

The State of the University 2014
By Robert A. Scott, President
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Introduction

Good afternoon and welcome. This is the fifteenth occasion for my delivery of the State of the University Address.

I have used these occasions to inform the faculty and staff about Adelphi's condition and, I hope, inspire our collective pursuit of excellence in fulfillment of Adelphi's mission. I have tried to accomplish these twin goals by reminding us about Adelphi's history and heritage, and the strengths on which we are building the Adelphi of the future, as well as by remarking on the University's progress.

As this is my last State of the University Address, I have organized it into these sections: Reflections; Forecasts and Concerns; and "TMTM", Ten Months That Matter.

Reflections

As I reflect on the past year and the thirteen that came before it, I think of "purpose;" "promises;" and "progress", with comments on "prospects" to come later.

Adelphi's purpose as expressed in the Vision Statement is to be the leading private liberal arts university in the region, with nationally recognized programs and a focus on student satisfaction, success, retention and graduation.

My promise was to restore integrity and transparency in all that we do, and for Adelphi to both be engaged in the community and to invite the community to be engaged with the campus. We are an asset to the neighborhood and we want the neighbors to know it.

I also promised to pursue a broad-based approach to planning based on these ideas: strategic planning is about principles for decision-making, priorities for action, and metrics for measuring progress.

Now, while what you measure indicates what you value, not everything of value can be measured. (Think of the "ah ha" moment when a painting seems to say, "Psst, come here," and you see layers of meaning hidden before you, as Donna Tartt suggests in the The Goldfinch.¹) There is no standard metric for that.

¹ Tartt, Donna. The Goldfinch. New York: Little Brown, 2013.

However, there are metrics for measuring progress. Here are a few: 500 +; 340; 175; 58.5; 10; 9; 1.

What do these numbers, or metrics, mean?

In the past 13 years we have constructed or completely renovated 500,000 square feet of institutional, performance, and recreational space, with another 100,000 square feet of new instructional and academic support space to be completed by September of next year.

In this period, we increased the number of faculty from under 200 to nearly 340, and increased undergraduate enrollment by 63%. Each year's orientation of new faculty is a special moment for me because it represents the hinge between a summer of reviews and planning on the one hand and the surge of energy at the start of a new semester on the other.

The number 175 represents the growth of invested funds from under \$50 million to \$175 million. The number 58.5 represents the total funds raised in the first-ever comprehensive fundraising campaign: \$58.5 million, \$2 million over goal. This campaign raised support for facilities; named student scholarships, such as the McDonnell Fellows; and faculty support, including the naming of the Ruth S. Ammon School of Education, the endowed Ammon Professorship, and the Robert B. Willumstad School of Business.

Ten represents the percentage of undergraduate alumni we expect to make a donation in 2015, up from under 2% in the year 1997 to 9% this past year.

Nine represents the number of years in a row that Adelphi has been designated as one of the two dozen "Best Buys" in American private higher education by The Fiske Guide to Colleges. Adelphi is also recognized with praise by The Princeton Review, U.S. News, U.S.A. Today, and other top college guides.

These forms of external validation of quality are accompanied by plaudits from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education; Standard and Poor's, the bond rating agency; and the United Nations.

One: Adelphi has many firsts in its history, including the first collegiate department of dance and the first university-based doctoral program in clinical psychology.

But "one" also means Number 1, and we are number "1" in graduation rates among comprehensive private colleges in the region. In addition, this year our student-athletes scored so many victories that we not only won the Conference Championship for a second year in a row, and won another national championship in Women's Lacrosse, but also were voted the top institution in the ECAC (Eastern Collegiate Athletic Conference).

Still other measures of progress reflect the dramatic increases in students studying in other countries and the number of students participating in paid internships in businesses, agencies, and non-profit organizations.

None of these accomplishments could have been achieved without the active engagement of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and trustees.

Today, I recognized *alumnus* and Trustee Chair *Emeritus* Michael Campbell with the President's Medal of Merit. Mike has been an advisor and friend for these 14 years. (It is, by the way, in his honor that we named the Campbell Lounges in the Center for Recreation and Sports.)

Mike is honored not only in his own right, but also as a representative of all those who took seriously the promises I made upon arrival.

In 2000, I arrived as the sixth president in three and one-half years. In fall 2001, I was the first president in that period to serve in two successive Septembers. Mike was a believer, and I am grateful.

There are many ways to measure our progress beyond these numbers that reflect quality assurance, alumni re-engagement, and a focus on teaching and learning. We not only have given priority to student success, but also to faculty support. Just think: no lay-offs or salary freezes; a 25% compounded increase in salaries in the seven years of this faculty contract; a reduction in the teaching load to allow more time for scholarship, especially involving students; and an increase in the number of course sections taught by full-time faculty. Not many institutions can recite such a record.

We have made progress in these and other ways, all related to AU2015, our strategic plan with four big goals for Adelphi: Recognition as a center of intellectual and creative activity; Student success in a range of educational goals; Relevance in a changing world; and Sustaining our reputation as an excellent, yet affordable university.

One of the major initiatives of AU2015 was to develop the Center for Health Innovation (CHI) as an overarching coordinator of colloquia, research grants, and program development related to health sciences and services.

As I reflect on these years, I take pleasure in the way we have given life to a slogan: Adelphi as the “engaged” university, and CHI is one more manifestation of this vision.

I believe that a college education is as much about character and citizenship as it is about careers and commerce. The Community Fellows Program, the Adelphi Prize for Leadership, and the Levermore Scholars Program underscore this commitment. The Collaboration Project and the year-long series on the changing nature of war and peace do as well. After all, our sense of war is changing in terms of the nature of combatants and our meaning of peace is changing to include climate sustainability and social justice as well as the laying down of arms. There are many in our community who cannot recall a time without a war or threats to our peaceful coexistence with other people or the earth itself, and we need to help them understand the history and changing nature of conflict.

What does it mean to be “engaged” at a time when the center does not seem to hold? Consider the list: Ebola, Syria, Iraq, Israel, Gaza, Ukraine and Russia.

The list goes on. At home, the events in Ferguson were both shocking and similar, reminding us of Treyvon Martin, Emmitt Till, and the number of other black teens killed in between their deaths.

Each August, my friend Josh Weston, former CEO of ADP, lists his “one page of America’s best and worst stuff”. This year, he noted, “Many Americans are so very caring and generous to others,” yet we have a “compassion deficit towards the unlucky 30+ million ‘have not’ Americans due to inadequate safety nets.” He also commented on the incredible beauty of nature that is threatened by our fossil fuel dependence, our pervasive “integrity” deficit, and the collapse of good journalism and informative news media.²

What, then, is our obligation to consider these traumas in their historical settings as well as in their contemporary contexts?

David Finkel’s book, Thank You For Your Service, our AU Reads selection, and his previous book, The Good Soldier, are major contributions to our thinking about the traumas of war and its consequences. Other programs this year will help us examine issues of race and ethnicity, forms of action against racism in meaningful ways, and the numerous threats to the environment.

One of my favorite authors is Marilynne Robinson. In one of her essays, I found support for my phrasing of “character and citizenship as well as careers and commerce,” when she said that democracy is not the same as an economic system; it is a philosophy of citizen engagement in the running of government affairs. Democracy is not about consumption and consumerism. It is about the investment of time, talent, and treasure in human and infrastructure development to allow for equality of opportunity and compassion in assisting the fulfillment of each person’s potential.³ Democracy requires us to be engaged by voting, writing, speaking and marching, committed to free speech, and respectful of diverse opinions, all as part of our civic responsibilities.

If democracy is a noble ideal, then let us all be noble idealists in finding meaning in life and in fulfilling Adelphi’s mission to help others find meaning in theirs.

Forecasts and Concerns

The path to such fulfillment is not easy. Just as none of our progress was inevitable, witness the experience of institutions like Polytechnic University and LIU, once considered to be Adelphi’s saviors, or Dowling in the present time, there are hurdles for us to manage. Some of these challenges are noted in a recent Standard & Poor’s Report. In order for us to maintain our “A” credit rating, without paying extra for insurance, we must continue to build our endowed funds, which now total about \$100 million less than the average “A” rated” institution; increase financial liquidity by selectively increasing enrollment without increasing tuition discounting to provide financial assistance, and generate more substantial operating surpluses.

² Weston, John. “What’s on my mind.” Private communication, August 27, 2014.

³ Robinson, Marilynne. When I Was a Child I Read Books. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2012 .

While these concerns seem to be internal, they are influenced by external forces as well as internal commitments. They are influenced by changes in population demographics in the regions from which we draw most of our students, no matter the program or degree level; changes in the economy, especially challenging for those for whom money is a weekly paycheck, not something one puts to work; and technologies, which prompt us to rethink which pedagogies and processes are best done person-to-person and which are better done online or in a mixed mode.

These are among the challenges to higher education cited in numerous reports often mentioned in the popular media. The Association of Governing Boards (AGB) for colleges and universities highlights as problems to be confronted the very revenue model we use, which is reliant on tuition pricing and subject to criticism by both policy makers and families, and the demands on institutional resources for health-care benefits, institutionally-funded financial aid, compliance requirements, campus debt service, cash flow, and deferred maintenance. AGB and others call for greater efficiency and effectiveness in the use of institutional resources, especially by a greater use of technology where appropriate.

Others comment on accreditation as inadequate to assure the quality of results and assessment as too focused on input and too little focused on what students learn. Still others decry what they see as a collegiate model that is out of date, given the leadership needs of institutions in this “new” environment. I say “new” in quotes because I can recall similar claims in the 1970’s. Most of those who complain now do not realize how resilient higher education is as a sector. However, it also is true that too many institutional leaders and faculty have too little appreciation for how major shifts in demographics, economics, and technology have forced radical changes on individual institutions.

I searched for the higher education issues in the year 2000, just to check my memory. In Losing Ground: A National Status Report on the Affordability of American Higher Education, the authors, still active and cited, reported that increases in tuition had made college less affordable; federal and state aid had not kept pace; students and families were borrowing more to pay for college; the steepest increases in public college tuition had been imposed during times of greatest economic hardship; and state financial support of public higher education had increased but tuition had increased more.⁴ This list was published in 2000.

The report also recounted that about one-third of undergraduates were older than 24 years of age; almost 40% were enrolled part-time; about 84% lived off-campus; and about 30% were non-white.⁵ These trends have continued.

Why is so much the same when it seems that so much has changed?

Do you remember Mount Vernon College? Elizabeth Seton College? Do you recall that Polytechnic University received a gift of \$144.2 million in 1998? These institutions no longer exist in their historic form.

⁴ Losing Ground: A National Status Report on the Affordability of American Higher Education. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2000.

⁵ Ibid.

Change happens when the dynamics are powerful and responses are weak.

A recent report cites these dynamics and calls for trustees to be more active, more involved, even to reviewing final grade trends. Furthermore, it says that “faculty cannot be the last and determining voice regarding academic value, academic quality and academic strategy.”⁶

This call for trustee involvement is based on two premises: that selective advantage favors adaptive societies, organizations, and institutions that can detect the unfamiliar and be flexible in response, and that faculty in general have not shown an ability to respond in a timely way.

Yet think of how higher education has evolved and adapted from the Oxbridge model, to the German research model, to the Land Grant model, to the development of community colleges, to the numerous adaptations inspired by World War II and the G. I. Bill.

Then think about Adelphi’s trajectory, now chronicled by Professor Jennifer Fleischner in her new history of our University to be published this fall. Adelphi started as coed, became all female, prepared women for teaching and nursing, became coed again, added military veterans who wanted a program in business, started social work and psychology, and then created other professional programs.

The most elite institutions today started as schools preparing ministers and teachers.

The message: to succeed, institutions, like people, must adapt to new circumstances. I believe that we have and can again, but to do so takes commitment.

These external challenges are real and we as a community must be certain that our priority is to keep Adelphi strong enough to fulfill its mission with excellence, and give total attention to undergraduate and graduate student enrollment, success, retention, and graduation.

I am concerned about how external forces will affect our Adelphi community, here in Garden City and at our various satellite centers. A community, after all, is a place where people have the courage to grant one another “real safety”, real autonomy, and the means to think and act as judgment and conscience dictate.⁷ This is why we focus on democracy, engagement with the community, which values the “common good.”

For a community to flourish, there must be the transparency I promised, and frequent and open communications. There must be a minimum of “we” versus “them,” whether it is based on a trustee’s commentary on grading trends or a faculty member talking about “the Administration” or “Levermore,” as if “Bob Scott” and “Gayle Insler” had less of a stake in the viability of Adelphi.

⁶ Governance for a New Era: A Blueprint for Higher Education Trustees. Project on Governance for a New Era. Benno C. Schmidt, Chairman. August 2014. Pages 9 and 11.

⁷ Robinson, op. cit.

A community is one in which members respect one another. The new signs to be installed around campus signaling “Others” are a reminder to respect others, help others, and welcome others.

I also am bothered by how the media, elected officials, and pundits portray higher education and present “solutions” to ill-defined problems. Take the claims about tuition and student debt, for example.

The media cite prices at the most expensive institutions and ignore the fact that the average cost of tuition and fees at private colleges this past year was \$30,094, considerably less than the \$50,000-plus noted. Ours was \$32,400, \$6,500 less than Hofstra and St. John’s – and we have higher graduation rates.

Another favorite topic of the media is the claim that college student debt exceeds \$1 trillion, and is greater than credit card debt. They then profile cases like the NYU student who borrowed \$120,000 and the Ohio Northern student who borrowed \$140,000 – without noting that the average baccalaureate student debt for both public and private college graduates last year was \$29,400.

Ours was \$24,532 for students who started as freshman and borrowed through federal programs, even though nearly 50% of our students come from families earning less than \$60,000 per year, and some 25% come from families earning less than \$30,000 per year. Our students also have very low loan default rates.

What the media fail to examine is how much of the reported \$1 trillion is cumulative for undergraduate and graduate study, how much is accounted for by for-profit colleges with dimly low graduation rates and whose students have the highest loan default rates, how much is the result of federal interest rates that are substantially higher than commercial rates, and how much is the result of alternative loan programs that ballooned when Congress cut funding for the federal loan programs.

Any debt is too much for some families, but let’s get the story straight and not scare the unsuspecting public.

The media’s attention to these “problems” concern me also because the headlines used to portray a “problem” can lead to a solution that looks good to some but can lead to consequences that limit opportunities for others. Think of proposing MOOCs to help recent immigrants learn English and avoid remedial classes – and human contact. While this may be an extreme example, it is representative of some current thinking.

And while MOOCs and other online approaches will improve, and must and will be adapted, there is a time and a place for each technology. We must be smart about new modalities just as historically we have been smart about teaching non-traditional students.

I also am concerned about how universities in general, and Adelphi in particular, respond to societal needs. First generation freshmen, adults returning to take classes, and those working

while managing family obligations all require that course design and scheduling take student needs and circumstances into account. This has relevance to us in terms of adult and graduate enrollment, and, therefore, positive net income. It is not enough to have active recruitment and smart marketing. We also must consider program mix, program length and convenience, design as a full degree or as a certificate, and instructional methods in order to be responsive to student needs.

For undergraduate admissions, generally, people consider a brand - a set of distinct characteristics - whereas for many masters programs, people are considering a commodity and comparing degree offerings to alternatives in terms of time, flexibility, and price. So, do we want the offer the program as we like it, or enroll the students we are pledged to serve and will keep us whole?

We also should have program approval processes on campus and at the state level that provide for prompt responses to mission-related initiatives to meet societal needs, with processes of different lengths and complexity for different kinds of changes: course changes, program changes, program additions and deletions, new academic units, etc.

We are obliged to consider these matters because our competition does, and we on Long Island have new competitors offering the same or similar degree programs in more convenient formats online originating from Texas, Illinois, and beyond. We must respond, not necessarily in kind, but responsive we must be, with vigor as well as rigor.

For the campus, such responsiveness requires “shared governance,” including the Administration, Faculty Senate, and Board of Trustees. Each has a critical role in fulfilling Adelphi’s mission and the goals of AU 2015. A commitment to shared governance in support of student learning as the first priority helps to avoid the “we” – “them” divide which is the curse of many institutions.

The Provost and I meet with the Faculty Senate officers each month and the Provost reports to the Senate at each meeting. I chair full faculty meetings three times each semester. I also meet with the AAUP president several times a year, and with the Student Government Association president on a regular schedule. My goal is transparency and communication, all with a focus on students first.

The goals for student learning include not only exacting major courses of study, but also a strong general education foundation. This foundation, for graduate as well as undergraduate students, should foster not only the ability to write with clarity and persuasiveness, but also the skills of reading and listening critically and speaking with poise. It should foster a knowledge of history and the skills of imagination, to ask “What if?” and “What about,” and reflect on the meaning of life. Such an education allows the student to distinguish between fact, faith, and fear - - or, if you will, between and among evidence, epiphany, and emotion - - and know that doubt is good and cynicism is not rigor.⁸ These abilities are essential, as numerous sources of information assert truths that are without merit.

⁸ Robinson. *Ibid.*

General Education is the starting point for educating students with a common purpose and an uncommon understanding of their place in the world. For each of us comes to college with a relatively narrow view of society and civilizations. It is up to us, as educators, to help students become liberated from their provincial origins, whether based on geography, gender, or social class, and reflect on their own lives and the meaning of life, as well as learn about the history, literature, and culture of others in time and in place. We do not want them to be “excellent sheep,” in the words of one recent critique of higher education, but leaders in self-reflection, compassion, and service.

In order to fulfill such aspirations, we need to have a common understanding of excellence. Each year, we recruit new faculty, and occasionally new deans. I am concerned about how we introduce these new members of the campus community to our notion of excellence. This concern is not unique to Adelphi. How does any campus which recruits faculty from many universities around the world explain and orient new members to local standards and criteria for an “A”, or any other grade?

How do we ensure that the standards for reappointment, tenure, and promotion are understood? For these decisions, we often refer to the “Boyer Model of Scholarship” articulated by the late Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, who sought to distinguish between and among the scholarship of Discovery, Integration, Application, and Teaching. Unfortunately, there often are multiple ways of understanding each form of scholarship. We don’t want to be too precise, and limit the use of judgment, but we do need to give more explicit guidance.

As we think about Purpose, Promises, and Progress, let us consider a key to Adelphi’s strength, its character. Students are known by their name and know us. Students say that we have great teaching even as they say that other campuses do not and that still others are large, cold, and impersonal. Students here can have the complete collegiate experience, no matter where their pillow is located. These are among the attributes of competitive advantage. Students tell me this is true, and we owe it to them to do all we can to prepare them for life beyond this campus, whether they are 17-year old freshmen or senior citizens wanting to add meaning to their lives. After all, while we cannot propose to teach them everything, we can promise to help them prepare to learn anything and be the authors of their own scripts.

TMTM

“TMTM”. Ten months that matter. Ten months that matter to you, to me, to us. While every month and every year matters, of course, the next ten months have special meaning for each of us individually and for all of us collectively.

For you, the search for a new president may bring a sense of uncertainty, a period of concern. I would not overdo this. Adelphi is in very good shape; it should attract well-qualified candidates, and the search committee and the Board of Trustees are committed to doing what is best for the University. I urge you to follow the search, suggest candidates, and participate actively in the process when you can, certainly when candidates are brought to campus. Continue to do your

part in fulfilling the goals of AU2015, because surely candidates will want to know how we are doing.

For me, the consideration of these ten months is daunting. There is so much to do in securing our gains, achieving our goals, and fulfilling our prospects. We need to complete our scholarship campaign, “Sustaining the Promise”; achieve our goals for adult and graduate enrollment, making sure that our degree and certificate programs are not too long and not too short, but are “just right” for this competitive marketplace; sustain our “A” rating with Standard & Poor’s; continue to increase the number of course sections taught by full-time faculty; complete the Nexus Building and Welcome Center, with underground parking and related renovations, on time and under budget; update the facilities master plan, keeping in mind our desires to bring Derner faculty together in one building and to create a proper Student Union; continue to increase the number of students participating in internships; and continue to increase the rate of alumni participation in annual support.

Internships are essential and should be universal. Students thrive academically when they study that for which they have a passion. An internship can help them prepare for life after study.

Our belief in the importance of internships and preparing for further study, careers, and life is so great that these services will be at the front door in the new complex being built west of Levermore Hall.

We also need to complete our application for American Chemical Society accreditation and keep all other accreditations up-to-date. In doing so, we will continue to discuss and refine our common understanding of excellence in teaching, learning, scholarship, and service.

During these months I also will be planning my sabbatical year, when Carole and I will travel and I will write with pen and camera. I will do what I can to help Adelphi and prepare for my return as a member of this faculty.

I also will be collecting memories: my last freshman move-in day; my last Matriculation ceremony; my last Commencement.

Conclusion

During the next ten months, we will continue our work together, and together we will ensure the foundation for a new beginning - - a new beginning for you, for Adelphi, and for me.

Thank you for the privilege of serving this institution for which so many have given the best years of their lives.