

Transcription of the Dean of the Faculty Address to the Faculty of Trinity College

September 9, 2014

[The following document was transcribed from Dr. Mitzel's oral presentation on September 9, 2014]

Welcome, everybody. As I stand here and look across the crowd, it seems like yesterday I was giving my original address to the faculty, and many of you were sitting in the exact same seats. It is hard to believe that a full year has passed. I believe we have accomplished a fair number of things in the past twelve months. Some of them were new projects and changes that I would like to mention.

With the retirement of the First-Year dean, we needed to revamp our First-Year seminar program. Sonia Cardenas (Associate Dean of Academics) took on this task, forming a committee to redesign our First-Year Seminars, and completed miraculous work inside of six months. Due to financial constraints, I tasked her with the burden of undertaking this project without new resources, which did not draw a smile. What you have going forward this year, however, with the First-Year seminars is because of the work that she and the committee undertook, and the success they realized in the process, for which I thank them a great deal.

We began a J-Term, also led under the direction of Sonia. The first year of this program hosted six classes. Student evaluations coming back were wonderful. We had promised the Board of Trustees that the program would be budget-neutral and we kept that promise. The J-term netted fifty-thousand dollars (\$50,000) of revenue. Entering the 2015-16 academic year, the number of classes being offered has doubled during the J-Term, and I thank all the participants once again.

Sonia and Rich (Dean of Academic Planning) undertook a Retention Program last year to more fully understand the scary drop in retention (to 88%) we witnessed a few years ago. We, as a community, wanted to make sure this drop in retention was not repeated, or that if it did occur again, we could determine the underlying causes. Last May, both Sonia and

Rich presented their findings on retention to the faculty. They presented that same material to the Board of Trustees – very well received – and many of their proposals are being implemented at present. Student retention from year one to year two has returned to 91% again this year, and I thank Rich and Sonia for their hard work toward a better understanding of student retention. I thank all of you who were a part of the project, both giving information and lending insight.

We have a new Course Management Console software package. Some of you have already been exposed to this program. There was a little bit of push-back in the beginning, but I think, as the program is rolling out, the power of the software package in terms of tracking teaching units for the Chairs and for the Administrative Assistants, and in terms of tracking what we do across campus, has gone well. I thank all the participants working on this project.

Those are a few of the new projects and changes. Some of what we accomplished was more difficult. We revamped how teaching credits are allocated across campus. Some of what we changed affected courses that went back ten, fifteen, or twenty years. These changes corrected inequities across campus as we strive to equalize workloads in a more fair manner. Those were difficult conversations, but they have and continue to occur, and people have been good at helping implement the changes. We began a discussion on overall equity across campus - both equity and, really, merit. This is a difficult conversation as well, and it is one in which everybody must be involved. I have asked Kevin McMahan to introduce this topic to the Faculty Conference and to begin outreach across campus as to how we may better measure equity among faculty members at Trinity College.

We have, for several years, been discussing the Educational Policy Committee (EPC) and position allocation. As you are aware, as written in the *Faculty Manual*, vacated positions from the faculty return to the College, not to the Department or Program from which they originated. Historically, our practice has not always followed the *Manual*. Over the last three years, this practice has come to fruition and all positions return back to the College. Subsequent allocation of any position is not automatically to the Department or Program from which the retirement, resignation, or change originally occurred. This practice will continue. With limited resources and limited positions, the EPC has a difficult job. When

you are writing proposals, keep these issues in mind. These are a few of the changes that we have put in place. Although difficult, I think they are, in the long run, healthy for the campus and faculty overall.

I believe some of the changes that we put in place were transformational. Here I am referring to faculty planning at the divisional level. For the first time in history, Trinity College faculty came together at the divisional level to talk about planning, process, and how different divisions fit into the overall campus and community. We have done extremely well planning at the departmental and programmatic level. With thirty-eight individual majors, however, there were too many disparate reports coming forward. If you remember the first time divisional planning was introduced, you received an outline of how I thought the process should go, which I thought, actually, was one of the better outlines I've ever made;...NOBODY agreed with it. We went back to the Chairs, we went back to the divisions, and we asked for your input and guidance. We actually did not begin the divisional planning until November, but the delay allowed us to start with much better agreement. The deadline was May, at which time I had to present the plans to the Board of Trustees. You made it! In four months, you completed and submitted academic plans. I cannot tell you how proud I am of those plans, and your work!! As I stood in front of the faculty in May, and gave a summary of those plans, it revealed a nice vision of how all the differing areas fit within the College vision. I want to tell you the Board of Trustees clapped when they heard your plans. It was one of the first times I have ever witnessed a Board of Trustee meeting where members clapped upon receiving presented material. They clapped--not because the plans were finished, not because they were polished, not because they had action items, but because for the first time in Trinity's history, the faculty came together and presented a highly-valued tool that the Board of Trustees could latch onto and follow. I will tell you that, not only was I very proud of you, but they also were extremely proud of what happened. This is one of the very first steps toward regaining a faculty voice, not just with the Administration, but also with the Board of Trustees. I cannot thank you enough for that work.

We placed the Secretary of the Faculty on the Board of Trustees Academic Committee--something that also had not been done in the College's history. The appointment was

initially a one-year trial, but since he has been invited to the October meeting, we have officially moved beyond the one-year period, and he is now a permanent member of the committee. We can also look at other committees, but it is important to note that members of the Board of Trustees are willing to reach across the aisle, and if we are willing to do the same, we can establish some great communication up and down the ladder at Trinity College again.

We started implementing Advisory Boards for each of the divisions and Athletics. The Advisory Boards were put in place to help procure resources for academic planning and projects. Two of the Boards have met thus far. These meetings have led to donations that have gone toward student projects and faculty ideas. The committees can be extremely powerful, and I ask for your help, when we reach out, in guiding the Advisory Boards. We are going to try to meet with the remainder of the Advisory Boards either this fall (2014) or early spring (2015). I know I spoke about them in more detail last year, so I will not go into great detail now, but I will repeat that they are here for your benefit: to help you realize your goals and to help you obtain the resources you need to teach our students at the highest possible level.

Many of our conversations last year were difficult, and we did not always leave meetings smiling, but I did sense us coming together nicely as a community. One of the things that struck me as I was walking out of a particular meeting was the thought that “it takes a great individual to make a wonderful career, but it takes an entire team to build a community.” I did see us coming together as a team last year, and I know that not all of the steps were easy; not all of the steps were smooth, but I saw us merging well. In response to part of the feedback I received, we are looking at restructuring the Dean of Faculty’s Office in a way that will allow a better voice of the faculty to filter into the Administration. Over the next couple of months, we will be coming forward with different plans to discuss with you, to get your input, and to determine in which directions to embark. I want to thank you for your insight in this project.

So...where does that take us? That takes us to the present. It is always fun to find out where we are. I will begin with capital projects.

We finished the Ferris men's and women's locker rooms. For those of you who have occasion to work out in the facility, you will notice brand new lockers. I have heard they are slightly smaller, but they look much nicer, and they are not rusty. It was a great project that took a lot of time, but we are happy with the outcome.

Crescent Street has gone forward with two phases of student housing, and at present, this housing tends to be the most popular on campus. Historically, every time we build a structure at Trinity College, we take away parking. That is a theme I have been hearing over the last several years, "You are going to build something and take away parking." As such, let me remind you that with the construction of the new Crescent Street housing, we added fifty parking spots to the Anadama parking area. We also removed a group of older homes along Crescent, which were more or less condemned. We were keeping them erect with Band-Aids and bailing wire, and they have finally been removed. We are going to put a parking lot in their place for now, adding eight-five parking spaces. Not only have we created nice dormitory space for our students, but we have also created additional parking to help ease some of our past congestion problems.

You may notice there is one home left standing on Crescent if you walk down and visit the area. We now own that home, and it will be coming down prior to the end of the semester. Once the home has been removed, we will begin to construct a building that will house a new restaurant, a Starbucks, and a bookstore. This construction will free up space in Mather Hall, and we will begin a conversation with the community as to how we can best utilize this space. We have fifteen months to figure out what you would like to do with Mather Hall basement. We want your input. The central campus location means we do not wish for the location to sit empty, and we need your ideas on how best to utilize that particular area.

Fundraising efforts continue for the Music and Neuroscience additions. They remain a top priority, and we continue to inch closer to our goals so do not lose hope.

There are several required repairs on the campus, most of which are underground. If you have walked by the Gates Quad, what was previously called the Mather Quad, you will notice there is fencing in place, and water has collected. We are not putting in a pool!

There was a leak, and the pipe is jacketed so we are not quite sure from where the leak is originating. Water leaks through the inner pipe into the outer pipe, and from the outer pipe to a possibly different area. We are trying to determine the location of the leak. We have an aging utility structure, and you will see holes around campus on occasion due to repairs of our aging utilities.

In terms of financial updates, our endowment has reached a new high. We are currently at \$530 million. Last year, we realized a return of 15.7%, which was in the top 25% tier in all institutions across the nation. I cannot say we will do that well every year, but at least for this particular year, things went quite well. Our Annual Fund rose above \$9 million dollars. The year before, it did not reach the \$9 million mark. We are starting to rebuild connections with our alumni/ae. The number of donors has risen from last year to the present. Although participation is not as high as we would like, our donors are coming back, and they are coming back in a strong way.

Our expenditures over the last five years increased by less than three percent, which can be considered a good thing, but it can also be considered a bad thing. I know that we have not been able to increase academic discretionary money over the past four or five years. We are looking at particular areas; trying to get finances back on track so you may begin planning for small expansions as we move forward. I cannot promise you a lot of money, but I can promise you enough to, hopefully, begin planning.

Compensation for faculty has reached the median of our peer group. I have to thank the Financial Affairs Committee for this accomplishment. Three years ago, the Committee put together a proposal that was submitted to the Board of Trustees to address Trinity College's low faculty salaries. The Board of Trustees accepted the Committee's plan to bring salaries back to the median of our peer group within a five-year period. We reached that median in only three years, ahead of schedule. We have now asked the FAC to construct a new plan for the Board of Trustees as a way to monitor where faculty salaries currently reside. We do not wish for this project to end just because we have achieved the goal of reaching median. This plan should be the beginning of a new phase where we ensure that salaries always remain in a more competitive state.

We still have issues to tackle. Our tuition is still a little bit too high. We have one of the highest tuitions in NESCAC and in the nation. “We would like not to be the highest!” It does not mean we are going to lower tuition, but we can lower the rate of increase, thereby slowly lowering our position with respect to our comparative group. Tuition is similar to cluster economics. Although we are at the top of our field, the amount of money needed to move away from that position is not much. It is not a move you wish to make quickly, but it is a strategy we can look to as a planning model.

We do not have enough financial aid for the students we wish to attract. I will talk more about this issue later, but we are focusing on a campaign for \$2 million per year of spendable financial aid to attract students, and we are focusing on a \$25 million endowment campaign to ensure we are able to continue disseminating financial aid where it is needed for our student body.

Our retention is up. Two years ago retention for students from first to second year was 88%, and we are back to 91%. Looking both at our resources and our student portfolios, the *US News and World Rankings* actually consider us to be over-achieving with a 91% retention rate. I think we can do better, and I believe when you heard the retention presentation, you heard ideas for raising our retention to 92, 93, or 94 percent. It will take all of us working together, but I believe we can achieve this goal.

Speaking of *US News and World Report*, by now you have all seen the news. We fell from 36 to 45. In an overall sense, that is not good. However, if you look at the areas where we dropped--our peer assessment survey, our student selectivity, and our faculty resources--these are all areas in which we can improve. Although our salaries rose to median, there are other areas within faculty resources that require our attention. Our Alumni giving rate fell, but it is beginning to rise again. Is there a silver lining? I believe there is. When we had a candidate for President come to campus, prior to seeing the *US News and World Report*, she was asked what were the foremost important things on her listing of priorities; she mentioned all the areas above. Although we lag in these areas now, she already has plans for which we need your help as a community to work together. Lend her your guidance. I have a great amount of enthusiasm that we can reverse this trend and get back to where we need to be. We are not going to get into the 20s in the next four or five years, but we should

be able to start working our way back up. I for one am very happy to see our new President coming in at this time when we need steady guidance. All of you will be called upon to help address these issues.

We are still faced with a \$1.3 million gap between our operating budget and our expenditures, which seems like a huge number. I stood in front of you last year, however, and told you that we had a \$2.5 million dollar gap requiring our focus. We did not close the entire amount last year. We closed about half of it, but in a manner in which the cuts were permanent. As such, we did not have to come back and re-do the same cuts again this year, leaving much less of a debt with which we have to deal. It does not mean that we are in the green, but it also means that we are much more healthy than we were even a year ago. We still have some difficult decisions to make, and we still have difficult conversations ahead, but we are beginning to make changes toward achieving financial health. The steps are slow, and they can be painful, but we are beginning to make that turn. With your help, we will continue down that correct pathway.

In light of all this news, our faculty have done tremendous work. We had 77 faculty-driven proposals last year. That is a 35% increase from the year before. We had 23 awards granted for those proposals, a 21% increase over the previous year. About 9-11% of all grant proposals are awarded nationally. We are well above the national average in this respect. We have eighteen proposals outstanding, seventeen proposals still in preparation, and we brought in over \$6.5 million dollars in the past four years. I cannot thank you enough for continuing to work extremely hard in your scholarship areas. I have always said that scholarship and teaching are not separate, but that they must go hand-in-hand. If you are a good scholar, you are also, most often, a very good teacher as well. At an institution like Trinity College, the two areas do, and should, overlap to a great extent.

You may have heard that the planning for the proposed House System has been changed. The price tag on physical renovations of residence halls to support the current plan rose to about \$27.5 million. We cannot afford that. However, this does not mean that the housing system has stopped. There is already a committee being put together to construct a plan to move forward in a realistic fashion. We talked last year a great deal about living within our resources and being able to achieve good things within our resources. The First-Year

Seminar project did it, the J-Term project did it, and the Divisional Planning did it. This project can do the same. The first round of planning did not work within our budget, but I have great enthusiasm for the committee that is being put together to plan a House System for students in the social realm that will work within a realistic budget. If you are called upon for advice, please give your input, please give your ideas, and know that we will be reaching out to you shortly.

We have searches for a Dean of Students and a Dean of Admissions going forward. The Dean of Admissions search committee has already been brought together. You will be receiving membership information shortly. The Faculty Secretary, working through the Faculty Conference, constructed a list for faculty member participation. I think you will be quite happy with the selection. We are extremely excited about getting that search underway. Utilizing the outside firm of RuffaloCODY, we are working to locate students both from extended demographics, and that will help bring our student portfolios higher once again. We are beginning the Dean of Students search in a few months. We will be reaching out to faculty for participation on that committee as well. I hope, if you are called upon, that you will join to help us search for our new Dean of Students.

I do want to thank both Larry and Fred a great deal for the service they gave to Trinity College over the course of many years. Larry has been at Trinity College for forty-one years; Fred has been here, I believe, twelve. They have done tremendous work, and they deserve to go fishing. In their absence, we will move forward as best we can.

As we begin our forward planning, I want to re-introduce a statement I made last year, a question we all need to keep in the front of our minds, and that is “as we begin any project, dialog, or request, start with the question: How does this enhance our students’ education?” If we keep that question always in the forefront of our minds, we can never go wrong. We can hit pitfalls, we can have disagreements, but in the long run, with that one question in front of us at all times, we can never go wrong. I truly believe that. You have been excellent thus far in keeping that exact focus. You have always been excellent in keeping students at the forefront of all decisions, and I ask you to continue in this fashion.

Last year, we moved together well with a singular voice. It was sometimes loud. It was sometimes contradictory, and that is great. I think faculty input is one of the most important aspects of our community, and I would not stop any type of discussion. I do believe we moved forward with a nice singular voice last year in many areas. I would ask that we continue in this fashion, which is not easy to do. It means that we have to come together, that we have to put aside our disagreements. It means that we sometimes have to act in areas where we may not have the greatest amount of enthusiasm, but we must work together. We have to come together as a community for our vision to move forward.

I promised you last year that I would try to make communication as transparent as possible. I do not know that I have done that well, but I continue to try. It is the job of the Dean of Faculty to coordinate communication both up to the President and the Board of the Trustees and down from the faculty to the students. I started on many pathways last year; I think they probably could have gone further, and I will continue to work very hard on moving those ideas forward. I will say that the divisional plan helped a great deal to open communication pathways with the Trustees. I think you will see changes based on those communications this year. The Trustees have already requested more meetings with the faculty. We are going to hold informational lunches. We are going to be host dinners. We are going to begin holding conversations, and that is your achievement by helping complete the divisional plans.

We started a faculty newsletter to highlight faculty activities and student activities. We do wonderful things, particularly as noted in the number of faculty proposals and awards. Other things that we do – reaching out into the community, the research that we conduct, working with students; we do not always receive enough recognition for what we accomplish. The newsletter last year was a way to help disseminate this information. We also share media highlights with the community every two weeks. You have been great on feedback when we have missed people, or we have missed a story. You have been wonderful on feedback overall. I ask you to continue to provide this feedback as we disseminate your stories to our community and the public.

We started two Faculty Advisory committees last year, one with Mary Jo Keating (the Faculty Advisory Council for Career Development) and one with Jenny Holland (the

Communications Advisory Council) both of which were well received. I have heard nothing but good things emanating from both committees, and I thank you a great deal for your help in these areas.

I met with almost every faculty member individually last year. For those of you that I did not get a chance to meet, I am happy to meet with you this year. For those of you who I met last year, if you wish to meet again, if I did not bore you to tears, I am happy to meet any time you would like, any place you would like. I think this type of conversation is irreplaceable. I still do my campus walks every day. I try to get into every building at least once a week. If you see me and wish to discuss an issue, let me know. If you see me, and you are busy, just wave. I will try not to take too much of your time in any given day, but I do like to walk around and visit with the community, and also get into the buildings and see how they are holding up.

With the help of Paul Mutone and Mary Jo Keating, we started the Academic Club last year. The programming we began in that space will continue this year. In the morning, coffee and pastries are available, beginning at 7:30 am. Please stop by if you are an early bird. It can be a nice place to have a discussion with your colleagues. Once a week, we have Social Hour. Here is a big misnomer – the “Social Hour” lasts for two hours, not one! During “Social Hour,” we offer free food, free water, free soda, and if you want something with alcohol, it is not too expensive. We have a nice group that participates every week, so please come in. You do not have to stay long. You do not have to eat or drink - just participate in nice conversation. We are trying to enhance the Hamlin experience. I have reached out to a few groups already, and I will be reaching out to more. I want your input. What is it we can do with Hamlin that would attract people back to that space once again? We do not have an unlimited budget, but we want to make Hamlin a place where you like to gather during lunch hour and meet your colleagues. If you have not already heard from me, you will soon.

Again, what we are trying to do – is recognize how hard you work. I will never forget when I got my first faculty job, my family said, “Oh, you will get your summers off.” It was easier to agree with them than to explain differently, although it was not correct. You work a tremendous number of hours, and you take a lot of work home. You work weekends, you

work summers. This is a very difficult job. I tell people that being a faculty member at a liberal arts institution with active scholarship is the most difficult academic position of all. At an R1 institution (large research institution), your main job is to conduct research and write grants. If you are at a teaching college, your main job is to go into the classroom, lecture, and most likely go home. When you are at an institution like Trinity College, you have to be an excellent teacher, you have to be excellent in scholarship, and those two items are the most difficult to balance on a daily basis. I also tell people, if you balance the criteria correctly, this is the most rewarding job you will ever have in your entire career. Forty years will go by very quickly, and suddenly you are retiring and fishing. What I want to do, by some of the changes we have begun to implement, is to make the campus feel more like a home and not just a job. I am not asking you to work more hours. I do not think we have enough hours in the day for you to give more time to Trinity College. When you are on campus, I want this to feel like your extended family, to feel like you can go to the different events, go to Social Hours, and just relax while you are on campus. If these changes are not working, let me know what you would like to see. I am always open to input, or any idea you may have.

As we move into long term planning, with the blessings of our new President, we will, once again, focus on both the financial and academic aspects of the community. Our financial situation is improving. We are modeling projects that will go forward, projects that will make us healthy. It is a long road, it is a difficult road, but it is beginning to happen. We cannot separate the academic and the financial, unfortunately. They go forward hand-in-hand. We have to be financially healthy to be academically healthy. Again, if we begin each project with the question, "How will this enhance our students' education?" we cannot go wrong. I have asked the Board of Trustees to think about that same question in the same manner. I have put the same question forward to them every time we start a conversation. What I am hoping is that we begin to move forward together, in the same direction.

I told you that I would come forward during the first or second faculty meeting to summarize all of the divisional plans that we started last year. I am not going to complete that task because the plans are just the beginning, and will be the foundation for our long-term planning as we begin that process. We are going to need your insight and your input,

and I will be coming back to ask you to do second and third level planning with the divisional plans. One of the ideas that I want to really drive home is that last year, with the planning that you completed, you showed the Board of Trustees that you can plan, and, they were extremely impressed. What we need to show them now is that you can guide them, not just plan for them; and they are willing and open to this process. Your voice will become stronger quickly. With your help, we can achieve this goal.

We are looking at growing in a couple of different areas. The Graduate Programs. We are designing two or three different BA/MA programs along with Neuroscience. These programs will be coming forward to faculty committees, and we will begin planning discussions. We are also looking at a Master's of Arts and Teaching, and a Master's of Arts in Urban Planning program. We will be coming to you for your ideas and your input prior to the initiation of the programs. We are looking at extending our summer programming in the academic field. The classes we currently host during the summer are strong, and we teach them very well. We do, however, underutilize our summer housing and summer academic programs to a large extent. We have much room on campus, and we can easily grow our programming. We will be reaching out to ask for your input in these areas.

As the Advisory Boards get further set in place, we will be setting guidelines for how they may most effectively help faculty, and we will be asking for your input and guidance as to how best to lead the Boards forward and form a policy on best practices.

The most fun thing upon which we will be embarking is the start of an accreditation cycle. We were accredited ten years ago, and I see the smiles never left your faces. We are beginning that cycle once again. We are in much better shape this time in terms of our academics, in terms of resources, in terms of our structure. We have an Assessment Advisory Council that will be helping with this process. I have asked Rachel Barlow to help coordinate the activities around accreditation, and we will be contacting Chairs and Program Heads for guidance and data collection. Remember, you have already started much of this process. Two or three years ago we began to construct learning goals with outcomes; and many other assessment measurements that you were not quite happy doing, but did very well. We are going to be returning and asking you for information again. Please, just smile and help out where you are able. Remember that if we do our assessment

internally, we really can help direct our student education to a great extent. If we do not conduct our assessment internally, if we do not take the reins and guide this process, somebody will do so externally. We have until the spring of 2016 to prepare for the site visit, which gives us plenty of time. I wanted to give you a “heads-up” so that we do not have to overwork anybody.

Very similar to what I said last year, we are a wonderful community. We have some of the best faculty in the world, and I do not mean that as a cliché. You can view CVs, you can view publications, you can view teaching awards, you can view anything, and I would confidently compare our faculty to any other. We have a tremendous amount of work ahead of us. We have to turn around our slide in the *US News and World Report* ranking. Not only because we wish for the number to rise, but because we want to fix the things that will help us educate our students better. However, we always, always, need to be proud of who we are as a community! We are still a top liberal arts college in the nation, which makes us a top liberal arts college in the world, and you do an incredible job. We always have to be proud of who we are and what we do. We can strive to get better, but we cannot hang our heads. That is not the way to go. We are much too good for that.

As we go forward, I do ask that you keep in mind, when we ask you to help with projects—and I promise to always work as hard as any of you ever do—that you keep in mind the statement: “individuals build careers, but it takes a team to build a community.” We need that team right now more than ever in the next two to three years to make substantial changes.

I am finished, and I wanted to say thank you. I know this was probably not the most enthusiastic set of issues to which you have listened, but we have made substantial progress dealing with some very difficult situations. I want to welcome Joanne once again. I believe that with her guidance we are heading into one of our better years. I am happy to take any questions you may have.