



Office of the President

Mary B. Marcy

Inaugural Address

Chairman Gaulding, Members of the Board of Trustees, Distinguished Guests, alumni, friends of the university, colleagues, and students:

Thank you for an inspiring welcome, and for a moving introduction. In particular, thank you to my good friends and colleagues: Elaine Hansen whose remarks today underscore a lifetime of leadership in liberal arts education; Kathleen O'Brien who understands and lives daily connection between education and meaning; the faculty, Sisters and students at Dominican who, through music, symbols and words have today demonstrated the profound intersection of intelligence and creativity.

It is a distinct privilege to be installed as the ninth President of Dominican. I am honored by your selection, strengthened by your support, and humbled by the history on which we stand. While we gather today for my installation as your new President, we are here today to celebrate Dominican.

The leadership of any campus stands on the history of the institution and on the vision of previous generations. As I formally assume the presidency today, I am keenly aware of the significance of legacy. When I look at this audience, I see leaders in American higher education, past and present Dominican leaders including past Presidents Joe Fink and Barbara Bundy, scores of alumni, students, faculty, and friends. And I see members of my own family, who I am so pleased to have join us today. I carry the legacy of both the campus and my family with me into the presidency. Their histories are not as far apart as you might think.

Consider, for example, the founding of Dominican. When the Dominican Sisters

chartered the college in 1890, they saw an unsettled land, had a powerful vision, a commitment to serve, and very few resources. That tradition has continued.

When Sister Samuel Conlan was asked to lead Dominican in 1968 she inherited a dedicated, robust educational community. Nonetheless, when she told her father she had been asked to become president of Dominican, he did not offer congratulations. Instead, he suggested that before she accept the presidency, she first go back to school and get an advanced degree in finance from the Wharton School. Good — and probably still relevant — advice.

At about the time the Dominican sisters were founding this institution, in the late 1800s, my great-grandfather moved to then-unincorporated western Nebraska. There he started a cattle ranch and helped found a community. He helped establish the one-room school where, nearly a century later, I began my education. That educational district served generations, and the ranch still operates today as a family business. Family folklore has it that when my great-grandfather left with his horse and wagon for Nebraska, he had nothing. When he got to Nebraska, he still had it.

So at the least, Dominican and my family share a tradition of commitment to education and a tradition of scarce resources. While this may not seem the ideal legacy the result, in both cases, has been enduring. To paraphrase the President of Bard College, intellectual ambition, idealism, and poverty can be an explosive combination.

As we look at this campus with its spectacular natural surroundings, its lovely facilities, its impressive lay leadership, its strong faculty, its committed alumni and staff, and its diverse and exceptional student body, it is tempting to assume that the merits of founding a campus in San Rafael in the late 1800s were self evident. They were not. The campus moved several times before being fully established, and there was a lapse of twenty-five years between the granting of our charter and the entrance of the first students.

Dominican is an institution that was, quite literally, founded on faith. Faith, of course, in the conventional sense, as the Dominican Sisters created a campus that embodied the ideals they had been called to serve. And faith in a broader sense as well. Faith that an institution of higher learning was essential to the development of a community. Faith that reasoned inquiry is fundamental to a meaningful life. Faith that education has the capacity to build a society, and to transform lives.

This is the legacy we all inherit, the legacy on which we build. Dominican has changed in some remarkable ways over the years. From a Catholic women's college we evolved to

become a secular co-educational university with a Dominican heritage. From a classic liberal arts college we developed pre-professional and professional programs infused with liberal learning. We built the physical campus, diversified the faculty and student body, and added programs, buildings, and enrollment.

This nimbleness has been a function of pragmatism, but also of confidence. We have evolved with the needs of a changing world. Such evolution is possible because we have clarity about Dominican's enduring strengths. The soul of our institution resides in Dominican values. Those values, the values of study, reflection, community, and service, are at the core of our mission.

Those values are the legacy we carry as we build Dominican for the next generation. This is a campus not only with a rich history, but with a dynamic present and a profoundly exciting future.

When I was in the midst of the presidential selection process I read thoroughly the documents outlining Dominican's educational approach. Included in those documents was the strategic plan. And included in the strategic plan was the most ambitious agenda for undergraduate engaged learning that I have seen. I have since had numerous conversations with faculty, students, staff, alumni, and the Board about that idea.

Today, I want to share it with all of you.

The strategic plan sets out an agenda for engaged student learning that rejects the false dichotomy between the liberal arts and practical education. The goal is to ensure that every student receives a rigorous liberal arts education. And the goal is to augment that classroom experience with a strong set of partnerships that ensure students put their learning into action.

Imagine a campus where every student will receive a challenging classroom experience grounded in the highest ideals of liberal education. Now imagine a campus where every student will graduate having actively applied those intellectual concepts beyond class. At Dominican, we will ask every student receiving a Bachelor's degree to have a common liberal education, and to have participated in at least three experiences that use that education in an active way. The out-of-class experiences will include service-learning projects, study abroad experiences, internships, student research, or leadership development projects.

The result will be the best of the liberal arts: the ability to think clearly, to analyze

thoroughly, to reason, to assess, to communicate, to make connections across difference. The result will be the best of practical education: the ability to put knowledge to use, to resolve problems and implement ideas, to adapt, to apply intellectual skills to practical challenges.

This is the vision embedded in our strategic plan. It is the idea generated through extensive discussion on campus and endorsed by the Board of Trustees. It builds on the strength of our graduate programs. It is a vision as ambitious as any in the nation, and I believe contains the seeds of Dominican's future.

It is unusual in higher education to embrace liberal education and lived experience in such a definitive way. There is a telling story — possibly apocryphal, but certainly credible — about a graduation ceremony at an elite university. As can often happen (although never at Dominican!) the Dean of Business and the Dean of Arts and Humanities had been in heated competition through the academic year.

With their in-fighting still unresolved, the Dean of Business decided to use the occasion of commencement to make a definitive statement about the preeminence of business education. As he prepared to announce his graduates, the Dean of Business stood and said “Madam President, I present to you today the candidates for degrees in business. These students are graduating today actually knowing how to do something.” After great applause, he proudly presented his graduates for diplomas.

While those names were read, the Dean of Arts and Humanities had ample time to reflect. When he arose to announce his graduates, he proclaimed: “Madam President, I present to you today the candidates for degrees in Arts and Humanities. These students graduate today knowing how to do anything.”

Dominican's students will graduate knowing how to do something, and prepared to do anything. Few other institutions in the nation have such ambitious goals around the notion of engaged learning. I suspect very few have the capacity to make it happen.

The reason we created this goal at Dominican, the reason we will realize this vision, is because it ties so clearly to our educational roots. The fact this effort builds on our natural strengths is illustrated by the already active programs in place: over 8000 hours of service-learning projects through 23 classes last year. Nursing and Occupational Therapy students who provide wellness services to low income adults. Over 70 student papers presented at the Conference on Undergraduate Research, the most in the nation. And when I talked to the faculty about this notion of engaged learning, they told me something both simple and

profound: our vision for engaged learning works because it represents Dominican values in action: to study, to reflect, and to serve our community.

But we cannot make it happen as isolated individuals. For a truly robust engaged learning program to emerge, we need your help. We will need non-profit and community organizations to help expand our service-learning programs. We will need businesses to help grow internship opportunities. We will need international partners to create strong study abroad and exchange programs. We will need laboratory space and equipment to provide high quality research opportunities. We will need mentors to strengthen our leadership development activities.

On campus, we will need to invest in our faculty, our intellectual leaders whose exceptional credentials are surpassed only by their commitment to students. We will need to engage our staff who will structure, manage, and enable these experiences. We will need to support students in and out of the classroom. We will need to recruit students who can most benefit from our distinctive model of education. We will need philanthropic support to create opportunities for program, faculty and student development. And we will need inspired leadership to make it all happen.

In short, we will need to act as a Dominican community. And we will. This notion of engaged learning is a cornerstone of our strategic plan, but it is not the only component of our vision for the University. The strategic plan has five overarching goals for a Dominican education, goals that are ambitious but achievable, goals that are tied to Dominican values and yet fully contemporary.

The second is a commitment to a common intellectual experience as part of each student's first year at the University. Dominican is one of the few institutions in the nation that requires a common first year seminar. The power of this approach is manifest: students engage the same texts, but may be taking the course from a philosopher or a biologist, a political scientist or an art historian. They learn how to approach difficult texts, discuss work of the course with peers, compare their class discussions with students in other seminars, and explore connections between and across difference. It is a thorough grounding in college-level work and creates a shared intellectual heritage regardless of major.

Dominican's first year experience takes this commitment one step further. We are the only institution using the emerging discipline of Big History as our common intellectual core. The course challenges students to consider history from the Big Bang to the present.

In the process, they learn about the creation of the solar system, about the conditions necessary for life and for civilization, and about the development of political, social, religious, and aesthetic systems that make meaning of that life. The approach is broad enough for thoughtful discussion of contentious topics, specific enough to invite research, and rigorous enough to demand a level of writing, thinking, and analysis that will serve students through their undergraduate careers. It is being taught by thirty-five faculty members from a range of disciplines and schools. Dominican is the undisputed leader in creating effective pedagogical approaches to this emerging and inspiring topic.

The third commitment in our strategic vision is to diversity. Diversity is an idea too frequently argued about, not as frequently thought about, and very infrequently understood. There are three philosophical underpinnings to Dominican's commitment to diversity. First is an understanding that students learn from peers in and out of the classroom, and having students from a broad range of backgrounds and life experiences enhances all students' educations. The second is a recognition that Dominican is an institution firmly grounded in California and the world. For our students to succeed on campus and beyond, they must be able to engage a population as diverse and rich as the human tapestry. And finally, because education is still the most effective means to personal and social transformation in the world, selection to that opportunity should be based on personal capacity and commitment, not on accidents or opportunities of birth.

This is why our Dominican community is a diverse community. Our students reflect this commitment. They look like California. Forty percent of our undergraduates are students of color and nearly as many are first generation college students. We have strong and selective graduate programs. We have one of the most active Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes in the country, and a robust Pathways program for returning adults. Our students are distinguished by their diversity, and connected by their Dominican education.

A fourth component of Dominican's strategic plan is a commitment to internationalization. As travel and technology have made the world more readily accessible, they have also made it more complex. As we watch debates over immigration at home and witness revolution abroad, there is little doubt that an educated citizen of the 21st century must have exposure to ideas, cultures, language, and experiences beyond the borders of the United States. And our work in universities must include research and service beyond our own borders.

Dominican has the opportunity to build a program that incorporates an international perspective in our curriculum while offering research opportunities, exchange programs, and study abroad experiences. Dominican's history of work in Uganda and in Thailand provides a solid base on which to build. Our research in the Pacific Rim, South Africa, and Sweden offers lessons in creating international programs that tie closely to our academic strengths. Our work with English language programs has taught us to welcome and to integrate students from around the world. Our study abroad programs have given students the opportunity to learn from personal experience what it is like to be different, to be in the minority, to be immersed in new cultures and new ideas.

The power of an international vision at a small campus is that we can provide the support and personal engagement students need while at the same time opening the world to them.

And the fifth component of the Dominican plan is sustainability. Sustainability, like diversity, can be misunderstood or contentious, serve as a rallying cry or derided. Like diversity, it is simply a fact of contemporary life, one that educated citizens in this century must be prepared to address. In the Dominican plan, sustainability is about how we educate students and how we manage our own campus. It entails an awareness of our living conditions, our community, and our long-term viability. We cannot educate students for leadership unless they have a clear understanding of the effects of their actions on themselves, their communities, and their habitat. So of course we work to make the campus environmentally conscious, and of course we monitor our own carbon footprint. But we do more than the conventional. We built a venture greenhouse, designed to nurture socially aware businesses and make them financially sustainable.

We launched a green MBA program, and challenge graduates to develop businesses that serve society as well as the bottom line. We support inter-disciplinary work in environmental studies. We worked with alumni and campus ministries and are cultivating a community garden. Sometimes we even pick apples at the President's residence and raise money with the proceeds.

Dominican is not a large enough campus to claim leadership in all areas, to offer programs across the spectrum, or to provide cutting edge research in every discipline. But this is not our mission. Our mission is to align academic excellence and Dominican values, to champion an educational model that is enduring and relevant, personal in its experience and global in its engagement. These five priorities: engaged learning, Big

History as the first year experience, diversity, internationalization, and sustainability, invite us to do precisely that.

We will succeed in these areas. In fact, we have already begun. With the leadership of a single faculty member but the commitment of an entire campus we have developed an integrated service-learning core. With the belief that research and knowledge advance social progress we have built a new science center, instituted partnerships with BioMarin and the Buck Institute, and created an active undergraduate research program. With the scholarly vision of an emeritus colleague and the intellectual curiosity of dozens we have crafted a distinctive first year experience program. With the belief that doing well and doing good should never be mutually exclusive we are supporting sustainable businesses and using our health sciences program to strengthen health care. With the vision of Dominic we have brought our model of teacher education to South Africa.

The influence of this mission is not limited to our campus. By nurturing students and leveraging education, we will change the world. This is not hyperbole. Think, for a moment, about the dramatic events we have witnessed since the start of the 21st century. We have learned quite directly in the last decade of the power of the individual and the power of community.

The late Stephen Jay Gould observed the impact of such actions at work in New York City in the fall and winter of 2001. It was, he said a 'Great Asymmetry.' On September 11, scores of lives were lost through the destructive acts of a small handful of men. Yet those acts of destruction were met by millions of acts of healing and compassion: volunteers working at ground zero, thousands standing in line to donate blood, discussions at universities across the country (including this one). This is what Gould called the Great Asymmetry: the destructive acts of a few are repaired by the creative acts of millions. We have witnessed the Great Asymmetry, across the globe and in our own lives.

Change in the Middle East was made necessary by the acts of a few brutal dictators. Yet the Arab spring was successful through the sustained action of thousands; thousands of individuals with a hunger for freedom and a belief in a better life.

Profound leaps of inclusion for women and for people of color were ignited by acts of simple courage: sitting at a lunch counter, securing the vote, pursuing advanced education, or demanding equal pay.

And we have seen the Great Asymmetry in our own communities. When we see the ravages of natural disasters, of poverty, or of personal illness, we respond. So we support

ground-breaking cancer research at Dominican, help neighborhoods respond to crime, and create educational opportunity.

Suffering is not healed through a single grand gesture, but through millions of acts of courage and service.

Destruction is simple. Creation is hard. And yet we seek connection. We long to build. Our collective future is dependent on the Great Asymmetry.

This is why I believe the Dominican vision for education can change the world. Because if we equip students with the intellectual tools to find their own calling, if we provide the basis for moral and ethical leadership, they will help swing the balance. We will contribute to the Great Asymmetry.

So Dominican and our students will help build our communities and will help change the world. I see a world today rich in resources, yet hungry for connection and freedom. I see the United States, a country of soaring ideals, yet searching for common ground. I see California, a state that has been defined by opportunity, now struggling to support the next generation, yet still committed to the Commonwealth. I see Dominican, a University with the vision, values, and intellectual capacity to transform lives. I see a faculty dedicated to students and to knowledge. I see an alumni community grounded in Dominican values and supported by the rigors of a Dominican education. I see a Board with the highest aspirations for their University. And I see a student body seeking knowledge and insight, opportunity and meaning. Our Dominican student body will leave this community knowing that their education has transformed them, and can transform the world.

As I consider the legacies we hold today, I conclude by offering two brief reflections. First, you no doubt noticed the flags brought in during our processional and now located on the stage. They represent our country, state, and University, as well as the many countries from which our students and faculty originated. At my request, there is also an American flag flying over the Dominican grounds today, on the flagpole near Conlan Recreation Center. That flag has a particular resonance for me. Like many of his generation, my father served in the Second World War. He died in 2005. The American flag flying on campus today is the one that was on his casket and was later given to my mother. It is here to remind me of the personal legacy I carry from my family. It is a family that believes deeply in the value of education and gave me the opportunity to pursue it.

The second reflection I want to share is a conversation I had this summer with a

Dominican alumnae. Soon after I arrived, I met several alumni and friends of Dominican at the newly restored Dominican Heritage and Alumni House. They were visiting it for the first time since its renovation, and were thrilled at the transformation. After our meeting, I learned that one of the women was visiting because she has a terminal illness. She wanted to see if St. Catherine Benincasa Chapel would be suitable for her memorial mass. When I heard this, I paid her a personal visit to learn more about her experience and about her wishes. We had a wonderful discussion of her time at Dominican, of her education by the Sisters, of her hopes for her family and her hopes for our campus. When I left, she said simply to me: “take care of my college. It means so very much.”

It does indeed. Dominican, its history and its values, is a campus that I am privileged to lead. Today, together as a community, we honor these legacies. Together as a community, we will create the Dominican of the future. Today, together as a community, let us begin.

Mary B. Marcy
President