

**Dean's Address to the College faculty
Paul H. Benson, Dean
August 30, 2013/ 3:00 p.m. /Sears Recital Hall**

". . . How to think and how to choose"

Good afternoon. It is good to be able to share some time together this afternoon at the beginning of a new academic year. The timing of this talk in relation to the Labor Day holiday is not entirely accidental. I want to reassure you that scheduling these remarks just before a long weekend after the hectic pace of New Student Orientation and the opening of the term was not an effort by the dean's office to determine who really would show up this afternoon. I hope that, by now, faculty members understand well that I don't operate out of any such manipulative motives — even if we do try to ensure that the refreshments at the reception to follow are appropriately enticing. Rather, the contiguity of my remarks with the Labor Day holiday makes sense because I want to reflect on certain features of the character and purposes of our work as faculty in a college of liberal learning and scholarship. I will outline some connections between that work and the deeper purposes of college for our students, as well as some connections between the purposes of college for students and some of our primary strategic initiatives in our college at UD.

Some of you may well wonder why I give a talk for College faculty each year at this time. After all, we usually feel rather drained after making the adjustment back from summer schedules to the academic year's rigors, preparing course syllabi, surviving departmental retreats, teaching for nearly two weeks, readying manuscripts and conference presentations for submission, and then looking ahead at all of the demands on our time and attention we will face in the coming year. Two evenings ago I was talking with my 89-year-old father on the phone. When I mentioned to him that I was writing some remarks to deliver to the College faculty at the end of the week, he asked, "What are you trying to

accomplish? What are your objectives? Do the faculty really want to hear you speak?" (There is nothing like fatherly love.) These are good questions. My answers may be overly simple.

First, I think that it is important, in part as a ritual that reflects the rhythms of our working lives together, to get together as the faculty of the College as we begin another academic year. Given our size and complexity, this is difficult to do without hosting an occasion such as this. I will return at the end of the talk to a point about the uncertainties and the delights of beginning again. Second, I believe that it is valuable for us to take a few moments to reflect on some of our deeper purposes and values as teachers and scholars — and to do so together — before the work of the academic year scatters us far and wide, physically, intellectually, and emotionally. This is a brief juncture when I can attract some modest portion of your attention for such reflection. As you will see in my remarks later, this idea parallels one view of the purpose of college study for students who have just completed high school: College offers students a precious chance to think and reflect before life overtakes and engulfs them. Third, while I do not use these occasions to deluge you with a great deal of information, the beginning of the term is a useful time to highlight a few significant features of our collective work that are on my mind. These talks allow me to show that I do think about things. I ponder our shared purposes and direction. I take seriously the College's mission and values, and I wonder how we can do even better at promoting them. I try to imagine the fullness of what we could become if our great potential were realized, and I consider how we might disclose, nourish, and bring to fruition more of the College's potential. I reflect on the barriers that stand in the way of some faculty members' and some students' success, and search for what we might do to remedy or repair their frustrations. Perhaps most importantly, I seek in each of these talks to celebrate a few of the remarkable things that faculty members in the College are accomplishing, especially in their joint work together.

Section 1

In his recent book, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*,¹ Andrew Delbanco tackles one of the most pressing challenges in American higher education, especially for colleges of the arts and sciences (in contrast with professional schools or technical institutes). Delbanco does not take on the challenge of college affordability and the growing socioeconomic fracturing of our society. Nor does he have a lot to say about the challenge of inadequate academic preparation in high school or the challenges posed by the rise of MOOCs (massive open online courses). Delbanco does not discuss at length the challenge of public disinvestment in higher education, as urgently important as this and the preceding challenges are. Rather, Delbanco ponders the pedagogical reality that all of us face when we begin working with a new class of first-year students, namely, that “most students have no clear conception of why or to what end they are in college.”² Delbanco rightly proclaims that “all students deserve something more from college than semi-supervised fun or the services of an employment agency.”³ Yet, for too many of our students, these are the primary reasons they seek out a college experience — to spend four years with peers much like themselves, consuming convenient, digitally enhanced, enjoyable experiences that will leave them with credentials valued by their preferred future employers, and with personal relationships and an institutionally supported network that will advance and protect their future career success and personal happiness.

This understanding of college is not entirely new. Robert Maynard Hutchins called it “the service-station conception” of college in the mid-1930s.⁴ Delbanco notes that students long have entered college without any clear or coherent conception of the deeper purposes that liberal learning can have for their lives. He writes, “The American college has always differed fundamentally from the European university, where students are expected to know

¹ Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012.

² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

what they want (and what they are capable of) before they arrive. [. . .] By contrast, in America . . . we try to extend the time for second chances and to defer the day when determinative choices must be made.”⁵

In this vein, Delbanco cites a searching plea he encountered in the diary of a student attending Emory and Henry college, a small Methodist school in Virginia, in 1850. “After attending a sermon by the College president that left him troubled and apprehensive,” Delbanco tells us, the student wrote the following journal entry: “*Oh that the Lord would show me how to think and how to choose.*”⁶ Delbanco professes that, he has “never encountered a better formulation — ‘show me how to think and how to choose’ — of what a college should strive to be”⁷ In light of this statement, I find it ironic that, when Delbanco proceeds to survey prevailing American conceptions of the purposes of college, he considers primarily these three: first, that college is good for individuals’ “economic competitiveness” and “the economic health of the nation”⁸; second, that college education is essential for the development of a democratic citizenry who are capable of ruling themselves collectively;⁹ and, third, that through college education one learns “how to enjoy life”¹⁰ — or, in the words of Judith Shapiro, former president of Barnard College, a college education should make “the inside of your head . . . an interesting place to spend the rest of your life.”¹¹

I do not disagree that these are three legitimate purposes of college, namely, advancing economic capability, democratic citizenship and engagement, and a rich and stimulating mental life. But college is not the only or necessarily the best way to achieve all of these ends. For instance, many people with little or no advanced formal education surely find their lives rich in enjoyment and the insides of their heads — whatever exactly we are

⁵ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

⁶ Ibid., p. 15. Emphasis added.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 28-29.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 32.

¹¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 33.

to take that to mean — to be interesting. The more important point is that none of these prevailing understandings of what college is for address very fully the Emory and Henry student's plea for divine guidance in how to think and how to choose (or, more precisely, *how to live*, as much of what we do and experience and become is not dictated by our choices). Nor do these prevalent conceptions of college's purposes address very fully our own students' search at UD for what is worth caring about, worth doing, or worth becoming.

Section 2

How do we in our College of Arts and Sciences at UD answer the question of what college is for? How should we help our students respond thoughtfully to this question? How do we guide students in their search to apprehend how to think and how to choose, or live?

As an institution, we have been wrestling vigorously with these questions throughout the process of reconceiving and now reconstructing the core requirements for undergraduates in the form of the Common Academic Program. The seven university-wide goals for student learning — as broad and as open to contestable interpretation as they are — nevertheless point us and our students in some clear directions for thinking about the central purposes of college here and now, in the context of our American, Catholic and Marianist, comprehensive, urban university community in Dayton, Ohio in the early 21st century. The *Habits of Inquiry and Reflection* report proposed in 2006 that college's purposes at UD include: seeking knowledge in a sacramental spirit; pursuing learning in, through, and for community; cultivating practical wisdom; forging critical ability to read the signs of these times; and supporting discernment of personal and communal vocation.¹² These educational purposes encompass not only the development of certain sorts of understanding and various types of skill; they also involve the development of capabilities

¹² *Habits of Inquiry and Reflection: Education in the Catholic and Marianist Traditions at the University of Dayton*, p. 4. Available at <http://www.udayton.edu/artssciences/about/images/Habits_of_Inquiry.pdf>

to think and feel and judge and act in various ways. These purposes touch upon sentiment and character, not only upon cognition and conduct.

For instance, the learning goal of community incorporates not only understanding certain things about meanings, histories, methods, and forms of community-building. This learning goal requires as well that students demonstrate particular values and dispositions, including acceptance of difference, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and promotion of reconciliation. Interestingly, these values, traits, and skills are increasingly sought after by employers in the U.S.¹³ They also are essential to well-informed and engaged citizenship in a society that strives to be a democratic republic. And they can contribute to the interest and enjoyment of one's inner mental life. But the values and skills of community-building that we expect students to demonstrate at UD reach well beyond the ends of college learning that Delbanco outlines. They speak more deeply and directly to how we should think and how we should choose. At UD, we have said, in effect, that we seek to educate students in becoming certain sorts of persons — peace-builders, reconcilers, neighbors motivated by solidarity, not only capable economic agents, reflectively engaged citizens, and people with rich inner lives.

As we all know well by now, the seven educational goals to be advanced in the UD undergraduate experience are open-textured and ambitious — some would say foolishly so. The effort to design specific courses that can be shown to promote student learning in these bold, high-minded ways is difficult, especially because many of the courses endorsed for CAP must synchronize and intersect with other CAP courses, since the goals for student learning are not independent of one another, and the primary components of CAP — from the Humanities Commons through the capstone experience — are defined, in part, in relation to one another. In my mind, this is as it should and must be if we are to take seriously our common purposes as faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences. Judging from

¹³ See the report of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, *It Takes More than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success*, 2013. Available at <www.aacu.org/leap/public_opinion_research.cfm>.

the concerted, creative, and sustained work that hundreds of the College's faculty already have devoted to CAP curriculum design, experimentation, evaluation, and revision over the past three years, I feel confident in saying that many College faculty share my sense of seriousness and high ambition for these challenging educational ends.

As we continue to work out in determinate curricular requirements and elective course options what the purposes of a UD education should be for our students, two particular learning goals affirmed in CAP take on special significance, particularly because they are at once so readily misconstrued and matter so profoundly for our educational mission. (Of course, one of the common characteristics of genuine profundity is that it is easily misconstrued and debased.) These are the learning goals of *practical wisdom* and of *vocation*. The notion that a university curriculum and co-curricular opportunities could enrich in some systematic way students' wisdom about how to decide, act, and reflect on their actions in the midst of the longer arc of their lives, along with enriching students' capacities to discern the value of their gifts for their own flourishing and the good of the human community, would sound audacious to the point of absurdity in many corners of American higher education. For, in CAP, we are not seeking merely to equip students to apply theoretical frameworks to practical problems or to identify likely career pathways in their areas of interest. The ends of fostering practical wisdom and discovery of calling, as evidently audacious as they are, nevertheless are purposes we have embraced in our ongoing work in the Common Academic Program.

Section 3

The joint ambition and distinctive educational importance of practical wisdom and vocation have surfaced clearly in conversations over the last academic year generated the Provost's Council's task force on experiential learning, which issued its report in May. The Experiential Learning Task Force was formed by the Provost to explore the possibility of expanding and strengthening UD's longstanding commitments to experiential learning so as

to make experiential learning — for instance, through undergraduate research, community-engaged learning, internships, coops, capstone projects, education abroad, leadership involvement in campus organizations, and so on — a signature dimension of a UD education and a nationally recognized mark of UD’s educational excellence ten years hence. The task force was chaired by Associate Provost Deb Bickford and included Kelly Bohrer from Campus Ministry (now with the Fitz Center), Cari Wallace from Student Development, Jason Pierce in Political Science, Dean Paul Bobrowski of the School of Business Administration, and me. The task force’s report, which was informed by campus consultations and received enthusiastic endorsement at a Provost’s Council retreat in May, included the following aspirational vision for what experiential learning could become for UD students over the coming decade:

Experiential learning at the University of Dayton advances active learning and reflective practice focused on real human problems and needs, enabling students to: (1) cultivate their gifts; (2) appreciate the interdependence of self and community; and (3) discover higher purposes for life and work.¹⁴

As the Common Academic Program calls out the importance of developing practical wisdom and discerning individual and communal vocation for a UD education, so, too, this vision for experiential learning at UD underscores learning that reflectively addresses real human problems and needs and prompts students to discover higher purposes for their life and work that draw upon their own gifts. Deb Bickford and I are facilitating this year a campus-wide Experiential Learning Strategy Team, charged by the Provost with building a strategy that feasibly could realize the task force’s proposed vision. Other College representatives on this new team are: Dick Ferguson (Executive Director of the Fitz Center), Carissa Krane (Associate Director of the University Honors Program and professor in Biology), and Carolyn Roecker-Phelps (President of the Academic Senate and chair of Psychology).

I mention the on-going work of this team not only to emphasize once more the ways in which we as a faculty are seeking to answer the question about college’s purposes

¹⁴ Experiential Learning Task Force report, May 20, 2013, p. 3.

by focusing especially on students' developing wisdom as agents and their search for callings that elicit their deepest gifts and passions, but also because these elements of what liberal learning should be for bear particular practical significance for the health of our College of Arts and Sciences in the coming years. The question of college's purpose and value is not merely a matter of academic soul-searching or routine self-scrutiny. The question also arises each year as students anticipating high school graduation, along with their families, contemplate whether and why and where they should continue their formal education — and at what financial price. While the College at UD has held its own in the increasingly competitive environment for student recruitment and retention, especially since the onset of the recession, there is little doubt that the question of the personal worth of a UD degree from the College now confronts prospective students and families more pointedly, more problematically, than in most recent eras. In this setting, opportunities for high-impact experiential learning have become especially attractive for prospective and enrolled students. Why is this?

First, we know that employers highlight various kinds of experiential learning as being particularly important for students' employability.¹⁵ Not surprisingly, some of the forms of experiential learning emphasized by employers, including "problem solving in diverse settings" and "applying knowledge in real-world settings," are more frequently in evidence in curricular and co-curricular programs offered in professional education than in liberal arts and sciences colleges. At the same time, it is important to note that other forms of experiential learning highly valued by employers, including student research or senior projects and direct experience with community partners, are as likely to be found in college degree programs as in professional schools.

Second, student recruitment and retention data at UD suggest that more and better opportunities for experiential learning in our degree programs and co-curricular offerings

¹⁵ See the data from employers collected by Hart Research Associates in the AAC&U's report, *It Takes More than a Major*.

would enable us to recruit more of our accepted students and retain them more successfully. In recruitment of our newest entering class over the past year, we saw that, although the College's first-year enrollment rose this fall to 45.3% of the incoming class (compared with only 40.2% and 42.9% of the entire incoming class in 2012 and 2011), the yield rate on our accepted students was significantly lower in the College than in either Engineering or Business. We yielded 18.9% of our accepted students —and only 17.2% of our accepted B.S. students — in comparison with 24% yield on acceptances in the School of Business Administration and 25.2% yield in the School of Engineering. Many factors are involved in generating this disparity, which has been persistent in recent years. But there is reason to believe that the relative dearth of formally developed and well-supported experiential learning programs we offer in the College compared to the professional schools contributes to the disparity.

Third, students' perception of the value of formal programs of experiential learning, like employers' perception of their value, is confirmed by the research done by George Kuh and his colleagues on so-called "high-impact educational practices" and the correlation of such practices with student retention and academic engagement.¹⁶ Among these practices, Kuh includes collaborative projects, undergraduate research, intercultural studies with experiential components, field-based projects with community partners, internships, and culminating, capstone projects. Kuh's research also indicates that such high-impact practices have even more positive educational effects on students of color and first-generation college students. According to Kuh, "historically underserved students tend to benefit *more* from engaging in educationally purposeful activities than majority students."¹⁷

Fourth, Kuh's research leads us to consider retention rates in the College in a new light. Here, too, as in the case with yield rates in student recruitment, there has been a

¹⁶ See George D. Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*, Washington, D.C.: AAC&U, 2008. Also see excerpts of the report at < <http://www.aacu.org/leap/hip.cfm>>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

persistent gap between College students' retention rates into the second year at UD and retention rates in the professional schools. For instance, for the class that entered UD in the fall of 2012, 86.6% of the students who entered in the College came back to UD this fall (whether in the College or in any other unit). Engineering and Business each achieved retention rates that were three percentage points higher, and the School of Education did six percentage points better than the College. Over the past five years, our retention rates have averaged 83.9%, over five percentage points lower than the professional schools' average retention rates over the same period. Moreover, of those students who returned this fall for their second year, only 87% of the students who entered last year in the College remained in College majors. By contrast, 95% of returning Business students stayed in Business, 94% of returning Education students stayed in Education, and 92% of returning Engineering students remained in that school. Undoubtedly, these gaps depend on far more than a single factor. But Kuh's research, along with studies of employers' attitudes, indicate that one likely way to improve our retention rates would be to offer more and better programs of experiential learning.

Many of us heard senior Laura Huber's remarks to the first-year class at Convocation last week. A triple major in INS, POL, and SPN, an Honors student and Dayton Civic Scholar, Laura is hardly the average student in the College. Yet her talk illustrated how very important her research experience in Liberia this past summer was for her educational development. Similarly, Christine Alwan, a triple major in POL, HRS, and WGS, wrote me a moving message a few weeks ago to describe the profound ways in which her research practicum in Malawi this summer had helped her "find her focus" as a student — and those who know Christine would attest that she certainly had not been unfocused as a student previously.

Considerations such as these have led the College in recent years to increase significantly our financial support for high-profile programs of experiential learning for our undergraduates. We have created the Dean's Summer Fellowships to provide housing

support for students who conduct research during the summer with faculty mentors. We have completed the third year of the Statehouse Civic Scholars program, which places twelve students in major legislative, executive, and judicial branch offices in Columbus over the summer, and we are looking into expanding internships in Washington, D.C. in an analogous manner. We have continued substantial financial support for the summer student Artist-in-Residence program, which was begun at ArtStreet and now is overseen by Visual Arts. We piloted an international development research practicum in Malawi this summer through the Department of Political Science, to name only a few examples.

If the College is to increase its first-to-second-year retention rate to 90%, which I have set as a goal, with a proportional increase in our six-year graduation rate, which currently stands at 72.5% for the students who entered the College in the Fall of 2007, we will need to do many things in addition to establishing new or expanded opportunities for meaningful, academically enriching, experiential learning for our students. We also will need to tackle curricular and pedagogical improvements for course sequences that generate the greatest attrition, in addition to continuing to improve academic advising structures and support, especially for our Discover Arts students, who historically have exhibited the highest attrition rates from UD. I am very pleased to say that the Department of Chemistry has begun preliminary exploration this fall of some very innovative curricular and pedagogical revisions in its first- and second-year course sequences that could improve academic performance and retention among majors in the sciences. Associate Dean Don Pair has been working over the past three years to implement changes in our system for UNA academic advising, and these efforts appear to have borne fruit this past year, boosting UNA retention from last year's entering class to 87.2%, which exceeded the retention rate for the College as a whole. Since 2007, our UNA retention rate had never before surpassed 82.6%, and it had twice dipped below 80% in the past six years. We intend to continue investing in more support for high-quality academic advising, especially for first-year students and for students from underrepresented populations.

Section 4

My remarks have traversed a good deal of ground, thus far, from a discussion of the fundamental purposes of college — and students' puzzlement about or ignorance of those purposes — to the role of learning goals for development of practical wisdom and discernment of vocation in the Common Academic Program, to an aspirational vision for what expanded and better-supported programs of experiential learning could mean in the College, to associated strategies for improving student retention and performance. In the final portion of this talk, I would like to turn to a few, selected highlights in the development of the College's faculty and faculty initiatives that deserve particular celebration.

First, we should celebrate the fact that the College's faculty continues to grow and that we have been especially successful in recruiting our first-choice candidates to faculty positions here. In the past year, we hired 14 new tenure-track faculty, in Biology, Communication, English, Geology, History, Mathematics (2), Music, Physics (2), Psychology, Religious Studies, and Visual Arts (2). These included newly-created tenure lines in Geology, Mathematics, and in Religious Studies. 8 of these 14 new tenure-track faculty are women; 6 of these faculty are persons of color. In addition, we hired a new full professor to chair the Department of Computer Science, Mehdi Zargham, and a new University Professor of Faith and Culture, Miguel Diaz, who also is a tenured professor in Religious Studies. In each of these tenure-line appointments, we hired our first-choice candidate. Those of you who worked on faculty searches last year are to be applauded for our outstanding success. I encourage you to congratulate and welcome the new faculty members who are here today and those who will be recognized formally at next week's general faculty meeting. Our job now is to support these new tenure-line faculty in their transitions to UD and to Dayton, and to assist them in developing fruitful relationships and doing first-rate teaching and scholarship here.

I am equally pleased that we received approval from the Provost's Office this summer to initiate 19 tenure-line searches this fall, including newly-budgeted tenure lines in English, in History, in Languages, in Philosophy, and in Physics. This promises to be our busiest faculty recruitment season in nearly two decades.

Second, I am thrilled to say that we are poised to launch in the coming year an interdisciplinary center for human rights research. Propelled by major gifts from Peter McGrath ('72), an English major and longstanding member of the College's Advisory Council, by skillful and strategic faculty hiring in Political Science, a robust network of faculty research and teaching collaboration across many departments, and by growing student interest in Human Rights Studies, our planned human rights center genuinely holds out the promise of becoming the leading academic organization of its kind in the nation to draw upon the Catholic social justice tradition in pursuing research that specifically concerns the social practice of human rights advocacy. I strongly encourage you to attend some portion of the conference, "The Social Practice of Human Rights," that we are hosting on October 3-5. Over 90 leading scholars, program officers, and human rights advocates from 10 countries will participate in the conference, including keynote speakers Juan Mendez (United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture) and Alex de Waal (Executive Director of the World Peace Foundation and research professor at Tufts). Panelists include prominent program directors from Human Rights Watch, the Ford Foundation, Amnesty International, Doctors Without Borders, Wallace Global Fund, and Catholic Relief Services, in addition to scholars from across the country.

I highlight this research initiative in human rights not simply because it is flourishing, but because it demonstrates how a team of faculty can identify and then cultivate over a number of years a powerful opportunity to advance interdisciplinary research and build a new, cross-disciplinary curriculum, both of which are scaled to UD's faculty and student bodies and carry great potential to generate major scholarly contributions at the national and international levels, as well as contributions to the direction and efficacy of human

rights advocacy. We can do this in other, carefully identified areas of research, as well. The TREND Center, directed by Dr. Takis Tsonis in Biology, continues to outperform the investment that was made in creating the Center seven years ago, producing a steady stream of major publications annually and supporting each year dozens of undergraduates, graduate students, and post-docs. While we cannot compete directly with much larger, better-funded research universities that support massive bioengineering departments and host major medical centers, many of our Biology faculty have found ways for TREND to be an important national and international contributor to research on, and grant funding for, tissue regeneration and engineering. I am currently seeking funding to develop new space and programmatic initiatives for TREND. I heartily thank all of the faculty in the sciences who have contributed to the center's progress thus far.

In addition, we are making progress in gaining major donor support for a university-wide sustainability center that would be housed in the College and would support new curricula, extend community partnerships, expand faculty and student research, and fund significant campus facilities projects in selected areas of environmental sustainability. These initiatives, when funded, will enable us to build substantially upon the very good work that faculty have been devoting to the SEE Initiative for many years. I am convinced that there are other new channels through which we can deepen the impact of our research if we take more advantage of some of the collaborative possibilities that can best be realized in a college of our size and are often so much more difficult to pursue in larger and more elaborately siloed research universities.

We also are reminded of our capabilities to collaborate along imaginative and wholly unanticipated lines by the magnificent *Rites.Rights.Writes*¹⁸ arts immersion project that Graul Chair in the Arts and Languages Richard Chenoweth has set in motion for the current academic year. Richard's project has drawn in many dozens of faculty and staff from virtually every corner of the University to explore relationships among cultural rites, human

¹⁸ See <http://www.udayton.edu/artsscience/graul_chair/rrw/>.

rights, and artistic expressions of human values by way of well over 125 events scheduled for this year. This remarkable project demonstrates that far more powerful connections across departments and divisions are possible on our campus than we might have supposed . . . , if, of course, we are fortunate enough to have Dr. Chenoweth's energy and single-minded drive.

As I have suggested in previous addresses, I see plentiful evidence that the College will continue to be well-served by developing interdisciplinary, inter-departmental, cross-divisional projects and initiatives such as these that draw upon our academic strengths and attend to our distinctive educational mission, both as a college of liberal learning and scholarship and as a college that finds and lives out its purposes in light of Catholic and Marianist intellectual and educational traditions.

Section 5

In closing, I want to return to my opening theme of the purposes of study in a college of the liberal arts and sciences and our work as faculty members in such an academic body. Andrew Delbanco describes college as offering students "the precious chance to think and reflect before life engulfs them."¹⁹ He urges the virtues of "loafing" in Walt Whitman's sense, of contemplating, of what Emerson described in his journal in 1831 as "drawing out the soul."²⁰ College is a time for students to search authentically for what they should care about, to join that young man at Emory and Henry in 1850, yearning to discover "how to think and how to choose."

As faculty members, we were drawn to our work and our callings as educators, scholars, and artists precisely because we sought to be engulfed in lives of thought, reflection, and creation. For us, these activities are not preludes to the full-scale onset of adult lives, as they are for many of our students; these are central, binding, and orienting

¹⁹ *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*, p. 35.

²⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 46.

threads of our lives, interwoven through much of what we do and who we are. At this moment in a new academic year, as we look ahead to the daunting and difficult work schedules that await us in the coming nine months, it is important to seize this precious chance to think and reflect — to loaf, at least for a moment — before the busyness of this year washes over us. In particular, it is important to recall to ourselves collectively how very fortunate we are to have the opportunity to be engulfed in lives of thought, reflection, and creativity, to be called to professions of learning and teaching, and to care about the ennobling and daring project of education, the drawing out of the soul, the leading of one another out of ourselves and into our shared life together in the university community and in the human community.

I offer this invitation to recall the power, the beauty, and the challenge of the teacher-scholar's vocation not to romanticize our work, but to acknowledge that, along with our students, we, too, yearn to know how to think and choose and live wisely, justly, and well. Faculty members do not serve merely instrumental roles in advancing for students the purposes of college. For we, too, are students and, together with our students, seek knowledge, wisdom, beauty, goodness, and justice. We draw out our own souls as we guide and support students in their educational journeys. We do this as faculty each in our own ways, of course, even as we learn together and from one another.

As we go forth, then, on our own educational journeys this year, with our students, with our colleagues here and elsewhere, and with our interlocutors and mentors, both present and past, living and dead, I would urge us to take delight in beginning again, in taking up in this new academic year important questions, problems, puzzles, and challenges, and in developing new relationships to address these questions, finding in our work the wonder and ineluctable excitement that we seek to ignite in our students. While it may dismay many in the room to learn that Steve Jobs is no particular hero of mine (and I live free of the encumbrance of any Apple products), I do endorse the guidance he offered the graduating class at Stanford's 2005 Commencement, guidance that we would do well to

embrace, namely, to replace “the heaviness of being successful” with “the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything.” Let us take joy together, as a college, in our new beginnings this academic year. I will do my very best to support you in the endeavor.