



President of Connecticut College

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Inaugural Address

October 14, 2006

“Between the Past and the Future: Preparing for Connecticut College's Second Century”

Thank you, and good morning to all of you. I am deeply honored you have chosen me to lead this great college at this important point in its history. As we move together to our Centennial in 2011, I want you to know it's a responsibility I value and I respect.

While it is customary to think of inaugurations as new beginnings, I prefer to think of an inauguration — especially this one — as an inheritance. I am heir to the history, to the accomplishments and all of the good work of all the strong, smart, good people who built this college. And to those who have guided its development over the past 95 years, including you.

As president of Connecticut College, I know I am but a steward of this inheritance. My pledge to you today is that I will be a steward to whom you can entrust with confidence this considerable inheritance. It will shape me, the strategies I follow and the decisions I facilitate as much as my stewardship will shape the college. And this is as it should be.

Today, I plan to honor this inheritance by recalling for you the words of many of our College's former leaders. They understood, as I do, that past, in many ways, is prologue. That we all take the best step forward when we do so with a clear understanding of all who have walked before us.

In fact, in an address 45 years ago on this very stage, President Rosemary Park said: *"This, I think, is the fate of human beings: we stand between the past and the future. We are responsible for the world of history, which we didn't make, and for the world of the future, which we will help to shape. The best preparation for assuming this responsibility is a liberal arts education."*

President Park was right. We all know the world our students are entering today — indeed the world they are helping to shape — is chaotic. Connecticut College prepares students for this world by teaching them to be active, engaged citizens. Our students here develop a respect for knowledge, an ability to think and communicate clearly, to lead with intelligence and integrity, and to be socially responsible and globally focused.

Our graduates will continue to make a difference in this changing world, so we must ensure the education we provide remains practical and timely. How should we do this? My answer is the same as President Park's 45 years ago. *"The best clue to the world of the future," she said, "is the past."*

Connecticut College was built on a foundation of pragmatism, global awareness, equity and respect for others. Our founders were active, engaged citizens who believed in the value of a four-year liberal arts education, and wanted to make sure it continued to be available to women of this state.

Through the words of our first President, Frederick Sykes, we gain a strong sense of the spirit of those early days. Listen to his words: *"Though our feet were in the mud, our heads were in the clouds. There is a tonic and tang in the air on this hilltop that finds its way to your soul . . . there is a ruggedness of life that is not all of the boulders and the fields and hills, but meets you in the energy and verve of these teachers and students who are made of pioneer stuff."*

That pioneer spirit, teachers and students with energy and verve, global awareness, respect for others, believers in the value of a liberal arts education — that's who we all are. These concepts, brought to life on this hilltop more than nine decades ago, are the very essence of a Connecticut College education today.

As we build on the past to shape our future, let's take a closer look at what we do and who we are. This will help us better understand where we are going and what our aspirations are.

First, let us look at *what we do* — at our mission. A good liberal education empowers individuals with broad knowledge and transferable skills, and a strong sense of values, ethics and civic engagement. Here at Connecticut College, it is our mission, and we call it:

Putting the liberal arts into action. The actual words of our mission statement are rather recent, but the concept dates back to Connecticut College's very beginning. Frederick Sykes liked to say a Conn education was not about memorizing and reciting facts, but "*preparation for life by purposeful living and doing.*"

Connecticut College educates the whole person. President Park spoke about developing "*tough-minded students with broad human sympathies.*" We expand the mind here, certainly. But we also nurture the spirit by fostering a sense of responsibility to others, instilling integrity and encouraging honest self-reflection.

Our students learn to be global citizens. Conn has always understood the value of travel and the importance of bringing to campus faculty, students and staff from around the world. The 1990s brought a new globalism, a new intellectualism that raised the bar for our students, and a greater appreciation for interdisciplinary learning given the complexity of the world. President Claire Gaudiani wrote in 1994, "*The inevitable conclusion of a liberal arts education is an insatiable curiosity about difference; we cannot stop ourselves from turning the page to find yet another nuance in the cultures, histories and physical phenomena we study, thereby opening us to other people and building communities where none were before.*"

And lastly, we are good environmental stewards. Connecticut College is a leader in environmental programs and in our own campus conservation work. This continues a long tradition; evident this year in our celebration of the Arboretum's 75th birthday.

Now that we've discussed what we do, let's look at who we are — and what we can learn about who we are when we look at our past. What sets Conn apart when it comes to our contemporary culture . . . and character? What specific traits did our activist founders inspire in Connecticut College?

Our academic excellence and excellence in teaching/research has helped the College attract first-rate faculty from the very beginning. And it has continued to enable Connecticut College to attract some of the very best faculty in the world. President Oakes Ames said in 1986, "*What matters is being challenged to achieve one's full intellectual potential, and being challenged to think deeply about values, to form well-reasoned opinions, and to develop the ability to make responsible choices.*" Our faculty is at the front line of this effort.

Equity and respect for others. We understand the importance of diversity in developing a realistic world view and finding creative solutions to global problems. Norman Fainstein told seniors at Commencement in 2003, "*Your college community shows that people from many backgrounds can not only live together, but engage one another and enrich each other's lives.* . . ."

A sense of community is perhaps our greatest strength. It is expressed here at Connecticut College in a number of ways:

- Through the unusual collegiality of our faculty and staff, and the mentoring relationships between professors and students
- Through our students, who form friendships here that last a lifetime
- And through our alumni, who tell me repeatedly they feel a connection to this place that is with them forever

Today, we see the legacy of this inheritance — of who we are and what we do — in many ways. Connecticut College students prepare for the "world of the future" by experiencing life firsthand. Through study, classroom work, hours in the library, laboratory, on stages and in studios, students grow intellectually. Through internships, travel abroad, community service, athletics and research, they learn to be action-oriented. Our students are doers as

well as thinkers. The breadth of choices for creating individual "educational pathways" — and the guidance provided by both faculty and staff — sets Connecticut College apart.

Students here feel empowered to make their education their own and to make this college their own. They say it brings out the best in them in every way. In fact, Connecticut College students tell us the college opens up opportunities and possibilities they never could have imagined.

The concepts we have talked about today will shape the years ahead, just as they have shaped our past. Connecticut College provides a deeper and more personalized educational experience by integrating academic programs with all aspects of co-curricular life. In many ways, it is what we do best. And it will be the foundation for our second century. The liberal arts are the most practical preparation for a life that is meaningful, purposeful and well-lived.

That said, I want you to know that together we will raise our sights even higher. We will build on all that Connecticut College does so well — our strengths and our distinctiveness. We are on a path to greater recognition as one of the finest liberal arts colleges in the country.

What are some of the things we are going to do to get us there?

- We will help our students weave their experiences together more comprehensively — from the freshman through senior years, within the classroom and well beyond.
- We will link, more explicitly, the study of language, cultural immersion and international learning on campus and abroad. We will provide opportunities for all of our students to connect in meaningful ways to the world outside these walls.
- We will forge new connections amongst the life sciences, math and computer science, fostering a synergy that foreshadows the biological advances of the coming decades.
- We will support faculty as active teachers and engaged researchers. This is essential to the educational excellence, innovative teaching and transformative mentoring for which Connecticut College is known. Connecticut College faculty members are held in high regard. We will continue to attract the best faculty and staff, and we will provide them with the resources so that they can excel.
- We will increase financial aid to ensure we enroll a qualified and diverse student body. With this, we will sharpen our focus on and understanding of diversity and inclusiveness and we will help students develop an even keener global awareness and sensitivity.
- We are proud of our relationship with New London and, consistent with our educational mission, we will continue to be good neighbors in this city that was so instrumental to our beginnings and will be so much a part of our future.
- The honor code will continue to underpin all we say and do. Integrity and respect must be the focus of our dealings with each other, with society and with the environment.
- And lastly, we will accelerate our investment in our campus and provide facilities that are both beautiful and functional.

Everything we do, every investment we make is about engaging students leading to a richer and deeper learning experience.

This is a progressive, 21st century vision of global education, and we intend to be a national leader in it. We will earn for Connecticut College the standing and influence it so richly deserves. A Connecticut College education transforms lives and people across the country will know it. We will succeed because of the power of our vision and our mission, because of the people who are here today, and those who came before us.

Together — together — we will help define the legacy of the College's first century. Together we will prepare Connecticut College for the triumphs of its second century. We are called to be pioneers and we will be good ones, like the ones who have come before us. We will honor these men and women by saying, "The best days are just ahead of us."

This is an outstanding institution, and to be here, as its president, is really an honor and a privilege for me. I want to thank my wife Ann and the rest of my family who have been so supportive over so many years. And thank you to our honored guests, our trustees, faculty and staff, of course our students, and all of you.

Thank you.