



# THE INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF President John E. Klein

RANDOLPH COLLEGE • OCTOBER 25, 2008

Bill, thank you for your kind words and for being with us today. You are the gold standard for college presidents, and I highly value the wise counsel that you have given me over the years.

I want to recognize and thank Bill Quillian, the College's fifth president, who served with great distinction for 26 years and drinks daily from the fountain of youth . . . and Ginger Worden, my immediate predecessor, whom we honored on Thursday for giving a year of her life to so successfully lead the College in the difficult year following the Board decision to become a coed institution.

Thank you, Lucy, the other members of the Board of Trustees, our trustees *emeriti*, our faculty and staff, our students, our alumnae, the delegates, my wonderful wife Susan, our children, our families, and our good friends. You honor me with your presence. I very much appreciate your support and your being here to celebrate the vitality of this College. While it is difficult to single out anyone, I would like to thank our special friend Ellen Edmondson Jones, from the great R-MWC Class of 1939, for making the trip from St. Louis.

I also want to thank all the members of our community who have worked so hard on the inauguration and all those whose generous contributions have fully funded this event. This has been a real team effort. I want to especially thank Carolyn Burgess Featheringill, Class of 1969, Trustee, and Chair of the Inauguration Steering Committee, and Frances Jones Giles, Class of 1965, Trustee *Emerita*, and Co-Chair. They have led the

planning for this event with humor and grace. All of the members of the Steering Committee who planned this event need to be recognized, especially staff member Jen Brestel, who spearheaded the effort.

## ASPIRE, EXPLORE, ACHIEVE

We have made *Aspire, Explore, Achieve* the theme of this inauguration. These are words that have guided my life and those of Susan and our children Jennie and Tom. These are words that can be guideposts for our students in their lives—before, during, and after their four years at Randolph College—in a continuum. And, today, these are words that are useful for the College itself in its journey into the future.

We *aspire* to be one of the premier liberal arts colleges in the country, proud of our heritage as Randolph-Macon Woman's College, known for our academic excellence, and distinctive in our diverse and close community and our small size.

We are *exploring* our options and resources, identifying and prioritizing our needs, and creating a plan that supports our strategic vision.

We will *achieve* our goals. We will be successful, and we will do it together!

I once read that the ancient Romans had a tradition: whenever one of their engineers constructed an arch, as the capstone was hoisted into place, the engineer assumed accountability for his work in the most profound way possible: he stood under the arch. Well, today, I commit to stand under the arch.

Randolph College must continue this process of aspiring, exploring and achieving, long after Susan and I are sitting on a beach somewhere, since the positive change that results will keep us relevant and allow us to remain attractive to students. As Pauline Kezer has said, “Continuity gives us roots; change gives us branches, letting us stretch and grow and reach new heights.”

### **SEEKING BALANCE**

This inauguration is about the College and its future, and about our students and their futures.

The word “inauguration” comes from the Latin *augur*, which refers to a group in ancient Rome that looked into the future by interpreting signs and omens. In keeping with ancient tradition, I want to reflect on some of the signs I see today and try to look into the future. I want to offer some thoughts on how we might work together to make Randolph College the standard for a liberal arts college in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **GROWING OUR ENROLLMENT AND A VIBRANT CAMPUS LIFE**

While opening our doors to men was a difficult decision, research indicates that this change will help us increase our enrollment of both women and men in the coming years. We plan to enroll more students, but with an eagle eye on their academic qualifications and only to a prudent level. We need to grow for financial reasons, but we also want more students on campus to make life here truly more abundant, intellectually and socially. Our goal is to increase enrollment over the next decade to 1,100 students, nearly doubling our student body. There will be more students with whom to interact, more students to participate in student organizations and on athletic teams, and more students to attend and benefit from all the activities that occur on campus, giving vibrancy to our campus life.

We do not seek to become a large institution. We treasure the personal touch here. Indeed, our close community is at the core of who we are. Students know one another, and they know their professors and the staff members who work here. Professors care about their students and engage with them on a level that extends beyond the classroom. Alumnae stay connected with their classmates and

with their professors throughout their lives, and alumnae embrace new graduates as if they were family. Even the president is part of daily campus life and the College’s traditions. Little did I know that as president, I had to sing a solo at Pumpkin Parade, no matter what my singing abilities, or lack thereof. These are rare things in higher education, and we must ensure that the growth that we envision will preserve our close community.

### **STRENGTHENING OUR ALL-IMPORTANT FACULTY AND STAFF**

As enrollment rises and our resources grow, we will begin expanding our dedicated and talented faculty. We will look for scholars who are excellent teachers, with multiple interests and capabilities. We will use these academic talents to strengthen interdisciplinary approaches to our curriculum. We will encourage faculty scholarship, which will benefit the College by fostering better teaching and creating more research opportunities for our students. We will provide more funds for faculty development and improve faculty salaries in order to better compensate them for the work they do—the important work of educating our students, inside and outside the classroom.

The College’s staff forms the backbone of this institution. These key members of our community are responsible for admitting students, fundraising, supporting our Alumnae Association, and making events like this one run smoothly. Staff members advise in the residence halls, keep our campus beautiful, ensure that buildings are clean, feed us, account for our revenues and expenses, and manage a museum, a riding center, and a nursery school. As enrollment and our resources grow, we will cautiously add staff where they will be most effective, offer opportunities for advancement, and ensure that staff compensation is competitive.

### **UPDATING OUR FACILITIES FOR LEARNING, LIVING AND WELLNESS**

As we grow, we must also update our facilities for learning, living and wellness. The College’s largest enrollment was in 1966, with almost 900 students. While some new facilities have been built and some renovated since then, construction will be needed to accommodate enrollment of 1,100 students and to stay competitive.

Under the leadership of professor Rick Barnes, a large committee has been working on a facilities master plan for almost a year. Rick has shared the developing plan with numerous groups within and outside the campus community and sought their input. Our Board of Trustees unanimously approved the plan just this week. It is an exciting plan for the next 10 years, with new academic, administrative and athletic buildings, renovations to the library and the student center, a new and more central museum, new residence halls, and upgraded infrastructure. Landscaping will open new green spaces and walkways behind Main Hall where there is now asphalt.

The plan pays close attention to maintaining the historic beauty and charm of our campus, while allowing us to grow responsibly. We will also invest money in maintenance to keep our buildings in good repair. We are proud of our campus. Its appearance and facilities should reflect that pride.

These capital additions, and repairs and replacements, will welcome new students and help us retain current students. All this will be done over time as resources become available. We will need the support of many people to make these dreams come true.

### **EMPHASIZING DISTINCTIVE ACADEMIC PROGRAMS**

Going coed, increasing enrollment, adding faculty and staff, and modernizing our facilities are all very positive and necessary steps, but they will not be enough to achieve our goals. Academic excellence is the key to our success.

There is no better preparation for a changing world than a strong, balanced liberal arts education, and my own career is an example. I was a European history major. English literature, French and Spanish were also my interests during college, and I have been able to have four different and meaningful career experiences: as a teacher, lawyer, business executive, and college administrator. When I graduated from college, I had no real technical skills (and computers were programmed with punched cards). But, among other things, I had learned about history, literature, and art, and knew how to speak several languages and analyze issues. My college education provided

me with a strong foundation on which to build, and over time, I learned on the job such things as organizational behavior, accounting, and financial analysis.

The liberal arts and sciences should hold fast to their primary missions: raising fundamental questions of meaning, introducing students to a broad range of our cultural legacies, fostering inquiry about how to make the world a better place, and providing students with the skills they can build upon to be successful in a changing world.

Students in every generation are engaged in a search for meaning in their lives. Taught by a highly qualified, skilled faculty, liberal arts and science courses will always appeal for their own sake to students. But as more and more students look for colleges that will prepare them for their careers, we need to find new ways to demonstrate that the liberal arts and sciences, while not focused on specific careers, can actually provide the best preparation for any career.

I was amused to read that J.K. Rowling, author of the Harry Potter series, said that her parents viewed her overactive imagination as a strange personal quirk that could never pay a mortgage or secure a position. As she put it, "Of all the subjects on the planet, I think they would have been hard put to name one less useful than Greek mythology when it came to securing the keys to an executive boardroom."

Such concerns are what have led many institutions to abandon the liberal arts in favor of programs that prepare students for specific careers. This, we will not do. Our commitment to the liberal arts is stronger than ever.

Our College has a long tradition of preparing its students well. In the late 1800s, William Waugh Smith founded the College to provide a rigorous education for young women because they were not allowed access to the same educational institutions as men. At that time, many of those young women did not have the opportunity to pursue careers and those who did were often limited to a few "accepted" pursuits. The College challenged society's narrowness then in order to give our graduates a life more abundant.

Today, our college still aspires to prepare students for the future, and the future is full of surprises. We must look for ways to adapt to new times, while treasuring and sustaining the best of what we have been.

Together, we need to plot a course that acknowledges financial realities but is not driven solely by them. This will be the key to the College's success. We need to find the golden mean by seeking balance between needs and resources.

I believe that we can develop the career value of a liberal arts education without betraying its fundamental purpose. I see three steps which will help make Randolph College a leader among liberal arts colleges in the country.

First, we need to identify the things that we already do well that will help our students in their future careers. We must strengthen those programs and activities and make sure that they are communicated to our students and prospective students.

- For example, our senior capstone courses are challenging and good examples of what the liberal arts can offer, while at the same time helping our students develop skills that are attractive to employers. Employers want students who are critical thinkers, who know how to distinguish between what is trivial and what is important, and who are able to communicate their thoughts in writing and in speech. But could we enhance our senior capstone courses? I believe we can.
- Similarly, our summer research program helps students learn the value of rigorous analysis and intellectual collaboration. This is a tribute to the best within the liberal arts, but it is also something that is very attractive to employers, who are willing to compete for students who have had these experiences in college. Could we expand our summer research program into something for which we are well known? I believe we can.
- We also have a strong advising program called the Randolph Plan. Could we make it better—and have it become a model for others—through

experiential learning experiences, course selection that makes connections, and the development of skills that will be valuable for life? I believe we can.

These are just a few examples of review that will help us take what we do well and make it better for our students.

Second, we must support our faculty to enhance existing programs and introduce new ones that will continually excite and engage students.

This past spring, our first-years and seniors completed the National Survey of Student Engagement. This survey, in which over 1,300 colleges and universities have participated, asks students about the nature and quality of their undergraduate experiences. Our students' responses for both first-years and seniors exceeded mean values for the top 10% of all participating institutions on the benchmark of Effective Educational Experiences. Students also rated the College especially high on benchmarks of Student-Faculty Interaction and Level of Academic Challenge.

Our faculty, and the programs they provide, are first-rate. Imagine expanding and integrating those programs to further enrich the College's strong liberal arts tradition with resources that help students connect their studies with post-graduation purpose. Might our graduates draw on their interdisciplinary studies to help solve the thorny environmental issues with which government, industry, and society are now faced? Might we build a powerful diplomacy and conflict resolution program for both international and domestic students? Might we build an enviable art history and museum studies program? With resources, there will be exciting opportunities we can hardly imagine today.

Third, we need to be able to present ourselves coherently to the world at large and be able to explain to others exactly what makes our College distinctive. We do so many things well, and it is difficult to say that one area is better than another, but we can start by examining our core characteristics for guidance.

- We have a heritage as a women’s college, which gives us a special culture and approach to issues. We will seek to honor that legacy and those traditions as we move forward as a coed institution. I will be soliciting ideas from alumnae, students, faculty and staff to find meaningful ways to do this.
- We have also identified three core characteristics that define us:
  - (1) we foster an honors culture in our academics;
  - (2) we encourage a global perspective; and
  - (3) we stress experiential learning.
- But is there a central idea here, one that informs all the others? I think there is. We are first and foremost a college that defines itself by the word “honor.” Our honor code is one expression of this, but it is something that flows through everything we do.

This is a world in desperate need of personal integrity and intellectual honesty. Political leaders from all parties and the news media bend and distort the truth for their own purposes. We need more honorable women and men in all walks of life. And in our private lives, our personal relationships will be stronger if we hold to the principles we try to teach here.

Randolph College is a small, liberal arts college that seeks, above all other things, to teach the value of personal integrity. Our students will live in a complicated world, where a global perspective and the ability to learn from experience are crucial. Their future, and the future of the world, hang in the balance. With a deep commitment to honesty, to integrity, we will be able to triumph over the challenges we face and make the world a better place.

## CONCLUSION

I will end today with something written by young Anne Frank, “How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”

We already have at our fingertips so many opportunities and advantages. We are blessed to be a part of this wonderful institution and

all that it offers. For over a century, graduates have left here with more than a degree. They have left with the intelligence, the passion, the independent spirit, and the skill to make the world a better place. As we embrace our future, it is my commitment that this hallmark of Randolph-Macon Woman’s College will continue on with Randolph College.

Our future will be bright, in large part because of our rich past. We will send our students out into the world with a solid foundation that will do more than serve them well in their careers. The experiences that they have had and the lessons they have learned at the College will position them to be women and men of integrity and of honor. In the end, it is the people we become and the differences we make that matter.

In this small corner of Virginia, tucked into the beautiful foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Randolph College is a special place, blessed with great tradition and bursting with potential. It is a place where students are encouraged to *aspire* to reach great heights, where they can *explore* all of the opportunities available to them, and where they can *achieve* their dreams. By enhancing what we do here, by pushing ourselves to become greater, by remaining true to our principles, Randolph College can improve the world with each student who goes forth from here.

Thank you for the opportunity you have given me to be part of this exciting journey.

