

