

President's Welcome 10.28.11

Jill Miller, Senior Associate Director of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving:

“I would like to introduce to you Dr. Joanne Creighton, president of Haverford College. Dr. Creighton came to Haverford following a distinguished 14 year presidency at Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts, where she championed change while remaining mindful of Mount Holyoke's treasured values and history. Prior to her term at Mount Holyoke, she served as interim president at Wesleyan University and vice president for academic affairs and provost and professor of English. She was also Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. A distinguished scholar of American literature, Dr. Creighton has authored four books and dozens of journal articles and reviews. In fact, she was well into planning for the next phase of her career, which was teaching a course called ‘Following Faulkner’ as a five-college, 40th anniversary professor at the University of Massachusetts, when she answered our call to become our interim president. Now, of course, Dr. Creighton, her husband, Tom, and her dog, Maisie, live in one College Circle, the home of Haverford presidents for more than half a century. I am pleased to introduce to you today Dr. Joanne Creighton, president of Haverford College.”

Dr. Joanne V. Creighton, President of Haverford College:

“Well, thank you Jill, and welcome, everyone. Welcome to what we hope will be a fabulous weekend. We know you're very happy to see your son or daughter, and we are very happy to have them and you with us. They are extraordinary, these young people. I'd like to share a few details about them, at least about the class of 2015. So, we are proud that this year we had a 5% increase in applications over last year, the second highest number of applicants to the College in history. There was a record number of early decision applicants to the College, up 16%, so these students know what they want. We're highly selective. Only 25% of those who applied to the College were admitted, and the percentage of those taking our offer has increased as well. They're really smart. 94% of the students were in the top ten percent of their class. Median SAT scores around 700 for Verbal and Math, 710 for Writing. They are achievers, and one could go on and on about individuals within the class. Just a couple examples: a student who created a recycling program now being implemented throughout the Denver public school system is a member of the class. The captain of the Quiz Bowl team that finished second in the national high school tournament is here, a congressional house page, one of 50 students chosen from around the world to be a Bayer young environmental envoy to Germany, a student who conducted biological research at MIT and Harvard, and I could go on. So, these are just a few of the measures we might use to document the fact that the Admissions Office tells us that these are the strongest figures for an enrolling class in our history.

But I'd like to step back for a minute and talk not too much about the students, but about myself. Who am I, you may wonder. You've just heard I've only been here for as long as those first-year

students. 'Who is this upstart speaking about the College?' So a little explanation about that. Over the summer there was some role switching of the kind that we do in higher education sometimes. Lured by his lab, President Steve Emerson, an outstanding research scholar, stepped down as president and took up his research full time and his position as a biology professor. Meanwhile, as Jill said, I was just finishing actually a year-long sabbatical after nearly fifteen years as president of Mount Holyoke College, and I was about to return to the classroom to teach my first love, William Faulkner. But those plans were interrupted by the call to service here: a call that I found irresistible, so I didn't refuse.

So I would like to say about this that we presidents are proof of what we preach. A liberal arts education develops your flexibility and your adaptability to changing roles and serendipitous opportunities. Indeed, I've always thought that an English major can do anything. This . . . isn't the first time that I've done an interim presidency, so I should know better you might think. The first was, as Jill mentioned, at Wesleyan University, where I served as president for a year when the president got whisked away to another institution. There, however, I already was provost and vice president for academic affairs, so it wasn't as abrupt. Here, it was quite an immersion experience, but I have really enjoyed this crash course on Haverford. I'm very happy to be here. And my long experience in higher education helped me to see and to appreciate what is unique and special about Haverford College. Over my career I moved from two public universities to now three private liberal arts colleges, from large to small. Each institution that I move to, in fact, has been smaller than the next, and this is the smallest of them all. In that I was distinctly contra-trend, going against major trends in higher education. So I'd like to talk a little bit about those trends and situate Haverford within the larger context of American education in dazzlingly generalized strokes I might mention.

The liberal arts college has a proud lineage and has had significant influence in shaping American higher education. Its curriculum has classical roots, of course, in antiquity, and there were historical progenitors, but the American liberal arts college is a unique entity and has a proud identity. The colonial colleges, they are now nearly all universities, preceded the founding of the Republic itself. And Haverford in 1833 and Mt. Holyoke as well, [in] 1837, were in the vanguard, were among the first liberal arts colleges after the colonial colleges, and were very influential in the spread of education in the 19th century. So in the latter decades of the 19th century, many private liberal arts colleges were established. In the 20th century, continuing to be developed, but also at the same time, as you know, the development of public education, universities, colleges, eventually community colleges. There were a lot of forces that were contributing to the accelerated development of education in the 20th century: the GI bill was one influence, coeducation, greater educational opportunities for the middle and working classes. In the latter decades of the 20th a new phenomenon, the for-profit institutions started to take hold and really grew very rapidly. The University of Phoenix started, I think around 1976. And then increasingly developed into international institutions and international markets for American institutions. So that, by the time you come to the 21st century, education, higher education is big

business. There are 4,300 accredited institutions, 18 million students, \$400 billion in revenues, 1.5 million bachelor's degrees, and 3.4 million employees. The dominant trends that I was going against are these large, public, urban, cosmopolitan, career-preparatory or vocational or professional education, value-neutral education, by that I mean focused on the acquisition of skills and knowledge, not on character development so to speak, increasingly more diverse and non-traditional students along with traditional students, that is 18- to 22-year-olds, and then the recent and rapid development of for-profit education. Meanwhile Haverford—and many of its peers but Haverford in particular—is small, private, bucolic, communal, focused on the liberal arts, value-laden, residential, for 18- to 22-year-olds, although increasingly and deliberately diverse populations of students, and, most decidedly, not for-profit.

So, as a result, as we look at the 21st century at the liberal arts college, they are a very tiny sector now of American higher education. With over 18 million students, the liberal arts colleges have only about 350,000, and many of those liberal arts colleges are not really liberal arts colleges so much anymore, only in name. But you will see that some of these other kinds of institutions, such as for-profit, the University of Phoenix and so on, they are growing really rapidly, over a million students, or just one community college system, 831,000 students in the system, or just one state system, the Ohio system, almost 500,000 students. Within this spectrum, the liberal arts college is a small piece. So what do you make of that? What do you make of the fact that your son or daughter found their way here in this sector of higher education that is no longer in the vanguard—you might say . . . that it was in the rearguard—of higher education? But, many of us would argue that small in number does not mean small in value or significance or influence or contemporary relevance or prestige. In fact, the liberal arts college is and remains a wonderful model, an exemplary model representing education at its best. I'd just like to quote this statement from the Pew Roundtable in 1995 because I think it summarizes many of the aspects of the liberal arts college that we have come to value: 'It is a liberal arts college, residential, devoted to instruction in the broad curriculum of the arts and sciences, designed as a place of growth and experimentation for the young, that remains the mind's shorthand for an education at its best. Architecturally and philosophically, the liberal arts college embodies the ideal of learning as an act of community in which students and faculty come together to explore and extend foundations of knowledge. The intimacy of the residential setting, the emphasis placed on teaching [and] the celebration of the liberal arts as the foundation for a lifetime of learning all define the ideal form of scholarly purpose and endeavor in undergraduate institutions.' And Haverford College, I would argue, is unquestionably one of the best of the best. A unique and distinctive liberal arts college.

To document this, I'd like to share with you some survey information. No, not from the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings, so flawed, so collated in so many of their spurious metrics with wealth. But Haverford, in those rankings, does rank 10th this year, despite the fact that its financial resources are a fraction of most of the others in that group. So in this, as in so many other ways, Haverford in its academic strengths outperforms. Those rankings have dubious

merit, and I deplore their very existence. But, to be fair, they do help to bolster the recognition and prestige of the liberal arts college. A more revealing top ten list, however, can be derived from a survey of students who applied to Haverford. It's conducted by the College Board, and it tallies the number of cross-applicants among various colleges. So where else do students, prospective Haverford students apply? Swarthmore, Brown, Yale, Princeton, Williams, Harvard, Amherst, Middlebury, Wesleyan and Vassar. It's a distinguished group, and, you know this well, you have struggled as your son or daughter has evaluated these choices as well as many others, because they'll be many more institutions on their list. They would weigh, I would guess, large versus small, public versus private, and many different facets of this. We are far smaller than our peers in terms of our student body, alumni, endowment and ability to market ourselves. Yet, we more than hold our own in competitiveness.

Clearly, there must be something about Haverford that draws students to our door and keeps us a peer with some of the very well recognized institutions in the country. We know it from various sources, and especially from students themselves, some of the price list assets that Haverford has, and I'd like to look at some of them. First, a reputation for, and reality of, academic excellence. This is the most fundamental, the most important. At the core there is a deep and abiding commitment to academic rigor and excellence. Two: selectivity in attracting exceptional, diverse students animated by both intellectual curiosity and moral passion. In a very real sense, the students of this institution make the institution, along with the faculty: strong teachers, scholars, mentors, who are passionate about their research and their teaching. And with the students, together with the students, they create an intense, rigorous and intimate learning environment. And that takes place on a stunning campus with state-of-the-art academic facilities. (Not all of them are state-of-the-art, I might note, but we are working to make them so.) The campus itself is a real joy, with husband and dog. It's a stunning botanic garden. It infuses your experience of the campus life every day. It's also a great location, this college. It has the advantage of being both bucolic and urban, so that students, the trends are strongly towards urban, well, it's close enough to be urban, but at the same time it still retains that wonderful campus space, bucolic side. It has connections, and this is very meaningful, to other institutions, most especially to Bryn Mawr College and Swarthmore College and Penn. That counterbalance is contra-trend smallness, so that students can feel that they are both part of an intimate, intense learning community, at the same time they're part of the buzz of a larger world, of college students. And, there is a living honor code that infuses academic and social life. When I moved from public to private education, from a university to a liberal arts college, I was struck very profoundly by how much more explicitly and unequivocally the liberal arts college focused on developmental education, on the maturation of both the intellectual and moral sensibilities of the young. Larger institutions have so many other purposes, that this mission sometimes is more obscured. Liberal arts colleges, in contrast, are mission driven. They find continuing inspiration in the ethical traditions that spawned them. It is certainly true of Mount Holyoke College; it's perhaps even more true of Haverford College.

Indeed, arguably the greatest assets of this college are the Quaker-rooted values passed down generation to generation and now part of the fabric of Haverford life. Those values are memorably articulated by Isaac Sharpless in 1888, one of the presidents, ‘For your consciences and your judgments, we have not sought to bind; And see you to it that no other institution, no political party, no social circle, no religious organizations, no pet ambitions put such chains on you as would tempt you to sacrifice one iota of the moral freedom of your consciences and the intellectual of your freedom of your judgments.’ I think that’s a powerful statement. As a newcomer to the institution, I see clearly that these ideals are the most determinative aspects that make Haverford Haverford, that distinguish it from other institutions. I’ve seen that play out very effectively in the way upperclassmen and -women pass on these values during Customs week. I’ve seen it in the Board of Managers’ commentary, testimonials—passionate statements about the way that their Haverford education influenced and transformed their lives. These values, combined with Haverford’s other great strengths, give it the luxury to be what it quintessentially is, which is an intimate, purposeful community with a fierce commitment to intellectual and to moral freedom, that transforms young people’s lives and produces what the world needs and values: honorable leaders and problem solvers who serve their communities in whatever capacity it may be. I’ve discovered that this is often referred to as being ‘Haverfordian.’ What could be a better outcome than that?

So, if you are worried about ‘Are you doing what’s best for your offspring?’ Relax. Take comfort in the fact that they have made wise choices in coming here. At Haverford, we care deeply about the total person. The honor code is more than just words, but it is infused in the academic and social life. We’re not only preparing them for a career—indeed, for multiple careers, for jobs that haven’t even been imagined yet—but also more fundamentally for life. Our goal is first: to make them better companions for themselves. ‘The soul selects her own society, then shuts the door,’ says Emily Dickinson, and it is certainly true as Lily Tomlin has said, [that] ‘We’re all in this alone.’ But it’s also true that we’re all in this together, bound to each other by history and culture, through our shared use of the finite planet. Your sons and daughters will learn much about the continuities, as well as the changes, in human history—and about living and working together—by studying the liberal arts and sciences in this intimate and beautiful setting. To be sure, seeing them major in art or ancient history, philosophy, or sociology, or physics, takes an act of faith sometimes. You might even blurt out occasionally, ‘What are you going to do with it?’ But, the good news is that a liberal arts education, although it often works in an indirect and ineffable way, turns out to be highly useful. It develops the skills, the knowledge, the critical thinking, the quality of mind, the reflective habits, the ethical perspective, the adaptability to change that will help them to be successful in their careers and help them to have a more enriched life. It fosters what John Cardinal Newman has called ‘a philosophical habit of mind. A skepticism, a confidence, a self-reliance, which are useful in all kinds of practical and pragmatic ways.’ So, the best way to prepare our young people for the inevitable and far-reaching changes they will experience in their lives is to encourage them to take up and extend

the incredibly rich legacy of human knowledge and experience encapsulated in the liberal arts and sciences. And no place does liberal arts education better than Haverford College.

So, during this transitional year, while the search for a new president is going on, I'm committed to finding strength—finding collective strength—in this liberal arts mission and in the potent values of intellectual and moral freedom that emanate from the College's very core of being. I'm also committed to moving forward, without interruption, on important institutional goals, already defined, which my colleagues and I will tell you much more about in a much more specific way tomorrow when we have a conversation about the College. So this is my job, which I undertake gladly, because this is truly a great institution, one that's so humble by nature, that I, an admitted outsider, am probably the only person amongst us who can use that adjective without sounding boastful. Like your sons and daughters, I feel incredibly fortunate to have this opportunity to become a bona fide Haverfordian myself. And because I suspect you wish you could go to Haverford yourself right now, I'm going to turn you loose very soon to go to the academic open houses so you can see and experience for yourself the vicarious pleasure and see the way that Haverford is embodied in the actual programs of the College. And in that, let me make particular mention of a special event at the multicultural center, which is just down the hall. They are dedicating an artifact today, a 16th-century Buddhist scroll: A beautiful example of the Ming period—a painting of a Buddha flanked by two attendants—an artifact that will now enrich the study of religion and culture at the College. But, before we go, I am pleased to open it up to any questions or comments that you may have.”