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Letter - 2011 Fall Address to the Faculty

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2011 Fall Address to the Faculty

Our Pioneering Spirit

I am delighted to be here this afternoon with you, California's most dedicated faculty. It's great to have a chance to convey how much I respect and admire your commitment to your work: your passion for teaching and your devotion to students. I know you spend hours planning your courses, even when you've taught those courses for many years. I know you say yes to independent studies even though it means even less sleep. I know you spend hours with advisees. I know you take great pride in your role as teacher-scholars, and I applaud your commitment. Providing a superior education focused on the learner. Engaging students through rich faculty/student relationships. Creating a community of learners, where faculty scholarship invigorates teaching and learning: these are values *I know* you live every single semester.

And these values have been at University of the Pacific's core for 160 years. This year marks the 160th anniversary of our founding. In other words, **your university is where California higher education was born.**

In rowdy, profane Gold Rush California, a group of Methodist ministers and laymen tested the moral temperature and grew concerned. Following the precepts of John Wesley, your predecessors founded a college they hoped would inoculate young people from the excesses of the era and prepare them for a productive and moral life.

That original faculty and administration were taking a risk. Of the 800 or so colleges founded before the Civil War, fewer than 200 survived.^[1] Pacific itself was hardly trouble free. We suffered a whole slew of financial crises and natural catastrophes in our first decades as a University. Yet, whereas 3 out of 4 of our competitors folded, Pacific *thrived*.

Why? Why would Pacific succeed where others failed? Because we stood for something from the very beginning, and we *never* stopped living our values.

Our Methodist founders insisted on educational excellence, just as we do today. In the 1850s, students at University of the Pacific learned Greek and Latin, whether or not that was in vogue in the pioneering west.

Our first faculty also believed in educating the student comprehensively, just as we do today. They developed a Wesleyan curriculum that would bring faith and learning together to develop the mind *and* the spirit. They sought to identify and develop *each student's* strengths and abilities. We proudly carry on this tradition in our commitment to students' intellectual, social, physical and emotional development. Through a rich combination of curricular and co-curricular learning, we prepare students not only to get a great job, but to live a good life.

And, of course, we have a long history of valuing learning through rich faculty/student relationships. We all know the famous story of the zoology prof who recognized Dave Brubeck's love of music, and directed the pre-vet major to stop cutting up frogs in the lab and get over to the Conservatory, where his head was at anyway. Where would American jazz be if Dave hadn't received this wise counsel?! The personal and intellectual interest you take in your students can truly be life changing.

Take novelist Kate Moses, Class of 1984, who had a life-changing connection with English professor Arlen Hanson. Kate says she came to Pacific in a kind of haze. She knew she liked to read and write, but she'd never considered a life of the mind. Arlen recognized and nurtured a talent Kate didn't even know she had. He piled books into her arms and new ideas into her head. In the columns outside Knoles Hall, Arlen met with Kate weekly to discuss art, literature and music. Those sessions, she says, constituted her intellectual awakening.

Kate's writes about her mentor in her 2010 memoir, *Cakewalk*. The book is a poignant testimony to the value of a college education. And that's a concept we need to think about for our future, because it's on the minds of prospective students and their families. What is the value our University provides? Why come to Pacific when you can go elsewhere more cheaply? Right now we tend to evaluate colleges based on metrics like the GPAs and SATs of their incoming freshmen. In other words, how does the student affect the institution? But we're moving as a nation toward different measures - how did the institution affect the student? How prepared are our students for the workforce? What have they accomplished ten years post-graduation? How did the richness of a Pacific education help them become leaders in their careers and communities? Our success as an institution corresponds to the quality of our graduates' futures.

And what about University of the Pacific's future? How can we ensure that our mission endures? That we attract excellent students? That we keep providing one hell of an education?

I think the answer lies in our heritage. I've said a lot today about Pacific's heritage of lasting values. Well, another value we should be proud of is our pioneering spirit. Since 1851 we've been innovative and progressive, educating our students with an eye to the future. Consider the audacity of our founders, who bestowed the name "University of the Pacific" on a school with *one* building! That certainly required a vision! Remember, too, that your University was the first in the state to give women access to the same education as men. Our commitment to creating a community that welcomes and supports excellent students from all backgrounds has only gotten stronger since then, and it will remain a core value into the future.

We continued to pioneer throughout the last century. In 1924, Pacific made an entrepreneurial move to Stockton to become the Central Valley's first four-year private University. During the Depression we split into two schools in order to survive with our high academic standards intact. In the 1960s, we opened cluster colleges in response to new movements in teaching and learning. We also anticipated the exploding demand for professional education and introduced schools of law, pharmacy and dentistry.

University of the Pacific's willingness to innovate while staying true to core values has helped us thrive while others failed. Colleagues, today we find ourselves at a crossroads. The world has changed. Higher education is changing. Our students' backgrounds and expectations are changing. I truly believe that if we want to flourish in tomorrow's world, it's time to pioneer once again.

Let me explain. For one thing, we are in the grip of a severe global recession, with scant recovery in sight. The economic future of our state and our nation is unclear. In these circumstances, many families are struggling to pay college tuition. At present Americans still hold a college education in high regard, but, given its price, might prospective students start to question whether it's a sound investment? Indeed, today fewer students and families are willing to go into debt for their education. There's even speculation about a higher education "bubble." University of the Pacific must make sure we are providing value to our students that justifies their investment. We also need to be ready for families to seek new alternatives when it comes to their students' education; we must plan how to compete while keeping our core values intact.

We're also witnessing transition in many professions, a transition that's been exacerbated by the Great Recession. Nearly every kind of work in every industry is experiencing realignment. Many jobs have been eliminated, some permanently. New fields have been born. New technology has affected the scope and practice of work. We need to better understand this shifting landscape to ensure our graduates are prepared to enter the workforce. We must also be prepared to educate our students for the jobs of tomorrow - some of which haven't been invented yet.

Education is in a state of flux. Our state university system has been hit hard by the recession, while for-profit colleges and universities are attracting thousands. All of this changes the playing field for California's privates. Moreover, the student population is changing. Student demographics are expected to shift dramatically in the coming years, and learners' attitudes and expectations about teaching, learning and work have been transformed by their lifelong use of technology. We need to be ready to attract and serve tomorrow's brightest students.

And finally, University of the Pacific is changing. We have a new President and a new Provost. We have many exciting new opportunities to consider. For example, how to better leverage our three city locations? How to attract and serve international students, and how to give our students here international opportunities? How to increase our technological capacity and explore online and blended learning? Given our many options, it's certainly possible that Pacific's "footprint" could look quite different in a decade.

So how will we thrive into the 21st century, with its paradoxical promise of uncertainty? **Our pioneering spirit will see us through.** We were nimble in 1851, 1924, the 1930s and the 1960s - ready and willing to respond to change in order to continue our mission. Likewise today we must stay open to new opportunities and new strategies, while maintaining our heritage: the mission and values that have defined us for 160 years.

A new strategic plan will help us lead change, as opposed to just react to it. Pacific Rising, approved by the Regents nearly five years ago, was an excellent plan that reflected our values and harmonized our efforts. It will provide a strong foundation for future planning. But given its age (universities typically engage in a new planning process about every five years), and given the dramatic shifts of the last few years, we need a new plan calibrated to the context of 2011 and beyond.

We will spend the next year in a comprehensive planning process involving all our key constituencies. The goal will be to develop a new strategic plan and a corresponding financial plan, as well as a framework for implementation and assessment. Regents, faculty, staff, students and alumni from all three campuses are invited and strongly encouraged to participate in a kick-off round of strategic thinking: a Symposium on the Future of Learning, Work and Professional Practice. This symposium will be held on September 24, 2011, from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in the ballroom of the De Rosa University Center here on the Stockton campus.

I especially want faculty to participate in the symposium - and to participate in general in the yearlong planning process. I'm envisioning this process as a "big tent" where all voices and views are welcome. We need your fine minds and expert viewpoints. To entice you to come to the symposium, let me tell you about our keynote speaker, Anya

Kamenetz. Ms. Kamenetz is an author and journalist who has written extensively on the millennial generation. She claims that millennial "edupunks" and "edupreneurs," fed up with traditional pedagogy and student loans, are going to radically transform American higher education. They're going to introduce a Do It Yourself model of higher ed. Should be a very provocative speech! Please plan to attend on September 24th. I look forward to beginning a rich, creative dialog around the future of higher ed and the future of University of the Pacific - a dialog we'll continue throughout the year. I welcome and need your voice in this process.

In closing, our students are our *raison d'être*. We owe them the best, most relevant education possible. We owe them access. We owe them value for their tuition dollar. Let's work together to plan how to keep accomplishing that.

There's another group we owe, in a way. Our founders, our first faculties - the dedicated men and women who held your positions before you. The faculties who held on to Pacific's mission through fires, floods and economic failure. We owe it to them to bring our values intact into the 21st century. We are the keepers of this institution, a University that's older than *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, older than the first shot at Fort Sumter, older than the Statue of Liberty. As a University community, let's plan a bright future that would make our predecessors proud, and that our successors will admire. Let's take the first step to the next 160 years.

Let's do it for our students.

And let's do it for Pacific.

[1] Kara Pratt Brewer, *Pioneer or Perish: A History of the University of the Pacific during the Administration of Dr. Robert E. Burns 1946-1971* (Pioneer, 1977), pp. 7-8.