

Faculty Convocation Remarks 2013

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President Esteban, Provost Robinson, Members of the Board of Trustees, Members of the Board of Regents, Distinguished Guests, and Faculty Colleagues:

On behalf of the faculty, I would like to welcome new colleagues, congratulate our newly tenured and promoted faculty, and to thank retired faculty and faculty soon to retire for their years of service to our University. Today, I speak on behalf of the Faculty Senate. I want to thank in a special way the faculty who are serving now or who have served on the Senate and its committees in the past, and in particular to those on the Executive Committee who have given so much of their time.

We begin this academic year with the second largest freshmen class in over 30 years. This freshman class is also academically strong, and many of us have already seen a difference in the classroom. We also begin the year with a flurry of ongoing and soon to be started construction projects that promise to improve the quality of life for students and faculty. And we begin the year with a most welcome cost of living increase. All good things.

I started thinking about these remarks during the summer, with, I might add, some degree of trepidation. As many of you know I spend summers in rural Ireland. A lovely place to read, and to think. I found John Cardinal Newman's *Idea of a University* and, 30 years after reading it in graduate school, I took another look. Several issues he addresses have relevance today. And I spent a lot of time thinking about the university and what we do and why we do it. I hope to share a number of things that uplifted me, that I found interesting to think about, and then some thoughts about the work to be done in this academic year.

Newman notes that the School of Paris was the first university that taught all the arts and sciences, the birth of "universal" learning, the birth of the modern University. This universality is what sets the University apart from other educational institutions. And, of course Newman goes on to make the case for the importance of Theology as a discipline in the modern University. Dr. Beneteau

noted last year that this was also where faculty and student rights were established (more about that later).

I remembered being struck all those years ago by Newman's thoughts about teaching and research and I was struck again at his discussion of intellectual labor.

"To discover and to teach are distinct functions: they are also distinct gifts, and are not commonly found in the same person. He, too, who spends his day in dispensing his existing knowledge to all comers is unlikely to have either leisure or energy to acquire new. The common sense of mankind has associated the search after truth with seclusion and quiet. The greatest thinkers have been too intent on their subject to admit of interruption; they have been men of absent minds and idiosyncratic habits, and have, more or less, shunned the lecture room and the public school. (Going back to Plato, Aristotle, Bacon). There are exceptions, Socrates being one. The great discoveries in the sciences have not been made at Universities. On the whole, teaching involves external engagements, the natural home for experiment and speculation is retirement".

Newman's thoughts certainly resonate with me, and I would guess with many of you. I do know that we are challenged today to teach and do research, and to do both well. For most of us it is a struggle finding the right balance. Getting outside funding can buy out our time. We then have more time for research but spend less time in the classroom. In a university like Seton Hall, that places great value on teaching, on what happens in the classroom and faculty interaction with students, how can we maintain excellence in teaching if much of our time and energy is devoted to research? The resources required to do both well is always an issue. It is also interesting that when Newman wrote the *Idea of a University* service was not part of the faculty job description. I am left thinking, how many hours are there in a day?

The goal of a liberal University education is to think, to question, to make sense of the world. Pope Benedict XVI notes that "The task of a teacher is not simply to impart information or to provide training in skills intended to deliver some economic benefit to society: education is not and must never be considered as purely utilitarian. It is about forming the human person, equipping him or her to live life to the full --- in short it is about imparting wisdom". (Benedict, p. 122).

This transcendent dimension of study and teaching is very much part of the Catholic intellectual tradition.

And Newman notes “*Liberal education and liberal pursuits are exercises of mind, of reason, of reflection.Knowledge is valuable for what its very presence in us does for us...a habit, a way of viewing the world, even so no direct end. A habit of mind is formed that lasts through life...whose attributes are freedom, equitableness, calmness, moderation and wisdom*”. These qualities may indeed make a University graduate more marketable.

Newman discourses on the importance of liberal arts as essential and foundational for professional schools within the University. He cites medicine and law, but we can add nursing, education, the health sciences and business.

I was a nursing major as an undergraduate. I am not sure if my own conviction of the value and importance of the liberal arts for all university students isn't at least partly related to the fact that as a nursing major I met my husband in a Western Civ class. Or, if it is related to the fact that in those years a nursing degree included 80 credits of liberal arts. What I learned in those courses made a difference both at that time and over the course of time. My liberal arts education probably made me a better nurse and it certainly has made me a better mother, educator and human being.

We are challenged at Seton Hall to be mindful of the importance of the liberal arts, particularly as we expand and refine curriculum. For the professional schools who deal with issues of accreditation this is an ongoing challenge.

Einstein said “A student is not a container you have to fill but a torch you have to light up.” I suspect that many, if not most of us can identify a professor, a class, an intellectual experience as an undergraduate or graduate student that sparked something in us...and that spark led to being here today.

Benedict notes that “*Every educational setting should be a place of openness, dialogue, cohesiveness, attentive listening where students feel appreciated for their personal abilities and inner riches and can learn to esteem each other.*” (Benedict, p. 100). He goes on to say, “*To ‘believe in study’ means to recognize that study and research...especially in the University years...have an intrinsic power to*

widen the horizons of human intelligence, as long as academic study remains demanding, rigorous, serious, methodical and progressive. Indeed on these conditions it represents an advantage for the global formation of the human person (Benedict, p. 125).

We all have memories of working hard as a student, especially when inspired by an excellent professor or excited by what we were learning. Inspiring and exciting students, and demanding hard work, brings rich rewards for ourselves as well as for our students. We can inspire students with our own hard work, our excitement, and our willingness to spend time with them in lively discussion and argument.

The *Wall Street Journal* on August 30 ran a piece that suggested that rising university costs are related to the increase in numbers of administrators. A letter to the editor a week later, *Professors Abdicated Their Governing Role*, suggests that faculty abdication of University governance is the reason for rising university costs. That same letter, not surprisingly, suggested that faculty have a cushy life with most responsibilities willingly farmed out to adjuncts and graduate assistants. This is an all too common idea and is certainly not true at Seton Hall. I won't say anything more about it. But the article and the letter to the editor raise the issues of the corporatization of the university and what role the faculty do play in university governance.

Provost Robinson affirms over and over again that universities are not corporations. Our products, our outcomes, could not be more different. Universities are a place apart. Where curiosity (Einstein talks of HOLY curiosity), imagination, and ideas take center stage. Where faculty (employees) can freely speak their mind (academic freedom), where ideas can be freely discussed and debated, where the life of the mind is central. Where students learn, not a collection of facts, but how to think. The University isn't about bang for your buck, delivering on your deliverables, or making a profit (although we know that having one's financial house in order is critical). At its worst, corporatization strips the faculty of its intellectual independence, impoverishes the teaching staff and diminishes its dignity and academic freedom, and deprives students of appropriate intellectual challenges. We are fortunate that the Chief Academic Officer is an academic and understands and values the role and the importance of faculty. His support, and the ongoing support of the President, are manifested in their

commitment to tenure, to academic freedom, and to shared governance. Although we don't always agree, there is always attentive listening, honest discussion, and a spirit of collaboration that, although it takes more time than we often like, eventually leads to progress. Back to that WSJ piece, I would argue that we, the faculty, have not given over governance of the university to administrators, unless, of course, we choose to not participate in shared governance.

Shared governance starts at the department level, and then the school and university level. Control of curriculum, hiring and promotion of faculty, and standards for admission and graduation are faculty responsibilities. The Faculty Senate and its committees vigilantly work to make sure the Faculty Guide, the Bible of our contractual rights and responsibilities, is followed. It's valuable to remember the School of Paris where 800 years ago faculty and students had no rights and fought to get them. If we don't participate we risk losing our faculty rights.

We face a number of critical issues that demand our attention over the next year, this is a snapshot:

- The Compensation committee continues its work on a salary study. This is a priority item with the hope that based on the study findings (completed this semester) and with continued financial stability, there will be planned salary adjustments over the next several years. The committee is also evaluating issues related to adjunct faculty compensation.
- The Senate approved an Intellectual Property proposal that is under review. The intellectual property rights of faculty are increasingly important issues. Plans to increase the number of online courses make having a clear policy regarding intellectual property of faculty of critical importance. This is a high priority item for the Senate.
- The Senate approved an Academic Integrity policy that is under review. Until this is officially approved there is no academic integrity policy at the University. Approval of a policy is critical.
- There has been discussion of an Honor Code for a number of years. The undergraduate student government has expressed keen interest in working

with faculty in developing an Honor Code. The time appears to be right for making this happen. Our vision is that this is a student endeavor with faculty involvement.

- Probationary faculty need to have some measure of confidence in the expectation of contract renewal as they work towards tenure. There need to be clear, fair guidelines at the department level, transparency related to expectations, and evaluations based on specific guidelines. This is also a priority item.
- Many departments struggle with losing excellent term faculty when the maximum 5 years are completed. The Faculty Guide committee, with the support of the Provost, is developing a proposal for a lecturer line with a rolling contract. This is another priority item.
- Tenure: Without tenure, there is fertile ground for restricting academic freedom, intellectual debate, and unduly influencing curriculum and research agendas. All schools in this University should have the opportunity of tenure appointments.
- We applaud the University for raising the academic excellence of our students. We would like to raise the bar on our own teaching and research. Centers of Excellence promise to ease the struggle of combining a life of teaching and a life of research (and service). We look forward to the Provost's plans for investing in us, the faculty who are not part of Centers of Excellence, to better support our research.

We look forward to working closely with the Provost and making progress over the course of this academic year. We are hopeful that an improving financial situation will allow us to focus on these strategic objectives this year.

Einstein had some wonderful things to say about education. *“Bear in mind that the wonderful things you learn in your schools are the work of many generations. All this is put in your hands as your inheritance in order that you may receive it, honor it, add to it, and one day faithfully hand it on to your children.”*

This is the work that WE aspire to do, I hope: putting the work of hundreds of generations of scholars, of human beings, into the hands of our students, honoring

it, and adding to it, so that our students can one day faithfully hand it on to their children, live their lives as a manifestation of it, and in doing so make the world a better place.

References:

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