

## State of the College Address

October 16, 2002

I am grateful for this opportunity to address the Queens College community and to talk about the state of the college and what lies ahead. First, however, a word of thanks. What a gracious and warm welcome you have given us. Despite the folk wisdom that you cannot go home again, with your help, we have. It is great to be back in Flushing and the City University – and, for my wife Alda, it is great to be back at Queens College.

We have taken special delight in having many of you over to the President's House, beginning shortly after we arrived with a luncheon with the Buildings and Grounds staff and extending to last week's reception for new faculty. More events are being planned, and we are eager to welcome each of you to our home.

For the last several months I have felt like a kid on a treasure hunt. I kept finding more and more hidden treasures. I had hoped to report on all of them today. However, a test run of this speech left most of my staff asleep. I blame that damn Cassidy. So I have resorted to listing all of the things I had hoped to talk about and would be happy to bend your ear on at a later time with the details.

I cannot imagine a more exciting time to be in higher education. Why is it exciting? Because it is a time of uncertainty. We are uncertain of what to expect from our economy, from our global neighbors, and sometimes from our neighbor next door. In such a time we are more receptive to new ideas, to different ways of looking at old problems.

In short, we are more open to all the habits of mind that a strong liberal arts education encourages, the kind of education Queens College has been providing for over sixty years. It is an education that is not merely the accumulation of information. It is an education that encourages intellectual curiosity, a questioning disposition, the ability to think for oneself, and to see oneself and the world in creative ways. I like what Lord Halifax said: "Education is what remains when we have forgotten all that we have been taught." As I said, it is not the facts you have learned, it is the habits of the mind.

But it is also habits of the heart. Queens College, with its liberal arts foundation, helps students to become good citizens, men and women of integrity, people of strong character. This has been true from our founding, when we adopted the motto "We learn in order to serve." A commitment to the proposition that the chief aim of learning is to give back, to serve, underlies our mission.

Queens College's great strength has always been its faculty. We have far more than our fair share of faculty who combine stellar scholarship with outstanding teaching. I have said on several recent occasions that our top priority must be to maintain and augment our strong faculty. The reason for this is obvious: A college cannot be better than its faculty. A college can be better than its facilities, its sports teams, its administration. But the level of its faculty is a level above which a college cannot rise.

I would like to direct a few words to our new colleagues who are at the beginning of their teaching careers. Much is expected of you. Our teaching loads are heavy and our expectations for your scholarship are exacting. If you view these two tasks as separate, you are likely to be overwhelmed. If you see that each supports the other, you will find there is no more satisfying and rewarding profession.

We hire scholars both to help advance knowledge and to allow our students to study at the feet of masters. But Aristotle's insight, "Teaching is the highest form of understanding," looks at the other side of the coin. The best way to truly understand your discipline is to teach it. I know our new faculty will add new energy and new ways of seeing to all the departments on campus.

While we are resource poor, we are rich in the quality of our faculty and we are determined to increase its quantity as well. Just last week, we took the first steps toward adding another class of scholar-teachers to join us next fall. Our challenge is to do as well next year as we have done this year.

One of the treasures I have found at Queens is the extraordinary strength of each of our four divisions, and I would like now to highlight just a few of the exciting programs and activities they are engaged in.

### **Division of Arts and Humanities**

This division has many strong departments including Music, Drama, English, Linguistics, and Media Studies. The Aaron Copland School of Music is the strongest in CUNY and one of the best in the nation. These departments sponsor programs that connect us with our neighbors, such as concerts in this beautiful hall, plays performed by our students, readings by some of the world's most honored writers, and a Speech and Hearing Center. Our language departments, which are so important in helping our students to see beyond the nearest borders, offer extraordinary breadth in instruction and great depth in literature and culture.

### **Division of Education**

Our Division of Education plays a crucial part in the New York City School System, particularly in the Borough of Queens. It is continuously improving our education system with its partnerships with schools and the professional development of teachers. We have the largest and strongest teacher preparation programs in CUNY. Indeed, we educate more teachers than any other college in the tri-state area, and one fourth of our students are engaged in teacher education.

### **Division of Mathematics and Natural Sciences**

New cluster hires in the sciences are helping the Division of Mathematics and Natural Sciences grow in strength. The division has been dedicated both to developing the excellence of their students by providing opportunities for research, and to reaching out to elementary and secondary students in a number of exciting programs, including the GLOBE Project, which is an exemplary example of a collaboration between disciplinary programs and the Division of Education.

### **Division of Social Sciences**

The social sciences are becoming more cross-disciplinary, and I applaud the division for taking an increasingly integrated approach to social inquiry and instruction, developing intellectual and curricular programs that foster synergies across departments and divisions. Fine examples of this are Honors in the Social Sciences, Teachers as Scholars and the recently approved Bachelor of Arts in Business Administrations.

### **Research Activity**

The strength of our faculty in all four divisions is acknowledged by the support they receive from government and private funding groups. We have a number of highly productive research programs, including some funded by the Department of Energy and the National Science Foundation. In fact, faculty across the College have obtained grants and contracts to support research, programs, and service. In the 2001-2002 academic year, Queens College received over \$12 million in external awards through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, an increase of 49.2% over the previous year. We are moving in the right direction as a result of the expertise and hard work of many.

### **Graduate Education**

Our Graduate Education is made up of strong academic programs like the Graduate School of Library and Information Studies – the only one in CUNY, and the Master's in Accounting program beginning its third year with over 100 students. Recently, with a supporting grant from the Council of Graduate Schools and the Sloan Foundation, we have investigated the potential for offering several professional masters level graduate programs. Two emerged from the study – Bioinformatics and Environmental Technology, both of which are scheduled to begin fall 2003.

### **Students**

We are bringing the world to Queens College and the College to the world. As we all know, Queens is the most diverse borough in the United States. A brief walk across our campus confirms this. We draw students here for what we can offer and we appreciate them for what they bring us. Queens is more than just an example of a diverse community; it is a multicultural setting that works for everyone.

How do we accomplish the task of meeting the diverse needs of our students? With programs and services that tie us together. From SEEK through the Writing Lab and into the Honors Programs and Weekend College, we provide learning opportunities across the full range of student expectations. We are committed to educating students in creative ways that meet their individual needs, be they the top student in their high school class or a single mother looking for a degree to improve her chances in the workplace.

A few of our many fine programs include the ACE Program, celebrating its 40th year, the Weekend College, entering its 5th year with high enrollments, the Interdisciplinary Ethnic and Area Studies Programs, and the Freshman Year Initiative.

### **Athletics**

Our Athletics Program stands tall among its Division Two counterparts. This past academic year we had 5 NCAA Invitational Bids, a reflection of many of our teams' superb seasons. We must work to strengthen our Athletics program because strong minds should be supported by healthy bodies, and a strong tradition of competitive sports helps us with our recruitment efforts.

### **Outreach**

Our community goes far beyond our campus borders and the borders of Queens. Queens College is a place of great resources and responsiveness to all. Reaching out goes both ways as a function of our programs like the Godwin-Ternbach Museum, the Asian American Center, the Colden Center, and Continuing Education.

The Jewish Studies Program enjoyed a record enrollment this fall. The Louis Armstrong House is under renovation, and plans are underway to expand its development. Our many research centers also address problems that are of great concern to our neighbors and the world.

I recently had the pleasure of attending our first fall Alumni Day. We had a good turnout of alums who were treated to a number of lectures and musical performances. And I was treated to their stories about how happy they were with their education and how pleased they were to see the College continuing that tradition. These impressive alumni made me proud to be a member of the Queens College family.

So far I have spoken about the many treasures that were handed to me when I became your president. It is now up to me, with your help, to continue the strong traditions of this extraordinary college, to find ways we can improve.

When I think of that awesome responsibility, I am reminded of a story about Albert Einstein. He was on a train heading out of Princeton where he was at the Institute for Advanced Study. As the train departed the station the conductor came into the car and called out 'tickets please, have your tickets ready'. Well soon Albert Einstein had turned the pockets of his coat inside out and had dumped the items in his briefcase beside him, obviously looking frantically for his ticket. The conductor noticed that he elderly gentleman in the back of the car was none other than the famous Albert Einstein. Seeing his predicament, the conductor went over to Albert Einstein and said, "Don't worry about your ticket, Dr. Einstein. Your credit is good with the railroad. Pay when you can." Albert Einstein looked up at the conductor and said, "Young man, the question is not whether I'll pay, but where am I headed?"

Indeed, where are we headed? The task before us is daunting. We know we can never stand still, we can never be content. We need a sense of urgency, almost an impatience to be better, but we also need the patience to work until we achieve the results we want. Our students are here to better themselves, and they deserve no less than dedicated faculty and administrators who continuously strive to better their own performance.

We have so much to do and too few hands to do it. The economies of the city, state, and nation are not strong. Clearly, we are going to have to look to granting agencies, corporations, and private sources to supplement what we receive from the state. These

efforts are under way and we will build on the good work begun by the campus community in obtaining grants from Con Edison, the Woodrow Wilson National Scholarship Foundation, the Fulbright Commission, and private donors.

We live in the world's most dynamic city, and many of our city's leaders have benefited from a Queens College education. We must help our Foundation Board reach out to our friends in the corporate world, find ways we can work with them to help our students with scholarships, internships, and resources we can use to offer innovative programs to the future leaders of our city.

The City University of New York has designated eleven of our faculty Distinguished Professors, and I am eager to re-establish the Distinguished Professors Lecture Series of years past. But even in the brief time I have been here, I know we do not have eleven distinguished professors, we have hundreds. They are the reason why we attract a spectacular group of students each fall, they are the reason why each year we are able to hire extraordinary new faculty such as those we have met today. We must promote this great resource. With this in mind, I soon will be asking all faculty to forward to their department chairs a list of all their publications, artwork, compositions, and scholarly presentations of the last two years so we can compile a database of their achievements. I will also ask that they forward a list of topics in their areas of expertise about which they would be willing to talk to the media. Reporters are always looking for authoritative sources for their stories. I want them to think of Queens College as their first source.

The future does not belong to those with the sharpest computer skills. The future, and the best jobs, belong to those with the best communication skills. This is what employers look for first, and this is what Queens College's liberal arts education has always done best: train students to be able to analyze a problem and clearly convey their findings to others. We have many other strengths. Our general education program has been a cornerstone of the College's liberal arts curriculum and we must look for ways to make it even better. This process has already been initiated by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. We should use Academic Program review to note strengths and identify weaknesses. We need to show that we have a full assessment plan but also how we have been using the results to measure student learning. We also have a strong, varied group of majors, and I hope to balance these with more professional degree offerings in the near future.

We take pride in noting how the world comes to Queens College, how students from over 120 countries choose Queens College as the place to begin their futures. In return, I think it is only fair that we give the world more Queens College. To do this, I plan to expand our Study Abroad Program. Students should be able to study in China, Latin America and India, to investigate new countries or further study their own country of origin. Some may say there is no need to travel, that you can find the world in your own backyard. But I say what a fine thing it would be to make the world your backyard. I believe many of our students will agree with me.

Our Age of Information is driven largely by technology. According to Alan Kay, one of the creators of the Apple Macintosh, "Technology is anything that wasn't around when you were born." The College has made great strides in technology, to the point that we

will soon be a wireless campus. And with the new CUNY technology fee, we will have more opportunities to improve ourselves. We need to plan for this expansion of technology. We are developing technological centers for multi-media and infusing technology into the advising process. We should look to offer courses in formats that create the best learning environment for our students, allowing them to learn at the pace and at the times that best fit their schedules.

Queens College is classrooms, but it is also a campus. We must not think that because we are a commuter college that we can ignore the state of our campus. An attractive campus is not a luxury only Ivy League schools can afford. A well-maintained campus says people have thought about this space, people have worked hard, people care. If prospective students see this thoughtfulness, hard work, and caring just walking across the Quad, they know they will find it also in the classroom. I want to bring to this campus quality space where students, faculty and staff can sit and study, work on group projects, or just socialize—a place where they will want to linger.

We should move our expectations of our physical space to the next level, work on our "curb appeal" by improving our landscaping projects near Klapper Hall. The perimeter fencing should define the campus, it should tell the community that Queens College is a good neighbor. People should want to come in our gates, walk across the campus, feel that this College is part of their community, part of their lives. We must let them know that there are hundreds of events on campus each semester, music, theatre, films, lectures, art exhibits, and that they are welcome to attend.

We should also continue to improve our appearance by adding artwork both to the interior and exterior portions of the campus. Many of these works of art have been donated by generous alumni and friends. We have award-winning buildings, including landmarks like Jefferson Hall, the administration building for the school for wayward boys built in the early 1900s. Kiely Hall, which is slated to receive a new curtain wall, is recognizable across the Borough, as is our Clock Tower. Once we complete the building projects under way, especially Powdermaker Hall, and we renovate and expand our space for instruction and research in the natural sciences, we will have a campus everyone can be proud of. The campus should also be easily accessible by car—meaning we must work on PARKING, or become pioneers in the development of drive-thru courses.

We must upgrade our website. The College's home page is our front door, our first impression to cyberspace visitors. Right now our website says, "Don't mind the mess, we just got here." It should say, "Everything you want to know about Queens College is a click away." This upgrade is a priority, and I anticipate having a webmaster on staff soon to begin work on this essential project.

We must make a quantum leap in appealing to our alumni. We must take advantage of new technologies to keep up with and communicate with our recent grads. For instance, students typically move three, four, five times after they leave school, but an e-mail address could be forever. We should know how many of our graduates found positions in the field in which they received their degrees, what professional and graduate schools they attended, how successful have they been, how have we helped them in their careers, how could we have done better? I want them to let us know when they move up the career ladder, when they marry, when they have children, when they see an opportunity

from which the College could benefit. I want them to be eager to return to the campus, and perhaps the classroom, to share what they have learned.

We must continue to look at our entire operation through the eyes of a student. Some of us may have been here 5, 10, even 30 years and think our procedures are transparent. But they may not be to an 18-year-old who is the first in the family to attend college. We often talk of students making the jump or the leap to college. I want to make the transition less strenuous, more like changing trains. When they come here, students should find a welcoming campus, an environment that is intellectually stimulating, attractive, safe and friendly. Our admission, registration, orientation, and advising processes must all be as student-friendly as possible. Recently, we have made great strides in this area, especially with our Welcome Center, where students enjoy a simplified enrollment procedure with minimal bureaucracy. Our goal must continue to be to provide student services free of institutional roadblocks that can delay the time to graduation.

We have recently reversed the declining trend in enrollment thanks to the hard work of the Admissions Office and President Russ Hotzler. I believe the rise in our enrollment is due in great part to the decision to concentrate our efforts on connecting with students at the local high schools, and we must continue to do this. At the same time, we must double our efforts to bring to the campus other talented students to reflect the rich mix of students in Queens and Nassau Counties.

We must also recognize that a growing number of our students have first spent two years at community colleges, such as Queensborough, LaGuardia and Nassau County. To ensure that they receive the full benefit of a Queens College education, we must determine how their needs differ from those of entering freshmen and how we can best address those needs.

We face many challenges here on campus. How we address them has far-reaching consequences for what it means to get a Queens College degree, for our ability to increase our enrollments, and for how well we serve the students who come to us. More important, we and our students face many challenges once we leave the campus. We have seen in the past year how quickly our world can change. Our economy can stall, our shores can seem too close to those who wish us ill. These changes seem hardest when we have been ill-prepared for them. We cannot afford to be so caught off guard again. We will not solve all the world's problems. But we can think long and hard about them and offer our ideas, and we can develop students who will become our allies in this important work of helping our nation and the world.