

Keynote Address at Innsbrook Rotary

May 11, 2017
Richmond, VA

As prepared for delivery.

Good morning and thank you, Lit, for your generous introduction. Let me begin by saying what an honor it is for me to serve as the 10th President of the University of Richmond. My wife, Dr. Betty Neal Crutcher, and I have been so warmly welcomed into both the University and larger Richmond communities, and we are very much enjoying our lives here.

Although my service to this community spans a little less than two years, the University I am privileged to lead has contributed to the strength and vitality of the Richmond region for nearly two centuries.

A Promise to Richmond

One of the key ways that we express this commitment is by the quality and the accessibility of the education we provide. In an era when the value of higher education is sometimes questioned—we'll talk about this later—the University of Richmond is focused on its mission to “prepare students for lives of purpose, thoughtful inquiry and responsible leadership in a diverse world.”

This education begins in the classroom, as dedicated faculty immerse students in the disciplines that they will need to help solve the world's problems. When you think of the challenges facing us today—such as the ones to which Rotary is so dedicated: fighting disease, providing clean water, or promoting peace—there is not one of these challenges that can be addressed without help from the disciplines that the University teaches.

Our faculty recognize that these critical problems will be solved by people working together from multiple perspectives and across disciplines. They are dedicated to ensuring that our students develop fluency across disciplinary boundaries through courses that interrogate a problem from different perspectives.

The University also recognizes the value of engaging students in learning outside the classroom. Last year nearly 100 faculty members from all five schools offered 137 courses in which some component of the students' work took place in the community. This “community-based learning” as we call it, takes many forms—from students in statistics classes who learn how to analyze data and put these skills into practice for local nonprofits; to students who practice their Spanish-language skills while serving as translators in community clinics and schools; to students in the arts & sciences who conducted research and made recommendations on how to conserve Virginia's wetlands to the Governor's Climate and Resiliency Commission.

Our MBA Program, ranked 21st nationally by *Bloomberg Businessweek*, also partners closely with Virginia businesses and nonprofits, especially through the Capstone Projects. A recent MBA graduate analyzed Millennial giving habits to help ChildFund International develop a plan

to engage younger donors; another proposed strategies to overcome seasonal labor shortages for James River Ground Management. In addition, our Executive Education programs offer a wide range of classes, programs, and consulting and coaching services tailored to the needs of local organizations and businesses.

Bonner Center for Civic Engagement

You've likely heard about the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement, which supports much of our undergraduate work and is home to our Bonner Scholars program. The University boasts the largest Bonner Scholars program in the nation with 100 students volunteering 8-10 hours per week with nonprofit and governmental partners.

Students engage with their partner institutions for three years to deepen their understanding of an issue and to ensure that the organization that they serve benefits from a long-term student commitment.

Our Bonner Scholars are not the only students embracing civic engagement. Last year more than 475 students volunteered regularly with 50 core partners. The success of this model is evident in the manner in which these students describe their experiences, using phrases such as "meaningful" and "life-changing."

Our partners are similarly effusive in their praise. One recently wrote of a student volunteer: "Our clients talked for weeks about the group session Whitney [our student] led. When people ask me what I want in a volunteer, I tell them to send me five more Whitneys!"

UR Downtown

UR Downtown, our satellite campus on East Broad Street, is a hub for the University's community engagement activity. Our downtown campus sprang from collaborations across the university, including the Bonner Center and UR School of Law, and with community partners. UR Downtown addresses pressing community needs through a combination of pro bono legal services and community-based learning, service and research by students and faculty.

Some of the initiatives housed at UR Downtown include the Wills for Veterans program, which provides estate and retirement planning for those who served in the armed forces, and a new partnership with the Virginia Equality Bar Association to form the Trans Legal Collaborative, which provides pro bono name and gender marker change services to members of the Trans community. We also continue to provide volunteer income tax assistance each spring for those eligible to receive the Earned Income Tax Credit.

As an educational institution, we are also passionately committed to teaching and learning. Through the Joan Oates Institute for Partner in the Arts, in our School of Professional and Continuing Studies, we are working with Pre-K through grade 12 schools and educators to provide training and resources in arts education. For nearly 25 years, Partner in the Arts, endowed by founder Joan Olmstead Oates, has helped local teachers create lesson and unit plans for integrating the arts into their classrooms.

Indeed, UR Downtown and the programs it offers are an embodiment of the University's commitment to community engagement and to educating engaged citizens. Through these programs, students develop career and life skills, such as active listening and working with diverse groups, as well as more nuanced understanding of important social issues. These are skills and competencies that they will need as the next generation of confident and ethical leaders.

Accessibility of a Richmond Education

It is also central to the University's mission that this education—deeply engaged with the community—is broadly accessible. The University is one of just a few dozen schools in the nation to be need blind in admission and guarantee to meet the full financial need of admitted students, ensuring that a Richmond education is affordable to students of all economic backgrounds.

In recent years we extended our commitment to affordability for Virginia families by expanding Richmond's Promise to Virginia. This program provides grants equal to tuition, room, and board, without loans, to traditional undergraduate students from Virginia families whose total annual household income is \$60,000 or less. Virginia students from families in these income brackets attend the University free of charge, because our most important contribution to the community is our graduates, and we are dedicated to ensuring that all academically talented students can access a Richmond education.

We introduced The Richmond Guarantee, which provides each undergraduate student up to \$4,000 to support faculty-mentored research or an internship during the summer. This past summer, more than 600 students received stipends. In the Commonwealth, students used their summer fellowships to serve in the Governor's Office; assist with mentor retention at Higher Achievement in Richmond; and to develop innovative ways to deliver prescription medicine to rural Appalachia.

We have also recently expanded academic opportunities through the School of Professional and Continuing Studies, including new partnerships with local community colleges and enhancements to our degree completion programs for adults and working professionals.

In the past five years, more than 500 students have enrolled at Richmond to complete their bachelor's degree through SPCS. These students, many of whom are first in their family to attend college have had their lives and their professional opportunities transformed by the power of a Richmond education.

The University is also far more diverse today than it has ever been by almost any measure. In less than ten years, the percentage of students of color at Richmond has gone from 11% to 28% in this year's incoming undergraduate class—the eighth year in a row in which students of color represented more than 20% of the class. Ten percent of our students are international, further increasing our campus diversity.

Our retention and graduation rates are excellent and rising, and first-generation, Pell-eligible, and students of color enjoy graduation success at rates comparable to the other students in their class.

Our People

Of course, the lives we change are our greatest contribution to the community—here in Richmond, and wherever our graduates go.

Our Spider alumni body is 53,000 strong and growing, with nearly 8,000 of those alumni residing in the Richmond area. Of our most recent graduates, approximately 8% pursued careers in Richmond, even though they hailed originally from more than 60 countries and nearly all fifty states.

The University boasts more than 1,500 full-time faculty and staff who reside in the greater Richmond area and contribute to the region: economically—paying taxes, purchasing homes; intellectually by sharing the applications of their work to the region’s challenges; and in their own civic engagement – through their service on civic boards and leadership in local charities and non-profit organizations.

Corporate Citizenship

The University has also long supported local businesses, and has prioritized promotion of small, women- and minority-owned supplier diversity. The University actively tracks and promotes vendor activity, and works with the Virginia Department of Minority Business Enterprise to host an annual Supplier Diversity Fair on campus that enables businesses to gain a better understanding of how to partner with us.

We also welcome the community to campus through the arts and athletics. Our 17 NCAA Division I sports teams reflect the best ideals of fitness, sportsmanship, and fair play. Our annual men’s basketball games against crosstown rival, VCU, are not to be missed—if you can get a ticket!

Our Modlin Center for the Arts and the University Museums augment the thriving Richmond arts community, highlighted by the wonderful Richmond Symphony—of which I am a board member—and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts—of which Betty is a board member. We are grateful for these and other cultural treasures, and personally honored to serve alongside many of you.

One Richmond

Economists and historians are often quick to note that higher education institutions are great partners to their local communities as well as assets to the students they directly serve. As is the case with the University of Richmond and the Richmond region, our successes are mutually reinforcing. We welcome students to a life-changing education on our campus. They learn from the community organizations they serve, and the community partners benefit from the partnership with our students, staff and faculty. And many of our alumni make their home right here in Richmond, drawn to the community where they first found their home as students. Ensuring that higher education fulfills its potential in helping to create healthy and equitable communities is an animating principle of my work, and will be a cornerstone of our recently launched strategic plan.

There is also another, less heralded way, in which the University of Richmond—and other institutions of higher education—contribute to our communities. We are actively creating the kind of engaged citizens who will lead us forward.

Let me explain.

Our headlines and policy discussions are filled with concern about the issues that divide us and the lack of dialogue and understanding across those lines of division. Experts note the growing tendency to live, work, and seek information only with those who are likeminded. In fact recently, there have been well-publicized incidents of incivility and viewpoint suppression on college campuses from Vermont to California.

At Richmond, and within higher education, we know that students learn best when they're challenged to engage in difficult conversations, AND when they're taught to have these conversations in thoughtful ways. Universities are uniquely positioned, and have a unique responsibility, to model substantive and civil disagreement that creates new knowledge and new capacities for consensus around shared approaches to seemingly intractable problems.

Too often on our campuses, and in our political dialogue, we lack the capacity to disagree using the potent triad of energy, substance, and civility. Our conversations on politics, race, religion, and the economy are often restrained by a fear of offending or acrimonious because the object is to “win” the argument, rather than genuinely exchange ideas.

Civility must not be code for quieting others' opinions but a call for an energetic exchange of ideas within our richly diverse academic communities. At Richmond, we don't claim to have all the answers. But we believe strongly in programs that expose our students to new perspectives as a means of better understanding themselves, their fellow citizens, and the knotty and complicated challenges we face. Our problems are shared and therefore it will take all of us working together to address them effectively.

Today, our students are acquiring the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that they will use to effectively lead us in the future. If they—and indeed all of us—are to be successful, no lesson any university can teach may be more important than this one.

At Richmond, we are pleased to have great partners in the community and among our alumni for this important work. As president of the University of Richmond, and a member of this wonderful community, I promise my deepest commitment to continuing to help build the future of the University, the City of Richmond, and the region. I look forward to our work together.

Thank you.