

THE JOURNEY, THE MAP, AND THE ATLAS The Provost's Address to the Faculty

The University of Dayton 10 September 2010

Good afternoon.

During this academic year we will celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Blessed William Joseph Chaminade. Indeed, as many of you know, the 10th anniversary of his beatification was one week ago today. Father Chaminade was born on April 8, 1761, and he founded the Society of Mary in 1817. In 1850, the year of his death, a small school for boys opened its doors in a southwest Ohio town. That modest Marianist school evolved into the University of Dayton.

If I were able to say just one thing to Father Chaminade and our founders, it would be that we are still serving others, still learning, still trying to improve, still seeking to live up to the ideals that they not only articulated, but embodied. Their faith inspired their work, and that faith continues to inspire us in ours.

Perhaps the most essential element in common between Chaminade's nineteenth-century vision and our contemporary purpose is our shared conviction that it is within the realities of everyday life that we can and must find what is transformative and even transcendent. The particular form of everyday life that I will address today is the educational journey that we all undertake at the University of Dayton.

Over the past few years we have spent a good deal of time focusing on goals and objectives, outcomes and measures. All of that has been essential and helpful. But I am concerned this may have distracted us from the larger and more important matter of what I have just referred to as the educational journey which begins anew every year at this time. In other words, I think we have given too much attention to where we would like to be at some point in the future, and

not enough to becoming more aware of the path itself that we are traveling together.

In speaking of traveling a path, I would ask you to think about finding our way along this educational journey, and the value of having a good map to guide us.

As you know, maps, like university curricula, are human constructs. They are products of calculation and compromise, reduction and translation, opinion and decision. By necessity, maps leave out far more information than they include. Maps become truly vivid and valuable when we are able to supplement their helpful but reductive symbolic language with the reality of our own, direct experience of the places they represent. A good map, after all, is more than a compilation of information. It is an instrument that reveals endless possibilities within clearly defined limits, and can therefore be a marvelous stimulant to our imagination.

So for the moment, I ask you to think of our University at present as a collection of sketchy and incomplete maps that are difficult to read, and that are not even really understood as maps. Each one is different, there is no consistent system of representation or orientation, and it often seems impossible to find one's way from the place defined by one of these maps to the territory depicted in another. I believe we can and must construct a new set of maps – what we might call a complete and legible university atlas of facts, relationships, and possibilities – that can be used to reveal the whole landscape of UD with clarity and coherence. Such an atlas would, I believe, afford new perspectives, stimulate our imaginations, and enable us to move more readily and intentionally from one place to another within our comprehensive University.

I have just asked you to think of the University as a series of maps, and to envision how we might map our terrain in a more integrated, intentional, and illuminating manner. I would now like you to conceive of a University education as something for which good maps would be particularly well suited. I ask you to

imagine this education not so much as a variety of courses, a major program, or a combination of academic and co-curricular activities, but as the journey I have already suggested we might consider. Together with our students, we regularly embark upon an odyssey, although it is one in which each of us is headed ultimately for a different destination. Yet for the time we are here at this University, we travel together.

Such a journey provides us with the chance to find things we are not looking for, to discover things we did not know we needed, or that surprise or delight us. We might even be shocked or upset. Most importantly, our encounters open our minds, engage our bodies, and touch our hearts and spirits. Writing of Christ, St. Catherine of Siena said: "All the way to heaven is heaven, for He said, 'I am the way.'" The educational journey I envision is one in which each step is literally the way, for the path itself is our real purpose.

This kind of education, in which we travel together, fully conscious of each step, calls us to work in concert. In fact, all of us who contribute to the comprehensiveness of the University of Dayton need to come together in this spirit. There is no part of UD – not one – that should be exempt – or worse yet, feel itself excluded – from the pleasure, the obligation, and the benefit of working with every other part of this learning community.

In order to do this, we need to ask ourselves: How can we be less bureaucratic and more agile, less prescriptive and more adventurous? How might we make the best possible use of our abundant resources and potential? How can we maximize opportunities for learning? I could offer a number of examples of how we could respond constructively to these questions, but I will select just one for the moment. My example relates to the potential for deepening our engagement with our first-year students.

All of our incoming first-year students are expected to read a particular book each summer before they join us on this campus. But once they are here, I am not sure that we do everything we might to help them connect that reading with the resources we could make available to them. I know that much is being done, especially through co-curricular activities, but how might we improve upon our good intentions and focus on curriculum as well? Could we find creative and constructive alignments between the summer reading and first-year courses? Could we take greater advantage of the book as a resource for the Learning Living Communities these students enter? Could we link the reading and its ideas as developed in first-year courses with the Distinguished Speaker Series? Could we present a faculty forum, drawing upon different disciplines to examine the ideas in the book and incorporate them in a wider experience of reflection and learning? Regardless of the details, I believe we should do things such as these. But more importantly, I believe all the things we do, curricular and co-curricular, should resonate with each other.

I want to be very clear about what I am proposing. I have referred to the first-year program as only *one example* of what we might do. In the coming months I hope you will take the initiative to apply this example across the entire campus to every area in which you are involved. But let's not remain only where you and I are already involved. The essence of what I am asking is that we extend ourselves, and that we help our students to stretch themselves as well. We all need to look beyond the territorial domains in which we routinely confine ourselves. I am asking you to join with me in forging new partnerships, making new connections, and opening new pathways in and throughout this comprehensive university.

By way of further explanation, I would ask you to consider a comparison between a city and a university. Major cities and comprehensive universities are immense reservoirs of resources for learning. But it is entirely up to each individual who enters a city to make of it what he or she will. There is nothing about the city

itself that leads in any particular direction, that connects one phenomenon or experience with another, or that provides any form of deliberate or conceptual framework through which it might be understood. On the other hand, universities certainly do not suffer from a lack of overt directives. Often they go too far toward imposing excessive control on students and faculty alike. Unlike the city, in which one neighborhood typically connects seamlessly with those around it, and one is free to move in all directions, the various disciplines of a university tend to fence themselves off from one another. And the non-academic neighborhoods of the university are confined to their own enclaves. To put it another way, any city dweller who knows only the neighborhood in which he lives does not really know the city, and might as well, in some respects, live in a small, provincial village. The question we must ask of a university is whether there is orderly but largely free and fruitful movement at the equivalent of street level. Can we travel amongst units, departments, majors, and courses with a minimum of hindrance? Might we even be offered incentives for doing so? I would argue that the degree of such movement is a critical measure of whether any university – or city – is thriving or stagnating.

This leads me to comment on an occasion that affords us an invaluable opportunity for us to thrive, and to begin mapping various parts of our University in new ways. In fact, I think this opportunity *requires* us to undertake an unprecedented project of mapping our academic resources. I refer to the Common Academic Program, or the CAP.

The intent of the CAP design process was to afford us a chance to function more fully and intentionally within the context of what I am calling a more integrated comprehensive university. In fact that process of rigorous examination and vigorous debate gave us an impressive start toward rethinking and reinventing a UD education.

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Now that we are about to begin implementing the CAP, we have a second opportunity to fulfill its intent. As was noted recently, what we have is an architectural design for a curriculum, while the real work of actually building that curriculum lies before us. Let us take advantage of this critical moment to be more inclusive of the full scope of our resources as a comprehensive university, to be more agile and less bureaucratic, less prescriptive and more adventurous.

As I said in my talk last year, a comprehensive university should be much more than a collection of different schools and a variety of programs at different levels. It should be a place where faculty and students work within but also across departments and other units. The University of Dayton needs to be a place where this is done deliberately, creatively, and as a matter of course.

The CAP cannot be allowed to become just another checklist of requirements. None of us wants it to devolve into this. Rather than something that even appears to stand by itself, it must become part of a broad field of relationships. It must become a dynamic and open-ended demonstration of ways in which faculty and students can be more innovative in using the resources of this University to map and to pursue their transformative journeys of learning.

For many people, the primary apparent purpose of higher education is to improve the odds of gaining access to a career that will provide for a particular kind of life. Like many of you, I resist that reductive and self-limiting view, but at the same time, I understand it. We all want our children to flourish, and we all want our students to succeed. And UD does a great job of helping people to fulfill their ambitions. But you and I are deeply committed to the belief that education is more than employment insurance, and we know that this narrow ambition is not always in perfect alignment with learning as a lifelong journey of transformation.

We also know that such a journey is actually more important than our students, their parents, and perhaps even we, on occasion, may realize.

We know that the career on which a first-year student sets her or his sights is likely to be quite different, or perhaps non-existent, by the time of graduation. Or if that envisioned career remains unaltered during four years here, it is almost certain to change within the next four. In any case, we need to be clear that preparing for a specific career is not our primary purpose. Our students need to be able to live and work in a world in which change is the norm. This requires a strong and stable educational foundation, but it also means that learning *how* to learn is at least as important as acquiring specific content and skills.

So what does all this mean with regard to the task of mapping the shared landscape of our comprehensive university? I will begin to answer that question by presenting you with four challenges.

First, I challenge those responsible for all aspects of the first-year experience to work together to map your terrain and to develop multiple reinforcements of your various messages and purposes, with a particular focus on curricular connections. I have already provided some ideas to consider in this area, but you know best, so I will leave the specifics to you, and encourage you to pursue all opportunities for fruitful collaboration.

Second, I challenge those in charge of implementing the CAP to conceive of that program as a map that shows it as fitting with other integrated curricular and co-curricular maps across UD. Let us carry forward with our original ambitions for the CAP by implementing it in such a way that both students and faculty see how our various academic territories overlap, and how each expands upon and contributes to the others.

Third, I challenge every academic department to create a map that shows how students can negotiate the landscape of their own majors. I don't mean a

program outline or a list of courses. We have those. I mean an actual map. And make sure that your departmental map gives some idea of how other parts of the University, both academic and non-academic, might contribute to the journeys of students in pursuit of transformative education in your field.

And fourth, I challenge all of us to regard my first three challenges as inseparable, and as only the beginning. Neither we as faculty nor our students can have a truly meaningful educational journey at UD if the first-year experience and the CAP are seen as strictly preliminary and fundamentally unrelated to majors. Ours must be an integrated curriculum, and this must be reflected in a set of maps that are creatively and constructively aligned, then bound together in an atlas that represents the fullness of the educational possibilities available at our University.

I do not know what these maps will look like. We will find that out only by delving into the problems presented by these challenges. So I am creating a task force of faculty who will help all of us with this process. More information on this will be available soon.

In general, however, I would say that, in order to create a map, you have to begin by surveying the territory you wish to represent, and through which you mean to travel. And just because we will be mapping places and ideas and relationships we think we already know, this does not mean we cannot see them from new perspectives and with fresh eyes. To quote from Rebecca Solnit's book *Wanderlust*: "The surprises, liberations, and clarifications of travel can sometimes be garnered by going around the block..." The primary purpose of the collective "going around the block" exercise that I propose is clarification. But I am certain it will also produce many surprises, and that ultimately, it will be liberating.

By employing the metaphor of the journey, I do not mean it has to be exotic, as I hope I have just made clear. But a journey that is likely to leave us unchanged is a journey hardly worth beginning. I would even say that the extent and quality of

change we experience is the best measure of any journey. It is our job to challenge and enable our students to change. And in order to do this to the best of our ability, we need to challenge and enable one another to change as well.

I hope you will take more than a casual or abstract interest in what I have presented this afternoon. My real hope is that, together, we will invest and enrich this brief outline with additional ideas and mutual enthusiasm. I have spoken of my conception of education as a journey, of the University of Dayton as the landscape through which we travel with our students, and of the need for good maps and a new institutional atlas that will enable us to make this journey as rich as possible with opportunities for us all. But we know that our goal is greater than helping our students to navigate through UD. It is to help them learn how to chart their courses beyond our campus and after the time they spend with us. In addition to guiding them through our own territory, we should, more consciously and intentionally than ever, provide them with the cartographic skills and insights they will need to continue their journeys once they leave us, skills and insights they will value and employ for the rest of their lives.

The new UD that I envision us building together will reflect Father Chaminade's challenge to change with the times. It will also embody the courageous spirit of our founders, who dared to do something new on this patch of ground they optimistically called Nazareth. Like Mary of Nazareth, those early Marianists said, "Yes," in the face of uncertainty. And so must we if we are to embark on both the concept and the reality of a journey together, and on the process of mapping our comprehensive University.

Thank you.