

Dr. Hartford, Trustees, Faculty, Students, Friends, and Guests...

It is both an honor and a pleasure to speak at inauguration of President  
Maureen Hartford  
To wish her the best in her new leadership role  
And to congratulate Meredith College in selecting an outstanding new  
president.

I must admit I feel a bit like the father of the bride!

Regretting that Michigan lost a remarkable vice-president  
But knowing that Meredith College has gained great leadership  
I must also admit feeling a bit intimidated being on the platform with  
President William Friday. President Friday is a true legend in  
American higher education, known as one of the great university  
presidents of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as evidenced by the remarkable quality  
and diversity of higher education we see today in the State of North  
Carolina.

Yet, if Bill Friday was a visionary leader of higher education in the 20<sup>th</sup>  
Century, Meredith College has chosen in Maureen Hartford a  
president capable of providing great leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This is important, for enthusiastic, visionary, and courageous leadership is  
needed during a time of great challenge and change characterizing  
higher education today.

And it is particularly important that Meredith College, because of the  
unusual role that it plays as an outstanding liberal arts college for  
women benefit from the remarkable leadership ability of Maureen  
Hartford.

This is a bit puzzling in a way, for in an age of knowledge in which educated  
people and their ideas have become the wealth of nations, the higher  
education has never been more important to our nation, and the value  
of a college education never higher. The educational opportunities  
offered by our colleges and universities, the knowledge they create,  
and the services they provide are key to almost every priority of  
contemporary society, from personal prosperity and well-being to  
economic competitiveness to national security to protecting the  
environment to enriching our culture.

Yet there are increasing concerns that higher education in American may be  
at some risk today. We are bombarded with news concerning the  
impact of information technology on the market place, from “e-  
commerce” to “edutainment” to “virtual universities” and now to “I-

campuses”, as MIT calls its Faustian bargain with Microsoft to develop jointly instructional technology.

Some believe that the intensifying market forces characterizing a knowledge-driven economy may sweep over our colleges and universities, pushing aside their academic values and traditions and replacing their civic purpose with the demands of the marketplace. Some doomsayers even suggest that the university, a social institution lasting a millennium, may soon disappear.

“Thirty years from now the big university campuses will be relics.

Universities won’t survive. It is as large a change as when we first for the printed book.”Peter Drucker

To most students and parents, the purpose of a college education is to earn the college degree necessary for a good job, for personal economic security and well-being. Many of today’s students approach their college education with very definite career goals in mind. They enroll with plans to become doctors or engineers or lawyers or teachers. While many will change their minds during their undergraduate years, almost all will emerge with quite specific career goals still uppermost in mind.

Employers reinforce this utilitarian approach. The recruiters companies send to campus are looking for very definite skills. Perhaps they seek something highly specific such as a particular undergraduate major or Internet navigation skills. Or perhaps they seek some evidence that the student can communicate well and work comfortably in a diverse environment. Students are extremely sensitive to these signals from the employment marketplace, and the experience other students have with job interviews and placements can have a very significant impact on their own educational plans

In sharp contrast, however, surveys of business leaders suggest that they seek something quite different than practical knowledge or utilitarian skills from college graduates. They seek graduates who exhibit strong communication skills, a capacity for and commitment to lifetime learning, a tolerance for diversity, and an ability to adapt to change—characteristics more associated with a liberal education than a professional program of study.

In a sense, the university is caught between the contradictory forces of responding to more pragmatic goals of students and employers while providing the liberal education that equips a student with the broader skills important for good citizenship and a meaningful life.

Furthermore, in a world of ever-changing needs, one objective of an undergraduate education certainly must be to prepare a student for a lifetime of learning. The old saying that the purpose of a college education is not to prepare a student for their first job but rather their last job still has a ring of truth.

Colleges have their indispensable office, to teach elements. But they can only serve us when they aim not to drill but to create; when they gather from far every ray of various genius to their hospitable halls, and by the concentrated fires, set the hearts of their youth on flame.  
Phi Beta Kappa lecture by Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1838

As difficult as it is to define and as challenging as it is to achieve, perhaps the elusive goal of liberal learning remains the best approach to prepare students for a lifetime of learning and a world of change. The broader intellectual development of the young, preparing them not simply for careers but for meaningful lives as contributing citizens, will remain a fundamental purpose of undergraduate education. After all, a college education should prepare one for life, and a career is only one of life's experiences.

And that, of course, is the most significant contribution of liberal arts colleges such as Meredith, to prepare women for meaningful roles, indeed, leadership roles, in our world.

And it is from this perspective that Meredith College has chosen its next president well.

For in Maureen Hartford, you have chosen leadership capable of preserving and enhancing this vital role.

Points

Importance of diversity, women's education

Importance of alliances

North Carolina

Molly Broad

Marye Anne Fox

Nan Keohane

Maureen Hartford

Michigan gifts

Maureen Hartford

Peggy Bradley-Doppes

Jim Renick

Eric Montross

The Time-Out!