

# Vice Chancellor and Provost's Address to the Faculty

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I am both humbled and excited to address you formally today for the first time as Provost. I am proud to be the chief academic officer of this University, with this chancellor and with this faculty of superb teachers, nationally recognized and engaged scholars, and leaders of thought and action. It is truly a privilege to lead Academic Affairs and to collaborate with dedicated and accomplished administrators, professionals, and staff members across all divisions of the University. It has been a pleasure to get to know students in all of our schools and colleges and to see the impact that many of them are already having in our SU community and our world. With this first chance that I have to address the University in my new role, however, I wish to focus on the faculty itself, especially its centrality in defining the excellence of Syracuse University and leading the education of our students, our greatest resource and most enduring legacy.

I came to SU 19 years ago with great excitement about being part of a faculty where it seemed everything was expected of me. Sure, mentors from my graduate institution steered me toward bigger name and higher ranked research institutions, but from the first, the expectation at Syracuse that you can—and must—“do it all” appealed to me: care deeply about teaching, conduct leading-edge research, and make an impact with your service. I knew it was a tall order, but I stood with Teddy Roosevelt on the rewards of this kind of life, when he said:

“I wish to preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife; to preach that highest form of success which comes, not to the person who desires mere easy peace, but to the person who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph.”<sup>2</sup>

Over the course of my time on the SU faculty, I must say that I’ve found the toil less bitter than Teddy suggests, but the rewards not diminished in the least—every day brings me, and, I know, you, splendid triumphs. Few other things can be more professionally fulfilling than doing important work and knowing that you are contributing not only to the vitality and impact of your field, but to the distinction of your institution and to the benefit of our society. Indeed, I believe that this environment has fostered a faculty that constitutes the very core of SU’s distinction as a university—what I think of as the source of our unique excellence. As I have had the opportunity to familiarize myself with the workings of this institution, having taken on

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<sup>1</sup> Delivered at Hendricks Chapel, October 24, 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, “The Strenuous Life,” speech delivered to The Hamilton Club of Chicago, April 10, 1899.

responsibilities as a chair, associate dean, and dean—and now as provost getting a closer view of other institutions—I have only grown more convinced of this. As such, I am proud to continue to define myself as a faculty member at Syracuse who has, for a period of time, been asked to serve the institution and all of you, carrying a strong sense of my faculty identity. To address this faculty of “do it all” today, then, as provost, is humbling.

This time is also tremendously exciting because I believe deeply that we stand at a moment in the history of Syracuse University ripe with promise, and that our distinctive strength—the crucible through which our faculty has been formed—is the key to achieving it. I’d like to spend my time with you today reflecting on this assessment and why I’m so optimistic about the months and years ahead.

For starters, when I reflect on the state of the University now relative to where we’ve been, I see a very positive trajectory. There are convincing reasons to believe that we are a stronger institution today, overall, than we have been before—perhaps ever before.

One reason is that the trend line marking the quality profile of our incoming undergraduate students would be the envy of Wall Street. We have attracted increasingly stronger classes of students, from every part of the United States and the world, over a period of decades, with growing ‘strength’ mapped along measures of both traditional admissions statistics and cohort diversity. GPAs and SAT scores of our first-year class have increased steadily, which is reflected in the fact that in the 1970s, we were admitting over 90% of applicants, while today our admission rate is 50%. Just as importantly, the incoming class has become more and more diverse—a clear characteristic of excellence—with 29% of this fall’s class being students of color, an eleven-point increase from just ten years ago. Further, we have sustained our commitment to remaining need-blind in admissions to sustain the socio-economic diversity of the incoming classes. These braided trends have had a transformative effect on the student body, as well as on the intellectual climate on campus. It demonstrates that the hard work that all of us have invested in everything we do has been recognized by prospective students and their families. Our alumni have taken note of this, too. In the relatively short time I have been Provost, I have come to learn that it is something of a running joke among many of our alums to quip that they don’t think they would be admitted to their alma mater today.

And yet, our alums clearly have not considered this turn of events to be discouraging. Rather, they have expressed their support for this trend tangibly and with increasing generosity. As you may know, over the course of the so-called “nucleus” phase of our current fundraising campaign, we already have raised more money than we did throughout the entirety of the last campaign. This is an indicator that our alumni and friends have a great deal of confidence in what we’re doing and in our potential. This generosity is being leveraged to accelerate the gains we’ve made in attracting ever stronger students to SU, but its fruit is particularly vivid in the colleagues whom we recognized earlier for having been appointed to endowed professorships and chairs. Such appointments are just one of the many visible academic benefits that our fundraising success has brought. The endowments created to support our faculty during this foundational period of the campaign are unprecedented at Syracuse.

Just as our alums are encouraged at the increasing quality of our new students, we the faculty should be encouraged by the trend of increasing quality among new faculty—a trend that the deans, Associate Provost Alston, and I have had the opportunity to witness up close. More and more often, we are winning in head-to-head competition with top-notch universities for junior and senior faculty members who are highly trained, highly interdisciplinary, and deeply committed to having an impact on students and changing the world through their scholarship.

This trend is entwined with the increasing success with which we have pursued grants or entered into partnerships with foundations and other organizations that are of national or international visibility and importance. The quality of our faculty, the interrelationships that we have cultivated across disciplines, and the resulting high quality of the education that we are able to provide have made us a very attractive partner in tackling pervasive societal challenges. I am thinking here, for example, of the fact that in just the last two years, five faculty members have earned National Science Foundation Career Awards. In recent months and years we have earned support from some of the most influential foundations in the nation and the world: Ford, Mellon, Carnegie, Luce, and Kauffman, for example. We have entered into an innovative partnership with JPMorgan Chase to help transform and diversify the global financial services industry. We have attracted Imagining America—a national consortium focused on the arts, humanities, and public engagement—to make SU its new home. We also increasingly find governments from around the world seeking out our experts to help them re-conceive the nature of the challenges they face and to help them work toward possible solutions.

In these last examples of SU's successes in recent years, I think we find not only more reasons for optimism, but an indication of how we must proceed if we are to make good on the promise of this moment. All of these examples in which SU garnered the attention and support of prominent organizations and individuals materialized because we were able to demonstrate our ability to leverage our long-standing strengths to meet emerging needs. They partnered with us because we demonstrated—indeed, you demonstrated—that we understood our strengths and could be creative and nimble in deploying them and structuring ourselves to take on new challenges, ask new questions, and find new solutions.

The key questions that we must ask ourselves at this juncture, then, are: how should we best understand the unique excellence of our faculty that launched us on our impressive, positive trajectory? And how can we capitalize on the momentum we now have to sustain and accelerate along that trajectory? I believe that we need not look far for the answers because they are within us. It is deeply embedded in our history and in our institutional character to be innovative in employing our assets to address the greatest challenges of the day and prepare our students to be leaders in the world.

We were reminded of this when, following Chancellor Cantor's arrival, we spent a year examining Syracuse University's strengths and weaknesses in a very open dialogue with all of our constituents—a year that was dubbed *Exploring the Soul of Syracuse*. There was extensive outreach to solicit feedback from faculty, staff, and students across campus, from alumni, from friends of the University, and from the community. We learned a lot about what we have been, what we are, how we have been influenced by, and party to, the illustrious history of our region in promoting social and technical innovation. Most significantly, this exercise enabled us to

articulate clearly and sincerely what has been at the very core of our character as a university all along, and it is enabling us to exploit this more boldly than ever before.

*Scholarship in Action* is the articulation of that core characteristic of SU's unique excellence: that historically our best programs and our best moments as an institution are based on engagement and collaboration with practitioners and communities of experts, connecting our disciplinary excellence to professions, ideas, and problems in and of the world. This vision requires faculty who are superb scholars and great mentors, it relies upon the presence of enterprising students from all walks of life, and it needs engagement points in the world so that these teachers and students can catalyze transformational discovery. *Scholarship in Action* also captures the SU community's desire to be an institution committed to more consciously and strategically focusing its attention on the great challenges of our time.

In some very important ways, addressing the greatest challenges facing the world was, for many of us on the faculty, a fundamental motive in committing ourselves to a life of scholarship and teaching in the first place—a commitment that we renew every time we enter the lab, the studio, the office, and the classroom. The flame of that commitment burns so intensely in many of us that we could not conceive of any other life as satisfying as this, even when we know that our work constitutes just one piece of a very large puzzle being worked on by colleagues scattered around the world. And so, in a certain sense, *Scholarship in Action* is a phrase that describes the commitment we have long held in our heart of hearts, throughout our careers: to do our part, our share, to make the world a better place through scholarship undertaken with the public good in mind and with care and attention as we mentor young people who will carry on after us. So you may ask, what is different for us today?

What is different for us today is that we, as a university—students, staff, administrators, alumni, friends, and faculty—have resolved to place this life of the engaged mind, this ideal of the scholar and teacher who cares deeply about the world, at the center of our self-concept as a university, so that *Scholarship in Action* need not be something that we pursue in isolation, out of an individual sense of commitment, but something that we pursue in concert, intentionally, out of a shared sense of commitment.

How, then, should we proceed in this shared pursuit, particularly with regard to shaping and supporting a faculty that, as a whole, is eminently well positioned to serve the public good in this way—to carry out fundamental and fundable research, to educate increasingly diverse succeeding generations of students, and to function as thoughtfully engaged institutional and global citizens? Here, too, our history can be a guide.

It has long been an element of our faculty's unique excellence that we balance our strengths in the two central aspects of faculty life — scholarship and teaching — across the composite faculty profile while also providing service to our University and our professional community. Thus, while each tenured and tenure-track faculty member contributes in each of these aspects, we have recognized that each faculty member has a unique excellence of his or her own. Some of us excel in advancing a research agenda and some in teaching and mentoring, and an increasing number in a tightly integrated combination of the elements. While we must retain this flexibility as we move forward in shaping the faculty, we cannot afford to simply be content with

our current composite profile. To sustain our upward sloping trajectory, we must continue to increase our expectations for ourselves because the effects of faculty efforts to meet and surpass those expectations form the long-lasting foundation of the institution.

We must seek to leverage our strengths to enhance our productivity in the central aspects of faculty life, with special emphasis on our status as a research university. Each member of the tenured and tenure-track faculty is needed to advance our scholarly profile as an institution, including pursuit of external support and support of students pursuing advanced degrees. Units traditionally expected to perform sponsored research or externally supported creative work must do more, and units with little history or expectation will be asked to work with us to explore opportunities with government agencies, foundations, corporations, or NGOs. This is imperative as we strive to increase our impact and our standing as an institution, and the administration—particularly Vice President Ware, Executive Vice President Marcoccia, and me—will work with the faculty to make it happen.

At the same time, we must explore means of constructing a more expansive definition of scholarship than was envisioned in the 1940s, when the AAUP promulgated the concept of scholarship that prevailed at universities for the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by defining the expectations and the responsibilities that come with tenure. Today, we must aim for a definition—and commensurate rewards—that includes what is often called “public scholarship”, not to the exclusion of, but in conjunction with, the traditional modalities of scholarship. We must seek to populate the full spectrum of scholarly modalities because in doing so, we create the most effective environment for the education of our students and their preparation to be leaders rather than “just” professionals.

Now, it is important to note what I am not saying: I am not saying that every faculty member must engage in public scholarship, rather, that we should strive to have a balance. We don't want our entire faculty in the humanities focused on local literacy projects, as important as they are to the long-term vitality of our community. But just as we must have humanists who analyze and elucidate the roots of contemporary cultural currents, we must also have some humanists who help nurture the cultural consciousness of our community. Our students need a balance: the fundamentals and the theory, but also the connections to our many publics, the great problems of our times, and the professionals who are helping to solve them. It is only through this breadth of education that we can truly prepare our students for the world they will face upon graduation. Further, our faculty's scholarship will have greater impact if we populate the spectrum from basic to applied and theoretical to clinical—some faculty spanning this breadth themselves—as collaboration across the full spectrum enables real and comprehensive change.

Crucially, this more expansive understanding of scholarship will allow us to underline our long-standing institutional strength in public scholarship at a time when it is gaining currency rapidly among research universities—a fact that has been driven home for me in many ways through my interactions with academic leaders at other member institutions of the Association of American Universities, or AAU. This is the select body of institutions, of which we have been a member since 1967, that sets the agenda for American research universities. Many AAU provosts are working with their faculties on this same issue: how to truly integrate the basic and the applied, the theoretical and the public, and how to differentiate their university through this integration.

Our unique history and the head start we have gained through our work over the past three years put us in a leadership position nationally on this issue.

The evolution of tenure is very important if SU is to recruit and retain the best new faculty, who are increasingly trained in interdisciplinary environments, able to traverse the full range of scholarly modalities, and interested in engagement with the full range of publics. I have been heartened by the substantial discussion that has occurred in the Senate Committee on Academic Affairs and by my valuable interaction with deans and department chairs. Most recently, I held two “Faculty Town Meetings” on tenure and believe that there is strong consensus forming about making positive, progressive changes in our definition of scholarship while maintaining rigor and high standards, increasing the transparency of the tenure process, and improving our system of guidance and feedback to tenure-track faculty. I will be working with the Senate Committee on Academic Affairs to finalize the path forward on the various elements of the “Provost’s Statement on Tenure”<sup>3</sup>—which continues to be improved by my interactions with various faculty and administrative constituencies—and look forward to working with the faculty on implementation.

As we examine the dimensions of faculty effort and accomplishment, it is also vital that we acknowledge the important role that non-tenure-track faculty play in contributing to our unique excellence, including professors of practice, part-time instructors, research faculty, and adjunct faculty. The academic world in 1940 was focused almost exclusively on full-time, tenure-track faculty, but like many other schools over the last decade or so, we have recognized that changes in the world around us must motivate our own change. We now use a mix of faculty types both to ensure the quality and relevance of the education of our students and to enable the tenured and tenure-track faculty to be as productive as we require them to be to remain a first-tier research university. We celebrate the deep professional expertise and accomplishment that non-tenure-track faculty bring into our classrooms, our laboratories, and our clinics and must resolve to continue improving our recognition and rewards for their contributions.

Just as I suggested above with regard to the undergraduate student body, a key measure of our success in honing our excellence as a faculty is our ability to attract and retain the very best from all available talent pools. Greater diversity in the faculty and staff, among other things, exposes our students to a broader range of thinking, ensures our students are aware of the contexts within which they will live and work, and enables solutions of higher quality and greater impact, whether product design, policy development, or business plan. We also have a responsibility to feed the pipeline of the future professoriate through recruiting, mentoring, and graduating a more diverse graduate student body. Diversity should not be viewed as a numerical goal, but must be part and parcel of our understanding of what makes us great. Of course, diversity is multi-dimensional; our relatively small faculty is called to be diverse in discipline, intellectual approach, educational background and professional experience. However, we cannot use these measures of diversity, as important as they may be, to give ourselves a pass on race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and other cultural markers.

Along with our signal successes in the recruitment and retention of undergraduate students, we have also made strides in faculty recruitment in recent years. However, we have not done as

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<sup>3</sup> [http://provost.syr.edu/documents/2007/10/1/Tenure\\_Provost\\_Statement09-07.doc](http://provost.syr.edu/documents/2007/10/1/Tenure_Provost_Statement09-07.doc)

well in the retention of faculty from underrepresented groups. It is clear to me, then, that we need to examine not only faculty roles and rewards, but also our cultural environment, with a keen and critical eye toward the conceptual and collegial adjustments we need to make in order to recruit and retain a more diverse faculty. We have made little, if any, progress, in the recruitment and retention of graduate students from underrepresented groups, and this failure has an impact beyond our campus. I see the path forward this way: I will work with each unit within Academic Affairs to understand and articulate the characteristics of a diverse academic community and I will hold leaders accountable for achieving the critical masses needed to cultivate a supportive environment and ensure the excellence of our education and our scholarship. This year, I will develop a plan to support those efforts materially, and I will consult deans and other leaders about the value and role of a new position of Associate Provost for Equity and Inclusion, on which a final decision will be made this fall.

I will be the first to admit that what I have described here in broad terms is a very rigorous set of ambitions, and I say this having, myself, been formed as a faculty member in our own crucible of high expectations here at Syracuse. However, I am convinced that we are up to the task and, in concert with the deans, the Chancellor and I already have begun to take steps toward refining these goals and implementing measures to attain them.

For example, I strongly endorse the steps we already have taken to understand and capitalize on our place in the universe of higher education, especially the research university sector, and to seek ways to differentiate ourselves in that company. We cannot be “just like” other major research universities: we must be strategic, disciplined, and build on our strengths. As you probably know, our profile is not typical of AAU institutions. We are among the smallest and, consequently, our research profile is different from most of our AAU peers, whose size permits them to “cover the waterfront” in virtually any field of study. Thus, in order to increase sponsored research, as we must, we need to be shrewd in identifying opportunities to leverage our strengths, for example, by using our size to our advantage.

Smaller size can bring with it the advantages of nimbleness and ease of communication and collaboration across disciplines and across institutional structures, allowing us to adapt relatively quickly to fill perceived gaps in our coverage and to foster creativity and innovation in ways that are much more difficult for large institutions. We have a history of taking advantage of this characteristic—think about the work at the interfaces represented by the formation of the School of Journalism in 1934 that would go on to become the Newhouse School, the formation of the Women’s Studies program in 1975, and the creation of the Arts Journalism program in 2005—and recognize that now more than ever we must work together to identify those transdisciplinary areas that are of fundamental importance and opportunity and use our agility to bring faculty together from across the campus to develop a new course or a new research thrust or even a new academic program. Further, we must make the most of the advantage of our size through disciplined investment both in fundamental, theoretical areas that lay the foundation for all scholarship and in areas that are more applied and enable deeper engagement with our various publics.

We also have invested in areas in which we have leveraged and enhanced disciplinary strengths to create interdisciplinary initiatives that are highly productive, highly efficient in terms of our

use of institutional resources, and address pressing societal needs. In recent years, we have seen robust development of this kind that touches every one of our schools and colleges. A perfect example is the Institute for Judiciary, Politics, and the Media, which has been driven by a wonderful collaboration among the College of Law and the Maxwell and Newhouse Schools that has encompassed leadership from the deans, hard work of the faculties, support and encouragement from “communities of experts,” and benefits for the students of each of the schools.

We have begun to exercise our nimbleness through disciplined investment in faculty clusters—areas of intellectual activity that integrate fundamental and applied aspects of multiple disciplines. The deans and Vice President Ware have been working with the Chancellor and me to identify and develop these clusters, which we think of as opportunity areas that are few in number—probably less than ten ultimately—and are based on knowledge of current strengths, national trends, and potential leverage that may be gained from partnerships, existing external funding, and consortial cooperation. Clusters will be identified based on the degree to which they exhibit the following characteristics:

- intellectual richness and high potential for future impact;
- opportunity potential—or the chance of making a real difference with the investment;
- synergy inward—areas that enhance and have committed participation from multiple schools and colleges;
- synergy outward—areas in which we can partner with our community and with other universities in our region; and
- potential for attracting substantial, ongoing, external funding.

An example of a very promising cluster now under development is one in biomaterials, which includes faculty members from three departments from the College of Arts and Sciences and two departments from the LC Smith College, as well as the potential to foster collaboration across institutional boundaries by deepening the ties we have with our neighbor, SUNY Upstate Medical University. As this cluster develops, we envision meaningful connections to essential cognate fields including those in the College of Law, the Newhouse School, and the School of Education. Some of these faculty members are investigating basic questions about the character of natural and synthetic materials while others are examining how those materials interact in specific applications employed in contemporary biomedical solutions to health problems. By creating organizational and physical conditions that promote collaboration among these scholars and teachers, we get an integrated whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Clusters such as this embody the flexibility that is both made possible and demanded by our size. We could not envision success for the biomaterials cluster without building upon the excellence of our biologists, chemists, and physicists who are forging the fundamental science of discovery. We will leverage that excellence and our significant investment to discover new applications and to solve new problems in the world. Making disciplined investments of this kind not only serves faculty interests, but, equally important, student interests. The dynamism of the clusters will increase the opportunities in the classroom, in the lab, and in the marketplace for undergraduates, graduate students, and post-doctoral fellows.

So, along with telling what I think is a great story of a strong institution making the best use of its traditional excellences through a vision we call *Scholarship in Action*, I am here today to ask you to continue to do the great things that you have been doing—that leading-edge research, that careful teaching, and that high-impact engagement with the world. And I invite you to work with me to set standards and expectations that reflect both that traditional excellence and the high aspirations we have for the immediate and long-term future because we have never needed committed colleagues and collaborators more than in this venture. I will continue to work with the deans and the University Senate and my senior team to strategize about directions to advance the University, but I want to hear directly from you on the issues that affect your lives of toil and effort and help you achieve your splendid triumphs. We have begun a broad conversation on aspects of tenure at Syracuse University that will continue through much of this academic year. I anticipate that we will also use a scaffolded, participatory approach, including faculty town meetings, to discuss other areas of importance such as research, diversity, public scholarship, RCM opportunities and impacts, and others as they emerge.

When I accepted this job, I was well aware that I would be called upon to make tough decisions on behalf of all of you and this University. I have accepted that challenge and acknowledge that there is no complex question that can be answered with unanimous agreement. But candid and thoughtful conversations across the campus are an essential characteristic of a vibrant and engaged academic community. I look forward to many opportunities to talk together, to work collaboratively, to encourage and cajole and congratulate, to argue and to assess our progress, and to cultivate our shared and individual excellences. I look forward to many opportunities to tell stories of the unique excellences of Syracuse University, which we will write together.

Congratulations again to the distinguished faculty recognized here today, and thank you all for your attention as well as the hard work you do every day that distinguishes us as a University.

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