

CONVOCATION ADDRESS

Dr. David Livingston

August 23, 2016

Welcome faculty, staff, Brothers, and colleagues. It is a distinct honor to welcome you back to the 2016 - 2017 academic year. This morning I wish to offer some thoughts on my first two months on campus, what I have heard from many of you in the hundreds of conversations that we have had, a sense of how I see the current higher education climate and where Lewis fits within this context, and finally some thoughts on where we might focus our attention for the coming year as an academic community.

I would like to start by saying something about what has led me to this moment of taking on the presidency of Lewis University. Growing up just north of here in Dundee, Illinois, I am the middle child with an older sister and a younger brother. I attended Augustana College, a small liberal arts college in Rock Island, Illinois. My initial intent was to attend Augie for three years and finish my chemical engineering masters at the University of Illinois. Though I enjoyed chemistry, I realized by my junior year that I was unwilling to leave Augustana after just three years and so I spent the fall of my senior year studying in Latin America and the spring taking classes in religion and philosophy. During the first decade of our marriage, Joan and I completed three graduate degrees, between us, had two wonderful children, moved six times and, I fell in love with teaching. During these years, I taught at two high schools and three universities. Though my undergraduate degree is in chemistry, both my masters and Ph.D. are in theology. The rest of my life has been in Catholic higher education and I am now blessed to join you as colleagues here at Lewis University. Joan and I have two adult children, one who practices law in New York City, Matt, and our daughter Sara who currently is serving in the Peace Corps in Ibarra, Ecuador. I know how important family and friends are and I want to continue to keep Lewis as a community which supports you both as a professional and as a whole person, who we know is enriched by time spent with family and friends.

Conversation

I would like to share with you one of my favorite quotes and explain how it has influenced my life as a teacher and as a leader as well as how it will influence my actions as the president of Lewis. The quote is from David Tracy, a Catholic Theologian, who spent his teaching and writing career at the University of Chicago.

“Conversation is a game with some hard rules: say only what you mean; say it as accurately as you can; listen to and respect what the other says, however different or other; be willing to argue if necessary, to confront if demanded, to endure necessary conflict, to change your mind if the evidence suggests it. ... In a sense they are merely variations of the transcendental imperatives elegantly articulated by Bernard Lonergan: ‘Be attentive, be intelligent, be responsible, be loving, and if necessary, change.’” (*Plurality and Ambiguity* David Tracy)

This quote has been important to me for two decades and though I have not always lived up to its call to be a good conversationalist, it has been a guide which I have trusted and tried to

approximate. This is one of the reasons that I believe it is so important that I begin my presidency with a focus on listening to this community of professionals that is arrayed before me. Since I arrived in July, I have met with over one-hundred of you in my office or in one of the listening sessions, and this has been time very well spent. In addition to these conversations with you, I have had many conversations with our alumni, members of our board and leaders in the community. I believe that I cannot lead this university if I do not understand this university. As I begin my role as president of Lewis University, I believe it is important that I be attentive, that I listen to and respect the wisdom of the university community. One of the greatest fonts of wisdom on this campus is the collective wisdom of the Christian Brothers, I will seek their counsel often. I want to publicly thank them for the nearly one-thousand years of service they have given to our students. Brothers, we are all fortunate to work in association with you for our students.

As important as listening is, a second element of Tracy's rules is equally important – that of confrontation, argument and conflict. It is important to listen with respect but also to confront and argue when necessary and to endure the uncomfortable moments that flow out of that confrontation. If we are a community in conversation, which I hope we will be, then we must appreciate the importance of those difficult moments when we disagree about important issues. I say this knowing that on most important issues we will likely agree.

Argument is fundamental to the intellectual life. It is the academic conversation which is the heartbeat of teaching and of research. Whether we are teaching literature, nursing, physics, educational psychology or finance – we are teaching the conversation or “argument” of the discipline. In research, one scholar makes a claim and another scholar critiques that claim or supports that claim, we adjust our understanding of the universe and each other through this ongoing dialogue in the form of articles, lectures, presentations, and books. The hope of the academy is that we understand the world better in 2016 than we did in 2006 or 1932 or 1679, because we have read and reflected on those scholars who came before us and we have struggled with their ideas, criticized their assumptions and modified their conclusions. We do this because we seek the truth and we seek a more just world. What we know now is not enough. This world, with all its beauty, is still filled with injustice and ignorance and so we strive for more and we are unwilling to settle for the status quo. Therefore we will often argue over how best to improve the world and certainly also have conversations about how best to live out our mission here at Lewis University.

In this light, we will need to have a conversation about the future of this fine university. This conversation has been happening on these acres for the last 84 years and it will continue for centuries to come. I am a new conversation partner and that is why I want to listen to what you, as my colleagues, have to say. There will certainly be many things on which we agree, but there are bound to be some areas where we disagree, even after we have listened to each other well. I know that when those moments come that we will argue and “endure the necessary conflict,” but I also hope that if we have been convinced, that we will be willing to change our minds. This, of course, goes for me as well.

Let me offer a few things that I have heard in these listening sessions.

- We, as a leadership team, need to communicate more effectively.

- People wonder how we are doing financially.
- People know and love the Lewis mission and believe that we live it out well and our students feel our commitment to the mission each and every day.
- I have heard some frustration and concern over the implementation of the new Banner system.
- This is a community that loves to work here and has a great deal of pride in what we do and how well we do it.
- We are a family.

This is only a small sampling of what I have heard over the last seven weeks. It has been wonderful to hear so many things for which we are rightfully proud.

These conversations with the community will continue over the academic year, and through these, we will be modeling for our students how to live and how to learn. I will return several times to the quote by Saint John Baptist de La Salle – “The way you behave should be a model for those that you teach.” We need to model conversation in all its difficulty and possibility.

One additional thing that I have heard in my conversations both here on campus and out in the community is that I have very large shoes to fill. I have said at my interview and to several people since I have been on campus, “I do not plan to fill those shoes.” Brother James was an amazing leader who worked over the last three decades with you to fundamentally transform this university for the better. He deserves our thanks and respect. If I try to fill those shoes, I will certainly fail. I do not know what size shoes Br. James actually wears, but his metaphorical shoes are at least 18 triple E. I wear a 10 or 10 and a half, depending on the shoe, but I know an 18 will not fit me. When you try to wear shoes that are clearly too big for you, you are bound to trip and fall. I can be a great leader, with your help, but I cannot be Br. James. I will not even try. Each of us that carries the torch of leadership for our tenure must offer ourselves to the university; we must offer everything we have. I promise to do just that, but I will be Dave Livingston and that is the best I can do.

Financial Realities

I think it is important at this point to discuss in some detail where we are as a university, financially. I want to say two things which may at first seem contradictory, but which I hope will make sense after a bit of explanation. We are in excellent financial shape as an institution and we are struggling financially as we try to find ways to continue to deliver a quality education here at Lewis.

As some of you may know, we have reduced our overall work force very significantly in the last year. The majority of this has happened through early retirements and leaving vacancies unfilled. This has been necessary because we have seen declines in our enrollment. We have seen a two year decline in headcount and credit hours; about a 2% decline from FY 2015 to FY 2016 and another 3.5% decline from FY 16 to our current FY 17 school year. We have been able to remain in a very strong financial position, but not without cuts to your budgets as well as some targeted layoffs and not rehiring many positions when people have left. As we continue to work on the budget, we will have to hire in certain areas, even as we hold other important

positions open. We understand that this creates genuine difficulties in delivering the best educational experience in and outside the classroom and this is a concern that we will continue to work through with your advice and input. Certainly some of our budgetary challenges have come because of the uncertainty of MAP funding, but our budgetary challenges stem from more systemic issues both here at Lewis and in higher education generally. I will explore these systemic issues in a moment, but I want to look more fully at our financial situation before we examine these systemic issues effecting all of higher education.

We have an excellent credit rating and therefore have been able to borrow at a reasonable rate to fund expansion on our campus. That being said, we have reached our borrowing capacity and so for the coming few years we will need to fund any additional capital expenses without additional borrowing. In order to keep that borrowing rate low and keep ourselves in compliance with our bank covenants, we need to produce a bit over a \$5 million dollar margin each year (3% of operations). This is both fiscally responsible and allows us to invest in our future, but it also pushes us to keep our operational expenses low and requires that we constantly look for how we might better deliver a Lewis education at a more affordable price.

It can be very difficult to understand how we can build a \$3 million or \$12 million building and not be able to hire a professional staff that you consider essential, or to hire a replacement faculty, especially when we are generating a \$5 million dollar surplus each year. It is key that we all understand as a community the difference between operational budgets and capital budgets. The easiest way I have come to understand it is in terms of repeatable and non-repeatable aspects of our budget. It is much like a family budget, especially a family that is saving for a down payment on a mortgage. If the family cannot show that it is able to save above and beyond its monthly expenses and come up with 20% of the value of the house, a bank will not loan the couple the money to buy the house. In this family's situation it is true that they could afford to go out to dinner twice during the week spending \$200 and they could afford to have a much better internet and phone plan which would cost them \$200 a month, but if they cut back and spend only \$100 a week in going out to dinner with the kids and \$100 a month on their internet/phone plan they could save \$500 a month and end up with \$6,000 in savings at the end of the year. We do, as a university, generate enough revenue to hire more people, but we cannot meet our bank covenants and pay for future one-time expenses if we do not keep our operational budget in line with these yearly "savings/margin" needs, while still delivering an excellent education.

It is very important that I pause here to be clear about our budget. Over 90% of our budget each year comes from tuition dollars, I believe most of you know this, but I want to state this in a way that emphasizes the faces behind this 90%. The parents of many of our students often work extra shifts or second jobs to pay the tuition for their son or daughter to come to school and become the first child in their family to earn a college degree. We also have many students who are single parents and work two jobs to be able to go to school part-time. And we have graduate students who are paying for their education while also paying for their children's education. It is this money that makes up our budget. This means that each time we ask a question about whether we should spend money on this project or this line, we must be able to look a parent or student in the eye and say that we are spending your money in this way because we believe it is the best use of your money to provide you and the rest of the university's students with an

excellent education both now and in the future. This changes the way I think about budgets and I hope it will change yours. I believe we must constantly strive to be good stewards of our students' money. As La Salle said, "The way you behave should be a model for those that you teach." Let us model good stewardship.

Systemic Challenges to Higher Education

There have been many significant systemic changes in higher education over the last decade. These systemic issues have to do with affordability, delivery, reach, demographics, quality, and efficiencies. Before I go into each of these in turn, I want to emphasize that we are not alone in facing these systemic concerns. Because we are not alone in facing these issues, it is crucial that we work diligently at responding to these challenges because our peer institutions are putting their brightest minds to work on these problems as well.

First, **affordability** – students and parents are demanding that we justify the value of the education that they receive. They are willing to invest significant resources if they believe that they are receiving an education that will serve them well over their lifetime of work. How an institution frames the value of their degree and also the value of the student's previous experience is key to convincing the student to choose Lewis over another institution. Our students come from very diverse backgrounds both culturally and in terms of their own life experience. Many of our students come directly out of high school and join us tomorrow as full-time undergraduate students. Other students transfer here from community colleges in our region. Still others come to us after a decade or more of working and can only take one or two classes at a time. Still others come as graduate students who work full-time. For each of these students, price and value are extremely important. We must demonstrate to each of these students the value they will receive if they choose to attend Lewis University. I believe we offer an excellent value today, but we can never stop asking the questions around affordability.

Delivery – is a second important issue. What is the best format in which learning can take place? How does technology play into how we deliver an education? Do different segments of the population want a different type of delivery? Are there different price points for different delivery methods? What is the best time to offer classes? We must design our classrooms and our curriculum in light of these questions. There will be many competitors who will offer new delivery methods each and every year. We have a responsibility to review these options and consider whether we should modify our delivery. Learning is the key, and if we find new ways for students to learn more effectively, we consider change, even if it might be uncomfortable.

Reach – who knows about Lewis as a university? Are we able to convince people in Beijing, Boston, or Benton Harbor to come spend the best four years of their life on this campus? As one's reach expands one's applications can rise and one may need to yield a smaller percentage of all the applicants. But an institution can also reach beyond itself and lose sight of its core service area. The evidence suggests that many students are willing to go two to three hours away to attend a university, while very few are willing to travel beyond this distance for an education. Over 90% of our students come from the Chicago area. Should we expand our target audience to the two hour driving range or possibly even a three hour radius? As we consider how we market and who we market to, the question of reach is essential. When we find ourselves in a position

of significant strength in the marketplace with one of our signature programs, we should consider how we can exploit that advantage.

Demographics – Most of us are well aware that the country as a whole is changing in terms of its demographics and certainly our region of the country is changing. Not only will our colleges and universities become more diverse in terms of underrepresented minorities and international students, but they will also continue to diversify in terms of the entering age of students and the number of students that will move in and out of multiple institutions for both undergraduate and graduate degrees and certificates. As an industry, we continue to have difficulties serving these distinct populations and the completion rates among these various groups are significantly different. At Lewis we have an incoming freshman class with 17% of our students who are Hispanic, 10% which are African American, and 7% that are Asian. Our entire underrepresented minority population is 37% for the incoming class. When we look at our student body as a whole we are a little less diverse, with 16% of our overall student body being Hispanic, 7% African American, 4% Asian and another 3% of two or more races. For the entire university we have 30% of our students who self-identify as underrepresented minorities. Every demographic study shows that we will be a majority-minority country by 2050 at the latest. In higher education we will see this change even sooner as our primary audience is younger.

Another demographic issue is the age and working background of those students seeking higher education. As the economy shifts many will continue to find themselves displaced by technology. As this occurs, they will attempt to find places to learn that can get them back to work quickly while at the same time making them less vulnerable to the next economic shift. We continue to try to serve students who begin attending a university in their twenties or beyond through The College, but though these numbers will rise and fall with the economy, we must continue to ask whether we have the appropriate infrastructure and delivery methods to serve these students well.

Quality - When a student is fully immersed in the learning experience they thrive. If the teachers, student life professionals, coaches, and other professionals on this campus are the best in their respective fields, then the student will experience quality at every turn. When families invest tens of thousands of dollars a year in an education, they expect quality. With the ability to compare institutions, the competitive environment demands quality. As a Lasallian institution we demand quality from ourselves. So we must deliver excellence in every arena of the university. This is not limited to any one area, it involves all of you. We certainly must continue to invest in new labs and new classrooms as well new spaces for students outside the classroom such as residence halls, a new student center, and new facilities for our athletes and our clubs and organizations. This is not enough, we must also invest in you. You must be constantly learning as professionals if you are to deliver a quality experience to our students. Most of this takes increased resources, but as already mentioned this is a challenge.

Efficiencies – in order to create a quality, affordable education each institution must find ways of maximizing the impact of each interaction with a student. To spend scarce resources on behaviors that have become unnecessary will lead to a lower quality experience. It is the limitation of resources that drive the need for efficiencies. This is not about some administrator saying we have to cut back, but rather that families speak with their feet when they see that one

institution offers a higher quality experience. They choose the university which they see using their tuition dollars to offer the finest experience possible. The reality of competition drives the need for quality and the need for quality drives the need for efficiency.

These six factors: affordability, delivery, reach, demographics, quality and efficiency; are systemic to the changing character of higher education. As a greater and greater percentage of the population comes to believe that they need at least a bachelor's degree to achieve what they want in their careers, higher education is forced to expand both in size and in reach. When higher education served less than ten percent of the population, and this was just over a century ago, our job was relatively easy. Those that chose to attend a university were well-prepared and had the means to afford the education. In the late 1800's the majority of society was unwelcome at the universities and could not afford it anyway. Now we have pushed this number to one third of adults obtaining a bachelor's degree. We are striving to offer half of the adult population access to higher education. This pushes us in terms of affordability, reach, and delivery. We are being asked to stretch ourselves while maintaining the highest quality. This is necessary because our competition is constantly coming up with new ideas for improving quality and enhancing efficiency. It is also necessary because more and more of our own graduates and those of other institutions are beginning to send their children off to college and they expect an even better collegiate experience for their children than they received.

Even as we compete on the issue of quality with our peer institutions, we face a price-based competition from institutions that have commodified education. They offer credits at less than \$300 and they offer degrees online and at convenient locations. We cannot try to compete with this commodity approach to education. If we try to do this our only goal will be to indefinitely grow enrollment. Growth can be good, but infinite growth is neither realistic nor is it desirable.

Therefore we must find our desired size, our desired reach, we must determine how we wish to integrate technology into our delivery. We must focus our attention on quality across the campus while also seeking to establish several signature programs that will enhance our reputational equity within the Chicagoland area and the region. Finally, we must stay focused on our historical balance of professional preparation and a liberal education.

Master Learners

One of the people that has influenced how I think about the future of higher education is Michael Crow, the president of Arizona State University. You will often hear me quoting one phrase from Michael Crow, the role of higher education in the contemporary context is to create "master learners." You will find just one of his statements about the importance of developing master learners on your card. The point here is that we should not focus our attention on any specific set of skills based in one field of study as the underlying purpose of a degree, rather it is creating graduates who can learn anything. These master learners can adapt to any situation and can learn any material.

It is important that a Lewis graduate can obtain a job. I do not in any way want to minimize that, we want our nurses to obtain jobs at the best regional hospitals and our teachers to continue to move into roles as principals and presidents after years in the classroom. Our accounting

graduates should pass the CPA and move into successful careers in business. We wish for our chemistry and biology graduates to get into excellent graduate schools or go to work developing the next pharmaceutical breakthrough or the next bandage for burn victims, and we want our aviation mechanics to receive offers from American or Southwest. Though we want all this, we must not only prepare them for their first job, but also prepare them for their third, fourth and fifth jobs. We do not know what the careers of the future will be, but we do know that employers want employees who can learn the new technology and adapt to new regulations and that the economy will reward those people who are able to learn a new set of skills as the economy shifts and responds.

A word that is often used regarding the shifts in the economy is “disruption.” Uber is disrupting the cab industry. The internet is a disrupting force in the newspaper business. And, Amazon is disrupting the big box stores’ ability to serve as retail hubs. These disruptive forces within each industry will continue and we have our own disruption that is occurring within higher education, but we must focus on the core of what we do for society.

I was struck several years ago when the CEO of Ford Motor company, Mark Fields, said that we are not a car company, we are a mobility company. In a recent interview he explained this more fully stating:

“It's a very exciting time at Ford, because we are transitioning from an auto company to an auto and a mobility company. Mobility for us, at the very simplest level, is to allow people to live, play, and work where they want. How do we help enable them to get around to do that? And there's a lot of talk around technology companies disrupting the auto industry. Our approach is very simple: We're disrupting ourselves.”

For the last two years, I have been asking myself, what would this mean in the business of higher education? If we ask ourselves what is the “mobility” in our restating of his claim “...we are transitioning from an education university to an education and **blank** university ...” If you can work with me on this analogy, cars and trucks provide mobility, but mobility is the real issue, education and learning provide **blank** and that is the real issue. I have been asking colleagues and friends about this question over the last couple years, and they have come up with some great ideas. We have circled around the issue of freedom or liberation. That is to say, yes we provide an education, a degree, credits, but why do people seek these things? They want to be **free from ... and free to ...** When people are educated they are free from illiteracy or they are free to read, they are free from having to work a minimum wage job and free to work in a career they love, they are free from poverty and free to live a middle class life. Understanding that freedom is a loaded term, I think this is an approximation to the “mobility” term used by Mark Fields. We are in the freedom or liberation business. While we will continue to deliver credits, degrees, and an education we are in the business of developing “master learners” who are free to do what they desire in life and in the economy.

So I agree with Crow when he says:

“And I’m not saying college is for everyone. Learning is for everyone. Adaptation is for everyone. If we can make our universities produce master learners more dedicated to the breadth

of our society, more dedicated to the betterment of our society, more dedicated to the betterment of our democracy, if we can do that also, we will have had a major impact on the outcome of humanity.”

I believe what creates master learners is a strong liberal arts education. Through courses in science and the arts, history and literature, math and theology, finance and philosophy – we prepare our students to be able to learn anything and to be able to respond ethically and productively to the changes that will inevitably occur within the economy in the coming decades. I also believe that Lewis University is better positioned than all but the richest of schools when facing the current challenges. We are committed to preparing master learners and have been doing this for decades. At the same time, we have committed significant resources over the last five years both in the physical plant and in new faculty lines in areas where we expect significant growth. These include: Occupational Therapy, UAS, Aviation, Nursing, Business, STEM, to name only a few. This investment positions us to take advantage of growth areas in the economy. We must continue to make strategic investments in program development and curricular enhancements. I look forward to continuing the conversation on how we can better prepare master learners and how we can further enhance Lewis for the economy of the coming century.

Mission

I would like to close with what this means for us as a community and as individuals who make up this community. I believe that we exist in the presence of the divine mystery. This God, which many of us in this room worship, is in relationship with us. As I have developed my own spiritual practice over the last fifty some years, I have had experiences of awe and wonder and I have had experiences of desolation and abandonment, that is to say, I am human. I have also discovered that I find some of my greatest meaning in being a part of a community with a shared goal, and not just any shared goal, but the goal of education, liberation and freedom. I have devoted my life to education and I am so fortunate that you have chosen me to be your leader. We as a community, can to varying degrees, expand the freedom of over 6,000 students this year. We do this one day at a time, one moment at a time. It is in these moments that we exist in the presence of the divine; that we act as the hands and feet of the divine. We offer ourselves to each other and to our students as a means of creating in them a sense of professionalism and mastery. Our founder and the patron saint of teachers believed in the power of an education to liberate the poor children of France in the 1700’s. I believe in the power of education to liberate people of our time. If we devote ourselves to developing master learners who appreciate that they are part of a global community and know that, they have a responsibility to make this world a better place, we will have done a great thing. Here I believe that Saint John Baptist de La Salle’s simple quote mentioned earlier that, “The way you behave should be a model for those that you teach,” is very important. Our students will only know that we believe that this community does miraculous things, even in the midst of its brokenness, if we model it to them. So I ask that in Lonergan’s words – “Be attentive, be intelligent, be responsible, be loving, and if necessary, change” – as you walk the halls, coach your teams, teach your classes and hold your office hours this year. We must be present to our students and our colleagues this year. We must be focused on providing the very best education possible while acknowledging that we spend our students’ money as we provide this education. We must therefore be good stewards of

their hard earned wages. We must live out grace, we must embody the divine love and we must offer this love and reverence to those we encounter every day.

I hope you have a year filled with moments of grace, mysteries to solve and many meaningful opportunities of association. You are a talented, passionate, caring community and I look forward to working with you.

Thank you for your kind attention and enjoy the rest of your day.