

Inaugural Speech

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As I assume the mantle of the twelfth presidency of The American University of Paris, I do not stand here alone. University presidents, ironically enough, do not preside over anything—we coordinate and collaborate with other members of our communities, standing up amongst the various University constituencies as a conductor might, gathering the sound of all those willing instruments into a symphony. That's on the good days.

I do wish to begin today with a number of acknowledgments as I take up this important work. I have been inspired to this podium by the contributions of many people gathered in this sanctuary today.

First, I claim the lineage, the vision, and the vigor of the 11 presidents I succeed, both the founding presidency of Lloyd DeLamater at our origins, the recent, visionary presidency of Gerardo della Paolera, as well as those of the nine presidents in between them: John McNary, Damon Smith, Daniel Socolow, Catherine Ingold, Glenn Ferguson, Lee Huebner, and Michael Simpson.

For well over a decade I have worked in partnership with the body of University trustees that govern and guide The American University of Paris. Our new relationship is only a few months' old, and yet already I am exhilarated at the prospect of what we are going to accomplish together in AUP's name. I thank you all for the work, the wisdom, the wealth and very often the wit you bring to our mutual cause. Judith Ogilvie, you are a president's dream.

Coming from the ranks of the AUP faculty, first as your Dean and then as your Provost, I want to say how much pride I take in the work you do daily in your classrooms, much of it one on one with students and unsung. Together we have taken this University from college to university, renewed our ranks with young teacher-scholars, built flourishing graduate programs, assessed and revised and innovated our curriculum, striven for the highest standards of academic excellence, and hosted more conferences, lectures, films, debates, and cultural events on campus than we have rooms to house. The faculty of this University has borne it aloft.

I salute AUP's staff with as much respect. Engaged fully with our mission, you see yourselves as contributing directly, alongside the faculty, to the learning of our students. Every day, in my walks across this campus, I see the commitment of AUP's dedicated staff. If we produce miracles here, it is in large part thanks to you. I want to say a special word of thanks to William Gadsby and Susan Mackay in my office—valor, discretion, loyalty do not even begin to describe what you do for me and for AUP every day.

Je tiens aussi à reconnaître mes collègues français dans cette langue bien aimée et pleinement intégrée dans les cours et les couloirs et les comités d'AUP. Nous partageons entre nous, autant avec exubérance qu'avec impatience occasionnelle, une identité bien hybride, solide, et merveilleuse, le mariage de notre citoyenneté française et de nos traditions académiques américaines.

In French or in English, in any number of other languages spoken on our campus, the work we do is always in the name of our students, whose learning, whose development, and whose success have been entrusted to us. You are our emissaries into the world of your future and ours—our *raison d'être*. Meghan Jennings and McCall Johnson you have done yourselves and the student bodies you represent proud.

One of the privileges of a president is to work closely with alumni, from the increasing number of dynamic, committed alumni on AUP's board to the several thousand active alumni who support the University worldwide. I am always amazed to learn in my travels how even a semester spent with us is enough to create lifelong ties and loyalty to the institution. Alumni leaders, such as Judith Ogilvie, our Board Chair, and Sean Casey, both of whom have been part of this celebration today, traverse the globe incessantly, Judith as the head of CHF International, one of the oldest and largest NGOs, working in forty countries around the world; Sean as a Director of Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights. We honor the world-healing work you do, as well as your extraordinary commitment to your alma mater, yours as well as that of the alumni community you represent.

As the circle widens, I want to acknowledge my friends, academic colleagues, fellow leaders, officers of the A.W. Mellon Foundation which has supported this University and the AMICAL endeavor for a decade—all of you the friends who have both succored and inspired me. Your presence here today is a gift.

Finally, I want to say a few words about my family. I have never known my mother, my rock, without a book in hand. An honors graduate of the University of Toronto, holder of a Master's degree, you embody in your person lifelong learning. You have participated in four book groups for over thirty years, have worked for decades to help students at risk, and are today, in your eighties a senior scholar at Florida Atlantic University where you are taking classes on Supreme Court history and international affairs. You have always stood tall against social injustice, and your values course through my veins today. To my sons, Lucas and Max, my two anchors, thank you for showing me every day that wisdom and character are what we make of our education, only a fraction of which goes on in the classroom. I am here today because of both of you. I acknowledge with deep gratitude the sacrifices you sometimes make so that I can do the work I love.

That's part one, the getting here.

In the time remaining, I want to trace a series of concentric circles that begin with a small, distributed urban campus under the Eiffel Tower, the vibrant city that surrounds it and serves as an extended classroom for our global citizens, and the world in which our university figures increasingly visibly. The arc I am going to trace today—the University, the City, the World—is both a temporal one, and a moral and intellectual one, and it as much celebrates AUP's past, as sets a course for our future.

I

AUP has a past deeply worthy of celebration as the first university in Europe based on the American model of education, a past that began here, in 1962, within the walls and rented rooms of the American Church in Paris, in partnership with The American Library of Paris which served as our first library. The 7th arrondissement has, for many decades, housed this trio of mutually supportive American institutions. Many of you sitting in this sanctuary remember that over the years we have held your classes here, located our Bookstore and Housing Office here, held freshman orientation in the theater. Soon—thanks to a newly renovated gym—we will expand our sports facilities in the basement. Nearly fifty years ago, the vision of one man, Lloyd DeLamater, AUP was founded on this site. I thought it a fitting place for our ceremony today.

DeLamater writes movingly of his own “coming to the vision of an American college in Paris,” citing the postwar devastation of Europe, his own marriage to a French national, his stint as a professor

teaching at US military installations all over Europe, his appointment as senior economist to NATO in Paris, his position as a Foreign Service Officer in the State Department. The American College of Paris was founded largely, he writes, to “de-provincialize” the minds of “fine, young American students.” Convinced as he was that the education and career preparation of internationally minded Americans should take place at least in part in Europe, he founded—sans funding, sans government support—a campus in Paris with the express mission of broadening the cultural, intellectual, and political horizons of American students. Negotiating agreements with prestigious liberal arts colleges in the States, DeLamater’s idea was to send these transformed students back to finish their college experience there.

One cannot help but be struck, somewhat ruefully I admit, reading this founding memoir, by the extent to which some aspects of AUP’s culture have remained the same since our inception—our scrappiness, our staunch survivability, our exuberance at having come through, somewhat more darkly put, our “enduring precariousness.” As we approach, in three years now, our fiftieth birthday, however, I am going to insist on an important shift in perspective. It is time to unpack our suitcases and move in. We have traditions that it is now time to celebrate, a campus it is time to revere and rebuild, a mission and student and faculty constituencies that are unique in the world and that call for celebration in all the ways that universities do. When he lifted a glass, at the College’s first Orientation, “to the inaugural class and symbolically to all classes to come,” Lloyd DeLamater was gesturing toward us, fifty years later, with a sense of purpose and belief, and we will lift a glass to him, back through the years, at our own reception in a few moments. AUP’s inaugural ceremony in 1962, by the way, took place in the gorgeous building of France-Amériques just across the Seine, where, most recently, AUP graduating students held their black-tie event and the faculty gathered for a retreat on the curriculum. Plus ça change, one could say, plus c’est la même chose, except that there are important differences between then and now.

I do discern a certain congruence of mission between the founding spirit of ACP and our global commitments at AUP today: We still want you, our students, to experience firsthand, and hopefully a little uncomfortably, the feeling of being “not at home,” of being “in the home of another” so that you can stretch yourselves into new ways of thinking, new ways of being in the world, new ways of resolving the inevitable tensions between human beings different from one another in a complex world. This is the equipment for living we hope to be giving you. Believe me, tolerance is way overrated—it takes empathy, curiosity, and very good negotiation skills to bridge everything that divides us from one another. That was an intangible but essential part of your curriculum, then as now.

Today, at AUP, we have fewer American students; we have reached 100 different nationalities. We are probably the most international university on the planet. To make matters more complex, most of these individuals think of themselves as bi- and tri-cultural, holding several different passports rather than identifying themselves with a single nationality. We have become an institution with a faculty, staff, and student body so increasingly diverse as to make our American project, at times, challenging. We are characterized more by this *métissage* than by any simple French-American hybridity. In this interesting “third place” where accented English often reigns, everyone starts on a level playing field. As one of you aptly put it: AUP is a community of foreigners that feels like home. The model of sending and receiving students from the US that inspired our founder has been replaced today by the diverse demography we have become. Not only do we receive students from all over the world, we increasingly send them forth as well, to Cape Town, Shanghai, and soon to Central Asia and the Gulf, notably most recently, to Fez, and to Pondicherry, India, where they teamed up with local NGOs in the field to develop communication tools, found libraries, brand and sell crafts, work for women’s rights and those of street children. What they learned there, thinking they had gone to “help others” is how similarly we and our neighbors on this planet suffer, celebrate our joys, and settle our differences.

AUP's substantial endowment has always been our location in the greatest city in the world, and, investing it wisely, we have attached our curriculum to the histories of the city—to Paris's many centuries of art, culture, literature, politics, music, sociology and the like, to its monuments, libraries, neighborhoods, but also to the edgy new Paris of demographic shifts, rising multiculturalism, food that is other than French, urban renewal, and texts in many different languages. One FirstBridge class last year attended Les Nuits du Ramadan, a stadium-sized celebration of the Muslim holiday held here in the City of Lights. Our growing series of interdisciplinary cities courses, once limited to European capitals, now includes Marseille, Damascus, the Islamic City, and Istanbul. When we christened our new general education program, now nearly nine years old, "envisioning a world of interdependence," that felt like a new idea—today it is an imperative, the air we breathe, the very ground of our daily interaction with this city, itself a site of change, mutation, unexpected juxtapositions.

The university in and of the city is also home to that complex cosmopolitanism that Martha Nussbaum, in her wonderful book, *Cultivating Humanity*, believes is essential to our development as morally responsible individuals in a globalized world and critical for the development of leadership in modern democracies. Nowhere more than at AUP are we shaping future citizens for an age of cultural diversity in an environment ideal for the cultivation of our students' humanity. Nussbaum believes that liberal education should create three essential capacities: that of "critical examination of oneself and one's traditions," rather than bowing to authority or prejudice; that of "seeing oneself as a member of a heterogeneous nation and world"; and that of being able to "think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story."¹ To be a world citizen, in her view, is most radically to feel one's primary loyalty to human beings the world over, that is, to humanity itself. Cultivating that kind of world belonging is the charge and challenge she levels at universities today.

What, ultimately, will separate good universities from great ones in our present global era? It is not, I believe, the criteria of the rankings, all those things we call "inputs," not the facilities, not the number of books in the library, not the size of the endowment, not even the number of publications of their faculties (although these are all important and are properly a president's work, mine as fervently as any other's), but their capacity to develop the world citizenship of their students in an era when, as borders fall, identity politics escalate. To that I would add, the capacity of great universities to produce young leaders who are so much *of* the world that they are *for* the world. Let me tell you just a few stories about our graduates. Alexis Olbrei, one of my former students, is today a high school teacher in one of the most challenging schools in New York City. Last year she got all 28 of her seniors into colleges, four of them into the Ivies. The City recognized success and brought her into its Leadership Academy and next year, at 26, she will become the youngest school principal in New York City history with responsibility for more faculty than I. Another leadership story of which I am particularly proud of is the founding of the Global Nomads Group by four AUP classmates in 1997. These four young men were committed to fostering understanding among youth worldwide by letting students travel the world virtually, exploring the global community firsthand. Using interactive videoconferencing, innovative programs linked to school curricula and 21st century learning objectives, GNG has conducted programs in more than 40 countries and reached more than one million young people. And I will end with another kind of leadership example, one that is also particularly ours—that of Joseph Williams standing before us in his Native American victory paint at

¹ Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press), pp. 9-11.

last year's graduation ceremony. He had us quickly laughing at his characterization of AUP as "the only place where one Swedish Iraqi can find another Swedish Iraqi," but then a thousand people in that room held *him* as he mourned with great dignity his brother recently fallen in Iraq. I have never seen a moment of public intimacy so powerful as that.

III

What role for a small, liberal arts university in an increasingly networked higher education landscape? What role for AUP in the rapidly-changing world of global higher ed? What kind of a difference can one liberal arts institution make in the world?

Yesterday, AUP was still Paris' best-kept secret. People who lived here had never heard of us.

Today we have joint programs with the Sorbonne and, increasingly, with other academic institutions of the European Union. Today we are a crossroads for international scholars and conferences.

Today we lead a consortium of 21 American-style universities in 18 countries across Europe, The Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia with whom we openly share skills, staff training, fellowship, future plans for academic collaborations and study abroad exchanges, a mission of the open sharing of resources and information and a vision of peace on earth.

Tomorrow, we will introduce this body of world universities to their counterparts in the US, founding a network of global liberal arts colleges with commitments to social justice, the global mobility of students, and the cultivation of cosmopolitan values—a sort of Universitas 21 of liberal arts colleges and universities.

Tomorrow we will show the world that a small liberal arts university is as capable of mounting a complex interdisciplinary Master's Program in Sustainable Development Practice as all the large research universities responding to this compelling 21st century challenge.

Tomorrow we will be awarded elite AACSB accreditation in Business and tomorrow we will be the first out of the starting blocks when Brussels begins handing down European accreditation.

And tomorrow we will still be measuring our own success by the stories of our graduates' achievements in the arts and sciences, humanities, communications, business, politics, the social sciences, and languages. We will still gauge our progress toward mission by celebrating their creativity, social entrepreneurship, and leadership. In the words of our new mission statement, we will still be sending them forth to take their places as responsible actors in communities, civil societies, and countries around the globe.

I am very much aware that I take office at a difficult moment. As one of our graduating seniors expressed it recently, "the world is broken" — not only economically, but politically and environmentally as well. Anyone reading the newspaper regularly over the past few months has no doubt succumbed, as have I, to moments of despair. It is not just the wages of our greed in the form of the financial crisis that keep me up at night, but the heartbreaking conflict in Gaza, the darkening picture of global health and global warming, issues that are—were we to work together—eminently solvable. I have just returned from a meeting of 500 presidents of independent liberal arts colleges in the US, at which, tellingly, the keynote speaker was Paul O'Neill, former Secretary of the US Treasury and former activist CEO of Alcoa. Brought in to discuss the impact of the financial crisis on our universities, he quickly moved beyond his gloss on recent events. This will pass slowly, he said, and with terrible consequences, but it shall pass. Here is the gist of his advice to us, advice that stays

with me yet. In grim times as in good, said he, lead your universities with authenticity and belief, cleave to mission, continue to labor for the public good, create a vision that enlivens everyone in your institution to honor your community's values. Produce students who will use their critical faculties and follow their better angels. Extraordinary talk for an economic leader.

The world has never needed, apparently, our kind of institution, more.

There is reason for hope, of course, audacious as it was this American election season. That "other inauguration" in Washington next week marks the end of a campaign that inspired the entire world, the playing out of a political process strong enough to mend itself, and the beginning of a presidency that already feels historic at its outset. If ever there were a moment for multilateralism to have its day, for environmental issues to be globally and effectively addressed, for rampant capitalism to be cut back, then surely now. If ever a leader understood what his times required, speaking in the longed-for language of the truth, then surely he. On the nights, though, when the weight of the world is heavy and I can't sleep, I think of Barack Obama's to do list and count my lucky stars.

Here, at The American University of Paris, we have our hands full too. We have much work to do in the coming years—the raising of an endowment, the building of our campus in and of this magnificent city, the creation of traditions and symbols in line with our second-half-century sense of ourselves, the expansion of our shared curricular vision of global sustainability, conflict resolution, world governance, cultural translation, and address of social injustice by every disciplinary tool at our disposal, but most important of all, the steady cultivation of our own and our students' humanity.

It is fierce and beautiful work, this work of taking a University forth into its own vibrant and world-changing future, work that I am honored to take up with my trustee, faculty, staff, student and alumni colleagues, having been granted the privilege to serve.