



9-1-2010

Letter - 2010 Fall Address to the Faculty

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Recommended Citation

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2010 Fall Address to the Faculty

"A Commitment to Quality"

President Pamela A. Eibeck

Good afternoon and thank you for joining me today to discuss issues of consequence to University of the Pacific, particularly to our faculty. Faculty are the "engine" of a university (please bear with me as my engineering background reveals itself!). It is the faculty who provide the horsepower to propel our university into the future and, most importantly, it is the faculty who determine the quality of the institution. It's you who have the most at stake regarding the future of our University: those with or anticipating tenure can anticipate a lifetime commitment to Pacific, and your professional satisfaction and reputation are directly linked to the institution's success. Thus issues of importance to University of the Pacific and to higher education are important to you. Which brings us to today's address, our first annual faculty address. Each fall, this gathering will give me an opportunity to share with you my perspective on the critical issues facing our university. Today I am going to talk about quality and how our quality as an academic institution rests with you.

Before I launch into my formal remarks, I would like to thank you for the efforts you've made to ensure a successful semester:

1. Here in Stockton we welcomed a record freshman class of 1,031 students, nearly 150 more than we anticipated. Our departments and faculty, especially those in the College, have welcomed these freshmen by adding numerous new sections of Pacific Seminar I, science labs, and other general education courses. Their home majors have expanded introductory courses and you, their advisors, have spent even more time than usual helping incoming students sort out their schedules and rethink their majors. Thank you for your positive attitude and great success in serving our students!
2. In San Francisco, the Arthur A. Dugoni School of Dentistry has soldiered on without their leader, Pat Ferrillo, who is spending the next few months with us in Stockton as Interim Provost. Thank you, Pat! And thank you to Nader Nadershahi and his team at Dugoni who have stepped forward to make sure that no student or faculty member misses a beat.

3. And in Sacramento, the McGeorge School of Law deserves applause for their outstanding entering class. At a time when our nation has a surplus of law schools and a shrinking applicant pool, McGeorge has attracted a robust entering class with the highest median LSAT score in its history. Moreover, they have been recognized as a top-100 law school by *US News & World Report*, with their Trial Advocacy and International Law Programs ranking fifth and fifteenth nationally.

4. Speaking of *US News* rankings, we can be pleased that Pacific was named a top-100 national university. This is mainly an undergraduate-oriented ranking that considers such factors as selectivity for freshmen (we accepted 38% of applicants last year), retention rates, graduation rates, and expenditures per student.

Now it is nice to be recognized, but at the same time these rankings are problematic. For example, *US News* rankings are a major consideration, if not THE major consideration, for prospective law students shopping for schools. But since peer assessment, a hit-or-miss measure, is worth a whopping 25% of a law school's position, ranking becomes a beauty contest that is unworthy of a profession based in reason and principles. And in the undergraduate rankings (where we are ranked with national research universities), peer assessment is worth 15-22.5% of the rating (depending on whether you count assessment by high school counselors.) But how can the opinion of someone who has never been to Pacific or spoken to a Pacific alumnus be a valid determinant of the quality of our University? Really, how can a handful of parameters, even important ones like selectivity and graduation rates and expenditures per student, determine a University's relative quality? A university's quality is terribly difficult - if not impossible - to judge simply by the numbers.

Rather, we know that a university's quality truly depends on its faculty - on the deep dedication you have to your students and your disciplines. Yes, a university's quality depends on the **passion of its faculty**, professors such as Eric Hammer - our Conservatory's Pied Piper - whose caring and engaged nature draws young musicians to Pacific and inspires them to share his passion for music. And a university's quality depends on the **discoveries of its faculty** - professors such as Will Stringfellow, the Director of our Ecological Engineering Research Program, who was part of the national research team that discovered that a new bacterium was devouring the massive oil plume in the Gulf of Mexico. And a university's quality depends on the **social conscience of its faculty** - professors such as Camille Norton, Chair of English, who has collaborated with student and veteran Victor Inzunza to help local veterans and their families write therapeutically about their experiences of war.

We also know that a university's quality depends, at its most fundamental level, on how well our students acquire new knowledge, new ways of thinking, and new skills, both inside and outside the classroom. Our students' intellectual progress is determined by many complex factors:

1. our instructors who bring knowledge to life with teaching that captures the beauty and complexity of the subject matter;

2. our curricula, which tie disciplines together and ensure depth and breadth of knowledge in our graduates;
3. our students' preparation and enthusiasm for learning, which drives them to give their all on assignments and exams;
4. our students' extra-curricular experience, whether that's research in a lab or service to ASUOP, which reinforces the value of knowledge and makes them eager to keep learning;
5. and, especially true at University of the Pacific, by the relationship between a faculty member and a student: the lifetime bond formed when you, our faculty, become the mentors that inspire our students to see the links between the knowledge they've acquired and the powerful and meaningful lives they want to lead.

And so I ask you, "Do we know how well our students demonstrate the knowledge, ways of thinking, and skills that you have worked so tirelessly to instill?" To use a very simple phrase: *what have our students learned from what we have taught?* As I said, we know that a university's quality - its greatness - extends well beyond this basic question: "how much have our students actually learned?" But this is the most fundamental knowledge that we, University of the Pacific, and every other higher education institution must attain.

Many of you are thinking: I know just what she is talking about. Our department's faculty members have been identifying what our graduates should know or be able to do at graduation, and for years we've been measuring how well they have achieved those outcomes. At times we have been surprised by what we learned (or rather, what the students *didn't* learn) and so we've gone back and modified a syllabus or added a new project and were relieved to see that it made a difference...our students actually learned the material better. Those of you who have been completing this assessment loop for years have probably done so in part because your accrediting body forced you to...likely for a decade or so. And likely you resented it at first, but eventually you figured out that it is doable and now you have made assessment a regular part of your faculty responsibility, to be done during and after each day, month, semester and year.

Many of our professional schools are well acquainted with this model. But demonstrating the quality of our university at its most fundamental level by measuring what our students have learned is no longer just the purview of the professional schools with accreditation bodies that require outcome assessment. It is the purview of *every* school, department and interdisciplinary program. It is necessary for *every* degree program we offer. We need to determine what every student should know to earn that specific degree, and we need to determine what students that graduate from University of the Pacific actually know. In fact, you decided to do exactly that last fall when you approved, through the formal governance process, a set of ambitious and powerful University-wide educational outcomes that will apply equally to the student graduating with a doctorate in dental science and the one completing a bachelor's degree in philosophy.

And now we face the challenge of showing *how* our students - the DDS, the philosophy BA, and every other graduate - demonstrate their mastery of the educational outcomes we have adopted. It's not enough just to say that these are the things we value and teach. We have to prove it. We have to assess student learning and achievement *visibly* and *systematically*.

We're making a lot of progress in pockets across the University, and in a minute I'm going to cite specific examples of schools, departments, and individuals who are helping to promote a culture of assessment at Pacific. But, just in case *anyone* is out there thinking: Ugh. I don't feel like listening to another lecture about assessment....I already heard it from my dean and my department chair and if I can just go back to my office quickly (I'll skip the wine at the president's house), I won't have to hear about this again. Just in case anyone needs a little pep talk on the value of assessment, let me share my personal story:

Allow me to reflect back on my marvelous days as a faculty member in mechanical engineering. I taught heat transfer to seniors. Engineers rely on mathematical modeling using differential equations to predict heat transfer in things like the floor of your car so your feet don't burn, or on the outside of a space shuttle during atmospheric reentry. So, anyway, every spring I would teach heat transfer and we would get to the section on predictions of heat conduction using differential equations, and I would go into a tailspin. I would rant to my colleagues over the coffee pot that our majors must not *ever* have taken a math class before, that they didn't know the basics of how to even do a differential, much less solve a simple first order Diff EQ...only three semesters after they took the bloody course from the math department! And it would make me sad, or furious, or both to see evidence of their lack of differential equations skills on that heat transfer conduction exam...kids earning a solid A in the course would wipe out on that exam. They would make it through the course, typically with a B or a C, but I knew that they would graduate without sufficient analytical modeling tools to be a good engineer. And that left me pretty discouraged.

I bet many of you can relate. It is the nature of the professoriate...to want our students to learn and to notice when they aren't learning well enough. And to get frustrated that they can slip by since an important learning outcome isn't indicated by a grade in a course, but rather is indicated by an exam or a senior project or a presentation or an essay.

What I should have done right away is gotten a group of faculty together to make sure we agreed on how much math modeling we expected from our students (perhaps I was unrealistic in my personal expectations) and reviewed the syllabi in the prerequisite math courses to discover that, yes, they were taught Differential Equations. And then we should have looked at the syllabi of our sophomore and junior year courses to see if the students actually **USED** the math they learned in other engineering courses before they hit the important heat transfer course in their senior year. And then, after increasing the math modeling assignments in our other engineering courses, I should have tracked to see if our students' performance on that heat transfer conduction exam actually improved.

Well, the good news is: that's exactly what we did...once our engineering accrediting agency, ABET, made us. We measured, made changes, and measured again. We kept records. And it felt good to

see improvements in our students learning, and ABET was happy to see the records of our students' improved learning.

So one point of this story is that our accreditation agencies are asking us to do, formally, what we do all the time, informally. They are just asking us to be more thorough, to record what we do, and keep at it to ensure that our students' learning has reached our expectations. The other point of this story is that I became better satisfied professionally once I began to implement the changes assessment told me were needed. As educators we need to know what we expect, where we stand, and how to improve, whether an accreditation agency expects it or not. Evaluation of this type is a necessary step to quality. It's how we maintain it and move it forward...and demonstrate our commitment to quality in all we do.

And colleagues, it's also important that we face reality: assessment of student learning is here at Pacific, and in every American college and university, to stay. The source of this pressure to be accountable to the public, the pressure to gauge what some policy makers refer to as "the primary measure of quality in higher education," comes not (or not only) from your university president, our professional accrediting agencies, and our regional accrediting agency, WASC. No, it comes directly from Washington DC: from the White House, the Congress and the Department of Education. And it's gaining momentum. This pressure began well before George W Bush's presidency, but it gained strength during that administration with the Margaret Spellings commission, which seriously considered a standardized baccalaureate exam. And as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported just the other day, this pressure is continuing under the Obama administration. The Obama administration promises to be even tougher on colleges than the Bush administration, because its officials value higher education and believe it needs to perform much better if we as a nation are to successfully educate our citizens and drive the American economy. In other words, US elected officials and policy makers have recognized that a college education is no longer simply an opportunity for the elite to spend four years attending class - occasionally - and cheering on the football team. Rather, over the past four decades, higher education has become a necessity for a young person to be prepared for an effective life as an individual, a citizen and a member of the American workforce. Our technological and scientific advances, our economic wellbeing, and, most fundamentally, our nation's future are at risk without educated adults.

Over these decades the feds have noticed that our young people are not well prepared to enter college. So we have witnessed the advent of "No Child Left Behind," the establishment of K-12 learning requirements, and endless standardized testing. Well, for the past fifteen years those same feds have also had higher education in their crosshairs. Now that K-12 testing is well entrenched, they have turned their attention to the possibility of college testing. Those regional accrediting agencies like WASC that "torment" university campuses by showing up to shake their fingers and insist, "YOU MUST ASSESS STUDENT LEARNING OR ELSE," are actually *protecting* us. They are the only shield between us (the universities) and federally mandated college-level standardized exams. Their "OR ELSE" is referring to what could happen if our universities, our faculty, don't assess student learning. Dr. Molly Corbett Broad, the president of the American Council on Education, said it well last April: "To the extent that federal policy makers are now willing to bail out

banks and other financial institutions, and to take major equity positions in our automakers, because those companies are too big to fail, then I believe it's wise for us to assume they will have little reservation about regulating higher education now that they know it is too important to fail." According to President Broad, for example, the Department of Education has recently taken to scrutinizing *how* regional accreditors judge quality. The Department of Education has proposed rules that would encroach on areas that historically have been the province of colleges and their faculties, such as the most basic issues of academic quality as the definition of what constitutes a "credit hour." In fact, the Department of Education has even questioned the viability of one of the regional accreditors, the North Central Association. So this is an issue the federal government is taking very seriously. And frankly, it extends even beyond our national borders. The European Union, for instance, is in the process of adopting the much-heralded "Bologna process," a centralized governmental reform of higher education.

So here sits University of the Pacific, a small player in this global, highly scrutinized, essential enterprise known as higher education, getting called out for coming up short in one crucial area of the regional reaccreditation process. For those of you new to Pacific, WASC (the Western Association of Schools and Colleges) is our regional accrediting agency and without their stamp of approval, all our professional accreditations are defunct and every one of our degrees is worthless to our graduates. A WASC team visited us last spring and in July they sent us an action letter communicating the issues they consider most critical. The most important statement from the WASC action letter is this:

Assessment of student learning, along with assessment of learning outcomes and student success, is necessary for program review, which in turn is required to demonstrate educational effectiveness under Commission standards. The team found that "[p]rogress on assessment of student learning at the program level is insufficiently developed and needs to be addressed...and constitutes a significant challenge for UOP as it approaches its Educational Effectiveness Review." It is expected that UOP will have student, course, program, and institutional learning outcomes developed by the time of the EER and that the learning outcomes will be measured and implemented.

The WASC team is coming back in spring 2012 to see what progress we have made. Our continuing accreditation will depend on what they find.

Which brings us back to the beginning of my remarks: QUALITY. How are we determining quality in the education we provide our students and how, if the results aren't up to our expectations, are we going to put it right? This, my friends and colleagues, is up to you. But don't be dismayed, because we are getting on the right track. Let me give credit where credit is due. Many of you out there are defining program outcomes that are aligned with university wide outcomes, mapping how your programs provide students the opportunities to achieve those outcomes, and collecting data to document and improve student learning and achievement.

- The Thomas J. Long School of Pharmacy, for example, is undertaking a professional development series on assessment so that faculty can measure student learning at the course and program levels.
- In the College of the Pacific, fifteen departments have recently adopted program outcomes and begun collecting data on student learning, and now they're planning to use that data to guide changes in curricula. In fact, the Communication and Political Science departments have already produced reports of their assessment activities and the curricular changes that have resulted. Professor of Communication and COP Director of Assessment Jon Schamber has been an incredibly effective coach and mentor in this effort.
- In the Conservatory, Professor Keith Hatschek and Assistant Dean David Chase have had an article on the assessment of integrative learning accepted by the *Music & Entertainment Industry Educators Association Journal*.
- In the School of International Studies, Professor Susan Sample is preparing to present a paper at the Intercultural Development Inventory Conference on assessment of changes in intercultural sensitivity, which is an SIS- and university-wide learning objective.
- And in the McGeorge School of Law, Professor Ruth Jones recently presented a paper to the American Bar Association documenting how current methods of legal education meet accreditation requirements for assessment. Her work draws on inventive methods used by McGeorge professors Michael Vitello, Fred Galves, and Thom Main.

As I said, we are on the right track. So I am proud to announce that to further explore and share what Pacific faculty are discovering about teaching & learning, we will hold a pioneering symposium from February 7th-10th, 2011, for faculty to share their innovative classroom techniques with their colleagues and the broader Pacific community. A call for proposals will be coming out in October, asking for submissions to a peer review process that will result in a celebration of teaching and learning at Pacific, as well as a conference proceedings publication. The symposium is a grass-roots effort that started with faculty in the College and is supported by the Center for Teaching & Learning, the Center for Social & Emotional Competence, and the Office of the Provost.

Yes, we are headed in the right direction.

But let's stop thinking about federal regulation, step back and return to the important issue of ensuring QUALITY. I would argue (as you will agree) that quality of a university's educational enterprise goes beyond just the fundamental level of whether our students' learning actually meets our expectations. It is determined to a larger extent by *whether our expectations are high enough...*for the students, and for ourselves. Are our courses covering sufficient content, integrating the latest information, and challenging our students to achieve beyond their own expectations? Are our programs of study leading to a degree reflecting the breadth and depth needed for the major? Are the degree requirements grounding our students appropriately in the discipline while

also preparing them for lasting achievement and responsible leadership in their careers and communities? Do we provide the vibrant intellectual environment that will ensure our students and our faculty members are aware of the latest trends in the field and have the opportunity to explore and expand the boundaries of that field? And does our intellectual environment empower our faculty to be leaders in their field and attract new faculty members who are excited by the opportunities to collaborate with brilliant and engaged faculty and to teach curious and capable students?

Believe it or not, it is the often maligned and time-consuming process of "program review," also known at Pacific as "program planning," that allows a department to answer these questions. Now I know that the term "program review" has negative connotations here because it's been linked in the past to the painful deletion of programs. But program review, at its finest (and normal) implementation is not about ending programs; it's about *improving* them. Program review done right brings in outside peer reviewers (chosen by the program as experts they deeply respect) to give a program honest input and strategic advice while engaging the administration from the dean to the president about the program's value and its promising future.

At University of the Pacific, for some reason, we have allowed program review to fall by the wayside, ignored by the administration and avoided by the faculty. It is time for all of us to work together to embrace the power of program review to help us achieve what all of us are committed to: offering programs that are second to none. All of us want a student who chooses University of the Pacific over a highly ranked Research I school to be able to count on getting an education at Pacific that's just as good, or even better, because that student chose a university that is above all committed to offering the highest quality education possible.

And ensuring the highest quality education means embracing the program review process. If we need more convincing, the WASC action letter warned, "A systematic program review process and schedule is also expected by the time of the E[ducational] E[ffectiveness] R[eview], as well as completed program reviews available for in-depth review by the EER team." We can do it, but we've got our work cut out for us.

And so now, as I come to the end of my prepared remarks, we've come full circle back to where we started....discussing quality. Quality education: which is the *raison d'être* for a university like Pacific. Quality education: which can only be assessed by faculty, whether here or your chosen peers across the country. Quality education: which can only be guaranteed, monitored, and held to high standards by....not by me, not by your new Provost, not by our Regents, and not by our accrediting bodies. No, quality education is guaranteed, monitored and held to high standards by YOU, our faculty. YOU, and only you, can decide if students have learned enough to meet your standards. Only you can decide if a proposed new course is rigorous enough. Only you can assess if a new curriculum or proposed new major meets the highest standards we hold at this University and ensures students will achieve the program's educational outcomes as well as our university's outcomes. And only YOU can decide if a new faculty member, or a faculty member up for tenure or promotion, meets the standards that we expect for someone who will spend a lifetime at University

of the Pacific...someone who will impact the education of thousands of students and who will shape your department and our university.

As I said earlier using an engineering metaphor, our faculty is the engine of the University. But allow me to modify that metaphor slightly and state, if I may be so bold, that our faculty members are the Michelangelos and the Leonardo da Vincis of the University whose brilliance and creativity and, most of all, unparalleled commitment to excellence, puts shape and form to what is University of the Pacific. And through those efforts, our faculty ensures that the QUALITY associated with our University will be apparent to all who know us now and all who will come to know us over the next 158 years of our existence.