



The State of the University 2007

by Dr. Robert A. Scott
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*“... (It) is at once ethereal and firm, as perhaps only a vision can be,”
wrote Eudora Welty about Virginia Woolf’s novel To the Lighthouse.¹*

This is how I think about our vision for Adelphi: nearly ethereal in its aspirations, yet firm in its grounding and as it is experienced by each of us—both one at a time and as a community. It is a foundation for a living story and a powerful legacy.

This fall, we will launch a new phase in the fulfillment of Adelphi’s vision. “The Campaign for Adelphi University” is almost celestial in its ambitions, yet grounded in the knowledge that so much has already been accomplished. Our Campaign seeks to increase endowments for student scholarships and faculty support, and add new and upgraded facilities for education, performing arts, and sports.

Today, I will focus on these areas of programming and aspiration, just as in recent years I have emphasized teacher preparation, art, and art history. I will support the theme of the Campaign—“Building Adelphi’s Future, One Story at a Time.”

The structure I will use is that of time: Looking Back, Looking Now, Looking Forward—continuing our legacy. Certain themes will be referenced throughout, including what is good and what can be better; engagement with the community; the centrality of integrity, trust, and open communications; the priorities we have for student learning and faculty support; and the special nature of an academic institution.

Also, I will have people in mind: longtime dean and alumna Ruth Stratton Harley, class of 1924; Helen Holmes Taylor, the first African American student, class of 1949, who is here today; and several of today’s faculty, staff, and students, who, with others, will continue a legacy now in its third century.

My emphasis will be on vision based on progress. A mentor of mine repeated each time we met, about twice a year until he died, “Secure your footing, then extend your reach.” Secure your footing so you have confidence in your position, but extend your reach; don’t be complacent. Throughout the year, you will hear me repeat these thoughts about being confident but neither arrogant nor complacent.

We have achieved so much recently, in terms of quality, staffing, enrollment, student selectivity and choice, facilities, endowment, finances, and recognition that some people seem to take it for granted. But there is no place here for the complacent; we have much more to do, and our goals require effort from everyone.

We may be in a strong position today, but we are still not where we want to be, nor where those who came before dreamed we could be.

¹Welty, Eudora, in Foreword to *To the Lighthouse* by Virginia Woolf. New York: Harcourt 1927; Eudora Welty, 1981, p.xii.

Looking Back

Adelphi has been a home to pioneers and visionaries, and during the coming year we will celebrate several of them. The year 2008 will be the 114th anniversary of the Adelphi Dramatic Association, which performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music until the College moved to Garden City in 1929.

The year 2008 will mark the 70th anniversaries for the Music Department and the dance program, the latter started in 1938 by Ruth St. Denis as the first academic department of dance in the nation.

Today, we talk about Adelphi as the “engaged” University, yet this tradition of public engagement started in Adelphi’s earliest years. Consider Professor of Sociology Annie Marion MacLean, who earned her Ph.D. at the University of Chicago (the second woman to do so), and taught at Adelphi from 1907 to 1912. She posed as a factory worker, department store clerk, and farmhand in order to conduct her research on women factory workers, sweatshops, Oregon hop pickers, department store work, and life in the Pennsylvania coal fields.²

The current Parenting Institute, the Vital Signs social health project, and concerns for child welfare and mental health have their origins in the interests and activities of Adelphi’s founders and early trustees and faculty.³

In 1932, dramatic arts students raised funds for the unemployed in Nassau County, just as this fall three dozen students participated in the Freshman Community Action Program by volunteering in nearby villages and towns.

The Adelphi Little Theatre, starting in Brooklyn and continuing in Garden City, provided another means for the College to bring culture to the community and the community to the campus. The same occurs with Olmsted Theatre, and will continue and expand with new facilities.

In addition to the new Performing Arts Center under construction, including a renovated Olmsted Theatre and a 500-seat music auditorium, a 100-seat black box theatre, and a

200-seat dance recital hall, we are constructing a new Recreation and Sports Center for intercollegiate sports, intramurals, and recreation. We will renovate Woodruff Hall to be devoted to the Ruth S. Ammon School of Education programs in health studies, physical education, and human performance science, and the related centers and institutes.

These programs have a long history at Adelphi, starting at the time of the Academy. The early faculty developed scientific approaches to physical culture and development. In 1890, the Academy had the largest gymnasium in the United States and, according to the Massachusetts Board of Education, the leading gymnastics and physical culture program in the nation.⁴

While this year will bring a new field hockey club and site to campus, the first team was recorded in 1926. Throughout the years, scores of Adelphi student-athletes in multiple sports have won conference and national titles, All-America honors, and Olympic medals.

We are renovating Woodruff because it is used so extensively and is too small for its many uses, including the academic programs mentioned earlier; intercollegiate athletics, intramurals, and recreation; dance; and offices and other facilities for all of the above. Yet in earlier years, it also housed theatre and music, the children’s theatre, the College infirmary, convocations, commencements, presidential inaugurations, banquets, dances, and even weekly chapel services (at which seniors were required to wear caps and gowns).⁵

“Looking back” at markers such as these can be helpful to understand an institution, just as it is for us as individuals. When I look back at critical moments or decisions made, I can often trace their trajectory and influence on later events.

That was an important part of my conversations with Ruth Harley: “When did this happen?” “Why was this done?” She knew the answers, and was always quick and direct in her responses.

²Correspondence from University Archivist Euguene Neely, April 13, 2007.

³Ibid.

⁴Ruth S. Ammon School of Education Web site.

⁵University Archivist Eugene Neely, “A Tribute to Woodruff Hall (The R Building),” Draft #3, July 2, 2007.

Looking Now

Ruth, Eudora Welty might have had you in mind when she said,

*She was like a bird for speed, an arrow for directness.*⁶

If I were writing to Ruth now, I would not have to recount Adelphi's past, as she lived and loved Adelphi her whole life. Her legacy continues, not only in the numerous lives she touched, but in her bequest which left over \$500,000 to the University and over \$100,000 to the Friends of the Library.

We earned Ruth's trust and confidence, to be sure, but her loyalty to the institution she knew as a child, schoolgirl, college student, professor, dean, and icon trumped all.

No, I would not have to tell Ruth about the history she helped me learn, but I would want her to know about the progress we have made.

Looking now, I would tell Ruth about the achievement of national accreditation by the Ruth S. Ammon School of Education, international accreditation by the School of Business, and continued accreditation by all programs except one, chemistry. I would assure her that it is our goal to correct this deficiency.

Ruth would also be excited about the new faculty, over 200 in the past six years; the new academic programs, including new opportunities for returning adults and expanded uses of distance learning technologies; increased support for faculty scholarship and creative activity; the progress of construction visible across campus, as well as by web cam; the doubling of endowed funds to nearly \$105 million from \$48 million; the level of enrollment and admissions selectivity, and repeat profiling by *The Fiske Guide to Colleges* as one of the nation's top institutions and "Best Buys;" and the ten alumni and friends who have committed gifts and pledges of \$1 million or more.

Ruth would be delighted to know of the public launch of The Campaign for Adelphi University this October and the receipt of more than \$32 million in commitments during its leadership phase. On October 4th, we will hold a campus reception and program to initiate the public phase of the Campaign as part of a four-day program

that includes special campus-wide activities. Then, in November, alumna Adele Klapper's painting by Pieter Brueghel the Younger, said to be the only one privately owned in the U.S., will be on display in the Center for Fine Arts, which by then I hope will be named in honor of Adele and her husband, Herbert, as further evidence of our Campaign's momentum.

I believe that Ruth would know that The Campaign for Adelphi University is not just about money for facilities and endowments, increasing alumni (and faculty and staff) participation, and creating a culture of philanthropy, but mostly about enhancing the environment for teaching and learning.

Central to our thinking now, as it has been before, is the meaning of an Adelphi education. Our Middle States accrediting self-study team is reviewing our vision and mission, and assessing how well we live up to what we say. I expect they will propose improvements in how we phrase it, but suspect that the essence, if not the exact language, will survive. We think of Adelphi as a pioneering private University that offers the particular focus of a liberal arts education along with the depth of expert knowledge found in a wide range of disciplines and professions. We aspire for Adelphi to be known for students and faculty who value excellence in teaching, learning, research, scholarship, creative activity, and service to one's community, as well as for the competence of our graduates and the impact of our initiatives on the broader community.

In addition to refining our statement of vision, we are refining the metrics by which its fulfillment can be measured. This is the assessment expected by our Board of Trustees and external agencies, including Middle States, and it applies to General Education as well as to majors, and to the need for coherence in our Freshman Seminar Program.

At the core, I think of the liberal arts (and sciences) as liberating—freeing us from the provincial origins of time, place, and a single culture. The goal of liberal education is to teach the ordinary student to become a cultured person and to appreciate other cultures; to develop in students the capacity to assess assumptions and understand the value-laden choices that await them as citizens, consumers,

⁶Welty, *op.cit.*, p. 49

decision-makers, and arbiters of ethical alternatives; to inspire students to contemplate the meaning of life and the role of religion, politics, and economics; to help students develop in their capacity to build a civilization compatible with the aspirations of human beings and the limitations of the natural environment.

Liberal education empowers students to think critically and to act globally; helps students gain the confidence to formulate ideas, take initiative, and solve problems; develop skills in language, learning, and leadership; and increase their abilities for reasoning in different modes. It helps students to appreciate the pursuits of pure science and the difference between science and technology.

With liberal learning as I have defined it, students can improve in clear and graceful expression in written, oral, and visual communication; organizational ability; tolerance and flexibility; creativity; sensitivity to the concerns of others; and aesthetic values. Liberal study in this way prepares students to distinguish between and among fact, faith, and fear as ways of understanding their world; it frees them and us from ignorance and apathy. Liberal education fosters imagination and wonder, which underscore the importance of the student and not just the text. If students learn nothing else, it is essential that they master how to use their learning wisely and justly, with empathy, humility, and humor.

This emphasis on liberal education should not suggest a lessening of importance of professional study. Indeed, Adelphi has been defined by how our eight schools share one vision. We began preparing teachers at our very beginning—by building professional preparation on a firm foundation of liberal study. That same philosophy continued with the addition of nursing, social work, psychology, and business, and the expansion of graduate education.

The connections between liberal learning and professional study are revealed by the four key elements defining a profession: “an accepted body of knowledge, a system for certifying that individuals have mastered that body of

knowledge before they are allowed to practice, a commitment to the public good, and an enforceable code of ethics.”⁷ These elements are formed through liberal learning, and the knowledge, skills, abilities, and values we gain from it.

Universities are unique institutions. As my friend Laura Bornholdt, former Dean of Sarah Lawrence College, said, “A college should be an institution where truth is sought, not where truth in all its dimensions is already known. In a college (or university) worthy of its name, cant and hypocrisy are abhorrent under any flag—radical or conservative, conventional or experimental—and the free exchange of opinions and views is the essence of life, change, and health for the institution.”⁸

I believe this, but know as you do that there are topics in our society whose discussion is shunned, and whose mention yields catcalls of “appeaser,” “racist,” “jihadist,” “anti-Semite,” “unpatriotic.” But if we cannot discuss controversial topics on a university campus, where can we?

Now more than 1200 years old, colleges and universities serve three distinct roles—as creator, curator, and critic. Think of it: the university creates new knowledge through fundamental research into what is not known, new applications of what is discovered, and new interpretations of human activities through poetry and prose, body movement, music, and visual expression.

At the same time, the university is the curator of human activity, of our heritage as cultural beings, and the repository through archives as well as databases of past accomplishments, whether for good or ill. This is why history is so important as a field of study. In fact, I think the study of history and the nourishment of imagination are the two essential elements in preparing citizens.

The university is also a critic. In this way, the university is at the margin of society just as in its roles as creator and curator it is at the center. As critic, it questions the status quo; it asks, “why not?;” it raises ethical questions.

⁷Bennis, Warren and James O’Toole. “How Business Schools Lost Their Way.” *Harvard Business Review*, May 2005, p. 102.

⁸Bornholdt, Laura, Dean of Sarah Lawrence College, 1957-1959, from correspondence, December 1958, on display in the Sarah Lawrence College president’s waiting room, June 2, 2007.

As ethical forces in society, universities must hold up a mirror as well as a spotlight. In recent months, I have seen troubling images. No doubt you have read about financial aid directors who have taken rewards from lending institutions and promoted those lenders to their students. Did you read about the institutions that ignore large numbers of alumni so that the denominator used to calculate the percentage of alumni donors each year, an important criterion for *U.S. News and World Report's* rankings, is higher than it would otherwise be? Some institutions do the same when they “omit” certain categories of students when calculating average SAT scores to be reported to college guides. Some institutions even “bulk” up their annual giving percentage by applying the senior class gift to 100% of the graduating class, even if only 10% donate, and counting each senior class gift over five years—even if initial donors do not repeat.

Unfortunately, I could go on. Misleading photographs in admissions booklets, grade inflation, the graduation rates of Division I athletes, the conflicts caused by medical research sponsored by “Big Pharma,” the lack of availability of courses needed for students to graduate on time: our enterprise has some serious issues—not universally, but sufficiently widespread to cause me concern.

How can universities be a critic of society, as well as creator and curator, if they cannot withstand scrutiny?

Fortunately, this is not the end of the story. For every example of ethical breakdown, I can cite hundreds of cases of positive behavior, and so can you. Universities are not only teaching environmental awareness and safety, they are behaving as “green” institutions and partnering with civic groups and businesses to promote sustainable practices.

Colleges are working closely with school districts in preparing new teachers and providing continuing professional development to teachers, principals, and superintendents in areas such as science, math, technology, foreign languages, writing and leadership.

University laboratories are exploring epidemics

such as diabetes and HIV (AIDS), how we learn, and aging among numerous other critical issues. Higher education institutions foster global literacy, leadership training for non-profit groups, and voluntarism in local communities. Think of students on spring break helping others in Appalachia, New Orleans, and inner cities. Athletes volunteer to feed the homeless and bring joy to the disabled. Students and faculty undertake research to assist communities and senior citizens. Faculty scholarship leads to scientific breakthroughs.

While we at Adelphi have not been involved in any of these cases of fraud or questionable behavior, and have exemplary programs on the positive side of the ledger, I do worry about how we socialize our many new faculty and staff to our standards of excellence and ethics, and to the future, not just the past.

When I reflected on the number of new colleagues we have added, a net growth to 300 from under 200 six years ago, I began to wonder how many of us realize the commitment and effort involved in their recruitment and the need for nurturing their growth; the number of classrooms and laboratories that have been renovated; the extent of improvements to the library; the increased diversity of our faculty and student body, even as we strive to do more; the value of the program of incremental funds to compensate for salary compression, market competition, extraordinary service and accomplishments, and release time; a reduced teaching load to allow more time for scholarship; increased funds for travel and professional development; and eight years of 5% or more in salary increases—all while many universities have reduced faculty positions, frozen salaries, and deferred maintenance. I began to wonder if we take all this, and improvements in student preparation, for granted, and if many of us are even aware of this progress.

These questions then led me to think about how academic program reviews of majors relate to our assessment of the total student learning experience, including learning goals for the general education of undergraduates,

electives, field placements and internships, study in other cultures, and the use of technology. As the American Association of Colleges and Universities reported recently, the major is not the opposite of general education, but a natural ally.⁹

How do we ensure that we have a common understanding of the standards of excellence in an environment of uncommon expectations—in the classroom, in the financial aid office, in the dean’s suite?

Surely, one of the mechanisms essential to achieving this station is communications based on integrity and trust. An important vehicle for such communication is campus governance.

Faculty governance regarding the University’s mission, academic programs to be offered, admission requirements, standards for excellence, and related matters are critical for a highly regarded university, and these responsibilities have been delegated to our faculty by the Board of Trustees.

Occasionally, academic issues will raise questions of working conditions, and when they do, we have an instrument and a process for resolution—the Collective Bargaining Agreement. This is a separate, but equally important, independent process.

When faculty and administrators conflate the two, quality is threatened, the institution loses its status. I have seen this happen, and so have many of you.

When the systems of faculty governance and collective bargaining become one, and every issue is viewed in “labor–management” terms, we have lost academic vision and vitality, and become like an out–moded factory. I don’t want this to happen, and I don’t think you do either. So please, work to make academic governance strong. Participate. Make Adelphi a beacon where faculty governance, collective bargaining, and the administration are equally strong, equally admired, and equally known to be supportive of the University’s mission.

While we each have our representatives, each of us must ensure that what we know about

each other is not limited to that which has been filtered or shaped by others. That is one reason I have an “open door policy,” and seek meetings with faculty, students, and staff in various settings.

We each have many roles to play on campus, and should not leave it to a few to be active in the governance processes. We have been fortunate that some have served the Faculty Senate for many terms, and are fortunate to have so many new members who now can take their turn, for they “have the right to advance.”

One of the benefits of rotation in governance is that a mix of new ideas and old makes for a dynamic future. We must continue to evaluate what we do, and encourage debate about ideas without standing on ideology or becoming mired in “process.” Process is essential, but process should not block breakthroughs; process is about participation, and need not be about pace.

In such a dynamic environment, conflicts are almost inevitable, even with the best of intentions. But plaintiffs are not always right or wrong, and defendants are not always wrong or right. Truth can be in the eye of the viewer, and facts can be interpreted differently. Fortunately, we have the means of dispute resolution, and these should be allowed to work without prejudice.

Communication between contending parties requires the same principles as honest inter–religious dialog: One must be able to maintain a belief in his or her own position without denouncing the other’s as wrong. This is a high standard in these litigious days, but it is a standard to which I think we can aspire.

Looking now, I see much more. On campus, I see a community celebrating the public launch of its first Comprehensive Campaign; construction completed and new construction started; a faculty vote on General Education assessment, an essential step for Middle States re–accreditation; continued “greening” of the campus through energy management and organic products for housekeeping and grounds maintenance; and a review of our global education

⁹*College Learning for the New Global Century*, a Report from the National Leadership Council for “Liberal Learning and America’s Promise,” Association of American Colleges and Universities, AACU.org, 2007.

initiatives to ensure that our goals are bold and our strategies coordinated. We will see increased attention to the history and myths of immigration through our television program, *Exploring Critical Issues*; economic research sponsored by the Horace Hagedorn Foundation; social health topics studied by Vital Signs; and a new initiative under development called the Center for Social Innovation, supported by a grant of \$500,000 that will help coordinate our approach.

In addition, the Parenting Institute, the Non-Profit Leadership Institute, the Levermore Global Scholars Program, and the Adelphi University–New York Statewide Breast Cancer Hotline and Support Program will continue to flourish. We also will offer sessions about changes in global teen culture and generational shifts, so as to better understand the interests of potential students and their parents, and how future faculty might have different expectations from those in the past and the present.

Even with these demands on our time and attention, as well as fundraising for our Campaign, we must ensure that we keep our focus on the fundamentals: high quality teaching and learning, and the environment to support these goals.

Off campus, we will monitor discussions at the state and federal levels as they affect colleges and universities, and in *The New York Times* special edition on “What’s Wrong with Higher Education?” While there are problems to be addressed, as noted earlier, Adelphi has not been involved and, indeed, has been at the forefront in many positive initiatives involving schools, communities, and businesses.

Looking Forward

This is my assessment. What about looking forward? I pledge to continue as we have, but there are forces over which we have little or no control, and changes in strategy, if not goals and values, are probable.

We have made promises and earned trust; we must continue to ensure that our promises are true and that trust is maintained.

When I introduced Helen Holmes Taylor to the trustees, Congressman John Lewis and Congressman Gregory Meeks, and others on the eve of Commencement in May, I called her a pioneer and promised that her courage and example would guide us as we look out and move forward. Helen has had a remarkable career, and I was privileged to interview her for National Public Radio’s StoryCorps project, and pleased that her story was submitted to the Library of Congress.

Helen, I see our campus preparing students not only for earning a living as professionals, but also for living life as citizens. For this role, they need to know the foundations for social, economic and cultural rights; the rules of domestic and international law; the principles of democracy, capitalism, and contrary theories; and the systemic relationships between peace, democracy, and development, including economic and ecological development. They need to learn about citizenship here, for as former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt said, not far from this campus, “Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home . . . unless these rights have meaning here, they will have little meaning anywhere.”¹⁰

With general education of this type, and expert preparation in the various disciplines, we can ensure that, as *U.S. News & World Report* stated, students are expected to achieve “proficiency in . . . critical thinking, logical reasoning, computation, at least one foreign language, appreciation for diverse cultures, and speaking and writing.”¹¹ Or, as the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) put it,

Colleges and universities need to provide students with an education that gives them more cross-disciplinary knowledge; expanded communication, teamwork, and analytic reasoning skills; and more practice in applying what they learn to real-world problems.¹²

But we expect more, and I cite three other areas. First, we want our graduates to know about “information” as a resource as compared to other resources—“because information is

¹⁰Roosevelt, Eleanor, quoted by former Ambassador Pierre Schori in personal correspondence dated July 27, 2007.

¹¹“What They Should Know,” *U.S. News & World Report*, March 12, 2007, p. 57.

¹²“Preparing Students for Today’s Global Economy,” *The Presidency*, Winter 2007, p. 9.

symbols, not things.” As Harlan Cleveland has said,

- Information expands as it’s used.
- Information is less hungry for other resources.
- Information can, and increasingly does, replace land, labor, and capital.
- Information is readily transportable . . .
- Information leaks . . . The more it leaks, the more we have . . .
- Information is shared, not exchanged.¹³

To Ambassador Cleveland’s list, I would add the need to determine what is empirically true as opposed to opinion and what is known through belief or bias.

Second, I want our students to appreciate art and artistic expression, whether through music, painting, sculpture, drama, dance, or other forms, and to know the difference between art and entertainment.

As Nic Muni, who will visit campus this next Monday, put it,

. . . the prime function of art is to disturb the status quo; the prime function of entertainment is to confirm the status quo. One shakes up our world with the implication that things need to change. The other relaxes us with the implication that everything is okay just as it is.¹⁴

Third, I want our students to have courage, to be the artist of their lives. As Jack London put it,

I would rather be ashes than dust! I would rather that my spark should burn out in a brilliant blaze than it should be stifled by dry-rot. I would rather be a superb meteor, every atom of me in magnificent glow, than a sleepy and permanent planet. The proper function of man (of us) is to live, not to exist.¹⁵



Dr. Robert A. Scott was appointed by the Adelphi University Board of Trustees as the ninth president and professor of anthropology and sociology in July 2000. He has built on Adelphi’s rich traditions in undergraduate and graduate education and continues to link the liberal arts and sciences with professional programs. He has been the driving force behind the success Adelphi University has achieved in the past five years.

With these three additions, understanding the nature of information and how to use it, knowing the difference between art and entertainment, and the personal courage to craft a life of integrity and purpose, just as Helen did, our students will be prepared to face the challenges presented by a dynamic world in which the U.S., Africa, India, China, and the European Union, in particular, will learn new roles and be required to adopt new approaches.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have touched on Adelphi’s vision, both the ethereal and the firm; we have looked back, looked now, and looked forward, reminding us of our legacy and our part in its future. We have been reminded that confidence should not breed complacency. We have made and kept promises, and will make new ones with each step of progress.

The extraordinary painter John Gustaf Agueli once said,

I have left aside all theories and kept this as my only doctrine: one is never exact enough, simple enough, deep enough.¹⁶

One interpretation of what he meant is that we should be precise, simple, and clear, i.e. transparent. This is our goal not only for the new facilities we are building, which allow the viewer to see in and beyond, but also for how we operate—with transparency. Only in this way can we exhibit our belief in the centrality of the faculty and staff to the fulfillment of our vision, and fulfill the meaning of our motto, “The Truth Shall Make Us Free.”

It is my pledge to continue our legacy, one story at a time: your story, my story, our story.

Thank you.

¹³Cleveland, Harlan. “Institutional change in government: puzzles and paradoxes.” *On the Horizon*, Volume 13, Nov. 1, 2005, p. 25.

¹⁴Murri, Nicholas. “The Opera Box.” Unpublished essay, 2006.

¹⁵London, Jack, quoted by former Swedish Ambassador Pierre Schori in personal correspondence dated July 27, 2007.

¹⁶Agueli, John Gustaf, Egypt (1914–15)