

Campus Orientation Seminar Series  
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The Intellectual and Academic Life in Service of  
the Larger Community

Chancellor Nancy Cantor

*Diversity and Engagement With the World*

As you come to know this campus—whether as an engineer or an artist, a student, a faculty member, a parent, a son or a daughter—I hope it will be very obvious that we care deeply about *diversity and engagement with the world*. We are seeking intellectual and social diversity, and we see ourselves as scholars—and citizens—of the broader world, not as experts cloistered *within* the boundaries of one discipline, the comfort of our own group, or the gates of this beautiful hilltop campus.

Today, I want to talk a bit about why we care about diversity and engagement with the world—why we see it as central to your education and to our excellence as a university. I also want to give you some examples of the ways in which we are pursuing this focus—in our programmatic offerings, our residence halls, downtown in Syracuse, and across the nation and the globe.

Universities like Syracuse exist, of course, somewhat apart from, and yet connected to the broader world—our students come from more than 100 different nations. Our discoveries and ideas are tested in the world's marketplace. We share our knowledge generously around the world, and our students become citizens of the world. So we must take the broader world seriously and try to understand it.

*Intellectual Diversity: Opportunities for Innovation*

Let's start with the value of intellectual diversity as an opportunity for innovation. It no longer works in higher education—and it may well never

have worked—to be cloistered within one discipline or course of study. The opportunities for real innovation require reaching across fields, so intellectual diversity is critical.

We are reminded of the complexity of problems—and the value of interdisciplinary knowledge—all the time. Consider, for example, the range of perspectives brought to bear in the recent Discovery shuttle mission (guided smoothly by the way by our graduate Eileen Collins). In this mission, NASA drew on the expertise of engineers, scientists, decision theorists, behavioral scientists, experts in business and management—even media consultants. They pooled their expertise not only to study the mechanical and technical aspects and risks of the mission, but also to consider the full range of costs and benefits of the difficult decisions that inevitably surround such a complex endeavor.

Such complexity is not unique to NASA's work. It characterizes so much of the landscape of innovation today, and that is why we at Syracuse emphasize a very broad, interdisciplinary and actively engaged education.

This is why Eric Spina, the dean of ECS (and an aerospace engineer himself with close ties to Collins and to Steve Robinson, also on the Discovery flight), urges his engineering students to become broadly educated in business, in A&S disciplines from writing to ethics and psychology, and in design and architecture.

This is why David Rubin, the dean of the Newhouse School, and his faculty—all media experts—are teaming up with faculty in A&S, Law, Maxwell, VPA, Whitman and more to create minors and joint programs to train journalists and broadcast media students to see the world through the eyes of experts in other fields. These programs now include arts journalism; law, politics and the media, and science and the media. Newhouse is also tackling in very innovative ways the complex questions surrounding religion and the media in our world of increasing religious pluralism and conflict.

Our emphases on interdisciplinary education and engagement with the broader world led the deans of Whitman, VPA and Newhouse to think that music industry should be our newest undergraduate program. And this spirit of collaboration between fields encouraged the Soling Program to produce a cross-campus Mayfest on the Quad last year, highlighting creative projects

from every part of the campus and giving students and faculty a chance to talk about them.

What is wonderful at Syracuse is that you can be studying a technical field, and you will find yourself challenged by experts looking at your problems from the perspective of ethics or philosophy, the society and human behavior, religion and politics. You may be an artist confronted here by experts in intellectual property and finance, or a chemist asked to collaborate on a very practical question of indoor air quality. From any direction, your work and your education will be better if you stretch across your disciplinary boundaries to see the world from another angle, or through another intellectual language or lens.

And, speaking of seeing the world through others' perspectives—having what I call empathy of mind—clearly, part of demonstrating an appetite for intellectual diversity is showing tolerance and openness to differences of opinion, ideology or interpretations. And this seems to be harder and harder to foster on college campuses, not to mention in our communities at large.

The analogy to disciplinary diversity is useful here. We are at our best at probing difficult questions, such as how to balance individual rights and national security, or how to resolve differences in the stem cell debate, when we get all of the perspectives on the table. This often means airing conflicts between strongly held positions on different sides. In the process, we try not to reduce points of view to questions of “right and wrong,” as hard as that may be when each side sees its own position with such clarity and confidence.

Sometimes, of course, a question emerges that does require the courage of conviction and evidence, and expertise should be heeded. Many life scientists, for example, would draw a sharp distinction between the stem cell debate—in which they acknowledge the relevance of ethical concerns even as they strongly defend the therapeutic value of the research—and the relevance of religious and/or philosophical discussion of “intelligent design” to evolutionary biology. We don't believe in easy compromises—the biologist is not likely to throw out evolutionary theory in favor of a proposition that cannot be tested, nor will he or she start teaching intelligent design in a course on science. At the same time, he or she will not punish a student for their religious beliefs, as long as they also show a command of modern biology.

There is still a place for listening and seeing on all sides, even in a world reduced perhaps too facilely to “red” and “blue,” and that is what a university environment can foster when it is at its best.

### ***Social/Cultural Diversity: Opportunities for Understanding***

Now, as hard as it is to engage across ideological differences, the terrain gets even trickier with social and cultural diversity and inter-group engagement. There are a lot of fault lines in our society and not many opportunities to cross them or to extend an empathetic mind and see the world from another’s perspective. This is true for all of us, black and white, rich and poor, LGBT or straight, Israeli or Palestinian, or, as I noted above for that matter, “red state” or “blue state.”

All people show preferences for spending time with people like themselves and develop strong loyalty to their groups, leading social psychologists (and I am one) to emphasize both the value and the costs of bonding with like-minded others. David Myers, for example, has this to say about the human propensity to want to belong, be part of a tight-knit group: “like sexual motivation, which fuels both love and sexual exploitation, the need to belong feeds both deep attachments and menacing threats. Out of our need to define a “we” come loving families, faithful friendships, fraternal organizations, and team spirit, but also teen gangs, isolationist cults, ethnic hostilities, and fanatic nationalism.”<sup>1</sup>

My colleagues and I have studied the many social groups on college campuses, and although we do find these campus groups—from teams to performance groups to identity and issue-oriented groups—to be great sources of what Robert Putnam calls “bonding social capital” (trusted networks of confidants), they can also constrain students from developing diverse friendships and pushing beyond their already well-honed skills and talents, to form what he calls “bridging social capital.”<sup>2</sup> Certainly one of the great assets of college life should be the opportunity to bridge to other groups. Spending too much time in familiar groups with like-minded others can interfere with taking full advantage.

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<sup>1</sup> David Myers, Close relationships and quality of life, in Daniel Kahneman, Ed Diener, & Norbert Schwarz (Eds.), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology* (NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999),375.

<sup>2</sup> N. Cantor, M. Kimmelmeier, J. Basten and D. Prentice, “Life task pursuit in social groups: Balancing self-exploration and social integration,” *Self and Identity* 1 (2002) : 177-184.

And, as universities become more diverse, the divisions in our society—with strong group loyalties and much inter-group wariness—are reflected more and more on campus. Indeed, when groups of students from the same ethnic or racial or cultural background sit together at the cafeteria, many people wonder about the value of diversity, arguing that students will self-segregate into familiar groups anyway. Some have even argued that the social divisions always just below the surface in our campus communities will be exacerbated if we focus on diversity.

But, really, no one should be surprised to find these tensions, nor should we blame students if they want to hang out with others just like them. It is very affirming to be comfortably ensconced in a group, and students come to campus with very little experience of *inter-group* interaction. In this country, neighborhoods and schools tend to be clustered by religion, culture, class, race and ethnicity, and it is only more so in other countries.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, as “natural” as it is to want to affiliate with people from similar backgrounds, sometimes the “we”-“they” distinction can become a problem. With every satisfying in-group experience, comes out-group exclusion of some sort that social psychologists have also documented across a wide range of cultures, ages, and types of groups.<sup>4</sup> Frequently, such exclusion is merely a reflection of favoring one’s in-group, as when we give members of our own group more benefit of the doubt, or we care more about their welfare. Other times, it may take a more disagreeable turn, as when we distrust or derogate groups simply because they are different. Often, discrimination grows out of our very real ignorance of other groups and our tendency to see them as monolithic and homogeneous, even as we perceive the great variety within our own groups.

Unfortunately, this tendency to lump together all members of an out-group can lead us to treat them unfairly in ways we may not intend. This is especially true when we see and react to others only through the lens of their “otherness.” The individual thus becomes less individual and more a representation of a group.

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<sup>3</sup> Derek V. Price and Jill K. Wohlford, “Equity in Educational Attainment; Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Inequality in the 50 States, *Higher Education and the Color Line*, ed., Gary Orfield, Patricia Marin, and Catherine L. Horn (Cambridge: Harvard Education Press, 2005) 65.

<sup>4</sup> See M. Brewer and R. Brown, “Intergroup relations,” *Handbook of Social Psychology, Vol. II*, ed., D. Gilbert, S. Fiske, and G. Lindzey (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998) 554-594.

We are all part of groups, like it or not, and so we are all subject to what my colleague at Stanford, Claude Steele, calls “stereotype threat”—that is, fearing being seen and evaluated through the lens of our group stereotypes. When we experience stereotype threat, we perform less well and experience considerable stress. Steele demonstrates this in many situations: White student athletes perform more poorly when they think it is a test of “natural athletic ability” than when they think the same task tests “sports intelligence.”

For minority students—students of color in a predominantly white university or women in science, mathematics and engineering, for example—this is a pervasive experience. But Steele also shows it in majority students, who feel vulnerable to being automatically misunderstood by others.<sup>5</sup>

In one experiment described by Steele, a white student is told he is going to discuss racial profiling with two other students. He is asked to arrange the three chairs in the room while the experimenter goes to get the other students. If he has been told the other students are also white, he puts the chairs close together. If he has been asked to arrange the chairs for a discussion of racial profiling with black students, he will usually move his chair away from the other two. And—paradoxically—the more the student perceives himself as concerned with inequality, the further away he will move his chair. His fear: being perceived as a racist.

What is clear here is that these students want to “do it right,” but stereotype threat takes over, and they have no idea they are under this kind of pressure. “If you ask them, they have no idea, no sense of having been under this pressure,” Steele says, “no subjective awareness.” But physiological tests, as well as the outcomes, show they have been responding to “cues in the environment” that put them under enormous stress.<sup>6</sup>

These are the stresses of inter-group life that our students (and the rest of us) face every day on diverse campuses and so we should have some considerable patience for the self-segregation into familiar groups that we see so often.

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<sup>5</sup> Expert Report of Claude M. Steele, *Gratz and Grutter*, in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan.

<sup>6</sup> Claude M. Steele, lecture at the Future of Minority Studies Conference, Cornell University, July 30, 2005.

Students and faculty alike can and should gather with those of similar background or shared interests—that table at the cafeteria of LGBT students has its affirming benefits that are important to support, especially in a world where homophobia is not rare on college campuses. But one also wants to see them have opportunities to talk, as a group or individually, with others, across groups. Not all the time, but enough to educate each other.

Many would argue that this is just “pc,” but as a social psychologist I can assure you there is nothing pc about the hard work that it takes for any of us to deliberately and consciously work to overcome the more pernicious aspects of the “we”-“they” distinctions that pervade our lives and our communities. This is hard work, but it is not a luxury (nor is it *just* pc), if we are to reap the benefits of and productively live in a diverse world.

To make that point, I’d like to draw an example from a student paper, “An American Modernity,” written for our Renee Crown University Honors Program two years ago by Assad Rajani. Rajani, who is now a law student, graduated with an interdisciplinary major in English and textual studies, history, religion and political science.

He decided to write about modernity because, in his words, “As a Muslim-American student, a project that focuses on the fissures of ethnic identity is extremely relevant to me. Especially in the post-9/11 era, it was important to elucidate the experiences of minority groups that are often considered outsiders to mainstream American culture.”

In modernity, he writes, “I am describing something that changes as I struggle to study it. Like students of the subconscious, the galaxy or the atom, I can only relate modernity’s significance through language—that is—through analogy. I cannot tell you what modernity *is*, only what modernity is like.”

In describing modernity, Rajani draws on writers ranging from Sigmund Freud to the Native author Sherman Alexie, but some of the most poignant insights into his situation come when he interrogates his own experience with—toilet paper.

“Bathroom etiquette was never a mystery for me,” he writes. “My mother was quite candid about it. She used to tell me not to use American bathrooms. *All these people just use paper! Hold it in until you get home.*

Home was transformed into a cultural fortress.” Home, he adds, was the only place the topic ever seemed to come up. It was not until he was a sophomore at Syracuse, heading toward the floor bathroom with his jug of water, that his roommate had the courage to ask him outright:

*“What’s with the jug? Where are you going?”*

*“To the bathroom.”*

*“What’s that for?”*

*“To clean myself, man. I don’t just use paper.”*

*“You’re kidding me, right?”*

*“No, I’m not.”*

*“Whoa, whoa, whoa. You mean you use your...your hand?”*

*“I need to go.”*

“The reaction was worse than I ever expected it to be,” Rajani writes, explaining that water is a central symbol of spiritual and hygienic purity in Islam. “For 19 years I had hidden this secret, and now not only was I being confronted with an image of my own body in such a brusque manner, I was being ridiculed by someone who perceived me to be unhygienic ... My act of hygiene, my act of purification and bodily cleansing was considered *unclean*.”

The confrontation, he reports, ended in uneasy laughter, without answers. In another context, however—if someone, for example, had overheard and intervened with an invitation to talk things over—this misunderstanding could have been handled in such a way that both students learned from it. The conversation could have been had on many levels—about the difference between the benign intent behind the roommate’s astonishment and the intensely painful impact of his line of questions; about the role of experience and culture in defining what is seen as good and bad; about the need to give each other standing and to learn to move together, not further apart. It could have been a time to realize the benefits of education in a diverse learning community, rather than suffering the distressing correlates of “otherness” and ignorance, however unintentional in origin. Most importantly, it could have been a time to build the perception of being in it all together—of common fate—by confronting difference rather than walking away, so that difference is appreciated but not privileged.

But, as the Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen has observed: “We all do make mistakes, we often experiment, we get confused, and so forth. The world

certainly has its share of Hamlets, Macbeths, Lears, and Othellos. The coolly rational types may fill our textbooks, but the world is richer.”<sup>7</sup>

And the world of group dynamics is richer yet, full of the potential for mistakes, misperceptions and worse. Yet we cannot avoid trying to extend our empathetic reach across these inter-group fault lines.

### *Inter-Group Dialogues*

How can we all learn about difference, and how can universities help foster healthy inter-group appreciation? And what are we doing at Syracuse that you can take part in this coming year?

We have to recognize both the reinforcing value of being comfortably with familiar others, and the educational benefits of stretching beyond. The answer is not to pretend that we live in a group-less, conflict-free society, but rather to find a way for everyone to affirm their own “narratives” and express their resentments, while acknowledging that others also have stories to tell and vulnerabilities to reveal. Regardless of how hard this is to accomplish even in the relatively protected world of universities, I do not see a path toward empathy that does not air conflict.

First, let’s talk about structured inter-group dialogues, some taking place as part of formal curriculum and others in the residence halls as co-curricular offerings.

Patricia Gurin and her colleagues at Michigan, who have pioneered an inter-group dialogue curriculum that departs from prior approaches by explicitly using conflict as a path toward trust between groups,<sup>8</sup> are preparing for a ten-institution evaluation of its effectiveness—a project that Syracuse is proud to join this fall.

The approach takes difference and conflict as givens, and:

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<sup>7</sup> Amartya Sen, *On Ethics & Economics* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994)11.

<sup>8</sup> M. C. Thompson, T. G. Brett, and C. Behling, C. “Educating for social justice: The program on intergroup relations, conflict, and community at the University of Michigan,” *Intergroup Dialogue: Deliberative Democracy in School, College, Community, and Workplace* ed., D. Schoem and S. Hurtado (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 2001) 99-114.

adopts an explicitly inter-group focus by bringing together members of groups that rarely interact in meaningful ways or may even be at odds;

acknowledges that these groups often occupy different positions in society, thereby uncovering patterns of inequality or cultural dominance that often go unnoticed; and

balances representation of each group in the dialogue, so as to provide security and comfort for each as inter-group conflicts and differences are aired.

With this structure as the basic model, trained facilitators, who also benefit from the experience, can guide a *dialogue*—not a *debate*—in which participants are encouraged to share their narratives, and explore similarities, differences, and conflicts within and between groups.

The goal of this form of dialogic thinking and interaction is to “normalize” conflict as part of life in a diverse society that can be managed with openness and care. We gain appreciation for others when we feel appreciated by others, even if this process starts with airing differences and disagreements that might otherwise drive groups apart.

It is critical here not to look for winners and losers, but to have a conversation that is revelatory for all. Accordingly, the groups are balanced in number not as an end in itself, intended to give each group an equal shot at dominating, but rather to have enough participants in each group so that everyone feels comfortable, able to lower their defenses and explore differences honestly. Eventually, in the dialogues, some of the monolithic thinking about the groups breaks down and the ground is laid for building common cause.

This year, as I mentioned earlier, there will be several different venues for opportunity for these structured inter-group dialogues. For quite some time on this campus, students have organized their own dialogues and peer support groups, such as the Team Against Bias, which has steadily expanded to be a fertile ground for discussion of the ignorance and tensions that we all bring with us to life in a diverse community. Last year, the LGBT Resource Center developed a very innovative program called Ally Development

Training, to give interested students the skills to address the homophobic attitudes and behaviors of their peers in constructive ways.

Building on this tradition of peer engagement, we are designing several new opportunities for inter-group dialogue around the issues that often divide campuses.

For example, there will be formal dialogue courses, such as Sociology/WS 200 on race/ethnicity or gender, and informal dialogue circles starting in the week of Sept. 19 in 11 residence halls. We call them CARE Dialogues: Conversations about Race and Ethnicity.

And the dimensions of inter-group difference and dialogue are plentiful in our lives, so every day we are creating new programming: For example, the Religion and Society Program is working on a set of “Difficult Dialogues” on religious pluralism, as we all confront the inter-religious conflicts of our world.

Syracuse—as a campus and as a city—is home to a very large and distinguished community of students and neighbors from many nations and traditions, and there are many groups working to foster inter-religious and cultural understanding.

Our Slutzker International Center is a tremendous resource for sharing the stresses and the excitement of ethnic and cultural and religious pluralism as it is unfolding in a world full of anxiety about difference.

In our residence halls, there are also several learning communities focused on crossing boundaries, such as the Interfaith and the Multicultural Communities, and the Honors community on Connecting Across the Equator, as well as the one on Language, Culture and Arts.

### ***Engagement With the World: Opportunities for Connections***

As we consider the fault lines that can, but should not, divide our campus community, it is critical that we also move beyond the campus to our many connected communities, at home and abroad. We must look to the richer and even more challenging context of engagement with the broader world. We follow the philosophy that our faculty is here to pursue discoveries while

simultaneously testing them in the “marketplace of ideas” beyond the campus. Similarly, our students are here to be educated in the world, and that entails being citizens of the world, not waiting until after graduation.

No matter what field you are in, from the arts to the sciences to journalism or management, the excellence and relevance of your education will depend largely on how well-versed and engaged you become with the complexities of life in a diverse, globally interconnected, ever-challenged knowledge economy, and with the issues confronting our numerous connected communities, at home in Syracuse, in cities around the country from NYC to DC and LA, and far away in countries both different from and similar to ours—Italy, Uganda or China, for example.

At Syracuse, engagement with the world starts right here at home, in a place as rich in the arts as it is challenged economically, steeped in the history of movements of opportunity and innovation—the home of the historical Haudenosaunee Confederacy, of nearby Seneca Falls or the Underground Railroad, of the Erie Canal. Today, it is right in the center of urban struggles, hoping to build: a sustainable urban eco-system, a bustling knowledge economy, a diverse inter-cultural and transnational population base, affordable housing and quality education.

In Syracuse, immersing yourself in “local” culture/community can translate into a rich knowledge base about the opportunities and challenges of a much broader world.

And, as some of you will experience very soon, education does not stop at the corner of University Avenue at Syracuse. You will see this as Architecture or Communication Design students taking courses and collaborating with local designers and artists in our new downtown Warehouse, or in the South Side of Syracuse as students in Whitman’s Entrepreneurship Program working with local residents on business plans, or Newhouse students producing a newspaper with the local community. You will see this as members of our Shaw Center’s Literacy Corps, mentoring Syracuse city school children or students at the Onondaga Nation School.

We are committed as a university to moving off the “hill,” physically and metaphorically, with a connective corridor bus system and an artistically lighted and designed pathway, marked by artists’ kiosks with Internet access and connections to all that is happening on campus and in the city’s many

cultural institutions. We are doing this because we believe that our city and region have so much to offer our students and our scholars, as we test our ideas and share our knowledge and learn about scholarship in action, as I like to call it.

This is not just service, though the work we do, the thousands of hours that students volunteer, the programs we start and the collaborative projects we support do make a difference in Syracuse. No, this is what it means to cross the boundaries of expertise by working with practitioners, citizens, public officials, artists, children and not-for-profits on the substantive questions that we also address in our laboratories, studios and libraries.

This is why we are locating the Center of Excellence in Environmental and Energy Systems—where engineers and scientists and scholars in environmental policy work with their industry counterparts—downtown a few blocks from the historic center of innovation, the old Erie Canal.

This is why we are expanding our engagement with the Syracuse City School District and announcing next week a long-term partnership to build arts, science and technology curricula, beginning with the Nottingham High School and faculty and students from VPA, education, engineering and IST.

This is why the Maxwell School has teamed up with numerous community agencies and foundations to create a position of “community geographer,” the first of its kind in the country, devoted to applying the latest techniques of Geographic Information Systems Mapping to compellingly capture the distribution of critical community challenges, from health disparities to hunger to illiteracy, across our city and region in the service of informing public policy initiatives.

This is cutting edge scholarship in action, and you can be a part of it.

Moreover, scholarship in action, mixing education and engagement with practitioners in the field, doesn't stop at the boundaries of Central New York. SU also has a broad reach, nationally and internationally, into its “communities of experts,” whether they are Broadway producers, Wall Street investors, writers of “West Wing” in LA or literary agents in NYC, commentators for the Olympics, scientists at NASA, judges in DC or war crimes prosecutors in the Hague. Our alums and friends are all over the nation and the world, and we are working with them to provide access to and

support for our faculty and students engaging with professionals and citizens on the “front lines,” so to speak. To name only a few of these opportunities: Drama students can spend a semester on Theater Row in NYC learning the business as well as the art behind Broadway. Broadcast journalists can dive into our nation’s capital for a semester and see how the news is made and our public consciousness is shaped every day. A&S and Maxwell students can join them at the Greenberg House in DC to study public diplomacy and international relations.

These experiences don’t stop at our nation’s boundaries, either, as architecture students compare the experience of urban revitalization here to the preservation of medieval and renaissance architecture in Florence. Fashion design and retail students see international markets up close in a London immersion program or students of contemporary culture, economics and politics take on what Tom Friedman called our “flat world,” in our newest DIPA semester abroad program in Beijing.

These experiences directly complement and greatly stretch the education of SU students here on campus. Here’s how one student, Paul Ronan, a senior majoring in geography and international relations in A&S/Maxwell described his semester abroad in Uganda. Paul first studied at the School for International Training (on a crash course in Development Studies— language, history, development theory and field research methodology) and then did a six-week internship with local NGOs. He says: “I cannot imagine a more intense learning experience ... I had to make contacts with people from all parts of Ugandan society; sweet-talking government officials, being prepared to defend my purpose in countless offices, following leads, learning (the hard way) the difficulty of asking good questions with limited time....” Paul goes on to remark on the importance of bringing this same experience-based learning perspective to our own region of Central New York. He argues for: “engaging the community, and world, around us, not only for the valuable experiences and skills we gain, but for the opportunity to play an active role in shaping the future of this planet.”

As you can see, Syracuse students have big ambitions, and that is why we need them to be on the front lines of engaging diversity, be it of disciplines or groups, at home or abroad. And, we are, for we see it in the awards garnered for the University of late: 2<sup>nd</sup>-most Green Powered University after U. Penn (EPA designation), one of 81 universities nationally designated as a Campus with a Conscience (Princeton Review and Campus Compact), and

7<sup>th</sup> in the nation for being an Entrepreneurial Undergraduate Campus (Princeton Review and Forbes). But, most importantly, as I said at the outset today, you see it in the way people work here and in what they are trying to do, and the world is noticing it.