

Claiming Our Place

Fall Convocation Address
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Once again, as is our annual custom at Geneseo, I am pleased to welcome you to the opening convocation—and to a new academic year. I offer my warmest congratulations to all the award winners we have recognized today. You stand out among the talented faculty and staff who make Geneseo a truly special place. It is also a pleasure to recognize those faculty and librarians who have earned continuing appointment or promotion in the past year. Your efforts in teaching, scholarship, and service have made a real difference for our College community. As we recognize these colleagues who have been at the College for some time, we also welcome a cohort of excellent new faculty and staff—appointments in all of the major divisions of the College, including ten new tenure-track faculty. I would like to ask the new faculty and staff present today to stand so that we may welcome them with our applause. We're very pleased that you have decided to join the Geneseo college community.

I

The past year has been one of transition, with the retirement of several key administrators with many years of service to the College and the departure of Provost Barbara Dixon. Among the new faculty and staff, there are three administrators I would like to introduce at this time because they are in central positions that deal with every unit

on campus. Succeeding Don Lackey in personnel services is our new Assistant Vice President for Human Resources, Dr. Edna Chun. She holds a B.A. in music from Oberlin College and Master's and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees in piano performance from Indiana University. She comes to us from Brooklyn College and has held senior human resources positions at Portland State University, Kent State University, and California State University at Northridge. Already she has been holding informational sessions and workshops for various members of the college community, and her office stands ready to answer questions and provide assistance in all areas of human resources. Two other newcomers you will need to know are Dr. Deborah Suzzane, Director of Institutional Research, and Ms. Penelope Koch, Director of Campus Scheduling. If you need data about any aspect of the College's operations, the Office of Institutional Research is the first place to go. Dr. Suzzane, who succeeds Jim McNally, holds a Ph.D. from the University of North Dakota and comes to us from the University of Texas at Brownsville. She has established and directed institutional research offices at two universities. Ms. Koch, who comes to us from the Town Hall Auditorium in Seattle and succeeds Sue Spring, has also served as Conference Manager at Bentley College. When you need to schedule a room or set up a conference, please call upon Penny.

With the appointment of Provost Dixon to the presidency of Truman State University on July 1, we also faced changes in Academic Affairs. To ensure the best possible leadership in this crucial area of the College, I consulted extensively with all the department chairs and senior administrators in academic affairs, as well as faculty and staff throughout the College. As Associate Provost since 1999 and a highly respected

former chair of sociology, Dave Gordon will do an outstanding job as Interim Provost. I am delighted that he has agreed to serve.

When I consulted the department chairs, many of them told me that it was very important to maintain the high level of service to departments that characterized our Provost's Office under Barbara Dixon. In a bad budget year it was vital, they said, to maintain careful stewardship of the budget. I was delighted, again, that Steve Padalino volunteered to stay in his post as Associate Provost for Budget and Technology. Upon the recommendation of Provost Dixon, I have also appointed Interim Dean Susan Bailey to the regular post of Dean of the College—a richly deserved promotion that will further ensure stability and continuity in the coming year (and a decision that was greeted with universal approbation by everyone who deals with the Dean's Office). Finally, on the basis of an internal search, Interim Provost Gordon has appointed Professor David Geiger as Interim Associate Provost to cover his former duties in faculty hiring and faculty development. With this excellent leadership in place, we can move ahead in academic affairs without skipping a beat. As we carry out the important task of searching for a new Provost, I am confident that we are well positioned to confront the challenges we may face as a college and seize many of the opportunities that present themselves in the coming year.

II

My title today is: "Claiming Our Place." But, as I was preparing this talk, I considered calling it "*Annus mirabilis?*--or *Déjà vu All Over Again?*" As I consider the accomplishments of Geneseo in practically every area of endeavor, I believe we can say that 2002-03 was a truly extraordinary year. In my remarks today I intend to share a few

highlights of the wonderful things we have accomplished together as an institution in the past year, and I think you will agree that it was a year of wonders. As I consider the state budget and state support for public higher education in New York in this same period, however, the words of that eminent philosopher, Yogi Berra, come to mind: our situation is: “déjà vu all over again.” How do we claim our place as the finest public undergraduate college in New York and one of the most outstanding public liberal arts colleges in the country, in the environment in which we find ourselves? How do we come closer to realizing our vision of Geneseo as the premier public liberal arts college in the country in the coming year? While celebrating the marvelous year we have completed, I hope to make some modest suggestions about how we might proceed, even as we experience this feeling of déjà vu all over again.

Annus Mirabilis. The 2002-03 academic year was indeed a year of wonders—so much so that it is hard to know where to begin. The most recent, and perhaps most exciting, achievement belongs to our Phi Beta Kappa faculty. On August 9, by an overwhelming vote, the 40th Triennial Council of Phi Beta Kappa, meeting in Seattle, Washington, authorized our faculty and administrators in Phi Beta Kappa to “shelter” a new chapter of the oldest and most prestigious academic honor society in the country. As you know, the vote in Seattle was the happy conclusion of a rigorous and detailed process of consideration that began in Fall 2000, when we submitted a preliminary application for a chapter. Out of 41 colleges and universities whose faculty applied, we were among only ten campuses authorized to prepare a more detailed application and to be visited by a three-person team from the Phi Beta Kappa Committee on Qualifications in March 2002. Of those institutions, only seven—along with another institution whose application

was held over from the previous cycle—were recommended by the Phi Beta Kappa Senate for approval by the full Assembly. Thus Geneseo now joins eight institutions authorized to establish new chapters. Recognition by Phi Beta Kappa is a strong validation of the quality of our faculty, our students, and our programs—a compelling indicator of Geneseo’s excellence in the liberal arts and sciences. When our chapter is formally installed later this year, we shall be one of only 270 schools nationwide with this distinction. Credit for this signal achievement goes to our Phi Beta Kappa faculty, ably led by Professor Doug Baldwin (Computer Science) and assisted by former Dean of the College Tom Greenfield (Professor of English). On behalf of the College community I thank them. I am eagerly looking forward to the installation ceremony in January.

Phi Beta Kappa will bring national recognition for Geneseo as a liberal arts college, but it is not the only national recognition received by our faculty this year. Because excellent teaching is so much a part of our culture, we tend to forget that Geneseo faculty members have compiled a truly distinguished record in teaching, not only at the system and regional levels but in a national context. In the past year, three members of our faculty have been honored by major national scholarly associations for outstanding teaching. In April, Professors Bill Cook (History) and Ron Herzman (English) were presented with the first national award for excellence in teaching medieval studies by the Medieval Academy of America. In July, the Board of Governors of the Mathematical Association of America approved granting the highest teaching honor in mathematics, the Tepper Haimo Award, to Professor Olympia Nicodemi. If my numbers are correct, Olympia’s award is the ninth national award for college teaching received by a member of the Geneseo faculty in the past decade. It is the second time that a Geneseo

math professor has won the award (Gary Towsley received it in 2000). In fact, there are only two other institutions with more than one Tepper Haimo winner on their faculty—Williams College and Purdue University. Except for the University of Rochester, Geneseo is the only institution in New York with more than one CASE Professor of the Year on its faculty, Bill Cook and Steve Padalino (Physics) having received the award in 1992 and 1999 respectively. In addition, Professor Margaret Matlin has won no fewer than three national awards for the teaching of psychology (and is perhaps the only person in the nation to have done so). This, I submit, is an extraordinary record for a small public liberal arts college in upstate New York.

In research as well as teaching, it has also been a remarkable year. Not only have Geneseo's faculty continued to publish significant books and articles in the humanities and social sciences and compile a fine record of performances and exhibits, but total sponsored research expenditures exceeded \$1 million for the first time in the College's history. Thirty principal investigators in 13 departments submitted 44 grant proposals totaling \$4.5 million; research expenditures rose 77 percent, from \$696,000 to \$1.23 million. We appear to be on track for another million-dollar year in 2003-04.

When we turn to undergraduate life and student accomplishments, again there is much good news to report. Our students continued their excellent academic work (indeed, 36 percent of the class of 2002 went directly on to graduate school—another new record), and Geneseo students continued to excel beyond the classroom—in service, co-curricular activities, and athletics. In the latter category Geneseo achieved an historic first. We captured the SUNY Commissioner's Cup, which recognizes the best overall record in our athletic conference. Geneseo teams won eight SUNYAC championships,

including an incredible sweep of all six track and cross-country championships by Coach Mike Woods' teams, an unprecedented occurrence in SUNY athletic history. We also won ECAC championships in three sports, state and regional titles, and NCAA national championships in three individual events. Nine student-athletes garnered a total of 18 All-American designations, and I note with considerable pride that many of the athletes who contributed to this record were also on the Dean's list and inducted into academic honor societies. Senior track star Melissa White, for example, graduated magna cum laude in a difficult field and received a prestigious NCAA scholarship for further study. Though we do not offer degrees in physical education or sports management and we certainly do not offer athletic scholarships or big-time football, our student athletes exemplify the old maxim, *mens sana in corpore sano*—a healthy mind in a healthy body. (And while I'm on this topic, I might also point out that Lauderdale Student Health and Counseling Center received glowing reviews and full reaccreditation by the Accreditation Association for Ambulatory Health Care.) The successes of our student-athletes remind us that all of us are in some sense educators at a public liberal arts college, and I am pleased to pay tribute to the outstanding teachers who hold the title of coach or athletic director.

Attracting students who can thrive at a school like Geneseo is another crucial element in our continuing success as a public liberal arts college. Again, this year's results have been spectacular. More than ten thousand students applied to Geneseo last year. We received nine applications for each place in the freshman class. The Class of 2007 is the most highly qualified in the history of the College, with average SAT scores of 1252 (621 Verbal, 631 Math—up 22 points from last year's mean), and a mean high

school average of 92.7 percent. Forty-eight percent of the new first-year students are in the top ten percent of their graduating class, 81 percent in the top 20 percent; and they come from almost every county in New York, nine other states and 13 foreign countries. This record is all the more remarkable because we offer very little non-need-based scholarship aid, preferring instead to invest our limited state dollars in faculty and staff lines, technology and instructional equipment, and other programs that directly improve the quality of our students' educational experience.

As you have heard me say on many occasions, many of the resources that provide an extra margin of excellence at Geneseo come from private philanthropy, which supports undergraduate research, faculty development, and innovative academic programs. Thus the work of the Geneseo Foundation is absolutely vital and becomes more important every year as the percentage of state tax support for the College declines. 2002-03 was a difficult year for private philanthropy, with contributions to colleges and universities down throughout the country. Geneseo bucked the trend, however, raising a total of \$2,001,038 in private gifts in the past year—a 25-percent increase over the preceding year and the second largest annual gifts total in Geneseo history. Giving by corporations, friends of the college, and parents increased dramatically. The 50th Reunion gift of the Class of 1953 totaled more than \$190,000 (in planned and outright gifts), setting a new record for all reunion classes, and the College is succeeding in cultivating the major and planned gifts that we need to ensure our long-range future. New confirmed bequests totaled \$460,000, for example, compared with \$45,000 in the previous year. Plainly we have enjoyed a highly successful year in College Advancement, and plainly we are moving in the right direction.

As we walk around the campus today, we can also see new buildings and more new construction than at any time since the MacVittie era—activity that is changing the face of SUNY Geneseo. The new entrance and parking area on Park Street is finished, and visitors are now welcomed to campus from Main Street with a handsome new sign. Major hard-scaping has been completed on the South Side. The new food court in Mary Jemison Hall is finished, and it is beautiful. I urge you to see it. Construction of the new connector building between Allegany and Wyoming Halls is well under way. It will create a new quadrangle as part of the North Village project, which aims to enhance the quality of residential life at Geneseo and allow us more fully to integrate campus life and our liberal arts program. Flowers, trees, lawns, and landscaping look the best they have looked in the nine years I have been here—even before the completion of the new Master Plan for landscaping that we are working on. The contract for Phase I of the Integrated Sciences Building has been signed; our contractor, The Pike Construction Company, is eager to start, and we hope to break ground for this \$33 million project within the next month. We are working assiduously with Senator Volker and other members of the legislative delegation to secure the \$20 million required for the second phase of the project, the renovation of Greene Hall. In addition to the \$53 million for the Integrated Sciences Building, if all goes well, we shall have completed \$22.75 million in new projects since Fall 2000, and we are beginning a further \$11 million in renovations this year. Not only will this construction transform the physical appearance of campus, making Geneseo a more appealing and welcoming place for prospective students and community members, but each of these projects is intended specifically to support our mission as a residential public liberal arts college.

As we look around at the new buildings, we can take great pride in our campus. But progress always comes at a price. The Integrated Sciences Building project is wonderful, but construction projects are inevitably disruptive. We must all bear with some noise and chaos as we build a science facility worthy of outstanding science programs in an outstanding public liberal arts college. Even as new construction accelerates, Facilities Services also is trying to serve renovation and maintenance needs—and doing so better, thanks to the I-3 program, which has continued to move forward in the past year.

Facilities services and administration, advancement, admissions, student and campus life, sponsored research, teaching and learning, academic affairs—there is no major division of the College or area of activity at Geneseo that has not had its share of remarkable accomplishments in the past year. I have mentioned only the most striking of superlatives in a year of superlatives. 2002-03 was indeed an *annus mirabilis*.

III

I wish that I could describe 2002-03 as an *annus mirabilis* for the State of New York or for the SUNY System. For the New York State economy it has been, in Queen Elizabeth II's phrase, an *annus horribilis*. For the SUNY budget, the legislative budget process in Albany, and the Geneseo budget it has been "déjà vu all over again." The best that can be said about our 2003-04 budget is that it is dismal but not disastrous. We have witnessed another disappointing year in Albany politics. The Executive Budget called for a \$180 million reduction in the SUNY budget--to be replaced (predictably) by a much-needed \$1200 tuition increase. No one likes tuition increases, so the Legislature

reduced the tuition increase to \$950, without, however, replacing the lost funds. The State University budget therefore suffered a \$36-million cut. What disappoints me most is that we were unable to make the case to state government for the urgency of our needs and the importance of a strong public higher education system in New York. The bottom line for Geneseo is two successive years of flat funding at a time when we are faced with increased contractual and inflationary costs. Last year we dealt with a \$1.5 million shortfall; this year we face an additional shortfall of at least \$500,000 and will need to make further cuts in our base budget to permanently cover the accrued shortfalls in both years.

Vice President Levison, the budget officers, the Provost and the other vice-presidents, and departments throughout the College are to be commended for an excellent job of maintaining the quality of our programs within a reduced budget, but to do so we have had to hold many faculty lines vacant—and recently we have had to cut some. Through creative use of our limited resources we will continue to provide an outstanding education for our students, but we cannot continue doing this forever. The sad fact of the matter is that another year of insufficient funding with no ability to raise appropriate revenues under current system policies will have serious effects on the quality of our programs. This situation of “déjà vu all over again” is cruelly ironic in light of Geneseo’s outstanding accomplishments in the past several years—indeed, in the past decade-and-a-half.

The question, of course, is how to maintain forward momentum in these circumstances, how to bring ever more fully to reality our vision of becoming the premier public liberal arts college in the country. To accomplish this in our current environment,

I believe, we must claim our place as the premier undergraduate institution in the State University and one of the finest public liberal arts colleges in the nation. There are several initiatives we can undertake in the coming year to claim our place. Though I am as aware as anyone of the gloomy realities of the state budget, I believe there are many hopeful signs.

For one thing, we are doing what we need to do as a College to garner the additional resources that make a crucial difference in achieving excellence. And we are becoming ever more successful in securing those resources, as last year's record totals in sponsored research and annual giving demonstrate. College advancement, in its broadest sense, is a campus-wide responsibility. We can all help—as principal investigators who write those successful grant proposals, as outstanding teachers and mentors who attract and inspire the best students in the state, as donors ourselves, and as advocates for the College in the community. Working together in the coming year, we can seize multiple opportunities to secure additional funding beyond the limitations of the state budget.

Now is also the time to claim our place in the State University of New York. According to the numbers, we are already the honors college in the system. We are plainly the most selective campus in the system. As the system administration measures such things, 83.9 percent of our entering class last year ranked in the highest selectivity group, ten points above the next most selective campus and double the percentage found at the third most selective. And those were last year's numbers. According to the *US News* rankings released today (and if you read the front page of the *Democrat and Chronicle* this morning, you know we should take them with a grain of salt!), Geneseo is once again the only top-tier institution in any category from SUNY when measured

against both public and private institutions. As our Phi Beta Kappa application demonstrated, we have the programs, we have the culture of learning, and we can point to the academic outcomes to back up these numbers. The case for special status and appropriate funding for Geneseo is strong, and working with the Strategic Planning Group and Chancellor King, I intend to make that case once again, forcefully and persistently, in the next few months.

Claiming our place, in national terms, is a long-range process. It transcends the vicissitudes of the annual budget process and the annual rankings. It is a matter of meeting our own high standards, of doing the things we know we need to do to become a truly outstanding public liberal arts college, of paying attention to the lasting effects of our teaching and learning process as we seek to develop “socially responsible citizens with skills and values important to the pursuit of an enriched life and success in the world,” as it says in our Mission Statement. In the coming year, there is much that we can do to claim our place in this subtler, more lasting sense. Let me mention three initiatives already under way or planned for this year that will help us in claiming our place.

First, building a more diverse community of teachers and learners in this place. We know we can do more in this regard. The Diversity Commission has provided excellent leadership in this endeavor; and their statement on community and diversity, which will be discussed at our first Senate meeting on September 16, provides an excellent philosophical rationale for our work. At this time, however, we need to do more to pull together the efforts of various members of the campus community to build diversity. I am pleased that Assistant Vice President Chun has already sponsored

workshops on diversity for coaches and professional staff with Dr. Christine Taylor of Ohio University. As senior human resources officer, Dr. Chun will be coordinating our recruitment and retention efforts and putting systems in place to track and measure our results. But diversity is more wide-reaching than numbers. In order to continue the conversation, we have scheduled the first annual President's Lecture on Diversity, to be delivered by Professor Jeffrey Milem of the University of Maryland. To provide further intellectual perspectives, the Teaching and Learning Center will sponsor multiple workshops and lectures under this year's theme: Teaching and Learning for Global Citizenship. By coordinating our efforts and by continuing to situate those efforts in a rich discussion of the meaning of diversity in a public liberal arts college, I believe we can make real progress in the coming year.

Second, we shall continue our efforts to foster civic engagement—to develop those socially responsible citizens referred to in our mission statement. In collaboration with other COPLAC schools, Geneseo will be involved in an initiative called the American Democracy Project, co-sponsored by the *New York Times* and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Interim Provost Gordon will work with Vice President Bonfiglio and faculty and staff teams that cut across divisional boundaries, to explore ways we can enhance our curriculum and campus activities in this regard. As we do so, we shall be mindful of the national conversation on civic engagement and service learning led by such organizations as Campus Compact and AAC&U as well as our own efforts to create strategic community partnerships.

Finally, the work of the Task Force on Faculty Roles, Rewards, and Evaluation continues, after a very productive first year. During the Fall Semester, members of the

Task Force established their bearings in the extensive literature on the subject and outlined a two-year plan of action. In the Spring Semester, the Task Force divided into four sub-groups, which tackled the issues of establishing a conceptual framework for evaluation, student feedback on teaching, peer review of teaching, and contributions to the discipline. The Task Force also met with members of the Commission on Diversity and Community, for a discussion of including contributions related to diversity in the evaluation process. As I review the work of the Task Force, I am reminded of the quiet phase of a capital campaign—if you’ll pardon the reference to fundraising and development. As these ideas develop and issues are defined, the members of the Task Force will be ready to “go public” in various forums during the coming year as they begin to craft their recommendations and proposals in response to their charge. I am grateful to the members of the Task Force, co-chaired by former Provost Dixon and Professor David Geiger, for their work in the past year. In the coming year, the Task Force will be co-chaired by Professor Mary Ellen Zuckerman, with Dave Geiger, who some may think has “gone over to the dark side” by becoming an Associate Provost, serving as administrative co-chair. Although its work is complex and subtle and certainly not visible to the general public beyond the campus, the Task Force is another absolutely essential means of claiming our place as a truly distinguished public liberal arts college.

In the year ahead we face challenges—the usual challenges, I suppose, on the budgetary and political front in New York State—but I remain optimistic about our prospects as a college, and I know, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that we have exciting work to do. I am optimistic because of the extraordinary things we have accomplished together in the past year. More than any year since I’ve been at Geneseo, we have been

blessed with vivid and visible successes—Phi Beta Kappa, faculty achievements, student awards, fundraising, and new construction. Let us take time to celebrate this *annus mirabilis*. There is much cause for jubilation. Let's be realistic about our budgetary situation, but aggressive and hopeful in helping ourselves find the resources we need; active, not passive, in claiming our rightful place in the State University and ultimately in American higher education. Let's keep our eyes on our true goal--claiming our place, yes, in the annual rankings and in New York State, but also claiming our place in doing and being known for the things that make for excellence as a public liberal arts college. I invite you to celebrate this wonderful year—and to join together with faculty and staff and our new students—at the campus-wide welcoming picnic later this afternoon. I look forward to working with you throughout the coming year.