

Inaugural Remarks by Dr. David C. Hodge, October 20, 2006

Thank you all for attending this ceremony today. We are here together - faculty, staff, students, alums, current and former trustees, representatives from our sister universities, and members of our broader community - to celebrate Miami's past, present, and future. I particularly would like to welcome President Shriver and Martha Shriver, President Garland and Carole Garland, and Winnie Pearson who have given so much to make Miami better. Everyone's presence here today honors Miami's traditions and energizes its future.

For nearly 200 years we have used the introduction of a new president as a moment of reflection, celebration, and renewal. There are not words to describe the sense of honor Valerie and I feel in joining a community of such deep traditions and purpose. We cherish the opportunity to serve Miami in our new roles and are eager to join with you to uphold the traditions of excellence and purpose that have sustained Miami over its long history, and, even more, to advance Miami to yet higher levels of excellence and impact.

I would like to use this opportunity to share some thoughts on how we might do exactly that. But before I do, I would like to take a moment to indulge in some personal reflections and appreciation. As we celebrate Miami's past, present, and future, I cannot help but think of my own life path and would like to acknowledge, and thank, several people here today who have done so much to make this day possible. I start with my parents, Donald and Margaret Hodge, who not only gave me life, but also gave me values that have sustained me in every aspect of my personal and professional lives. Neither of them finished high school, but they represent the goodness that is at the heart of our society. They taught me to value hard work, to extend kindness to strangers as well as to friends, and to believe in ideas and institutions that transcend our personal lives.

We are also joined today by former colleagues at the University of Washington. To them I owe much in learning about leadership. Their fearless commitment to excellence, to integrity, and to responsible and progressive change for a better future have shaped my approach to leadership and fueled my hunger to contribute to the world our children will inherit.

Finally, and above all else, I owe today to my wife and children. As many of you know, our first introduction to Miami came a little over three years ago when our son, Gene, attended a summer leadership conference here sponsored by Beta Theta Pi. He returned to Seattle and declared that Miami was the most beautiful campus he had ever seen and that I should be president there. Until that moment, I had always thought of him as a level-headed person! When I think of what Gene has taught me, I am reminded of a phrase that Jimmie Carter ascribes to Admiral Rickover, "Why not the best?" From his first responsibility in his first summer internship with a construction company - to take care of the punch list for an eighty million dollar building - to his first and current responsibility as a full-time employee of the same company - to do all of the scheduling for the construction of a two hundred million dollar hospital - he has unhesitatingly shouldered responsibility at the highest level.

Our daughter Meriem shares this fearlessness and adds a strong dose of energy and decisiveness. When we were waffling over whether to leave Seattle temporarily for a stint at the National science Foundation in Washington, D.C., it was Meriem, at age 8, who said, “Dad, sometimes you simply need to jump into the deep end of the pool.” That has become a family motto, and she has modeled that behavior by going off to college about as far away from Seattle as she could get, and now changing course to embrace the challenges and opportunities of Miami University.

And finally, there is Valerie, who is in every sense of the word, a full partner in this endeavor. She is a remarkable woman. Last spring when we were wrestling with the decision about whether to leave Seattle and take on this new responsibility, she was also wrestling with the grief of the loss of her mother and trying to embrace the joy of our 25th wedding anniversary. This personal strength and commitment to family have sustained us all over the years. And now she is utilizing all of her professional experience in higher education, her affection and caring for people, and her deep commitment to the future, to serve Miami. It is difficult to express the joy we find in working together, at this moment, and in this place, for such a great cause. Miami and I are both blessed to have such an incredible person in our lives.

The Fusion of Learning

Thank you for the opportunity to focus for a moment on such a personal reflection. I would now like to return to the task I set out earlier, to offer some thoughts on how we can advance Miami’s excellence and impact. Of course, there are an infinite set of conversations we could have around this theme, but given that my remarks stand between us and the fried chicken outside, I want to focus my comments on what I consider to be at the heart of our future, namely the creation of a learning environment that is unmatched by its excitement and accomplishment. In preparing these remarks, I have benefited greatly from a number of colleagues who have stimulated my thinking and offered insights into Miami that have provided me with both perspective and inspiration. Thank you for your help.

I have titled my remarks, “The Fusion of Learning” to create a metaphor for the ambitions I hope we will embrace. Fusion is formally defined as “The formation of a heavier, more complex nucleus by the coming together of two or more lighter ones, usually accompanied by the release of relatively large amounts of energy.” Now you may be wondering what nuclear physics has to do with the future of Miami University. I can assure you that there are no plans either to create a new department of nuclear physics or to replace our coal fired power plant with a nuclear one.

Rather, my goal today is to describe the power that comes from the fusion of our seemingly separate missions of teaching, research, and service into a new whole that, like nuclear fusion, releases large amounts of energy. This metaphor was inspired by an observation made many years ago by William Butler Yeates who noted, in the finest of Miami traditions, even though he was not speaking of Miami directly, that “Education is

not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” I have come to believe that for the top levels of higher education, and especially for Miami, this is a moment or special opportunity to be seized. It is a moment when we have the capacity to draw from and combine our core missions to create a higher level of energy to propel us forward in our quest for an extraordinary learning environment. The fusion of teaching, scholarship, and service into learning can, like the nuclear counterpart, release large amounts of energy that will fuel our efforts and strengthen our accomplishments.

I would like to briefly describe three core strategic directions that underlie an ambitious learning environment: adopting the mind of a scholar, embracing difference and diversity, and extending learning through technology. This list is not meant to be either comprehensive or definitive. Rather, the goal is to describe how these strategic directions can shape an extraordinary learning environment through the fusion of teaching, scholarship, and service.

Adopting the Mind of the Scholar

It is a prime quality of universities that they attract people who are by their nature consumed by curiosity. We hunger to understand the unknown, to make sense of a messy world, to imagine new thoughts or artistic expression that challenge what or how we know. Of course, curiosity is only the beginning. Curiosity provides the spark, but disciplined reasoning and methodological rigor (both quantitatively and qualitatively), the essence of scholarship, provide the means to answer the questions posed by curiosity. That is why it is so important that we have a research active faculty who continue to develop and use their research capabilities to answer questions that challenge us. Historically in higher education, graduate programs have been at the forefront in the approach to an education that encourages disciplined curiosity, while contributing directly to the scholarly output of our faculty. In so doing, graduate programs at Miami University not only provide advanced education, but can, at their best, also contribute substantially to the construction of an exciting learning environment that benefits everyone, including undergraduates.

Unfortunately, throughout most of higher education, the common approach to undergraduate education does not engage students as active research agents. In my experience, we spend too much time telling students what we think they need to know, and not enough time using their curiosity to drive their learning. Miami is fortunate to have the potential to lead the charge toward a new form of active, engaged education for our undergraduates through the fusion of scholarship and teaching – in essence, lighting the fire of learning. The key is our conceptualization of learning itself. Marcia Baxter-Magolda, Professor of Educational Leadership, has outlined an approach to an effective learning environment that she terms the Learning Partnership Model. The model supports students as inquirers through three focal points: (1) validating their capacity to construct knowledge, (2) situating learning in their experience, and (3) emphasizing that knowledge is mutually constructed with knowledgeable peers. One of the best examples of the application of this concept on campus is Project Dragonfly. Created by faculty, staff, and students at Miami and led by Professor Chris Meyers, Dragonfly is guided by

the core principle that “the most powerful way to engage people in science is to invite them into the community of science, to allow people to see themselves as investigators.” In the project, participatory science asks students to share questions, test ideas, author knowledge, and communicate with peers and experts.

I want to be clear here, that adopting the “student as scholar” model is not just about actual research experiences, although it bears noting that such experiences are important and that Miami has some absolutely terrific research opportunities for students. Rather, I am emphasizing that “student as scholar” is a frame of mind that should motivate all of our teaching and learning, from large introductory classes to the special opportunities to work on a scholarly project with a faculty member. In fact, I would argue that it is particularly important to adopt this approach to introductory level courses because it is in those classes that we have the unique opportunity to introduce students to the expectations of the University and to the habits of mind of a scholar. Even in a large class it is possible to effectively create a course that is inquiry-driven and active, the hallmarks of a learning-centered education that engages students. At the University of Washington we had considerable success rebuilding our foundation courses around these attributes, resulting in better learning outcomes and more engaged students. We don’t know yet how this experience will affect the way that both students and faculty approach higher levels of courses, but the goal at Washington was to use the transformation of introductory courses to change the expectations of both groups over the entire curriculum.

I believe that this approach is tailor-made for Miami, drawing on our strengths. Not only would the successful transformation of Miami Plan courses provide even better learning outcomes, I believe that such a transformation of our foundational courses would affect our entire curriculum and add greatly to Miami’s national reputation as a university that teaches “academically ambitious undergraduates” to lead “intellectually vigorous lives.”

It is difficult to refrain from providing numerous examples of Miami courses that embrace the learning paradigm, but there simply isn’t time today. So let me conclude this section on the student as scholar by highlighting our excellent progress in addressing a core learning skill: writing. As most of you know, we were fortunate to receive a \$10.5 million gift from Roger and Joyce Howe to support the Center for Writing Excellence. The Center, and the many faculty and staff who have been involved in advancing writing in the University, recognizes that good writing is an active endeavor. While a primary goal is to ensure that our students can express themselves clearly and persuasively, writing is also a primary vehicle by which we learn. As we work to present an argument that is persuasive, we are forced to confront and critically evaluate our evidence, we are forced to link arguments into a conceptual whole, and we are forced to draw on our imaginations to describe our results. Thus the Center is not only about doing a superb job of helping students learn to write, it is also about teaching faculty to teach students how to use writing to learn.

Embracing Difference and Diversity

Throughout much of my life, the pursuit of diversity in the US has been the pursuit of individual and group justice. Especially since 1954, the nation has been actively engaged in a struggle to overcome the legacy of two centuries of discrimination and separation of educational opportunity by race. Regrettably, that struggle continues today and we must not, for even one moment let up on our resolve to change the differential rates of success that reflect the widely divergent paths for both students of color and students from lower economic circumstances. We will, at Miami, redouble our efforts in the years ahead to change the opportunities and success that all K-12 students should enjoy, and we will work ceaselessly to make sure that Miami is attractive and accessible to all academically ambitious students regardless of their social and economic background. This is our pledge.

In more recent years, however, we have also come to understand that diversity is central to a high quality education. This is a key argument in many of the high profile court cases dealing with racial preference in admissions. Several universities have argued vigorously, but with only modest legal success, that increasing diversity is a compelling interest, i.e., that having a racially diverse student body is integral to the experience of all students.

But increasing the number of students of color, or of other social minorities, while valuable in and of itself, does not necessarily yield a high quality education. Learning is predicated on embracing our differences so as to challenge our conventional understanding of the world around us. We need to strongly encourage our students to push the envelope of their comfort, to take risks, and to avoid the safe and mundane routes by pushing on into new areas, experiences, and development. We can do some of this in the classroom. We can shape the curriculum to include more diverse perspectives, and we can create learning situations where students are forced to engage their sense of self, and their own boundaries. We are fortunate to have two groups of 12 faculty each, lead by Ron Scott, Professor of Communications, who have joined together in a faculty learning community dedicated to making our curriculum embrace diversity as well as accommodating diverse learning styles.

A critical dimension of learning by embracing difference is to encounter circumstances that are beyond our experience as well as our comfort level. A major opportunity for student engagement with circumstances different from their own is through service learning. Service learning can, and should, be as much about the mind as it is about the heart. At its best, service learning provides opportunities for students to see their academic material at ground level as well as pushing them into situations that stretch their comfort level. A great service learning experience is a true fusion of scholarship, teaching, and service, creating a highly motivating and engaging learning experience. Let me note that while opportunities to participate in service learning are limited in Oxford, the two regional campuses are portals to communities with a great many opportunities for students to both contribute and learn.

Like many aspects of the Miami Experience, learning from and about difference and diversity is not confined to the classroom. Indeed, co-curricular activities are an essential

component in our efforts to create and learn from diversity. We have many student groups that provide the opportunity for leadership, support, and learning. Valerie and I had a group of such leaders over for dinner a couple of weeks ago and were impressed by their dedication and the range of active experiences that enhanced their intellectual and personal development. Yet it was also clear from the conversation over dinner that we need to be more organized and even more purposeful in our efforts to engage the broader community. The MUvement program a few weeks ago was a fine example of an event that purposively sought to combine community, learning, and entertainment to celebrate diversity.

Another classic way in which we embrace difference is through the study of foreign languages and cultures. In an active approach to the study of foreign language, students have a real opportunity to understand how their own language and culture defines them, as they see themselves through the lens of “the other.” Of course, combining the study of language and cultures with international travel provides the ultimate form of engaged learning. We are proud that thirty percent of our students now have an international study experience. But given the critical importance of both global understanding and an understanding of ourselves, we should set a goal of having at least half of our students having a study abroad experience before graduation. We are also fortunate to have a good representation of international students who come to Miami, as evidenced by this wonderfully colorful display of flags that add so much to the festive atmosphere today. Our challenge is to find more ways that we can draw from their differences to enhance our learning as well as making sure that they feel welcomed here.

I would like to conclude this brief discussion of embracing difference and diversity by recognizing our long-standing and deepening relationship with the Miami Tribe. We are the only university in the US named for an Indian tribe, a point of great pride for us. I cannot begin to express the honor you have shown to me and to Miami University by your presence here, Chief Leonard. I look forward to our visit to your home in June. We are so very pleased that we have 15 students from the tribe studying at Miami, that your son is on our faculty, that we have a major commitment to studying the Myaamia language, led by tribal member Daryl Baldwin, and that in the fall of 2008 we will host a major exhibit of Miami Tribe artifacts in our Art Museum. All of these contribute to our learning by providing insights into a culture that has much to teach us. Thank you.

Extending Learning through Technology

The dramatic improvements in information technology over the past 30 years have radically and rapidly changed how we can achieve the fusion of learning. A colleague recently remarked on the surprise of a student when she learned that her professor completed college at a time when there wasn't an internet or world wide web. In 1993-94 while I was at the National Science Foundation, I was puzzled by the excitement of some of my colleagues there who were testing a new software package named Mosaic, which I now understand to have been one of the first internet browsers. I am sorry to confess that at the time I couldn't imagine why they were so excited, but here we are, scarcely more than a decade later, when a new generation of students can take the internet

and ubiquitous computing for granted. We could easily spend a very long time discussing the ways in which IT is transforming education, but I will restrict my brief comments to three: the ability to access raw material, the ability to customize or individualize learning interactions, and the ability to engage the broader world.

Of all the changes stimulated by technology improvements, I believe that none are more important than the dramatic improvements in our ability to access raw material for research. For most of the history of Miami University, students have been forced to rely heavily on texts that described what others had concluded from materials they had gathered. The ability to interrogate the same materials used by scholars was at best extremely limited, because access to the material was limited, as was the capability to analyze that material. Thus the questions and methods of analysis were defined by someone else and students were relegated to the role of observer, rather than inquirer. Today that is vastly different.

Consider my own case. When I began as a student, census data were available in limited form and locations. To use the data, I copied numbers from pre-defined tables and then performed manually some rudimentary descriptive analysis. I moved on to a counter-sorter, a mechanical device that allowed me to sort and count computer punch cards that contained some simplistic data. In graduate school I graduated to the use of card readers to input computer programs and data. It was very laborious and I was required to punch in all of the data by hand, but I did have access to statistical packages like SPSS to conduct more sophisticated analysis. It was laborious and time consuming since the data and program were physically submitted to a person behind a counter. Assuming that none of the cards were “eaten” by the card reader – and I have many a sad tale there – I received my output sometime later, often overnight. Well you get the idea. This was not a research friendly environment, even for an advanced graduate student, much less an undergraduate.

Now fast forward. Students today, at all levels, have at their fingertips through the internet almost unlimited access to the same raw material that researchers are using or have used. From the human genome to census data to historical archives to the world’s finest art collections, students can reach out over the web and follow their own curiosity with real data. This capability fundamentally redefines what is possible in education and opens wide the possibility of fusing scholarship and teaching into learning. Of course this capability produces new challenges such as authenticating the data and learning how to effectively search and analyze huge amounts of information. But we also have incredible new tools to aid us in this effort. In my own department, Geography – which, by the way, is celebrating its 100th birthday! – we have gone from an environment in which we struggled for long hours in the cartography lab to produce maps for analysis to an environment in which a few key strokes will yield useful spatial displays from vast sources of geographic information.

On the teaching side of the equation, rapid developments in our ability to share material, and to interact with each other remotely, have transformed how we can think about our courses, especially our ability to use software to create a customized approach to

learning. It is now possible for students to work their way through material or processes at their own pace with appropriate feedback and assessment. This allows us to create what Glenn Platt, Professor of Marketing, refers to as “the inverted classroom.” Glenn has demonstrated how we can turn lectures into podcasts and interactive online applications and then spend class time on experiments, modeling, team projects, and problem solving, stimulating critical thinking. The use of hybrid courses, mixing online and in-class experiences, should soon be the norm in most classes, if we truly embrace the power of technology to transform learning. The new courses developed by faculty on the Hamilton campus over the summer reflect this power very well.

A second source of customized learning lies in the use of simulation. With the powerful computers and networks now available, we can create incredibly sophisticated simulations of everything from chemical reactions to international conflict. The key point is that simulation allows individuals, or groups, to explore the consequences of their reasoning in real time using what appear to be real situations. The use of simulation again underscores an approach to learning that is inquiry driven and active. It motivates, and it challenges students’ intellectual skills.

Implicit in the discussion on the use of technology is a recognition of the ability to engage with others, as well as raw material, in disparate and even remote locations. We can use everything from computers to Treos to cell phone devices to interact with people locally or across the globe. For Miami University, located in Oxford, Ohio, this capability can, and should, radically transform the possibilities for research, teaching, and service. We can collaborate effectively with others throughout the entire world. We now have a beautiful physical campus with no boundaries. We can live and learn with each other locally while simultaneously engaging colleagues literally across the entire face of the globe. In this sense, our Luxemburg campus is no further away than Hamilton or Middletown. This semester students working with Armstrong Interactive are rebuilding the corporate intranet of a global firm. These students routinely conduct focus groups and videoconferences with the client’s offices in San Francisco, Chicago, New York, London, and Dubai.

This course is made possible by an inspired gift of five million dollars from Mike Armstrong who wanted to ensure that we have the capability for students to engage the entire world. And there is more. I am very proud to announce that today’s ceremony is being webcast to our wider community, for the first time in Miami’s history, with Mike’s support. On behalf of everyone here, I extend greetings to those of you watching from afar. I can’t wait to find out where the most distant observer is located! But this is just the beginning. We need to imagine a university functioning in a world in which high quality two-way video, as one small example, is as common as a cell phone call is today. What a marvelous challenge these new technologies pose and what marvelous opportunities they pose to fuse teaching, research, and service into expansive, yet individualized, learning.

Conclusion

As I noted at the outset of my remarks, this is an amazing and exhilarating time to be in higher education. It is a moment of remarkable transformation, a moment when a student-centered approach to education, the hallmark of Miami University over most of its 200 years of existence, can be fully realized. As the fusion metaphor suggests, this is a moment when we can create a new approach to education by fusing our missions of teaching, research, and service, obliterating boundaries and using each element to redefine the possible in the others.

By adopting the student as scholar model, we infuse the relentless drive of curiosity into all aspects of the university. We collapse the separation of teaching and research. By embracing difference and diversity, we stretch our minds and engage the world around us. We obliterate the boundary of the classroom and use service learning to educate, challenge, and inspire. And we do all of this in a world of extraordinary technological changes that quite literally obliterate boundaries, allowing us to unleash the power of individualized learning in a global context where collaboration reigns. We have the ability to create a learning environment that is simply unmatched by its excitement and accomplishment.

And yet, amid all of this transformation and dislocation, the spirit of Miami endures and guides. We remain, as we have for 200 years, a university deeply intent on making a difference. We attract faculty and staff who make their mark on the campus and throughout the world. We graduate students who possess not only the intellect and the education to accomplish great things, but also the tenacious yet unpretentious drive to succeed, indeed to excel.

It is an honor beyond words to stand before you today, as Miami's 21st president. Valerie and I are deeply grateful for the welcome you have given us, and we join with you in dedicating our service to the ideals of this remarkable university. We thank you for joining with us today to celebrate Miami's past, Miami's present, and Miami's future. We have much to do to ensure that future generations live in a better world. But I can think of no place better prepared by the strength of its history, and by the will of its people, to take on that privileged task.

Thank you.