

**Inauguration Speech
Ronald A. Crutcher, President
University of Richmond
Friday, October 30, 2015**

Rector Pat Rowland and members of the Board of Trustees, I am deeply honored to have been elected as the 10th President of the University of Richmond. Thank you, President Hrabowski, for your introduction and for taking the time to share this day of celebration with us. I am also pleased to have three of the former presidents of the University of Richmond with us today. Thanks for your leadership and commitment as well as your good advice.

On behalf of the University of Richmond, I want to welcome the many delegates who are representing our sister institutions and higher education associations across the country, the leaders of the City of Richmond, and the Commonwealth of Virginia. A special thanks to my fellow presidents of colleges and universities. Truly, each of you honors us by your presence.

Greetings to those of you who are University of Richmond graduates — my fellow Spiders. I look forward to celebrating Homecoming Weekend with you and to our work together in the years ahead. To faculty and staff colleagues, to parents and friends, and to my own family and friends, some of whom have traveled quite a distance, thanks for being with us. Of course, to my wife, Dr. Betty Neal Crutcher, and to our daughter, Sara Elizabeth Neal Crutcher, thanks for your unconditional love and support. Please help me in welcoming them all to the University of Richmond.

My life has been influenced and shaped by many people, some of whom are here today. I also want to acknowledge the spiritual presence of my mother and father, Burdella Miller Crutcher and Andrew James Crutcher, Jr. They both loved me unconditionally and helped me become the person I am today. My mother through her courageous 11-year battle with cancer taught me — among other things — how to live and how to die graciously. My father taught me the importance of hard work and discipline.

Finally, to those who are watching this ceremony online through the live stream. Thanks for taking the time to be with us.

Thank you all for honoring both the University of Richmond and me by your presence today. I am most grateful.

Now I want to extend a particularly warm welcome to our students who have gathered with us today. You have probably heard many times that you are at the heart of all that we do. Indeed, it may sound too obvious or even cliché to say aloud, but let me try for a moment to break through the platitudes and convey to you just

how deeply our interest in you, not just collectively, but each and every one of you as individuals, guides all we have done and will do in the coming years.

Not so very long ago, I was in your position, asking myself questions about who I wanted to be and what pathways might lead me there — and being challenged by my education to continually re-assess and deepen my thinking about those questions. Indeed, I have never stopped doing that.

Let me tell you a bit about my story. It is not so much about me, though, as it is about you — or, rather, a way of explaining my hopes for you here at Richmond. When I was in junior high school in Cincinnati, Ohio, where I grew up, a music teacher gave all of the students a test of our ability to discern pitch. The test showed that I had an excellent natural sense of pitch, so he invited me to choose whatever instrument I wanted to learn to play. I chose the cello.

On that cello just eight months later, I played two movements of a Bach suite in a state music teacher's competition. In the audience happened to be a music professor named Elizabeth Potteiger, who taught at nearby Miami University. On the spot, she invited me to attend a music camp at her university and then, after the camp, offered to provide lessons to me for free if my parents would agree to transport me the 35 miles to and from her campus every Saturday. We took her up on her offer. This chance encounter with Professor Potteiger, in many ways, set the course of my life. She was a world traveler and a Renaissance woman who taught me not only important technical skills, but about the historical background and musical architecture of compositions, as well as the discipline necessary to progress as a musician.

Subsequently, I received a scholarship to attend Miami as an undergraduate student. The liberal education foundation I received there made possible, and enriched, so many of the experiences I have had in my life as an educator, musician, leader, husband, father, and friend. It led to my graduate study at Yale and a Fulbright fellowship that brought me to Germany for almost five years very early in my career, and allowed me to thrive in both of those environments. It guided my thinking and values as my teaching and administrative career developed, as my musical career developed, and in my personal relationships with family, friends, and members of the communities of which I have been a part.

As a result, my lifelong passion has been ensuring opportunity, fostering an engaging educational culture — with a liberal education core — in which all students can thrive, and supporting close faculty and student collaboration. The University of Richmond shares a very deep commitment to these values, which is what drew me to this institution. I chose to come here out of my profound sense that, at Richmond, I would have the opportunity to engage with an intellectual community that not only develops students' potential as individuals, but also educates them to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

I have experienced firsthand this shared commitment to being student-centered in my visits to departments and divisions across campus over the last four months. In meetings with faculty in all five schools and with the faculty senate during a retreat, I have seen that your dedication to students is consistently the central concern of all of our interactions. Indeed, I am struck that no matter the specific topic we discuss, the conversation always orients itself around the needs of our students. This way of thinking is not specific to any discipline, school, or division. It is a value shared broadly throughout our institution. And not only by our faculty of excellent teacher-scholars but throughout our staff — by our athletic coaches and our residential directors, our museum curators and our colleagues in dining services and everyone who teaches and serves our students inside and outside of the classroom.

And it is recognized by our alumni, who have told me countless stories about that one person at Richmond who made the difference in their education here. Our alumni, in turn, are actively involved in mentoring and advising our students and opening doors for them now and after they graduate.

We are all motivated in our work by a deep respect for the intrinsic value of knowledge and a privileged responsibility to guide students as they discern their potential to shape their own lives and to influence their professions, their communities, and the lives of others. We do so by continuing to put them at the center of our thinking and our efforts. We must prepare them to navigate, and thrive in, an interconnected, diverse, and changing world.

The challenges our world presents today can seem unprecedented. Profound differences over the complex issues confronting our nation manifest themselves in loud and often discouraging public debates over everything from how we best foster economic prosperity to how we address inequality in its many forms, protect our fundamental freedoms, and care for the most vulnerable and marginalized among us. The challenges that come to us from abroad are no less complex as we wrestle with multiple competing interests and unintended consequences in a deeply interconnected world. Meanwhile, the technology at our fingertips continues rapidly to reshape our culture and how we engage with, and disengage from, one another.

These and other challenges may seem daunting, but they are not discouraging. Indeed, they are a vivid and urgent reminder of the importance of our work together. Pick any one of these complex challenges, and you will likely find that it can be fully understood only when viewed through multiple lenses — economic, moral, historical, legal, scientific, sociological, or other additional ways. And the most effective approaches to them will, likewise, bring together multiple perspectives.

This manner of thinking — and of educating our students to think — is part of our DNA as an institution with liberal education at our core. Through our commitment to liberal education, we develop in our students the capacity and empathy to discern

complex understandings of the knotty issues that confront us now and that will confront them in the future. And to respond to them in the most effective ways.

As an educational institution, we have a responsibility to be receptive to the demands of our age. This is a responsibility we have embraced, not just now but throughout our history. For example, a century ago, in 1914, at a time when the very idea of higher education for women was widely resisted throughout the South, we not only established Westhampton College, but we hired as its founding dean a woman who wrote her doctoral dissertation at Germany's oldest university on the subject of Anglo-Saxon weaponry. I am speaking, of course, of Dr. May Keller, who, alongside our longest-serving president, Dr. Frederick Boatwright, insisted on rigorous academic standards, grounded in a liberal education, for Westhampton's women.

We saw our community's commitment to meeting the demands of our age a half-century ago. In 1969, alumnus E. Claiborne Robins made a \$50 million gift that forever changed the futures of all of us who are now part of the University of Richmond. His gift, which came at a time when the university was struggling in the face of rapid growth by the state's public institutions, completely changed the parameters within which this university could dream and put in motion a chain of events still unfolding today. It was, in many ways, the beginning of the superb national and international university we now enjoy.

And we have seen this commitment in the last decade, when this community came together to develop The Richmond Promise. Under this strategic plan, we made extraordinary institutional progress on multiple fronts. We more closely integrated our academic units with each other and more deeply connected our institution with our city and region. We not only expressed commitments to greater diversity and inclusion, but we took concrete steps to live these commitments. We introduced The Richmond Guarantee, which guarantees each undergraduate student up to \$4,000 to support either faculty-mentored research or an internship during the summer. We also expanded Richmond's Promise to Virginia, which now provides grants equal to tuition, room, and board, without loans, to Virginia students from families whose total annual household income is \$60,000 or less.

As we gather today, we inherit from The Richmond Promise an exceptionally strong foundation on which to build. This, of course, raises the critical question for all of us: Where shall we go from here? This is a question that we will begin to answer together in the coming months as we begin to develop our next strategic plan. Allow me to offer some thoughts and observations that will help seed our conversations.

As I mentioned, our campus is far more diverse today than it has ever been by almost any measure. This is one of the major accomplishments of The Richmond Promise. I am reminded of the words of the 20th-century American theologian and Civil Rights leader Dr. Howard Thurman: "Community cannot for long feed on itself," he wrote. "It can only flourish with the coming of others from beyond — their

unknown and undiscovered brothers.” And, I would hasten to add, sisters. The perpetual embrace of new voices and perspectives nourishes and strengthens us all. We must now be every bit as thoughtful and purposeful about harnessing the power of our community’s diversity as we have been in creating it. We must continue to shape the culture of the institution in ways that ensure that all students thrive at the University of Richmond regardless of their race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, or gender.

When I spoke earlier of my own experience in higher education, I mentioned that it does not seem so long ago that I was in the position where our students are today. Like them, I looked ahead to a future I had difficulty picturing in any concrete way. This difficulty was not from any shortcoming of my own imagination, nor from yours, students. The future, by its very nature, will always present developments and challenges that are not only unforeseen, but also unforeseeable. If we prepare you only for what we can see ahead of us today, we will leave you ill-equipped to address complex new realities and unscripted problems that will inevitably develop.

We must position you, our students, to continue to build on new knowledge and address new realities throughout your lives. I have often likened my own professional development to the simple act of climbing a spiral staircase. As we climb such a staircase, we continually circle around the same points on a horizontal plane, but rise to higher and higher levels as we accumulate experience and elevate both our capabilities and our aspirations. This is an iterative process. As we meet new situations, we recognize in them similarities to what we’ve encountered before, but we now have more resources and wisdom to manage them with greater success. I refer to this process as spiraling up.

A liberal education provides a remarkable set of intellectual tools for addressing whatever situations may arise as we spiral up. Furthermore, it engenders civic capacity, social responsibility, empathy, and understanding. And, of course, a liberal education provides students with tools to build a meaningful life in which knowledge and creativity are worthy and beautiful pursuits in their own right. What I gained from my education is what students have long gained from an education grounded in the liberal arts: not just skills for a particular line of work — though it does that — but the enduring capacity to be an agile, adaptable learner who reflexively seeks multiple perspectives and is deeply committed to serving others.

At Richmond, we have all of the ingredients for the kind of thriving intellectual community necessary for providing the very best such education. Our students and faculty already earn impressive national awards like Trumans, Goldwaters, and Guggenheims in numbers that belie our small size. Our graduates go on to attend the nation’s finest professional and graduate programs; others begin their professional careers with leading companies and organizations, many of them beginning their senior year having already secured a position as a result of an internship or other experience outside of the classroom.

We are in a position to be an exemplar of the very best higher education has to offer. An important part of the work during my tenure as president will be to serve as a tireless ambassador through engaging with our colleagues across the spectrum of higher education to share more broadly our successes and the lessons we are learning. We take up this responsibility not for the sake of recognition but because we have an obligation to provide leadership where we are called to do so.

Our work together will, of course, extend much further. It is absolutely critical that we ensure that all of our students are thriving and that they are part of, and see themselves as part of, our intellectual community. As we did with The Richmond Promise, we must not only profess these values but take concrete steps to live them. It is only through the full engagement of every member of this community that we truly realize our common potential. It is not enough for our students to study diligently and earn high marks on projects and examinations. Their accomplishments take on much greater significance when they have learned to engage in the sharing of knowledge and creative expression everywhere — from their classrooms to their residence halls, their student organizations, the broader community, and the places they go after they have earned their degrees. They must have the capacity for meaningful engagement not only with people already like themselves but also with others in whom they come to see themselves, particularly through differences. They must be able to respond to difficulties and setbacks with resilience, confidence, optimism, and renewed effort. More effective engagement with one another is the secret to unlocking and truly capitalizing on the potential of our students and of all of us.

I invite you to join us at 2:30 this afternoon in Camp Concert Hall for our symposium, “America’s Unmet Promise: The Imperative for Equity in Higher Education.” You all know that, in our country, we see profound disparities in educational opportunity and attainment — from preschool to K-12 to college. I am very proud of the work many in our university community are doing to address these issues, and I am deeply committed to continuing to build on our institution’s strong commitments to access and affordability in higher education.

At the symposium, we will discuss in greater depth many of the issues I am raising here this morning. The symposium takes its title from a treatise published in January by the Association of American Colleges & Universities. Its authors make the case for the urgent need to expand access to, and success in, high-quality educational programs for students traditionally underserved in higher education. Through our speakers and, I hope, with our questions and discussion, we will ask questions that are critical to our understanding of diversity, equity, and mission in higher education generally and at our respective institutions.

Let me share with you a closing impression that explains why I am here today and why the University of Richmond is an appropriate place to be having these conversations. My dream is that we could take any Richmond graduate, place them anywhere in world, and this alumnus would possess the skills and broad

understanding necessary to quickly adapt. Indeed, I imagine such a graduate so comfortable with navigating differences, new environments, and people that they would not only adapt, but quickly become a contributor to the community in which they found themselves.

If we are building an intellectual community in which all of our students are thriving, they will be prepared throughout their lives to generate new knowledge and solve new problems, to engage in creative expression, to serve others purposefully, and to help those around them do the same. In short, to live meaningful, fulfilled lives not only for themselves, but also for others. This is the enduring outcome of a liberal education, which remains the best hope for bringing a diversity of perspectives and knowledge to addressing our most vexing problems. Our time here steers the course of not only our lives individually, but of our collective future together in this complicated, ever-changing world.

As we look around ourselves in this room now — at all of this ceremonial regalia, at this silver university mace and these ornate robes and caps we've earned at institutions of higher education around the world — we can see signs of the resiliency and enduring values of our fundamental, centuries-long work of preparing students, through a liberal education, for whatever may come.

As I expressed at the outset, you, our students, are at the center of our work together, for you will lead the next generations into the future on behalf of all of us. As we begin the next phase of our history at Richmond, you, and the students who will follow you, deserve nothing less than our finest efforts and our commitment to thinking in the ways that we ask you to think:

- across boundaries, broadly, creatively;
- with ambition, compassion, and purpose;
- and with a genuine openness to varied voices and perspectives.

As Richmond's new president, I promise this community my deepest commitment and tireless effort as we do just that and continue, through our embrace of the benefits of a liberal education, to shape our future together for generations to come. I am privileged to be part of a remarkable community gathered for this purpose.

Thank you.