

State of the College

22 September 2009

Members of the CLA Community,

I am delighted to welcome you to the start of 2009/10 academic year, and I am especially pleased to welcome the new members of the Assembly to this important collegiate body and the 10 new tenured and tenure-track faculty, and the 10 contract, visiting, and adjunct faculty to our college and University.

The commencement of a new academic year is traditionally a moment fraught with anticipation about new classes and the projects to be undertaken over the next nine months. For many of us in the academy, late summer and early autumn witness a quickening of our spirits in the face of new students, new colleagues, or looming deadlines for those many fall conferences, workshops, and performances that seemed so distant some six or seven months ago when the invitations were first extended and accepted. Such rituals are both energizing and comforting, a joyful acquiescence in our pursuit of academic excellence, and despite the anxiety of facing unfamiliar students for the first time, or effecting the timely completion of a manuscript or composition, we celebrate the renewal of, and our commitment to, our educational community.

As some of you know, autumn is my favorite season, and I cannot resist extolling the pleasures of fall at the start of each academic year, and especially on today, the first day of season. But this year our nostalgia for the rituals of autumn is tempered by the sobering economic realities that beset higher education in 2008/09, not only in Minnesota but across the country, and whose aftershocks are still being felt. As I addressed this Assembly last September, the imminent collapse of Lehmann Brothers and other leading financial institutions was occurring, and our national and eventual global descent into a deep recession, unparalleled since the Great Depression, was unfolding with unprecedented rapidity before us. This year the threat of H1N1 has arisen, an illness whose magnitude is still unknown, but whose effect on the lives of our students, faculty, and staff may be profound. Many of us are painfully aware of the personal consequences of the economic downturn, and we are well informed through our academic networks about the experiences of colleagues, faculty, and staff, at other institutions across the country, and the increased financial hardships that our undergraduate and graduate students are experiencing. Since the economic upheaval of last fall, we read almost weekly about sharp declines in endowment income, the downsizing of faculty and staff, the closing of academic departments and programs, the halting of new hiring, the mothballing of capital improvement projects, double-digit pay cuts, and mandatory furloughs for faculty and staff. To

offset the decline in endowment income or the dramatic reduction in state funding for higher education, as we have experienced in Minnesota, tuition is rising annually from 5% - 10% or even higher, increases that many of us have been able to mitigate at least for some 24 months thanks to the economic stimulus money that we have received. Stimulus money is most welcome, but it is only a brief respite for our students before the challenges ahead, especially in Minnesota, not so much for the current biennium of FY10 and FY11, but more pointedly for FY12 and FY13.

Higher education in the United States, both private and public, is at a significant turning point, and the steps that will be taken over the next 18-24 months will determine the long-range fiscal health and academic excellence of many institutions. This 18-24 month timeframe is especially pertinent to the state of Minnesota and to our University, for current projections for the state's budget shortfall for the next three fiscal years waver between \$4 and \$7 billion dollars (roughly 15% of the state's total budget). In such a climate, there will likely be a decrease in the amount of state funding that is allocated to the University, and, in turn, a decline in the amount for funding available for the academic collegiate units. We have already been informed that we should plan for further reductions between 1% and 3% in the near term. In light of these challenges, we need to engage now and throughout the 2009/10 academic year in thoughtful planning for

our college to ensure the continued distinction of our most outstanding programs and to support emerging areas of academic strength.

During the past academic year, as the severity of the recession became increasingly apparent, all collegiate units were instructed by the University administration to prepare for cuts at the 5% and 8% level. At the end of the academic year, we were informed that our FY10 reduction would be 5.2%, a reduction of \$11.9 million on an annual operating budget of \$230 million. This reduction followed an unallotment of previously allocated funds for FY09 of \$1.5 million. In effect, our total reduction at the beginning of FY10 amounted to \$13.4 million. We realized this reduction by retrenching \$6.1 million in open faculty lines; by reductions in the academic departments and schools of \$2.3 million (about 5% for each unit), and in CLA administration of \$1.2 million. We also expended our tuition reserve of almost \$1 million dollars, and we are in the process of identifying a remaining \$1.4 million for FY10 to complete the 5.2% reduction.

During this past spring, there were opportunities across the college and University for faculty and staff to participate in open town-hall style meetings. As the magnitude of the projected reductions sunk in, one CLA colleague asked pointedly what would be different between March and September of 2009. Prescience in the face of so much uncertainty was difficult that afternoon, but let

me recapitulate some of the differences, both positive and negative, between last year and the present.

This fall we welcomed one of our strongest and most academically prepared incoming classes of first-year students. We exceeded our projected target of 2,650 incoming freshmen by about 40 students, and welcomed our largest cohort of international and transfer students to the college, a number about 8% higher than expected. Almost 20% of our incoming students are students of color. We also matriculated 370 new graduate students across the college, and, in a few moments, our new faculty will be introduced.

Our current faculty continued to garner the highest awards in their disciplines, and the most competitive research fellowships. This past year faculty in Cultural Studies and Comparative Literature, Economics, History, Journalism, Psychology, and Theatre Arts received their field's most prestigious honors and honorary degrees. History professor Carla Phillips received a knighthood from Spain, and our 2009 Dean's Medalist, Professor John Freeman, will shortly be inducted as our college's newest member in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Our staff have also been recognized for their outstanding accomplishments, most notably Barbara Frey and Ellen Kennedy for their work in human rights and in holocaust and genocide studies, and the internal awards that our faculty and staff receive attest to the excellence of their teaching and advising

of our students, and their exemplary service to the college and the University community.

These gains have been counterbalanced by some losses. The reduction of 5.2% of the college's recurring funds has affected, and will continue to affect, the number of new faculty that we have been able to hire, has resulted in the consolidation and some reduction in administrative and instructional positions, restrictions in the number of new graduate students, and the contraction of our curriculum without impeding degree progress. The hiring pause that the University initiated last October remains in effect for the current academic year, salaries for all personnel were frozen at FY09 levels, and we are more restricted in our ability to conduct as many searches for needed faculty and staff as we have in the past.

In this new economic climate, it is easy to identify the differences between the previous and current academic year. But it is vitally important for us at this challenging time to reaffirm the core principles that we all share and will continue to uphold regardless of the financial circumstances. We have not wavered at all in our commitment to academic excellence, to the production of transformative ideas, to the creation of new knowledge, and modes of innovative performance. We have not wavered at all in our commitment to our graduate students to ensure that they are trained for successful careers as researchers or artists and teachers. We have not wavered at all in our commitment to our undergraduate students that they

understand and benefit from the breadth and depth of the liberal arts, and that they are trained for postgraduate careers of leadership and service. We have not wavered at all in our commitment that academically prepared students will have access to higher education in our college and increased financial support to realize their highest ambitions. We have not wavered at all in our commitment to diversity broadly defined across national, racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual boundaries, and to our belief that creativity and excellence thrive in a diverse community. We have not wavered at all in our commitment to public service, to bringing our college to a wide range of external communities, and to sharing our expertise in ways that will educate, inspire, and advance the people of our state and region. In sort, we have not wavered at all in our commitment to ensure that the academic quality of our college thrives, that the distinction of our faculty grows, and that the education we provide will make us a regional and national destination for talented and diverse students.

These are lofty words and they may seem contradictory to the financial exigencies within which we are now constrained to operate. Nonetheless, I believe that we need to remind ourselves, especially in moments of financial crisis, about the principles that we espouse. It is our line-in-the-sand: We will not act in a fashion that vitiates academic excellence, that accepts mediocrity, that retards students' academic progress, that compromises the rigor and competitiveness of

our academic programs. Yes, I know it's hard, and yes, I know that at the end of the day when the tough choices need to be made that we may not always agree. Debate and dialogue are deeply inscribed into the liberal arts, and I expect the members of our community not to be silent, not to be passive, but to be engaged interlocutors in the difficult discussions that we will need to undertake. You may even remind me at a future date about these principles after a particular decision has been made with which you disagree. What we must agree about, however, is excellence. I will do whatever I can to ensure that we have the resources to realize our highest aspirations for this college, and to retain as much of our recurring resources as we can in the face of mandated reductions.

So in the face of an austere economic environment, what are our ambitions for the year ahead? We are at a turning point in higher education, especially in public higher education, and it is unclear what higher education will look like after the current fiscal tempest subsides. This uncertainty should not be a moment of intellectual retrenchment but rather of intellectual engagement. Rather than to speak about the reductions that we might be constrained to make for the next fiscal year, I would rather speak about the vision for the college not in FY11 or in the next biennium, but on the other side of the next biennium in 2015. The question we need to ask ourselves: What do we want our college to look like? How will the principles I spoke about a few moments ago manifest themselves in academic

practice? What are new ideas that we wish to advance and realize, and what current practices should be changed, reduced, or eliminated? How will we need to change as a college to meet the needs of our emerging student population? Will we have to adjust the way we teach to be more cognizant of the way in which students learn, or think differently about the ways in which faculty balance their teaching with their research and creative work? And, assuming a general consensus about our principles and goals, how will we finance our plan and eventually know that we have succeeded?

Last month the department chairs and the college administration began a series of conversations about future strategic directions for the college. In particular, we considered the collegiate strategic plan of 2006/07 and its future. There was general agreement that the plan contained many fine ideas, some of which had been realized, or were in the planning stages, but that many areas needed modification, especially in light of the changed economic circumstances. This fall, using the best ideas of the 2006/07 strategic plan as a starting point, we will initiate a broad conversation in the college with faculty, students, and staff about the strategic directions for the college that manifest our core principles and that are consonant with the economic realities of the next three-to-five years. (I invite the members of this Assembly to participate in these discussions as well.) We will have to ask ourselves some very hard questions, for example, about the

right size of our college, the ideal number of faculty and non-tenured instructors, the number of graduate programs and the most effective way to support graduate education, and the quality of the undergraduate educational experience.

In order for our college-wide conversation to succeed, we will need to come together as a collegiate community and not as a set of widely different departments, disciplines, and interdisciplines. This will be hard work: it's hard to think departmentally beyond one's own research and teaching duties, and it's even harder to think collegiately beyond the departmental boundaries. We will need to suspend our natural inclination to think primarily about what might benefit a single department, school, or center, and plan collaboratively for programs that might benefit multiple sets of colleagues in CLA and across the University. The renown of the college must rest not just on the distinguished work on colleagues in a small number of fields, but on the work of scholars, researchers, and artists who bring luster to a broader set of departments and schools. We will need to consider faculty and staff hires that not only strengthen the core disciplines but that reflect emerging intellectual directions through joint appointments between departments, especially within the college.

Our strategic planning for CLA 2015 is only one of the many tasks before us. We also need to re-examine the role of the liberal arts in undergraduate education at Minnesota, the nature of the undergraduate experience in CLA, and

determine innovative strategies for building the national reputation of our undergraduate program. Let me begin with a fundamental observation: There is no distinguished university in the United States that does not have a distinguished faculty, outstanding graduate programs, *and* exceptional undergraduate education. I will speak shortly about graduate education and the faculty, but for the moment, I would like to address the issues that need to be addressed to strengthen our undergraduate education. We have much work to do in this area, but let me begin with a statement of fact and a challenge. For many years, the operations of this college—its hiring of faculty and staff; its support of faculty research; its support of graduate and undergraduate programs—has been funded in large measure not on dollars received from the state but on undergraduate tuition. And last year, 2008-09, was the first time that funds from tuition dollars outstripped the funding from the state for University as a whole. As state support for higher education has declined—and the prognosis is that it will likely decline even further—the more dependent we become on the funding provided by our undergraduates. Currently about 70% of our operations is funded by tuition dollars, 62% of which comes from the undergraduates, i.e., from their own resources or those of their families, or, increasingly, from the loans that they have secured. Put differently, there are significant portions of our academic enterprise that are funded by the borrowed money of our undergraduates. Some of our undergraduates receive financial aid

directly from the University, from work study or from the limited scholarship support that the college provides. But with the rising cost of tuition, the need for greater financial assistance, larger numbers of scholarships, and grants to replace the loans becomes especially pressing.

Now for the challenge: Given our dependence on undergraduate tuition, we have an obligation to provide our undergraduates with an outstanding educational experience. In many of our classrooms, laboratories, and studios, we already do an exceptional job, and Assistant Dean Chris Kearns and his CLA Student Services team provide invaluable advice at critical moments in a student's intellectual development. Throughout the college, transformative moments do indeed happen between the faculty member and the student when the student discovers the beauty of a complex idea, the interrelationship of several different fields, or a possible career option and the confidence to achieve it. But we can do better. We need more opportunities for our undergraduate students to interact with our faculty, both inside and outside of class; we need significantly more classes taught by tenured/tenure-track faculty than we have currently, especially in high-demand fields. The number of students who complete their CLA education of some 20-25 classes, a quarter of which may have been taught by faculty, is embarrassingly high. We need to streamline our curricula to be sure that students can actually finish their degree at the end of four years. We need to strengthen freshman seminar

opportunities for our undergraduates, and, building on this successful practice, consider ways to provide similar multidisciplinary seminars at the sophomore or junior level. We need to increase the number of internships and service learning opportunities, the number of undergraduate research opportunities, and the opportunities for study abroad, especially for students interested in attaining advanced levels of foreign-language proficiency. We need to engage with the larger Twin Cities community, in both the for-profit and non-profit world, to expand opportunities for our students to explore potential careers. We need to be cognizant of the role that technology plays in enhancing student learning and in the creation of intellectual national and international networks, both formally and informally, and adopt it sensibly, wherever and whenever it can improve the transmission of information and the formation of new knowledge. And we need to enrich the undergraduate experience by providing time and opportunities for faculty to serve as intellectual mentors for undergraduates, both within the major field and during the first and second years. Advanced graduate students on the cusp of entering the professoriate can also play a significant role in mentoring the work of undergraduates.

We also need to do a better job in communicating with our students, both prospective students and those who are already here, about the nature and meaning of the liberal arts. The University of Minnesota has seven freshmen- admitting

colleges, and the names of six of them clearly describe who they are—business; technology; biological sciences; agriculture; design; education—fields that are familiar to most students, especially those who regard higher education as a higher level of vocational training. But there is no subject called the “liberal arts,” and few of our undergraduates actually understand what role our fields play in their education. To be sure, some of our own internal terminology obscures matters further. Students know, for example, that there are University liberal education requirements to fulfill, and they expect to fulfill some of them in our college, but they quickly learn that not all of them can be met here. We need to alleviate this confusion and improve the transmission of our shared belief that the liberal arts have historically been and still are the foundation of all knowledge. We provide the foundation upon which students can build additional knowledge in their chosen undergraduate majors or in their postgraduate careers, be they in business, engineering, education, public service, the health sciences or the other professions. We all know this, but many of our students do not know this while they are here, and we need to provide opportunities inside and outside our classrooms for them to perceive the value of the liberal arts, their foundational role in education, their lasting pertinence in the contemporary world, and their ability to help our students to discover not only what they might do in their postgraduate lives, but what those lives actually mean. This past spring, Associate Dean for Undergraduate

Programs, Jennifer Windsor and I, charged a faculty committee to explore the ways in which the value of a liberal arts education can be made more apparent, and discussed ways in which a liberal arts education in CLA (and at Minnesota) can be regarded as a unique undergraduate experience compared to our peer public institutions. This committee has done outstanding work so far, and their counsel has already started to change our communication strategies. But there is still much work for us all to do.

What about graduate education? The quality of our graduate programs and of our graduate faculty makes Minnesota a national and international destination for outstanding MA and PhD students, and a beacon for talented faculty. This past winter the University initiated significant changes in the administration of graduate education, and the consequences of these changes are still unfolding. Two working groups have recently been formed by the provost to recommend strategies for the improvement of graduate student support services, and of the academic and fiscal administration of graduate education. Although many details of this complex transformation have yet to be determined, the ambition is that the colleges assume greater responsibility for administering graduate programs and ensuring the quality of the graduate student experience. Some of this administrative work may be new in the college—and the financial plan to support it has yet to be determined—but the qualitative oversight of graduate programs and the funding of graduate

education have long been, and will remain, collegiate priorities. Collegiate support of graduate education has historically far exceeded the support emanating from the Graduate School: We provide funds for teaching and research assistantships, for supplementary (“top-off”) fellowships, for summer funding through the Graduate Research Partnership Program, and through small grants in support of dissertation research. Our greatest need in graduate education is adequate financial support for our students, and as we move forward with our strategic planning for the next five years, we will need to examine carefully in what areas support should be continued, reduced, or increased to ensure that programs of distinction have sufficient resources. We will also need to be mindful of, but not governed exclusively by, the market for our doctoral students, especially in fields where demand is contracting, and be sure that the training we provide will prepare them for successful postdoctoral careers in a diverse and rapidly changing academic environment.

Our ambitions for undergraduate and graduate education depend on the quality of our faculty, the research they produce, the new work they create, and the excellence of their teaching and advising. Despite the hiring pause that went into effect last October, the college proceeded with searches for 13 new tenured/tenure-track colleagues for ten departments—considerably fewer than the 42 searches that were initially authorized in the summer of 2008—and, thanks to the

efforts of Associate Dean for Faculty Richa Nagar and her assistant John Blair, we are welcoming some of those new colleagues this afternoon. Three searches that failed in 2008/09 have been re-authorized, and two from 2008/09 are still being negotiated; in addition, we are again searching for 13 new tenured/tenure-track colleagues for nine departments. In each of these cases, the college has sought to act strategically by authorizing searches that (1) ensure the continued distinction of strong departments; (2) support promising departments that are on the cusp of distinction; (3) sustain the academic core of a strong department; (4) build signature undergraduate and graduate programs in academic units with increasing demand; and (5) advance the academic priorities of the college. It is unlikely that the college will conduct as many searches as we did between 1999 and 2007, when 65% of the college's current faculty were recruited at an average rate of 45 searches per year, but we will continue to search for the most promising new colleagues, retain our leading scholar-teachers and artists, and seize opportunities for exceptional appointments.

Let me turn now from the work we have yet to do to the work that we have done during the past academic year. Although we were constrained to realize many reductions, we have continued to advance our college on several fronts the increase of research support, curricular innovations, and the renewal of our infrastructure. We have also initiated a movement to realize savings through creating a

sustainable work environment, and we have continued to seek new resources through philanthropy.

In addition to strategic faculty hires, the college remains committed to supporting the research of the outstanding faculty and staff who are already here. Our college and University will not grow in distinction only through the funding of new hires; we must also support the new and sometimes risky work of our established and valued colleagues. We have appointed a new arts and humanities grant coordinator to our successful grants team, and we are in the process of hiring an additional person to expedite the fiscal and logistical preparation of grants and fellowships. Under Associate Dean Jo-Ida Hansen's leadership in research and graduate education, the number of grant and fellowship applications has increased, as has the number of grants funded and dollars received. Additional resources from the Office of the Vice President for Research have been secured to provide research infrastructure support in the arts, and the Vice President partnered with the college in the remodeling of laboratory space in Speech-Language-and-Hearing Sciences. Brain imaging research continues to thrive, the social and behavioral laboratory and survey services that were opened in 2007 continue to seed the projects of our faculty and graduate students, and the college is currently exploring funding for an EEG laboratory.

We have also moved forward with reexamining the way in which curricula are administered in the college in order to give our departments the creative space to meet the needs of our students and to explore new directions in the discipline. Associate Dean Jennifer Windsor and Assistant Dean of Curriculum Nanette Hanks are piloting a new approach to curricular planning in the college with four academic departments this year, and at least a half-dozen more in 2009/10. New curricular directions are also being explored from technology-enhanced classes to undergraduate minors in the collaborative arts and an undergraduate program in Islamic Studies. A graduate minors in early modern studies has just been established, and proposals are underway for a new graduate minor in Moving Picture Studies and critical dance studies. The newly expanded undergraduate major in religious studies continues to attract increasing numbers of students, and in response to the recommendations of a planning group on the future of linguistics, the college is taking steps towards the elimination of ILES (The Institute for Linguistics, English as a Second Language, and Slavic Languages and Literatures) and replacing that unit with a free-standing Department of Linguistics. We are also working with colleagues from the foreign language departments to create opportunities in selected majors for students to attain higher levels of foreign language proficiency in their areas of specialization. And Associate Dean Richa Nagar and Assistant Dean for International Studies, Evelyn Davidheiser, just

initiated a series of conversations this year about internationalization and diversity with a long-term aim of building a global network of international institutional partners in the liberal arts that encompass both the global north and global south.

In the past year, the renovation of new space for the Department of History in Heller Hall was completed, and the renovation of the former History space in the Social Sciences Building will shortly end, bringing much needed additional room to the social sciences departments that are housed there. Our major capital project for the upcoming year will be to secure funding from the legislature for the much-needed and long-desired renovation of Folwell Hall, and the creation of new classrooms and office spaces to support research and teaching in foreign languages, literatures, and cultures. And I will ask this Assembly's help in the coming months in conveying to our governor and legislators the importance of this renovation to our college. Associate Dean Gary Oehlert and his assistant Scott Elton have done a magnificent job overseeing these and other complex projects from new student study space on the first-floor of the Social Sciences Building to the creation of a paleoarchaeology laboratory on the fourth floor of Blegen, and they have managed to plan and complete these projects with exemplary fiscal prudence.

The CLA Office of Technology remains one of our most creative teams. Director Ed Clark's talented group of IT professionals continue to provide crucial

support to the research, educational, and administrative work of the college. The success of the Course Transformation Project has provided the necessary space for faculty and our instructional staff to transform many core departmental courses into multimedia voyages of discovery. It is often said that technology, along with facilities and personnel, are the three major cost-drivers of the rising cost in American higher education. Our IT team, however, has been energized by identifying new approaches to conserving funds: They are taking the lead on sustainable planning in the college--the greening of CLA—and identifying ways in which utility costs can be substantially reduced. They look for opportunities to share current resources rather than investing in new products, explore the most effective way to adapt e-learning to our students' needs, and they are helping us realize administrative savings through streamlining our student support systems at the graduate and undergraduate level.

As many of you know, the economic downturn has taken a substantial toll on the annual revenues available from our current endowments for professorships, fellowships, and scholarships, and established and prospective donors to the college have been hard pressed to realize their philanthropic ambitions. Mary Hicks and her talented team of development officers have risen to this challenge admirably, identifying new prospects and working with department chairs and center directors to establish clear philanthropic goals for their programs. At the

collegiate level, our highest priority in the current environment has been to secure scholarship funding for our undergraduates, and fellowship funds for our graduate students. In fiscal year 2009 we raised \$7.3 million. As we approach the capital campaign, we continue to pursue funding for professorships that enable us to recruit and retain faculty, and endowments for research centers to sustain their important support of our intellectual community for the long term.

Before concluding, I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to two members of the collegiate leadership team, whom I have not yet mentioned. I would like first to recognize our Chief Financial Officer Karen Dewanz and her hard-working staff for helping us identify the necessary funding for our work this past year, and for assisting all of us through the intricacies of the University's new electronic financial system—a journey that still continues. The collective work of Karen Dewanz and Associate Dean for Planning Gary Oehlert has enabled us to match our ambitions with our resources, to think creatively about the ebbs and flows of collegiate funding, and to confront soberly the fiscal realities before us.

I should also like to thank the newest member of the collegiate administrative team, Jennifer Cieslak, our chief of staff, for her wise guidance of our human resources and media/ public relations teams, her leadership in the

dean's office, and her expert skill in ensuring the smooth flow of work between our offices and the advancement of our collective projects.

And finally I should like to thank you, Assembly members, faculty, staff, department chairs and directors, and our collegiate leadership team for the exceptional effort that you made this past academic year in helping us to plan carefully to meet the new challenges. Your prudence, your creativity, and your commitment to our college community inspired and sustained us all during this difficult period, and I am deeply grateful for your generosity and your readiness to help us shape a college and University of which we can all be proud.

The past academic year has been unprecedented in the recent history of our college and University, and over the next three-to-five years our ambitions for this college, as so often happens, will likely outstrip the available resources. We live in a creative community where ideas almost invariably exceed the requisite funding, and the future strength of our community will continue to depend in large measure on our willingness to plan carefully together. Resources are certainly less abundant than they have been in the past, but I would sooner live in a community overbrimming with creative ideas and solutions and limited resources than in one bereft of any inspiration and profligate in its expenditure of wealth. As you can tell from

my brief narrative of the activities of the past year, and as you can see from the new members of our college whom we welcome here as faculty today, we have not stood still; we have progressed, albeit more slowly than we would have anticipated a year ago, towards our common ambition of building the academic distinctiveness of our college. We still have much work to do together, and we have a limited time to plan for the challenges, but I am confident that our collaborative efforts over the next few years will enable us to create a college that not only will have weathered the sharpest threat to its fiscal health in more than a quarter century but that will be regarded widely as a national leader for visionary research and innovative education that many others will wish to emulate.

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