



Higher Education, Citizenship, and Vocation in the 21st Century

INTRODUCTION

Welcome, family and friends.

Congratulations to the new initiates. You are now members of this nation's oldest academic honor society. A venerable institution. And as is characteristic of those most venerable institutions, Phi Beta Kappa has evolved to meet the world as it is. The inclusion of Fairfield and many of our fellow Jesuit and Catholic institutions in the latter half of the 20th century speak to this.

I am humbled and honored to be sharing—in a small way—this momentous occasion with you.

In preparing this afternoon's talk, entitled Higher Education, Citizenship and Vocation in the 21st Century, I have reflected at length on my tenure as an academic administrator, my scholarship as a political scientist, and my experience stewarding organizations of various stripes, in order to frame a conceptualization of what a university – and the arts and sciences tradition – asks of our students and what it calls them to do. I would clarify I am not solely using vocation and calling to refer to those called to the priesthood, but rather to describe all those who are called to follow the passion towards which their gifts direct them.

HIGHER EDUCATION

To consider the purpose of higher education in the 21st century, I propose we look to our origins. First, of universities broadly and second, to our Fairfield University in particular.

James Axtell writes at the introduction of his seminal history *Wisdom's Workshop: The Rise of the Modern University*, "Universities, like cathedrals and parliaments were unique creations of Western Europe and the Middle Ages." Fundamental to this rise was an evolution of the curriculum beyond the Trivium (Grammar, Rhetoric, and Logic); and the Quadrivium (Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy) otherwise known as the seven liberal arts.

The introduction of more "contemporary" subjects of study such as philosophy, science, and law, and the continuing ability to adapt the curriculum to remain

relevant, have insured the university's longevity while at the very same time, Axtell notes, the university has preserved its fundamental patterns and basic social roles and functions.



Fairfield's own origin story is much more recent. Just a few months removed from Pearl Harbor, a group of Boston Jesuits travelled southwest on Route One to establish a university and a preparatory school to serve the growing population of southern New England.

Fairfield is the product of two distinct but intertwined streams. The Jesuit commitment to advanced learning and the emergence of the American university.

From its earliest days, the Jesuits' uniqueness as a religious order has been marked by its dedication to works of education. Beginning with the arrival of a Basque nobleman, Ignacio de Loyola at the University of Paris in 1528 to the formation of the Society of Jesus in 1540 to the establishment of the College in Messina in 1548 and the Roman College a few years later, the Jesuits, as John O' Malley notes, have been dedicated to schools for a broad population, clergy as well as lay, rich as well as poor (though truth be told the Jesuits were late to co-education). Central to Jesuit education was a commitment not just to scripture, but literature as even John Henry Newman recognized a year before his influential *Idea of the University*, in the first of a series of lectures on the Present Position of Catholics in England (1852) where he remarked the Jesuits had "men of eminence in that department."

American higher education dates its founding to the establishment of Harvard College in 1635. And similar to the narrative Axtell shares, the emergence of the American university was predicated on curricular evolution coupled with structural continuity and clarity of role. It would be a mistake, however, to assume the path from 1635 to today has been a linear and steady progression. For the first 200 plus years, American institutions of higher learning more closely resembled finishing schools than a home for serious scholarship and inquiry. Or, as Lawrence Veysey puts it, "To paraphrase Henry Adams, Harvard in 1850 was in many ways closer to the Middle Ages than to the Harvard of 1900."

The university we know today emanated from two significant waves of development, ignited by federal legislation and shepherded by the institutional entrepreneurs who led universities: the Morrill Act of 1862 which laid the foundation for our land grant colleges and universities, and the GI Bill of 1944 which provided a myriad of benefits for servicemen returning from World War II, most notably tuition to attend college.

For us at Fairfield this is particularly relevant as our founding in 1942 came right at start of this second wave of development, and not only did the GI Bill fund a number of our first students but the expansion of American higher education fueled by the

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bill gave rise to the master comprehensive model of institution which we and so many of our Jesuit peers embody.



As a Political Scientist, it would be folly to suggest that in our current climate we could expect significant federal legislation to spur a third wave of development in American higher education. At the same time, however, universities must evolve if we are to remain relevant and to stay true to our purpose of transforming lives. For universities, at core, are a social construct. Our authority and legitimacy do not stem from governmental sanction or divine right. Rather, our highly privileged position emanates from a belief that we are helping advance both our national interest and global society. To justify this faith, we must no longer think of ourselves solely as academic institutions but rather as civic ones as well.

CITIZENSHIP

In thinking of the university's role in the civic sphere, I naturally look to my disciplinary home, political science, and its subfield, American political development. American political development posits that three major forces drive public policy and political action: interests (individual and collective), institutions (governmental and societal), and ideas (public and private). Our current political discourse and activity focus almost exclusively on the advancement and ordering of interests, rather than the development of institutions or the exchange of ideas.

For us as a republic and as a broader global society to meet the challenges of the 21st century this must change and universities must play a significant role. A role defined by what I have referred to in previous work as the transitive theory of American political development. In our context, universities are essential to political participation and activity. For one, the single largest influence upon likelihood and nature of civic participation be it voting, volunteering, or advocating is level of education. And second, as Tocqueville observed, political participation and activity are crucial to our national institutions' identity. Therefore, if both of these statements are true, then universities are integral to our national institutions and identity.

Speaking broadly about this intersection of institutions and ideas, the social anthropologist Mary Douglas notes, "half of the task is to demonstrate the cognitive process at the foundation of the social order. The other half is to demonstrate that the individual's most elementary cognitive processes depends on social institutions."

Extending this idea, the political theorist Eldon Eisenach has noted our universities have served as something like a "national" church: a repository of common values and meanings. At this moment, however, one might suggest we are suffering a crisis of civic identity. As Eisenach notes "Our only source of a common American identity is political; our fundamental political ideas are largely constitutive of our personal

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ideas as Americans. If the moral and intellectual integrity of our most basic political ideas is in doubt, so too are its ideological products and the authority of political groupings organized around those ideologies.”



I want to stress when I speak of the American context, I am speaking of where and how our political identities are formed, not limiting where they can and should have an impact. For as one of 200-plus Jesuit works of higher education across the world, we at Fairfield recognize our role in forming global citizens responsible to one common humanity. It is the essence of what we do and who our students are called to be.

VOCATION

In closing my remarks, I would like to offer a notion of how we might answer this call to global citizenship. First and foremost, I would stress that no matter what profession or what further study you choose to pursue, you are called to be stewards; you are called to leave all you touch better than you found it. Or as the Irish statesman and political philosopher Edmund Burke wrote:

“Society is indeed a contract. It is to be looked on with other reverence; because it is not a partnership in things subservient only to the gross animal existence of a temporary and perishable nature. It is a partnership in all science; a partnership in all art; a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are yet to be born.”

As you begin preparing for your next phase in this partnership allow me to offer some guiding principles:

1. Trust. This is fundamental. As the Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho states so simply and elegantly, “None of us knows what might happen even the next minute, yet still we go forward. Because we trust. Because we have Faith.”
2. Push Yourself. In chronicling a season with the New Zealand All Blacks rugby side, inarguably the most continuously successful sports team of all time, management expert and author James Kerr observes one key to their success, “A culture of asking and re-asking fundamental questions cuts away unhelpful beliefs in order to achieve clarity of execution. Humility leads all on the team to ask one simple question, how can we do it better.”
3. Have Fun. Find joy in all you do. As the poet, author, and civil rights activist Maya Angelou writes, “Joy is a freedom. It helps a person to find his or her own liberation. The person who is joyous takes responsibility for the time he/she takes up and the space that he/she occupies. You share it! Some of you have it ... you share it! That is what joy is! When you continue to give it away you will still have so much more of it.”

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Trust, push yourself and have fun. Three simple concepts which when married to the fundamental Ignatian questions of 'Who Am I?' and 'Whose Am I?' offer a framework for the ultimate question of *'Who am I called to be?'*



Thank you for allowing me to share some thoughts with you and again, congratulations.

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