

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

THE ROAD AHEAD: A CALL TO ACTION

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- Being the first choice of a prospective student.
- Attracting and retaining field shaping researchers and teachers.
- Pursuing research that is vital to the community.
- Graduating students that organizations are eager to recruit.

These are just some of the qualities of a destination college.

Our vision is to transform the College of Liberal Arts into a destination college.

We will do that by re-energizing our commitment to the community by graduating the best prepared students.

By re-imagining how we best position CLA research to advance the study, understanding, and improvement of community from the local to the international level.

And by re-engaging CLA with the community.

Today we set our course toward that destination.

Thank you, Provost Hanson for your kind remarks. We're proud to have a CLA alum serving in such an important leadership role at the U.

I also want to thank the School of Music and the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance for contributing their wonderful talent to this evening's event.

Welcome alumni, donors, faculty, students, staff, friends—all of you in our CLA community. Welcome to the Road Ahead.

At its core, most every question in the liberal arts wrestles with community.

CLA scholars study how communities are defined, how they change, how they prosper, weaken, conflict, and unite.

We study how plural communities may be embedded within a larger community, and whether this happens by choice or coercion.

We aim to understand how being embedded in multiple communities affects the individual.

We examine how institutions build and bolster, or diminish and demolish, community.

We explore through the arts the multiple meanings of community, and we give life to communities through artistic and creative performance.

We interpret how the spread of social media has revolutionized concepts of community around the world.

We analyze where community allows individuals to flourish, but also where it hampers individual freedom.

The identity and interaction of communities, and the relationship of the individual to the community, is one of the central, most persistent issues and themes of the early 21st century.

And put simply, that is what we do. We, in CLA, study community.

A major land grant research university needs a strong study of community at its heart.

President Kaler laid down the challenge for CLA when he told his senior leadership group in August: “in order for the University of Minnesota to be great, it needs to have a great College of Liberal Arts.”

We agree. We’re here today to accept that challenge.

We *will* become a destination college by renewing our commitment to community.

This vision will unite our efforts, and drive our collective work.

During this journey, we will advocate—not apologize—for the liberal arts.

Tonight I will outline the road ahead—a vision for CLA.

On Monday, we will share with everyone a first draft of what we are calling our “Roadmap,” in which we will chart our course toward that vision.

The term “Roadmap” was chosen because it demonstrates that although we approach our vision from different directions, the paths all lead to one destination.

I’ve identified five goals that will inform the route we take on this Roadmap. Each is directly tied to our interest in studying, building, and serving the community.

Our first goal is that CLA alumni will be the most desirable graduates available.

Shaping the minds and lives of our students in preparation for what comes next is at the very foundation of what we do.

In my State of the College address in September, I said we had a deep obligation to enrich and enhance the student experience and to prepare students for success in life.

I view this as a profound commitment.

We need to attract large numbers of high-achieving, CLA-first-choice students by offering them something different and better.

Let's build a widely known reputation for interesting and innovative programs.

Let's be sure we are explaining clearly what students will gain in our courses.

Let's provide clear curricular pathways for students with particular career interests.

Let's make sure we are responsive to areas in which CLA students express career interests by enhancing our research and curricular presence in those areas.

We will set that in an environment of research, internships, engagement, and experiential opportunities that integrate coherently with our curriculum.

We'll combine all of this with enhanced career advising, coaching, and alumni mentorship to prepare students for the next stage of their lives.

I know from talking with students and parents that they worry about a focus in the liberal arts. Their anxiety is most directly related to concerns about employment prospects.

Let's eliminate that anxiety.

We know already that the liberal arts provide a strong foundation for life satisfaction, extensive contributions to our communities, and future career success.

Employers tell us they are looking for those who can solve problems, think inventively, communicate well, work nimbly, and conduct research.

Liberal arts students are well positioned for careers throughout the economy. The liberal arts at their best promote an entrepreneurial mindset in students—inventive, risk-taking, questioning, innovative, analytical.

The heavy representation of liberal arts graduates throughout the leadership of Fortune 500 companies as well as leadership in government, health care, the tech sector, law, education, small business, and non-profits, tells us something important about the opportunity provided by a liberal arts education.

Interim Dean Bud Duvall—also here with us tonight—led work last year along with dedicated alumni on an “undergraduate ecosystem” designed to rethink how the college prepares students for the future. We will continue that work.

At the same time, we want students to explore and discover. We have an obligation to prepare students for life in the fullest sense, as well as careers.

To help our students become the most desirable graduates available, we also need to continuously review and revitalize our teaching methods.

New techniques should be used where they improve teaching and create flexible and effective learning opportunities for students. For example, we are now building an online minor in health psychology.

It's easy to find students who benefit from what CLA offers, and I can't resist sharing two examples.

Claire Atmore is a CLA senior. Originally planning to study outside the liberal arts, Claire was encouraged by her advisor to take a course in political science.

Despite knowing virtually nothing about it, she agreed—and was pleasantly surprised by what she found. Her professors were experts in their fields who spoke passionately about their research.

Claire has taken advantage of CLA's first-rate study abroad opportunities by participating in three different programs—in Norway, Mexico, and Spain—and has come to believe that a liberal arts education is the key to a globalized citizenry.

After graduating this spring with a major in political science and a minor in statistics, Claire plans to pursue her career options or head to graduate school.

I'd also like to introduce CLA junior Teo Crespo-Carrión. Teo's chosen highlights from his high school years are: reading postmodern literature, getting grass stains on his jeans, watching Cartoon Network, and indulging in music and the visual arts.

Here at CLA Teo is pursuing B.A.s in Music and Anthropology, with minors in History and Public Health. He's a violinist and does freelance gigs around the Twin Cities.

Teo has worked with local organizations to increase higher education accessibility for people of color, and to introduce inclusionary immigration policy on a local and national scale.

After graduation, he intends to use the ethnographic research skills and interdisciplinary frameworks he has learned to promote equity in policy design, education, and healthcare.

Claire and Teo, please stand up. This is the face of CLA.

Our task in CLA is to accelerate the development of programs and resources that will attract, teach and prepare students like Claire and Teo for their life after campus. All of our graduates should leave the College absolutely confident that they are well prepared for the next stage of life.

Our second goal...is that CLA will have a relentless focus on research and creative excellence.

I am committed to making world-class excellence in research and creative practice a hallmark of the College of Liberal Arts.

Achieving research greatness means having ever-higher expectations of faculty.

It means providing an environment that makes CLA the best environment for field-shaping faculty to do their work.

It means risking failure as we continuously innovate and experiment with seed funding for new research avenues and curriculum.

Achieving greatness means making tradeoffs—we cannot pursue every good idea simultaneously, and we will need to end some things to begin others.

And achieving greatness means being able to better compete for top graduate students and to place them in prestigious positions.

Research is tightly linked to graduate programs, and the quality of the two rise and fall together.

We have some great graduate programs—some of the best at the U. But for an institution of our stature, we must do better.

The idea that “good enough” is good enough doesn’t work in today’s competitive environment.

And it doesn’t serve our grad students or our communities well.

Rankings aren’t everything. But, I’ll admit it, I’d rather see a department rank in the top 20 than the top 50, and the top 10 than the top 20. Perhaps this comes from being a Red Sox fan and having to wait 84 years to become number 1.

I am committed to increasing the number of great programs by pushing good programs to the next level.

Research excellence provides a superior educational experience for our undergrads as well. When I ask students why they chose their major, many tell me they did so because of the reputation of the major as a research powerhouse. Our students learn from the creators, innovators, and pioneers.

Having the highest research standards attracts and retains top faculty, which attracts top undergraduate and graduate students. High quality students attract more great faculty. Research excellence is a virtuous circle.

Research and creative excellence are also vital in the land grant mission for what they do off campus. They contribute to the understanding and solution of important problems and they advance human knowledge.

I am looking forward to working more closely with the Office of Vice President of Research at the University to advance that mission. Brian Herman, thank you for joining us this evening.

We must do a better job showcasing our research results and their contributions to the state. It's okay to brag a little in Minnesota. Maybe even a lot.

Goal number three...CLA will lead and flourish in the environment of grand challenges.

CLA is poised to act on the University's strategic plan relating to grand challenges, particularly the challenge of building vibrant communities that enhance human potential and collective well-being in a diverse and changing society. Here, the liberal arts can make a distinctive, lasting, and leading contribution.

We are well positioned to integrate and lead this grand challenge on the research side and on the curricular side.

And we have much to contribute to the grand challenges on sustainable, healthy, secure food, and environmental and economic development issues as well.

We are eager to begin work on these grand challenges and to help identify others on which the university can have a great impact.

Our fourth goal...The CLA community will mirror the community at large.

The fact of the matter is that we have reduced currency in our community if we do not reflect it. Diversity at all levels is a critical challenge and priority.

Top students, faculty, and staff are difficult to recruit and retain. This is even more true of students, faculty, and staff of color.

To move toward this goal we have undertaken a diversity assessment in CLA to identify our key challenges. I salute those colleges on this campus who are further along on this work than we are. We look forward to learning from you.

After our assessment, we will form a diversity committee to make recommendations, identify possible next steps, and monitor our progress.

Our fifth and final goal: CLA will deepen a culture of engagement for our alumni, community, and state.

The critical importance of real, two-way community engagement and sharing of what we have to offer has been a recurring theme during my first 85 days here in CLA.

Today, I am announcing the Minnesota Compact.

This will be CLA's portal through which we invite community involvement and the community invites ours.

Through which our research is shared.

And through which we fulfill our land grant mission.

What would be included in the Minnesota Compact?

It is our pledge to provide the citizens of Minnesota with a friendly front door to learn about and access the research expertise of our faculty.

It is our pledge to be in service to the people of this state, in the spirit of a great land grant institution.

It is our pledge to our alumni to keep them engaged in the life of the college and to seek their help to make the college stronger and to help today's students.

The Minnesota Compact will be the framework for CLA's commitment to share our research expertise and creative excellence with the state.

In the liberal arts, global and cultural awareness is built into our curriculum extensively. Our top students are competitive on a national and global scale. Many would like to stay here.

Through the Compact, we would build partnerships with government, non-profits, business and others who are interested in hiring liberal arts students here in Minnesota.

Through the Compact, we can consider post-baccalaureate certificates or degree programs that provide additional opportunities for individuals already in the workforce.

As the largest college in Minnesota, we have the largest number of graduates who go on to live and work in the state. Such post-baccalaureate programs would further expand our already large contribution to the state's economic development and its social, cultural, and political life.

This framework is an opportunity across the entire college because so much of our research and teaching speaks to community issues.

For example, it might include sharing the work being done by Professor Phyllis Moen in Sociology on Baby Boomers and their life transitions in the face of unprecedented life expectancy.

Or perhaps the insights into memory and human rights from the work of Professor Ana Forcinito in Spanish and Portuguese.

The Minnesota Compact could also further deepen our connections in the arts, with our Arts Quarter on the West Bank serving as a gateway between the university and our exciting metropolitan arts communities.

These are just examples—there is much more we can achieve through the Minnesota Compact.

These five goals are an ambitious agenda. But from the start, I have been impressed with the deep energy, enthusiasm, and commitment in CLA to consider how we can be better.

Achieving these five goals around readiness, research, grand challenges leadership, diversity, and a culture of engagement requires us to rethink our collegiate organization and the way we work.

Consistent with the priorities of the University's strategic plan, we will assess and improve our operations and closely review how we spend our funds to help us get our collective work done.

To be an effective leader—and effective champion—of the liberal arts, I need to spend more of my time in our large CLA community advocating for our agenda.

I also need time to hear from our faculty about how we can best advance our diverse research study of community in its many aspects, across our disciplinary and interdisciplinary areas. Where are the opportunities? Where can we be on the leading edge? Where do we have untapped potential already present in the College and on campus?

As dean of CLA, I have over 40 direct reports. That does not give me much time to focus on questions such as these.

I am suggesting a reorganization of CLA along three intellectual corridors representing the arts, humanities, and social sciences, each with an associate dean with the responsibility and authority, in consultation with me, to advance our five goals.

We will begin consulting with our governance groups on the shape of this collegiate reorganization shortly.

This arrangement does not deter interdisciplinary linkages. Indeed, associate deans with deep familiarity of a set of departments will be well positioned to help identify potential research, curricular, and organizational linkages across units in a way that will make us more intellectually dynamic and more effective as a college.

Reaching our goals and achieving our vision requires us to focus intently on how we collectively make the College stronger.

As I said earlier, a draft of the CLA Roadmap—outlining specific ideas and proposals—will be circulated Monday and made available online.

I am acutely aware of President Kaler's charge, stated in his inaugural address, to pick up the pace.

I share the desire to accelerate.

My challenge to each of us is this:

In about 1400 days we will convene to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the College of Liberal Arts.

That date cannot simply mark a moment in time. It must be a celebration of transformation.

Each of us, between now and then, has a role to play.

Faculty, students, staff, alumni, employers, donors, and friends—on and off campus—all have a place in our Roadmap, and no one will be left behind.

We will proceed thoughtfully, but decisively.

We will re-energize our commitment to the community by graduating the best prepared students.

We will re-imagine how we best position CLA research across the arts, humanities, and social sciences to advance the study, understanding, and improvement of community from the local to the international level.

We will re-engage CLA with the community.

We *will* become a destination college.

Thank you for joining us as we move forward on the Road Ahead.