

Leaving No One Behind

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Deaf and Hard of Hearing Adolescents Conference
Memphis, Tennessee
September 18, 2006

Good evening. I am honored that you have invited me to speak at this important conference. I am very pleased to see that this conference is happening as a result of a collaborative effort between the Gallaudet University Regional Centers and the University of Arkansas.

I would like to recognize those individuals whose hard work and dedication made this conference possible. The University of Arkansas' impressive team, Dr. Glenn Anderson, Dr. Steve Boone and Dr. Doug Watson were instrumental in making this collaborative effort successful. Dr. Margaret Hallau and Dr. Katherine Jankowski from the Clerc Center at Gallaudet University provided the Gallaudet Regional Centers with the support necessary for this conference to take place. Ms. Kim Krebs and Mr. Steve Larew brainstormed the idea of reviving this conference. Thank you Steve, for chairing this conference.

I reviewed the conference program and I am very impressed with the breadth and depth of topics offered and the cutting edge work that is being done. I am sure that everyone will benefit from coming here. More importantly, deaf and hard of hearing adolescents will benefit from it.

The focus of this conference, the educational experience of deaf and hard of hearing adolescents, and the timing of it is important. We are at a critical juncture in the history of American deaf education. Education policy trends, an increasingly diverse population, technological advances, growing recognition of what deaf and hard of hearing people are able to achieve, and the current world situation has resulted in a generation of deaf and hard of hearing adolescents unlike these we have witnessed at any time in our history.

As President of Gallaudet University, some of my happiest moments are when I stand on stage during commencement and shake the hands of graduates as I present them with their degrees. Each graduate who crosses the stage represents a success story: for the graduate, for the family and friends, and for the faculty and staff who contribute to the graduate's success. I am sure all of you have had similar moments.

But as the President of Gallaudet, the lens through which I view the education of deaf and hard of hearing students is not limited to college and graduate school. To a certain extent, Gallaudet is a microcosm of the educational system for deaf and hard of hearing students throughout the country: elementary education at Kendall School, secondary education at the Model Secondary School for the Deaf, Baccalaureate, Masters and Doctoral education at the university.

I mention this broader lens because I would like us to think together about a vision for education that will help us progress toward the goal that no deaf or hard of hearing child, youth, or adult will be left behind. Achieving this goal is a huge challenge.

In 2002, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) issued a report titled *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College*. That report was developed by a "national panel of top education, private sector, public policy, and community leaders [who] spent two years analyzing higher education in the United States Today." The Panel found that "broad, meaningful reform in higher education is long overdue." Higher education and, in fact, education at all levels has been criticized in recent years. What I like about the *Greater Expectations* report is that it proposes "a new vision that will promote the kind of learning students need to meet the emerging challenges in the workplace, in a diverse democracy, and in an interconnected world."

This is the kind of learning students need, whether or not they go to college. I wouldn't be surprised if you share this perspective. *Greater Expectations* points out the importance of "solid preparation for challenging college work achieved through excellent K-12 teaching and curricula." Isn't such excellence equally important for students who may not attend college? Shouldn't they too be expected to meet the "emerging challenges in the workplace, in a diverse democracy, and in an interconnected world?" I think that is consistent with the view of many people that the creative and challenging learning opportunities in talented and gifted programs provide learning opportunities that should be available to all students.

I think we may be too elitist in our approaches to education. Typically, the best teachers are found in programs and classes for talented and gifted students and in honors programs and, overall, we expect that these students will go to college. Yet we know that we also need the best teachers for students with special needs such as those with learning disabilities, emotional problems, or behavior problems. We also know that for a variety of reasons, not all capable students want to-or expect to-go to college.

In *Greater Expectations* there is an emphasis on life-long learning, recognizing that part of what we know about our changing world is that people change jobs and careers far more commonly than our parents and grandparents did. We also know that the growth in information and changes in technology require new knowledge and new skills almost daily. Students who get degrees in computer information systems and computer science often say-not entirely in jest-that when they graduate, what they learned in college is already outdated.

Greater Expectations proposes that for college graduates to be successful in the complex world of the 21st century, "...higher education should help college students become intentional learners who can adapt to new environments, integrate knowledge from different sources, and continue learning throughout their lives." Here again, shouldn't this also be a goal of secondary education?

I suggest that we think in our educational planning about every deaf and hard of hearing individual as on an educational journey from the moment she or he is born until the end of life. I think most of us probably think this way in general already. But what I'm not sure we think enough about is: how does what each of us does link with-and build on-prior learning? How does what each of us does provide a foundation as the student continues on this educational journey?

Let me give you an example. We know that colleges often express concern-and even complain-that many students come to college poorly prepared. *Greater Expectations* notes that 53% of

first-year college students take remedial courses. But how many colleges communicate with secondary schools about what students need to know to be prepared for college?-the skills and competencies they need to have?

I recognize a concern from the perspective of the secondary and elementary levels typically does not emphasize analytic and integrative skills. Yet, these skills are important for students to succeed-not just in college, but also in life. They are important too as colleges strive to better prepare graduates for the challenges of the 21st century. In this era of high-stakes testing, many of you know better than I the competing priorities between increasing the number of students who pass these tests, and providing the kind of educational experiences students need to be successful, whether that is success in employment, as citizens, in college, or in other aspects of their lives.

You may know about the Spellings Commission Report on the future of higher education. Last month the AAC&U expressed concern about the report's "practical encouragement of a cafeteria-style college curriculum." AAC&U also noted the report's failure to discuss "the outcomes that matter in a twenty-first century education...what the nation needs is a clear understanding of how to support students' cumulative progress towards essential learning outcomes from school through college." * As I said earlier, we do not have to assume that every student will go to college, but I do support AAC&U's position that we must focus on "how to support students' cumulative progress towards essential learning outcomes."

Until about the last 15 years, educators have focused more on what we taught and the content of the curriculum than we did on goals and outcomes, and assessment of whether students achieve expected outcomes. Accreditation requirements at the college level led to a change in focus and, in addition, mandated that we document how we use the results of assessment to improve program quality. These expectations come from the bodies that accredit professional programs and those that accredit colleges and universities. Legislation, particularly the No Child Left Behind Act of 2000, has led to comparable changes at the elementary and secondary level.

Traditionally, liberal arts colleges offered a curriculum in particular disciplines and taught what an educated person should know. There was an emphasis on western cultures and western world views. Although students usually had at major area of study, the number of credits was limited and this was not considered career preparation. Preparation for jobs and a career was considered the responsibility of graduate schools.

The new vision for liberal education - not liberal arts - proposed by AAC&U:

- Links critical thinking to practical problem-solving, including decision-making when confronted with conflicting values
- Emphasizes learning about cultural complexity and global issues
- Promotes collaborative work with diverse groups
- Emphasizes information literacy: finding information and evaluating its accuracy before using it
- Prepares students with knowledge and skills for jobs, careers, career change, and for good citizenship

- Views college learning as part of a continuum, dependent on K-12 learning

There are many other components of this new vision, but this gives you a sense of many of the important changes. I'd like us to think now about the continuum of learning and the importance of having student learning outcomes that each level in the educational system builds on. This promotes integration of learning and progress towards achieving increasingly more complex learning outcomes.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to reduce the number of students in your class who tell you that they can't apply what they learned in my class because after they passed the test and completed my course, they forgot what they learned? Integral to this new vision is skills in analysis and integration with less emphasis on memorizing facts and other information. This way of thinking about learning applies to students progressing from one class to another, from one grade to another, between elementary and secondary education, and between high school and college.

Practical learning is also very important and I am pleased that at MSSD all students have community service and work experience as part of their required curriculum. At the college level, most Gallaudet students have internships and we are having discussions now about whether internships should be a requirement for all students.

We are engaged in the process of adopting a new vision of liberal education at Gallaudet. The base comes from *Greater Expectations*, but is adapted to fit Gallaudet as an inclusive deaf university. Thus, learning about cultures and languages includes deaf culture and American Sign Language-and also the many different ways to be deaf. The new vision was discussed widely on campus during the spring semester and we have begun discussions about implementation, a process that has implications for our curriculum and for what we will be expecting students to come to Gallaudet with as a foundation.

A very important part of the process will be to have dialogue with all of you whose graduates apply to Gallaudet. We will be increasing standards and as we do that we must communicate with schools and programs whose graduates seek admission to Gallaudet. One step we are taking is developing more articulation agreements with community colleges so that many students who have taken developmental courses in the past at Gallaudet would be able to take them at community colleges and have a smoother transfer to Gallaudet. Conversations with secondary schools may also lead to more students coming directly to Gallaudet without needing to take developmental courses. This will not be an overnight change, but will be one of Dr. Jane Fernandes' priorities as Gallaudet's ninth president.

For the final part of my presentation this evening, I want to talk about the challenges and opportunities we have because of the growing diversity in the population in this country and the growing diversity in the deaf and hard of hearing population. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, people of color make up 30 percent of the population. The Census Bureau estimates that by the end of this century, people of color will be 60 percent of the U.S. population. People of color are already a majority in some states today, including California where they comprise 56 percent of the population.

The diverse population in this country includes people from other countries. In 2000, about 11 percent of the population was born in other countries, an increase from 7.9 percent in 1990. If this trend continues, the number will exceed 15 percent by the end of this decade, the highest percentage in this country's history, exceeding even the European immigration at the turn of the 20th century.

Many of the families who come to the U.S. have made huge personal sacrifices. I have met families who send their children to the Clerc Center solely because they wanted the best possible education for their deaf child. They left behind relatives, jobs, and homes to do this. I suspect that those of you who are nearer to our southern neighbors have many similar experiences.

Migrant workers from Mexico often return home with their families for several weeks in the winter because there is no work available during the non-growing season. "One elementary school in Los Angeles modified the academic year so that students could take off for four weeks at the end of December and beginning of January. An additional two weeks of school is added to the end of the year to make sure that students do not miss out on instruction. A school in Texas located near the Mexican border established a cooperative relationship with a Mexican school across the border to enable its students to enroll in school while they are in Mexico." **

These major changes in our population make it essential that we have an adequate pool of well-trained professionals-particularly, deaf and hard of hearing-from these diverse groups to staff our educational programs. Gallaudet and other universities must be aggressive in recruiting and educating professionals to help meet this need. We must have professionals in our educational programs at all levels that reflect the same diversity as our students.

Another very important dimension of diversity relates to what it means to be deaf in the 21st century. With advances in medical technology, we see rapidly growing numbers of deaf children with cochlear implants. Many of these children enter schools without knowing sign language and without any ties to the deaf community.

Since the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL-94-142), the precursor to today's I.D.E.A. legislation, enrollment of deaf and hard of hearing students in schools for the deaf has steadily declined. Today, deaf schools enroll less than half the number of students they did 30 years ago. In mainstreamed programs or public schools, about half the students are one of just three or fewer deaf and hard of hearing students in the entire school. Almost one-fourth of those attending mainstreamed programs or public schools are the only deaf or hard of hearing student in the entire school.

All of these deaf and hard of hearing students should have adult role models who understand their unique experiences and efforts to develop an identity with which they are comfortable. We who are professionals in the educational system are challenged to understand and respect the cultures and identities of others. Those of us who are educating and training new professionals must include in our programs developing sensitivity and expertise in guiding and supporting students as they deal with these complex issues.

The reality is that all of us here also have a great deal to learn and there is much to be learned from each other in the next couple of days. Through our collaborative efforts I am confident that we will all see increasing numbers of deaf and hard of hearing students become successful in careers, as leaders, and in life.

Gathered here are educators and many other professionals who can work together to support deaf and hard of hearing adolescents in their lifelong learning journey. You have enormous expertise about deaf and hard of hearing adolescents. This is a wonderful networking and learning opportunity for us and I am confident that what you take home will help in our efforts to make sure that no deaf or hard of hearing adolescents are left behind.

References:

* AAC&U Statement on Spellings Commission Draft Report (August 2006).
<http://www.aacu.org/About/statements/SpellingsFinalDraft.cfm>

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