

## **The Road Less Traveled By**

Fall Convocation Address

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I am pleased to welcome you to another academic year at Geneseo. The title for my remarks today comes, for a change, from a familiar poem, one that many of you know well: Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken." For the most part, however, I shall be talking about the road we *have* taken as a college, in the past year and, indeed, over the past two decades, rather than the road *not* taken.

Today's convocation is a celebration of a highly successful journey completed in the past year on the road Geneseo has chosen to take on our way to becoming the premier public liberal arts college in the country. In recognizing our colleagues who have been promoted or granted continuing appointment, we celebrate their progress on individual journeys that enrich our entire college community. In honoring those who have received system-wide or college awards, we celebrate the special achievements of faculty and staff members who have helped make Geneseo the outstanding public liberal arts college it is today, and whose efforts have helped us further down the road to achieving our distinctive vision of excellence in undergraduate education. And in introducing the new faculty and staff with us today, we welcome them as fellow travelers on this journey of ours. After several years during which we were hiring few if any full-time faculty, it gives me special pleasure to recognize the 20 new visiting faculty who are joining us for

the year, as well as our Fulbright scholar, Dr. Amr Elsherif, who comes to us from Damanhour University in Egypt and will be teaching in both the Department of English and the Department of Languages and Literatures. Talking with our new faculty and staff in the past few days, I can already see the many talents and diverse perspectives they will bring to the College. They come from literally all over the world, and they will provide much-needed teaching support in many departments that have been burdened by understaffing in the past few years. Twenty faculty searches are a lot to do in a single year, and I want to thank all the department chairs and committee members who assisted in the process.

I am also pleased to introduce two new senior administrators who are present in the audience: first, Dr. Anjoo Sikka, Dean of The Ella Cline Shear School of Education, who officially begins on September 1, but is already on board representing her school. Anjoo comes to us from the University of Houston-Downtown, where she has served as Associate Dean of the College of Public Service and as Professor of Urban Education. She received her Ph.D. in educational psychology from Mississippi State University and holds an M.A. in clinical psychology from Maharaja Sayajirao University in India. Her research has focused on perceptions of effective teaching, self-silencing and depression, and teacher assessment. She has published and presented widely on those topics. I'm delighted to welcome her and warmly endorse her goal of building a learning community in the Shear School where teachers and students feel energized by teaching as a profession and a life-long learning experience.

Though he technically doesn't start until September 17, our new Vice President for College Advancement, Bill Brower, is also here with us today. As with Anjoo, his

presence is an indication of his enthusiasm for Geneseo and eagerness to begin his work with us. Bill comes to us from Hamilton College, his alma mater, where he has served in advancement for 16 years, most recently as Executive Director, Major Gifts. The clear first choice of the search committee, he impressed everyone he met during his visits to campus. Bill brings great energy and significant experience in all areas of advancement. As an award-winning history major and captain of the track and cross-country team, he understands and believes in our liberal arts mission. I am confident that we will continue to build on the many successes we have already seen in securing private support. Please introduce yourself to Anjoo and Bill and welcome them to campus.

## I

The Frost poem from which I take my title is tinged with melancholy and a rueful sense of loss. As the speaker observes in the last stanza, “I shall be telling this with a sigh/Somewhere ages and ages hence,” but the message of the final lines of the poem may be applied in a more positive fashion to our situation as a college community:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

In the past year and indeed for the past two decades, Geneseo has taken the road less well traveled by. Rather than growing in enrollment or adding trendy career programs, we have stayed the course, always focused on becoming the best public liberal arts college we can be—a distinctive, intellectually alive, and above all life-enhancing teaching and learning community. Our choices at Geneseo have indeed made a

difference, and the rightness of our course was confirmed through the Middle States reaccreditation process last spring. This, too, involved a choice. Under the leadership of Dave Gordon and Ray Spear, the Middle States committee proposed a thematic self-study centered on “transformational learning,” our central objective as a public liberal arts college. As you may have sensed at the closing session with the team chair, we came through the visit with flying colors. The team’s official report, now available on the self-study wiki, was overwhelmingly positive. We met all Middle States standards; on eleven of the fourteen standards the team either commended us, or singled out significant accomplishments for praise, or did both. We were commended for the careful way we handled the financial crisis, while at the same time seeking to move the College forward strategically. Our general education program was commended for its integration of course and general education outcomes, and the use of assessment results to close the assessment loop. The team praised us for the wiki, saying the following: “the SUNY Geneseo work on the wiki in preparation for the MSCHE visit was exceptional. It made the retrieval of assessment data rapid and transparent, and more importantly, has improved the college’s culture of assessment and its ability to conduct effective assessments.” The team even praised our College Senate Chair for his work on shared governance reform! The team made only two formal recommendations, both procedural, related to Standard 7 (Institutional Effectiveness) and involving ownership and better documentation of the process.

As you may know, the visiting team’s report is presented to the Commission at a later date, when the commissioners actually vote on reaccreditation. The Commission’s action was conveyed to us in July. It was short and sweet: “To reaffirm accreditation and

to commend the institution for the quality of the self-study process.” Because the theme of transformational learning is so central to what we do and who we are as a college, the Commission’s unconditional reaccreditation represents a true affirmation of our distinctive mission as a public liberal arts college and strong external confirmation of the high level at which we carry it out. Lest you think this is a small matter, let me point out that we received the highest possible level of action by the Commission. The seven other SUNY undergraduate campuses under consideration in the same cycle were not so fortunate. Their reaccreditation actions were accompanied by conditions ranging from recommendations to be addressed in the five-year report to a required monitoring report.

I regard our successful reaccreditation as the most important achievement of the past year because it speaks to everything we do and confirms the efforts of many people over many years. I am particularly grateful to Dave Gordon and Ray Spear for leading the self-study steering committee and to all the members of the larger Middle States committee who worked so hard to ensure our success. Dave and Ray will present a paper, with Paul Schacht, at the Middle States Annual Conference on our use of the wiki for the self-study. And they have been asked to train other self-study teams in the process as well. Reaccreditation is a College-wide enterprise. Thank you all for your splendid work and for all the work you have done that led us to this happy conclusion. And, while I am on the topic, let me also congratulate Dean Michael Schinski and his colleagues on the Business School’s successful reaccreditation by AACSB. Mike’s hard work and leadership in the process cannot be underestimated. Now, in three short weeks, it’s on to the NCATE accreditation visit for the Shear School of Education.

The Middle States reaccreditation was a great accomplishment, but I'd like to single out another, more recent accomplishment in an entirely different category: disaster recovery. We are here in Wadsworth Auditorium, rather than our usual venue in Alice Austin Theatre because of a disaster. Early in the summer, in the middle of the night, a new water main, connecting to Bailey Hall, burst, flooding the basement of Brodie Hall with four feet of water and knocking out electrical power to most of the upper campus. The flooding left all of Brodie unusable and uninhabitable. George Stooks and the staff in Facilities Services mobilized to solve the problem. Rico Johnson and Andrea Klein in the Provost's Office made contingency plans for the departments in Brodie, including finding spaces for all their fall semester classes. Since the repairs involved emergency funding from the State University Construction Fund and the purchase of custom-built circuitry, we were all worried that Brodie would still be closed at the beginning of the semester. Through Herculean efforts on the part of almost every unit in the College, Brodie reopened on Wednesday. I want to commend the efforts of everyone involved in speeding our return to Brodie. These include the efforts of Kirk Spangler and the cleaning and maintenance staff, the work of Becky Anchor in Procurement, who managed to get complex equipment orders through the state purchasing system in record time, and the nimble efforts of facilities services staff in securing emergency financing for the restoration. Often we forget the behind-the-scenes work of units like Accounting Services or Procurement in making it possible to expend state funds. Those departments are especially to be commended this year for their extraordinary responses to the challenges presented by an entirely new state-wide financial system. Many people

helped in the Brodie crisis, but these individuals demonstrate the truth of our Mission Statement: “the entire college community works together” to educate our students.

The Brodie disaster reminds us once again of the many ways in which our colleagues in Administration and Finance support our mission. Often, they literally make it possible for the rest of us to do our work. Beginning in 2004 with the Integrated Science Center, Geneseo entered the most significant period of construction, rehabilitation, and landscaping since the major expansion of the College in the 1960s and 70s that created the physical campus as we know it today. The department of facilities services is currently managing some \$105 million in capital projects—construction that will once again change the face of the campus. In this area too, we have taken a road less well traveled by. When possible, we have chosen the route of renovation rather than new construction. We have carefully matched projects to our liberal arts mission. In the name of that mission, however, we have not been shy about making the Geneseo campus look as good as its programs and people. We have used sustainable construction methods, and we have not expanded the College beyond its current footprint, leaving plenty of green space. The Doty Building will provide an historic doorway to the campus, serving admissions and international student recruitment and other offices that deal with the public, but it will also provide an acoustically excellent recital hall for concerts and lectures. Doty is scheduled for completion in January. The new stadium project is moving forward. Roadwork is finished, and we hope to have the fields and stadium ready for spring sports in 2014. Total renovation of Letchworth Dining Hall has already begun, which will provide more opportunities to build community on Northside. The Bailey Hall project (the source of the disaster), which will house what I call the hard-

edged social sciences, is well underway, and Monroe Hall will open for students in the spring semester. Dave Norton and everyone who manages and supervises these projects deserve our thanks and commendation. When all this construction is completed, we will have the most handsome campus in SUNY—a campus to rival some of the best private colleges in New York. This is an exciting time in the history of Geneseo, and I look forward to watching these projects advance in the coming year.

A handsome campus and facilities worthy of our academic and co-curricular programs are essential, not only to our ability to carry out our mission but also to our success in recruiting a talented and diverse student body. In spite of a depressed economy and another year of unusual quirks in college admissions, Geneseo continued to recruit an outstanding first-year class. Like last year's class it was diverse (25 percent students of color) and academically talented. Mean SAT scores were 1333 (25<sup>th</sup>/75<sup>th</sup> percentile range: 1280-1380), up from last year; 58 percent of the class comes from the top ten percent of their high school classes. Geneseo continues to be the most selective campus in SUNY. New international students, including exchange students, will total more than 50. Moving to new facilities in the renovated Doty Building will help Admissions even further in recruiting great students.

As usual, Geneseo was highly ranked in almost all the college guides, but a new on-line guide (called "The Educated Quest" and edited by Stuart Nachbar) is of particular interest, since it does a nice job in defining our position as a "public Ivy." In a recent article entitled "Is Your School a 'Public Ivy'?" the guide sets forth criteria for public Ivies: high graduation and retention rates; selectivity; in-state tuition no higher than one-third that of the least expensive Ivy; and out-of-state tuition no higher than two-thirds of

the most expensive Ivy. Geneseo meets those criteria, along with only 11 other schools in the nation—including Binghamton, Ohio State, UNC-Chapel Hill, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. If you believe Educated Quest, then, we do literally provide an Ivy League education at a public college price. On a more serious note the article shows that, unlike many top public universities, we have kept our tuition low and remain an incredible bargain, even for out-of-staters. This is another way in which we continue to distinguish ourselves, even from other highly ranked publics.

The past year has also seen remarkable achievements in Advancement. The public phase of our capital campaign “*Shaping Lives of Purpose*” was launched at Gotham Hall in New York last September, at an event attended by some 450 alumni and friends of the College from all over the country. The New York City launch was followed by fifteen more launch events, from Los Angeles to Washington, DC, and from Chicago to Tampa, concluding in Boston on June 2<sup>nd</sup>. I attended all of them, and they were all quite inspiring. The results are equally inspiring. Total commitments to the Campaign now stand at \$19.6 million, and we are well on our way towards our goal of \$22 million. Thanks to the campaign, total giving for the year reached a record high of \$4,087,659. These results are a tribute to the hard work of our advancement team, led by Mike Catillaz, and the enthusiastic participation of alumni volunteers and board members (who by the way personally funded all the launch events). I want to take this opportunity to thank Debbie Hill for her service as interim vice-president since Mike’s retirement on May 1. Her efforts have ensured that we haven’t missed a beat in moving forward with the campaign, and we are well positioned for success as Bill Brower joins us.

As an offshoot of the campaign and part of a national alumni engagement initiative, we have also created 18 regional alumni committees throughout the country. These committees have prospered beyond our hopes, and we have been able to use them to establish a national network of alumni volunteers. More than a hundred alumni and friends of the college representing the various regional committees returned to Geneseo in April for the first annual Alumni Planning Summit, where they discussed four crucial issues facing the College. In the wake of the Summit, we have established a new National Alumni Council, chaired by John Gleason '87, with vice-chairs from Los Angeles, Chicago, and Buffalo. The new Council will hold its first meeting at the end of October in connection with the fall meetings of the Foundation Board and the Geneseo Alumni Association Board. One of the goals of the campaign was to extend the national reach of the College. We have done so, and will continue to do so in the coming year.

All of this activity—capital campaigns and construction—is ultimately in the service of our mission as a public liberal arts college. The Campaign for Geneseo is intended to provide support for the great work our faculty and staff do every day with our students. It has already brought us our first endowed professorship, the Charles Van Arsdale Chair in Entrepreneurship. A national search for the first Van Arsdale Professor, chaired by Professor David Geiger (Chemistry), is underway, and we are confident that the new professorship will enrich not only the course offerings in business but also the ways we think about entrepreneurship in a liberal arts college. We will keep the College community informed on the search as it unfolds in the coming semester. The campaign has also led to the creation of a new Center for Inquiry, Discovery, and Leadership, which will bring together endowments for exciting programs in undergraduate research,

student fellowships, internships, international study, faculty support, and leadership development. Again, we are literally shaping lives of purpose through the capital campaign. The results of the Campaign are already evident in the nine “ambassadorships”- \$5000 fellowships for student projects—that have already been funded. We shall hear more about them in the coming year.

Not only private funding but also grants for sponsored research and educational programs have reached new highs in the past year. Total expenditures from external grants through the Research Foundation reached a record total of over \$1.6 million, and internal funding for grants through our Research Council and Office of Sponsored Research, at \$307,000, also set a new record. Much of our internal funding, by the way, comes from The Geneseo Foundation through unrestricted annual giving and endowments. Particularly heartening this year is our success in securing grants from Rochester-area private foundations for our various summer programs for at-risk students. Thanks to a grant from the Farash Foundation, we were able to expand the Rochester Young Scholars Program, and with the assistance of a grant from the Marie C. & Joseph C. Wilson Foundation we were able to establish a new six-week, six-hour-a-day summer program called “Soaring Stars” for rural low-income students from grades K to 5. Our faculty continued to bring in major national grants, and I am happy to report that Geneseo may have its first Five Million Dollar Man. If all goes well, our colleague Professor Steve Padalino (Physics) will have brought in over \$5 million research grants as principal investigator. Stay tuned.

Our students also continued to do us proud. Although this is anecdotal information, I believe this year was an unusually successful year for admissions to top

graduate and professional schools. It was also a good year in athletics, with six SUNYAC championships. Some of the athletes who were on those championship teams were the same students (I think of math major Katie Gayvert in women's tennis, for example) who received rich fellowships from major Ph.D. programs at places like Cornell. This is no accident: GREAT Day 2012 was the largest ever, with 902 participants offering no fewer than 512 exhibits, posters, presentations, and performances. As I mentioned last year, we are indeed a powerhouse in producing Ph.D.'s—not only in the sciences but in all fields. According to NSF data, among master's degree institutions, we are number 3 in the nation in STEM fields and number 8 as the undergraduate source of Ph.D's in all fields. And, again, our students shone in community service and civic engagement.

I am pleased to report that the Commission on Diversity and Community, now chaired by Professor Kathy Mapes (History) and Tracy Paradis (Library), finished its work on the College's Diversity Plan, which was approved by the Strategic Planning Group and returned to the Commission to establish metrics. The Middle States visiting team praised the Diversity Plan as “a model for using assessment findings to develop goals and objectives linked to institutional mission.” The Task Force on Sustainability, now elevated to the status of a presidential commission, and co-chaired by Professor Kristi Hannam (Biology) and Darlene Necaster of Facilities Services, has been particularly active during the spring and summer. They will present a new statement on sustainability to the college community for consideration and discussion this fall. Also on the sustainability front, plans are underway for a new energy farm on campus—an E-Garden—that will demonstrate some of the best practices in solar and wind power and

conservation. This too is an exciting addition to our programs as a public liberal arts college, and very much in keeping with our College values.

## II

As always, there is so much more to tell you about the accomplishments of the past year. I have only scratched the surface and provided a few examples of the good work so many of you have done. I believe we can all look forward to the coming year, and I am eager to begin again. The Middle States report provides us with an opportunity, however, to think about what really matters over the long term to Geneseo as a public liberal arts college. We have indeed taken the road less traveled by, and that has made all the difference. I was reminded of this fact when talking with Bob Bonfiglio and Carol Long, who have been meeting with the parents of new students during the summer orientation process. Many parents ask us, what other schools is Geneseo like? And the answer is very few. As a public liberal arts college, we are distinctive. Because of selectivity and our commitment to liberal learning and excellence in the education of the whole human being, we are an outlier in the SUNY system. We are closer in that regard to our private aspirational peers because we have taken a road less well traveled in public higher education nationwide. We can take comfort from—and learn from—our connections with a very small number of truly outstanding peers among the members of the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges. We can take justifiable pride in the road we have taken, but it does make things more difficult in negotiating our role in a large, multi-campus system of higher education. The SUNY system, for example, is now in the

process of revising the funding allocation model for its campuses. Most of the discussion on the issue involves very conventional notions of program costs— notions that privilege doctoral and graduate professional education and vocational education at the undergraduate level. That is not what we do as a public liberal arts college, though we do prepare students very well for success in the world in a variety of careers. Another element of the funding model discussion involves peer institutions—and again the list of peers proposed to us involves only public institutions and institutions with a similar mix of programs - institutions, however, that for the most part aren't as selective as Geneseo and that don't have our high graduation and retention rates. In these SUNY budget exercises, I believe, there is a real danger of reversion to the mean. We might be funded for our program mix, not our liberal arts mission or our results. Indeed, this is pretty much the case now.

Somewhat the same issues arise when one considers the national dialogue on accountability and cost. If one measures completion rates and costs alone, one leaves out what is really important in higher education: the development of intelligent, creative, ethical, and engaged citizens who can successfully contribute to building a better world—and, by the way, help maintain our competitive advantage in the innovation-based global economy of the twenty-first century. That's ultimately what we do as a public liberal arts college. Enrollment plans or funding models, however, that focus only on narrow economic goals or current work-force needs simply don't do the job, either for the nation or for the state of New York.

If you think about it, there are three major things we do as a public liberal arts college. First, we develop minds and hearts in a teaching and learning community that

prepares scholars, in the best sense of the word: talented students who are academically successful, but who have an edge on the competition because they are equipped with the skills and values needed for true long-term success. That's why our general education program (which we'll be reviewing this year) is so important. Second, we educate for leadership through our unique blend of a rigorous curriculum and rich co-curricular experiences, which we intentionally seek to link together in ever more effective ways. Third, especially as a residential college, we prepare for citizenship in a Jeffersonian or Deweyan sense. That's why student experiences in campus organizations, in service-learning, in social action, and in international settings are so important—and why we seek to expand the range and depth of such experiences.

As we have over the years, we shall continue to seek a more appropriate level of funding for our unique mission, from the SUNY system and from the state of New York. Over the summer, for example, the College prepared a request for special mission-based funding to support our role as New York's public liberal arts college. We shall also seek a NYSUNY 2020 grant to support the special things we do here and could do more of through the Center for Inquiry, Discovery and Leadership. The proposed grant will not only provide capital funds for a building to house the Center; it will also authorize an academic excellence fee for additional faculty and staff to support enhanced liberal learning and high impact practices throughout the campus.

Our special mission and our success in accomplishing it—our success, if you will, on that road less traveled by—has been externally validated in the Middle States review and by the excellent results we have achieved as a college over the years. Yes, we can—and should—always do better. Over the long term, we need to stay focused on the things

that really matter. Although some of the discussion of funding models at the system level may give us pause, we are in a good position to plan and act now for the future. For the first time since I have been here, our budget has been stable for two years in a row. The presence of twenty new visiting faculty is testimony to what we can do with modest, but consistent funding that permits rational planning (and I would add that the Provost's advisory group on faculty lines has been working over the summer on a long-term faculty hiring plan). Has anyone noticed, by the way, that this is the first year in which I have haven't mentioned the budget wars in Albany? Because of the rational tuition plan, much less lobbying was needed this year, and, as I have suggested, the crucial budgetary issues this year seem to be at the system level.

As I look forward to the coming year, I am optimistic. We need to be keenly aware of the very real challenges that confront us in public higher education, and we need to understand as never before that state funding for Geneseo will remain flat at best. Much of what we do that is most important is not funded by a line-item the state budget. That's why completing *Shaping Lives of Purpose: The Campaign for Geneseo* is so important, and I thank everyone who has contributed to it thus far. It will enable us to support even more of the high-impact practices that make a Geneseo education strong and distinctive. In the year ahead, let's keep our eyes on what's most important to us as a public liberal arts college. Let's seek to do the work of transformational learning even better. Let's take pleasure in what we have accomplished and the wonderful things we do together as a teaching & learning community. We have chosen the road less well traveled by. I know it is the best road for the long haul. "Ages and ages hence," as Frost says, we shall look back and we shall know that it has made all the difference for this

College we love and support. Thank you all for joining me on that journey in the coming year. I wish you—and all of us—joy in the journey.