

## State of the College

28 September 2010

Members of the CLA Community,

Welcome to the 2010-11 academic year. I am especially pleased to welcome those of you who are joining the Assembly for the first time, as well as those of you who may be returning for your second year or for a new term. The work of the Assembly has become increasingly important during this watershed moment in higher education, and I am very grateful for your generous agreement to serve. I am also delighted to welcome the 23 new tenured, tenure-track, contract, and visiting faculty to our gathering this afternoon. We are very pleased that you have chosen to work at the University of Minnesota, and we look forward to your contributions to the academic life of our college.

Autumn is a season of renewal and anticipation, and this fall semester will be fraught with change. We are all anticipating the changes that might ensue upon the election of a new governor for our state, and we are even more anxious about the outcome of the search for a new president for the University of Minnesota. The

past two academic years have been unprecedented in the history of higher education since the end of the Second World War: the fiscal challenges for higher education have been enormous as the “education bubble” (Taylor) has burst; mandates formulated in better economic times remain underfunded or not funded at all; and ambitions for future growth or institutional advancement have been postponed, in some cases indefinitely. State support for public higher education continues to decline—a downward trajectory that began well over a decade ago, and public institutions, such as the University of Minnesota, are facing the need for greater fiscal prudence, if not austerity, and circumspect, targeted academic planning and investment.

The prospect of a new governor and of a new University president can raise expectations that higher education will be better funded by the state than in the past, and that the hardships of the past 24 months can dissipate almost as quickly as they arose. And indeed I, too, hope that the next governor will take a very close look at higher education, and realize the significance of having an internationally renowned public research university committed to education, innovative research, and outreach almost in our backyard. But even with the best intentions, the new governor will need, initially at least, to address the projected \$5.8 billion (dollar) deficit for the next biennium, almost 20% of our state’s operating budget, and the

results of any re-examination of higher education in Minnesota are still at least a biennium, or two, away. The National Bureau of Economic Research may have declared last week that the recession was officially over in June 2009 (remember that the NBER identified its origins in December 2007), but unemployment is painfully high and public support for higher education is stagnant or falling. Funding for public higher education is unlikely to increase, and given that our institutional costs have recently risen at the rate of roughly \$40M per year, even if no new investments are made, public institutions will need to be confident in their mission and ensure that the funds are present to deliver on their highest priorities.

The economic downturn of the past 24 months has generated a plethora of books and articles about higher education and the current “crisis” in which it finds itself. We read almost daily about the need to “save alma mater,” about the myriad ways in which higher education is failing its students, both undergraduate and graduate, about leveraged overspending in higher education and the lack of discipline among University leaders that has created a fiscal crisis akin to the collapse of the housing market, and about the very real possibility that some higher educational institutions, especially small liberal arts colleges, may actually fail. The average cost of four years in college has increased 202% at a time when the consumer price increase rose only 80% and the rate is even higher at private

institutions. Spiraling tuition increases have won few allies for higher education in state houses and in Congress, and the ever-increasing student debt—the national average is now \$22,000 and growing for an undergraduate—has alienated both families and the general public. Despite the well-documented socio-economic advantages that await those with a four-year college education, families are beginning to question the value of a degree, especially in the current weakened job market.

There is a growing anger in the general public that public universities, especially public research universities, have become too large, too bloated, and have lost a sense of the centrality of the educational mission as they increase tuition to replace the state dollars that are no longer there. Questions are being raised about the quality of the education that is being provided, about the amount of teaching and advising that the faculty provide, and there are repeated calls for assessments of students and teachers to be sure that colleges and universities are actually delivering their academic programs well. With the new emphasis on deliverables and a vocational approach to undergraduate education, it is becoming increasingly difficult to justify the intrinsic value of the liberal arts as fields worth studying in depth, and some institutions among our CIC and R1 peers have been

jettisoning foreign language and humanities majors and graduate programs—even successful ones of strong quality--with a disturbing frequency.

In this understandably anxious environment, it is vitally important that we know who we are, what the values are that influence the decisions that we need to make, where we are going, and how we plan to get there. Very few higher educational institutions have actually developed a firm sense of direction in the so-called “new normal” besetting our universities: everyone can agree that there are fewer resources than in the past but it has been difficult for most to engage in the kind of radical rethinking that is necessary for academic advancement. Change is an intrinsic quality in any creative undertaking, and though change may be unsettling, it should be welcomed as a necessary process to realize our most ambitious plans for improving the intellectual life and the education of our students in the college.

So what kind of change are we talking about? As you all know, we have been engaged in a year-long planning process, CLA 2015, announced in last year’s State of the College address, that has engaged some thirty colleagues, staff, and students in imagining the future of our college. Their interim report that appeared last spring received much attention both inside and outside the university, and engendered several conversations in our college among faculty, staff, and students

that have continued over the summer. I would anticipate that there will be even more robust conversations that follow upon the issuing of the final report in late October.

The work of the 2015 planning committee under the steady leadership of Associate Dean for Planning Gary Oehlert and Professor Chris Uggen, chair of Sociology and of this year's Council of Chairs, has not been easy. There are several key points about which its members disagree, but a consensus is emerging around several of its final recommendations. I knew when I appointed the members of the committee that several shared opposing views, and I wanted to ensure that a range of opinions would be presented. We are a very diverse college, and our diversity is, in fact, one of our strengths. We are also a college in which discussion and debate is encouraged among all of our members, and I do not consider it in any way disadvantageous to have opportunities to share our opinions cogently and frankly.

I also know that there is considerable anxiety in the college about the steps that we will take once the recommendations of the 2015 committee have been received. Debate and disagreement are welcome, but once the views have been fully aired, decisions will be made. Please rest assured that ample time will be given as we move through the implementation process for conflicting opinions to

be heard, and our own collegiate governance process, the Budget Advisory Committee, the Curriculum, Instruction & Advising committee, and the Assembly, will have to vote on any significant changes to academic programs, both undergraduate and graduate, before they can be forwarded to the central administration for further review and final approval by the Board of Regents. We will move forward expeditiously with specific proposals, but not all changes that we may wish to make can be realized within a single academic year. I named the process CLA 2015 to connote what we are working towards, and what we want to be by 2015, in the full realization that it would take two to three years for proposed changes to be reviewed, modified, accepted or abandoned, and ultimately put into effect.

As we move forward with our strategic planning for 2015, we need to bear in mind several external and internal forces that will set the boundaries within which our conversations will unfold. Some of these factors can be addressed directly, and others cannot, but we need to be aware of these forces and act accordingly. I have already spoken about the sobering landscape of public higher education for the foreseeable future, but there are additional challenges for us in the liberal arts. The liberal arts, especially the humanities, do not rank among the most popular fields of study, and fewer than half of all undergraduates in the

United States major in the liberal arts. Only 4% of college graduates major in English; only 2% in history, and those numbers are declining. We do have some of the most populous majors for American undergraduates in our college, namely, psychology, communication studies, and journalism and mass communication, and about 35% of our students plan on a career in the health sciences. In the current economic environment, students and their families are understandably steering towards vocational or professional majors and seeking a return on the sizeable investment that they are making in higher education. This does not mean that we focus our college on just a few programs, or programs with a clear vocational outcome, but we need to be aware of the realities with which our students are wrestling and the difficulties we will have in speaking, as we must do, about the foundational role of liberal arts in undergraduate education. In many of our fields, we do not measure the research and educational outcomes by the products that we create and bring to market, or the patents that we secure, but by preparing our students to think about thinking; to reflect on what it means to be a human being; to understand their place in their communities, both local and global; to reflect on their origins; and on their relationship to the social, economic, political and religious institutions within which they will live out their lives. In the liberal arts, broadly defined to include arts and sciences, one can learn about the relationship between humankind and the animal world, and the nature of life as well as its

meaning. Where colleagues in other colleges explore the best way to discuss climate change and its environmental impact in China, in CLA we also say learn Chinese; where colleagues elsewhere promote sustainable agriculture, we also say listen carefully to indigenous populations and their customs. Where colleagues elsewhere speak of leadership training, best business practices, and responsible government, we steer them towards psychology, moral philosophy, and political science. We know all of this already, and I am sure that you can each think of many other examples where the education that we provide, and the research we do, are essential for success in other fields. But such advantages are not immediately apparent to the 18-year-olds arriving in Dinkytown each September—after all, they never really heard about the liberal arts in high school though they may have unknowingly studied them—and shame on us if our graduating seniors still cannot explain the value of the liberal arts. We need to do a much better job in communicating to the external community about the value of the arts, humanities, and social sciences, especially in our secondary schools. We need to do a much better job in educating our students throughout their undergraduate careers about the virtues of a liberal education, and make clear both to internal and external audiences about the liberal arts as essential to a well-lived life, especially, but not exclusively, in a complex democratic society.

I have spoken so far about the external challenges but there are also internal audiences who need to be reminded of the central role of our college at this University. No other college at the University has as many NRC-ranked programs as CLA. (Just today we learned that [9 or 10] of our 22 ranked graduate programs are deemed by peers to be among the top 25% in the nation.) No other college educates undergraduate and graduate students on the scale that we do, no other college represents *in nuce* the breadth and diversity of the University, and no other college contains all the elements of what the University calls a “liberal education” with its accompanying myriad of requirements. It cannot be stated frequently enough that without a strong College of Liberal Arts, the University of Minnesota cannot maintain its stature as a leading public research university. But the economic downturn and the resulting fiscal allocations have taken a high toll on our college.

The CLA constitution provides that the dean report annually on the state of the college, an injunction that encompasses both its fiscal and academic health. Thanks to the efforts of all departmental leaders, their faculties and their staff, and the extraordinary efforts of the people in CLA administration, especially Chief Financial Officer Karen Dewanz and her team, we are entering fiscal year 2011 with a balanced operating budget, but the cost of this balancing act has impaired

the academic well-being of the college and the morale of its employees. In the current biennium, our college has suffered reductions in the number of faculty and staff, our ability to educate and advise our undergraduate students has been diminished, our ability to fund our graduate students adequately and competitively has declined, and our ability to fund the necessary infrastructure to support our work has resulted in increased workload for the colleagues who remain. We have been constrained to do more with less, and to postpone plans for programmatic development and faculty growth in targeted areas for the foreseeable future, and we are no longer able to support our students or our faculty at the now seemingly bounteous level of just three years ago.

As the largest college at the University with a recurring annual budget in FY11 of \$221M, one might expect that the reductions that have been imposed on us by the central administration would be large. But as the new fiscal year begins, we can also clearly see that we have sustained the largest reduction of any college since FY08, and that we are currently the only college with substantially fewer resources in FY11 than we had in FY08. In effect, we have \$3.5M fewer recurring dollars in the college, a decrease of 2.5% in the funds that we can control, that is, in the funds that we are not obliged to pay for central services such as the administration, the library, student services, utilities, debt service, etc. We have

lost the capacity to fund up to 60 faculty lines, to provide much needed funding for our graduate programs, to staff undergraduate student services in the optimal way, and to prevent our undergraduate student-faculty ratio, which has always been high, from reaching 28:1. Tuition increases for our in-state undergraduate students may have been temporally reduced, thanks to stimulus funding, for FY10 and FY11, but the reality of the 15% tuition increase that has occurred in FY10 and FY11 will impact our resident undergraduates fully in 2011-12. Almost 60% of the undergraduates at the University are receiving some form of financial assistance, but costs are rising faster than the students' ability to pay. The average debt load of our graduating seniors has increased to \$25,000 on average, and approximately 65% of our students are financing their studies on borrowed funds. Tuition increases for graduate students have raised graduate fringe rates to a stunning 105%, limiting our ability to hire teaching and research assistants, and further impairing our ability to provide competitive graduate student support. Because we rely on tuition to cover over 70% of our operating expenses, and the amount of debt that our undergraduates currently carry, many of our core operations are actually funded by the borrowed money of our undergraduates. Given this reality, it is incumbent on us to continue to provide our students with an outstanding educational experience, but the diminution of resources over the past two fiscal years has made this task especially difficult.

It is not my purpose this afternoon, in reviewing the harsh fiscal realities that our students are confronting, to establish a platform for railing against macroeconomic circumstances that are largely outside our control. But our size and centrality to the University's educational mission gives us basis for arguing for no further erosion to our operational base. You can be sure that I will continue to advocate forcefully for our college, that I will remind the administration that their success is in large measure dependent on our academic success, and that every distinguished comprehensive research University has multiple programs of national and international distinction across the liberal arts. In advancing these necessary arguments, however, we need to make clear that, as a college, we are working together to effect change, and we need to demonstrate that the changes we are making will enable us to thrive with fewer resources. Despite the current grimness of the economic reality, we must be engaged in the collective project of strengthening the academic core of our college and University. Things have changed all around us, and amidst the remains of the ambitiously broad, publicly funded multiuniversities of the past 50 years, we need to work collaboratively in shaping the new paradigm for higher education for this decade and beyond. We can no longer afford to wait for the "market" to spring back, for students to discover on their own the centrality of the liberal arts, for undergraduates to embrace majors without considering job prospects, nor can we wait for new

academic jobs to open up for our Ph.D.'s in fields where the tenured/ tenure-track positions have been declining markedly for decades. This is a very exciting time to be in higher education, for no single institution has yet decided on the best way to advance academically with fewer resources. Now that the moment of “negative panic” in which most universities have been too paralyzed to act has sufficiently passed, it is our collective responsibility to acknowledge that the ways in which we conduct research, educate our students, and fulfill our public service obligations have irrevocably changed.

So how are we going to do our work differently in the new educational environment? How are we going to educate and advise our students better, how are we going to support the creativity of our faculty and staff, and how are we going to realize our public outreach commitments? Such ambitions can best be realized through collaboration, through the realization that our college is a collective not just a departmental enterprise, and through matching our professional interdisciplinary proclivities with our daily institutional lives. We should not limit our strategic planning to undertakings that will advance the academic aspirations of just a few departments at the expense of seeding new initiatives in others—a zero-sum game. We need to be able to support and build academic strength through

innovation across several fields in which additional investment promises significant intellectual and educational benefit.

I have presented a sobering view of the current landscape in higher education and challenges that await us both inside and outside our University. The solutions are by no means easy, but I am confident that through our collective efforts, we can effect the necessary changes. This past academic year we worked together to identify a solution to resolve the \$1.4M deficit we had at the beginning of FY10 in order to complete the entirety of our \$11.9M reduction. Faculty, staff, and students worked together to mount a highly successful campaign, after many disappointments in the past, to secure the funding for the renovation of Folwell Hall, a change that will provide a new home for our foreign language and literature departments, and classrooms equipped with the latest technology to serve our students better. I am confident of our ability to change wisely and creatively because of the continuing engagement of our faculty and staff in the 2015 planning process, both at the college and departmental level, because of the new ideas that repeatedly surface through my conversations and meetings with faculty, departments, administrators, and our support staff. I am inspired by the abiding commitment of our alumni to the college and by the many donors whose financial

support of the college, even at these most difficult times, continues to provide much needed aid for our students, faculty, and academic programs.

During the past academic year, we have taken several steps to advance the college academically while limiting the negative impact of the fiscal shortfall on our students and programs. Despite fiscal hardships, we have been able to retain most of our outstanding faculty who were being aggressively recruited by other institutions last year (6 out of 8 retentions were successful). Our University's hiring pause remains in effect, but in the absence of a complete freeze, we have been able to hire 16 new tenured/ tenure-track faculty, many of whom we are welcoming here today, and rethink and fill several key staff positions that provide essential academic and administrative support. This current academic year, we are searching for 14 new tenure-track faculty, but in doing so, we are encouraging greater interdepartmental cooperation whenever possible and taking aggressive steps to increase the diversity of our faculty through partnering with the central Office for Equity and Diversity on a postdoctoral program that leads to a tenure-track position in our college. Collaborations this past year with the Korea Foundation and with our own Minnesota Population Center enabled the hiring of two new tenure-track faculty, and such collaborations will be essential to maintaining the strength of our faculty in the future. We have also been working

hard to devise new ways to foster interdisciplinarity among collegiate units as well as with cross-collegiate partners. These efforts are reflected in the faculty and post-doctoral positions that we are seeking to fill this year as well as in new initiatives such as the Internal Faculty Visitors Program.

We have also made significant progress in managing the cost of delivering our curriculum and providing access to necessary courses for our students so they can complete their degrees in a timely fashion. Thanks to the joint efforts of several collegiate offices (Undergraduate Programs and CLA Fiscal) and the hard work of Associate Dean Jennifer Windsor, Assistant Dean Nanette Hanks, Assistant Director Pandora Aaron, and our department chairs and undergraduate directors, the college has worked closely with each academic unit to provide the requisite instructional funding for each to manage responsibly. By tightening the number of courses and reducing the number of low-enrolled classes, the college has been able to conserve its limited resources and redirect excess funds to areas with unmet student demand.

The power of collaboration has also informed the new approach that the college has been taking, under the leadership of Associate Dean for Faculty Richa Nagar and Assistant Dean Evelyn Davidheiser, toward internationalization in the college. As many of you know, the college has maintained several programs for

exchanging faculty and graduate students, chiefly with institutions in the global north, and those opportunities have resulted in closer intellectual partnerships and new research initiatives. In contrast, the college has, to date, established few relationships with institutions in the global south, except through our participation in the University's Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change, and we are now seeking the best way to forge lasting reciprocal relationships with them. Instead of following the traditional path of internationalization in which American universities share their expertise in a unidirectional manner helping institutions in the south to learn from northern partners, we aim to build relationships that allow for an equal, reciprocal exchange of ideas from both sides. In the year ahead, the college will be exploring the development of pedagogical practices that would buttress these mutually supportive exchanges as we identify a small network of partners with whom deep relationships can be established.

The CLA 2015 planning process has understandably dominated the strategic discussions among colleagues across and within departments. But in addition to the important work of this group, working committees have also been established to encourage collaboration across several units. This summer I convened a group of faculty from across the departments engaged in teaching foreign languages, literatures, and cultures to re-examine the number and structure of our foreign

language programs and the best way to move foreign language study from an end in itself to an integral part of an undergraduate's mastery of a specific field.

Secondly, we invited all research centers that focus on Europe to rethink their administrative infrastructure so that funding could be freed up for broadening partnerships with institutions abroad and reimagining European studies in the college. Thirdly, we asked our ethnic studies departments and programs to collaborate on shaping a common intellectual agenda that would foster stronger ties between them without compromising their distinctive identities, and that would more deeply embed their work into research and teaching across the college and University.

This fall, I will convene a broad set of colleagues to devise a plan for advancing the humanities in the college at both the undergraduate and graduate level. The humanities and, to a certain extent, the arts have been particularly endangered by the decline in funding for higher education. Undergraduate enrollments in many areas, especially literature and history, have been declining, resulting in a shrinking market for Ph.D.'s in these fields. Graduate funding for our most competitive programs has long been a challenge in CLA, especially in the humanities, and the gap between our elite competitors with their multiple-year fellowships and generous assistantships has reduced our ability to recruit the best

students. This past recruiting season was particularly unsatisfactory, and prospective students declined our offers, though they desired to study at Minnesota, because funding was simply inadequate. We are still placing the majority of our graduate students in the humanities in academic positions, but we need to be thinking too of the best way to prepare humanities Ph.D.'s for non-academic opportunities as well, given the further narrowing of the market.

As an R1 college, we remain committed to supporting and strengthening graduate education, but until this summer, responsibility for graduate education had been divided between the Graduate School and our college. As of 1 July 2010, we have assumed responsibility for oversight of our graduate programs and for providing student services support in much the same manner as we support our undergraduates. As a result of the decentralizing of the administrative functions of the Graduate School, we are in the process of establishing our own collegiate infrastructure for supporting graduate programs. We have much experience already in establishing systems for undergraduate students that are so effective that central administration has adapted them for the University. Our enrollment tracking system for monitoring the academic progress of our 14,500 undergraduates, designed by the CLA Student Services team has received major internal awards, and is now used for all undergraduates. There is no doubt that we have

exceptionally creative staff in the college to design an optimal system to support graduate education, and Associate Dean Jo-Ida Hansen is working closely with Directors of Graduate Study and graduate program assistants to build the new structure. As we enter the recruitment season for the fall 2011 cohort of graduate students, we anticipate final decisions from the central administration about the disposition of the fellowship and block grants funds that had previously resided in the Graduate School.

I have spoken so far about some of the changes that have occurred in 2009-10 and the plans that are currently underway to effect further improvements in future. But as we look forward over the next three-to-five years, there are much more profound changes on the horizon for higher education, many of which have been, or will be, facilitated by technological innovation. Some of us can still remember the arrival of email in the late 1980's and of the Internet and global search engines in the mid-1990's, and the significant ways in which these innovations transformed research and teaching in many fields. Today we stand once again at a transformative moment. No one was on Facebook five years ago, and until 2007 social networking was confined to live conversations at parties or conferences. For-profit online universities, such as the University of Phoenix and Cappella, now enroll over a million students, up from 50,000 in 2001. In 2002, 9%

of all higher education enrollments were online; five years later in 2007, 22% of all enrollments are delivered online, and given the rising cost of brick-and-mortar higher education, this trend is very likely to continue.

Our incoming freshmen class of 2,500 students this year, one of our best prepared classes academically, cannot remember a time before the internet and the web, and we need to be sensitive to the effect that this technology has had on their academic lives. Just last week, the *New York Times* reported on the ways in which the Apple iPad was designed to replace the traditional textbook, and at least one college at the U is considering iPads for all of its students.

We all know about these technological advances, and many of us have already enhanced our teaching through implementing WebVista and Moodle, and using the CLA-OIT-designed Media Mill and Digital Content Library. Both Media Mill and the Digital Content Library are currently used across the University of Minnesota system, and usage is increasing at an annual rate of 50%. But there are many more changes on the horizon. The changing media for the delivery of classes and the facilitation of research and teaching will set the stage for collaboration and collaborative rethinking of academic programs. We need to consider the key differences between face-to-face, blended, and online instruction; we need to be open to the ways in which different media of instruction may also change the way

in which our teaching and advising will take place; we need be constantly thinking about the way in which technology can create hitherto unimagined opportunities for our students, for the ways in which we do research as individuals, and the way in which we collaborate across the University, our University system, and with colleagues at institutions world-wide. In other words, the technological changes that have occurred and that are currently underway will push us into a world where collaboration and networks define the nature of the work that we do; where boundaries between disciplines and subfields will become more porous than before and, and where institutions may profit more through collaboration rather than an exhausting competition for ever fewer resources. Are we ready for a world where graduate education may take place across a network of departments and institutions offering a broad but complementary curriculum; where students around the table hail from five or more institutions; where such events are commonplace rather than an exception? This is not shotgun collaboration, or collaboration that arises from economic constraints, or collaboration as a temporary fix before higher education returns to the golden years of the mid-1960's when funding was seemingly abundant and inexhaustible. We are talking about a systemic change that will over the next 5-10 years change the paradigm for the delivery of higher education, and the relationship between higher educational institutions. (Consider, for example, the possible changes within our own U of Minnesota system, or

between the U and Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, or between public and private colleges and universities in Minnesota.) We are talking about increased access to higher education, about global networks of universities, about expansion of learning across one's lifetime and across generations. We are talking about higher learning across global populations on a scale unimaginable today—but unimaginable in the same way that the popular use of the Internet was in 1990.

The idea of collaboration is fundamental to the kind of the transformative, systemic changes that may be possible in the decade ahead. Collaboration has led to some of the most unexpected discoveries in science and technology in the recent past, and then as now, collaboration is essential for knowledge production and institutional change. As a college we have gained much through local collaborations and alliances. Through our long-standing collaboration with the research department of the Minneapolis Federal Reserve, Minnesota's Department of Economics and its macroeconomic theorists have garnered international acclaim. Our 10-year BFA collaboration with the Guthrie Theater has attracted students from across the country and prepared them in superlative fashion for professional careers from California to New York. Several new conversations in CLA are grounded in collaborative initiatives across departments, programs, and centers; our arts departments are exploring collaborations with local theatres, K-12

schools, and arts organizations that go beyond internships towards theoretical and practical training that educates the students and advances the work of our extramural partners. With some seed funding from Central administration, we will seek in the coming year to establish coordinated programs with selected community colleges in our region to facilitate the transfer of students from two-year to a four-year institution without any loss of time to degree or incursion of additional costs.

We still have many more collaborative opportunities to explore, for example, professional M.A. or M.S. programs that will provide much needed education to professionals already engaged in their careers, or perhaps joint B.A./M.A. degrees or B.A./ professional degrees that will provide a seamless movement, for those who wish it, from undergraduate to professional education in the health sciences, business, or law. We currently have successful professional masters programs in strategic communications, geographic information systems, scientific and technical writing, and in statistics, but there are many other possibilities across other disciplines as well. We may even want to ask—indeed we should not be apprehensive about asking—whether the structure and curricula of some our Ph.D. programs, especially in the humanities, are educating our students in the best possible and most intellectually exciting way. We have been

internationally known for signature graduate programs in the past, such as Comparative Studies in Discourse and Society, and we need to consider what those new signature programs may be that will energize us and our future students.

As I mentioned in the beginning, we are at a watershed moment in American higher education—indeed global higher education—and as a public institution the stakes are higher than before in charting a future course that will advance the intellectual life of our college, stoke the creation of new educational approaches, and relieve the financial burden on our students and their families. Our graduate and undergraduate students are looking to us to shape a future for them in which they will have the necessary knowledge and tools to lead productive and fulfilling postgraduate lives. To be sure, the challenges may at times seem daunting, but our commitment to the advancement of knowledge, to creating ever more exciting intellectual journeys for ourselves and our students will sustain us through the difficult tasks of choosing the best course and realizing our most daring ambitions. Not to change is not an option: just as stagnation in research results in mediocrity and activity without accomplishment, so too will an unwillingness to participate in institutional change retard our ability to educate our students with imagination and verve. There is a challenging time to be in higher education, and we owe it to ourselves, our colleagues, our students, and our community to deliver on our core

mission, the education of students. No single person has all the answers to the current crisis in higher education, and the problems that beset each institution are unique to specific circumstance, but through our collective efforts, we have the ability to transform our college in ways that will strengthen and promote the foundational role of the liberal arts in Minnesota.

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