

Chairman Ross, Members of the Board of Trustees:

Thank you. Thank you for the trust and confidence that you have invested in me by inviting me to serve as the 11th president of National-Louis University. I am truly honored and proud to be formally and publicly installed as the 11th president of this venerable institution.

On this day I commit to you, without reservation, that I will work tirelessly to champion the cause of NLU, to steward its mission, and to strengthen and secure its future.

I stand here as the grateful and humble beneficiary of the numerous legacies and achievements forged by my predecessors. President Litman, I want to recognize and thank you for the trust that you engendered within the university community, and the bridges that you built during your tenure as president.

To the many faculty, staff, family, and friends who are here, we are graced by your presence. I am especially honored to be joined by members of my family – both formal and extended – who have served as guideposts, mentors, and unwavering supporters throughout my life. And I want to thank my father who has served (and continues to serve) as my personal and emotional compass and who I know is looking down today as honored and proud as I am. I also want to recognize and thank Rick, my fiancé and best friend, who has stood with me for the last ten years through so many of my brightest and darkest moments, never wavering with his love and commitment.

During the preparation of this address, I reviewed the presentations of many of the former presidents of this country. I learned that in 1841, William Henry Harrison delivered the longest inaugural address on record – a one hour and forty-five minute oration. He did this without wearing a hat or coat, in a howling snowstorm. He came down with pneumonia and died one month later. His was the shortest tenure in the White House. Some believe his death was a result of not having the good sense to wear appropriate attire. I don't believe that is the case; though I did go out of my way to insure that I had appropriate attire for this ceremony. Rather, I believe this misfortune occurred because he did not have the good sense to pay attention to the length of his speech. This resulted in terrible karma. Accordingly, I have no plans to break any records in speech length this afternoon. So let me begin, so that I may finish in a timely fashion.

Introduction

Since my arrival in March, I have been contemplating and outlining the agenda for my first full year in office. As the agenda has become clearer, I have become convinced that this year presents us with all the ingredients necessary to make it a historic, watershed moment in the life of NLU – a real “game changer.”

Just consider some of the factors that will converge next year. In addition to my appointment, a number of new leadership team members will have been welcomed, bringing fresh ideas and

best practices from their varied spheres of experience. It will also be the 125th anniversary of NLU. We will commemorate and celebrate this momentous achievement through a year-long series of events and activities focused on prompting all of us to celebrate our past, renew our individual and collective commitment to the university's mission, and come together around a common vision for the future. And finally, next year we will also draft a new institutional strategic plan that will guide NLU for the next decade and beyond. For these reasons alone, we should view next year as a very special one, having the potential to serve as a launching pad that literally propels NLU toward a leadership role in the 21st century.

Of course, future achievement and success in any human endeavor is never automatic or guaranteed – such outcomes must be planned for and earned. And so it follows that no university ever attains greatness accidentally, or simply because it has the potential. It must first envision the content and character of that greatness, be able to imagine and describe what it should look like, and then plan and implement strategies targeted to actualize that vision. Next year's potential will remain only that unless we seize the moment.

I want to use our time together today to share some thoughts that will serve to begin an institutional conversation and dialogue that will culminate with the formulation of a new vision for NLU.

This vision needs to be shaped and shared by the entire NLU community, of course, so that ultimately it can be embraced and advanced by Trustees, faculty, staff, students, and alumni alike. In order to assure that this discussion has parameters and focus, I am offering, today, my reflections about NLU 2020 as a way to begin the conversation. By taking this first step, I am reminded of the wisdom of Mark Twain who once said, "Let us make a special effort to stop communicating with each other, so we can have some conversation."

I have chosen to organize my remarks around two areas: our past and our future. I would like to begin by reflecting on our past.

T.S. Eliot, in his poem "East Coker," opens with this seemingly paradoxical statement: "In my beginning is my end." I believe Eliot's words have import for us today. Any vision of our future begins by looking in the "rear-view" mirror, back at our institutional roots – exploring the life and times of our founders, and all decades since to the present. In doing so, we will know our institutional soul, NLU's DNA, if you will – those core values that give NLU its distinctive character.

Over these past few months, I have spent time learning about NLU and exploring its history. And, I have visited and had wonderful conversations with many stakeholders throughout our university community. It has all been time well spent, because this research, reflection, and conversation has produced for me a clearer understanding of the set of values that sparked the birth of NLU and sustained it for the past 125 years. And, I have truly been inspired by this institution – its past and its present. Moreover, I believe that our past has such power and

contemporary relevance, that it can continue to shed light on the way forward to a new vision for NLU 2020.

Permit me to share a set of six core values which I think constitute NLU's DNA ("its soul"), those characteristics that have defined us from our inception.

- 1. A Pioneer Spirit.** Our founder, Elizabeth Harrison, was, by anyone's measure, a trail blazer. For example, flying in the face of conventional wisdom and practices in her day, which among other things denied women the right to vote and often viewed them as second class citizens, she promoted the radical notion that formal education, even beyond high school, was important and appropriate for women. In addition, she raised the bar for pre-school education, nationally and internationally. Her work and advocacy were pivotal influences in bringing about the introduction of kindergarten instruction into the public schools and the elevation of teacher preparation in that field to a respected professional status. Her school became the progenitor of the Parent-Teacher Association in America. The number of trails blazed by Elizabeth in her work and life are too many to mention here, but collectively they provide abundant evidence of her remarkable pioneering spirit. Her actions in the 1800's reflect NLU's enduring commitment to the juxtaposition of innovation, excellence, and access. Her ability to challenge social norms was the seed of NLU's focus on service, community, and social justice. And, thankfully, that spirit has continued to inspire our institution through all the decades since. It continues to be an essential element of the DNA of today's National-Louis University, animating it with the courage to envision bold new ventures and be innovative when the situation demands.
- 2. Passion/Commitment.** None can doubt that our founders were passionate about their work. They were equally committed to bringing their best efforts to that work (quality, first and foremost). They wanted to make a difference in the world and would be satisfied with nothing less. This passion continues today. It manifests itself in our commitment to providing "transformative" experiences for those who pass through our doors.
- 3. Community Engagement and Service.** The work of our founders was the embodiment of a commitment to both community engagement and service. And these continue to be embedded in our DNA. It is not an accident that in my first weeks at NLU, on several occasions, members of our community echoed in one form or another that we at NLU "serve those who serve others." We continue to engender in our graduates a "fire in the belly," a desire to make a real difference in the world.
- 4. Perseverance.** The chronicle of major events and organizational paradigm shifts that have swirled around NLU during its one hundred and twenty- five year history is nothing short of amazing. This institution has survived and thrived through two

world wars, the Great Depression, Prohibition, several urban riots, the reign of Al Capone and other gangsters in Chicago, and numerous location and name changes. Our drive to conquer all threats to survival can likewise be traced back to our roots. Our persevering attitude began with our founder.

There is in the NLU Library a volume which bears the captivating title: DAUNTLESS WOMEN IN CHILDHOOD EDUCATION. It is not surprising that a large section of this book is devoted to the life and work of Elizabeth Harrison. Truly, she was “a dauntless woman,” overcoming many momentous challenges in her personal life and life’s work.

When I was being considered for (and was considering) the presidency of NLU, the Board and I had several candid discussions about the many challenges facing the university today and going forward – issues related to struggling enrollments, tight finances, and increased competition, among others. The good news was, I received honest answers to all my questions. The complete portrait was painted, warts and all.

The bad news was, of course, I received honest answers to all my questions – warts and all. But I must tell you that the more I learned of the resilience demonstrated by this venerable institution (from its early years to the present), and the more I experienced the “can-do” spirit of so many current Board members, faculty, staff and alumni, any initial concerns or reservations I might have had about prospects for success here soon dissipated. I stand here today because, like all of you, and like our founder, I am dauntless. Perseverance and tenacity continues in the DNA of our institution.

5. **Educational Excellence.** Elisabeth Harrison believed in the value of education, describing it as “preparation for life.” She also believed education without values could not facilitate the transformative experience for which our university is most noted.

In a speech to the National Congress of Mothers in 1910, Ms. Harrison stated, “character is absolutely indispensable in any great educational undertaking.” Imparting values through education, preparing students to be ethical people, good parents, and responsible citizens is an indispensable part of NLU’s character and mission.

In many ways, our founders in the 1800’s foreshadowed the knowledge economy. But they also had the wisdom to know that knowledge without a foundation of values would emotionally and economically bankrupt individuals and their communities. And finally...

- 6. Diversity/Inclusion.** The foundation of our university was built on an egalitarian platform, cutting across and bridging class, race, and all forms of diversity. Our founders questioned social norms and had the courage to forge new frontiers where education was a sword that fought for equity. They had the wisdom to recognize that education was the greatest equalizer for those who were unempowered. This foundation manifests itself clearly in our institutional life today. It is reflected in our commitment to social justice, and it is central to our mission which focuses on enhancing access.

I believe all of these characteristics define the soul of NLU. I have seen these values manifested throughout our community. This is our core that has and will continue to sustain us. But it is not our end. In fact, even Eliot goes on to observe that when we have completed the process of exploring our beginnings, “where we started,” we will have come to “know the place for the first time.” National-Louis’ history is not only the window to our soul, but it is the door through which we must walk to know our future.

So accordingly, while our soul, our values, should be enduring, the culture of an institution (some of its attitudes, goals and practices,) can and often must be modified in the face of new realities. The world around us does this and is changing, often with lightening speed. And, we must adapt our vision accordingly. Edna Dean Baker, NLU’s second president, said at her retirement in 1949, “Always remember that we cannot stand still in a world of change.” Therefore, it must be our bond and commitment to each other and to the world beyond that we will change and progress. And, as we rise to the challenge of making needed cultural changes, we together inevitably forge a new future for NLU.

Let me now turn to our future. The president’s role at NLU is not to provide pat solutions to our most demanding challenges. It is to convene the conversation that will allow us to shape our destiny – fostering a climate of transparency, rigorous debate, and mutual respect. And once conclusions are reached, the president must ensure that we act purposefully, deliberately, and responsibly to move forward.

I am grateful for all your support over the last six months as we have begun to make some very significant and necessary cultural changes at our institution. And I look forward to continued conversations about additional changes we will need to make in the future. In fact, Mark Twain adeptly described my attitude about such discussion when he said, “Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.” You may have already concluded from my address today that I am a fan of the wit and wisdom of Mark Twain. No doubt, if he were alive today, I would be a devoted follower of his daily tweets.

While I do not have a detailed blueprint, I offer the following cultural changes which I think should be prominent in our discussions as we together develop our NLU 2020 Vision. I have organized my thoughts into seven general categories:

1. **Our Employees.** As a university we must foster an environment that attracts the most talented faculty and staff, and we must ensure that we allow them to achieve their promise. Our faculty should not only contribute to contemporary debates, they should define them. They should not only demonstrate their expertise in fostering change, they should demonstrate the effectiveness of their interventions through evidence-based evaluation. Our staff must feel this is a workplace that is supportive, welcoming, and recognizes the importance of their contributions and their achievements. As with our faculty, our staff should strive for excellence. Our culture must be committed to attracting and developing talent with clear pathways for promotion and recognition of great contributions and performance.
2. **Our Students.** NLU will continue to serve students across their lifespan as they pursue their educational aspirations. We must continue to provide access to those who have been underserved with recognition that we now live in a global community, in an economy driven by adult learners.

Our institution must be student-centered in 2020. Our students must experience unparalleled support and opportunities for successful achievement. Their successes will reflect our success and effectiveness as an institution.

NLU 2020 must be all about “customer service.” All leading business management theory today supports a renewed emphasis on underscoring the important roles customer focus and customer satisfaction play in organizational success. In terms of our “customers,” we need to be acutely aware that students have more choices today than ever when they seek to enroll in a college or university, and that the competition for students is increasing, not receding. But having said all that, I would also contend that good “customer service” in higher education, especially at NLU, is important not only because it makes good business sense, but because it is the right thing to do. This kind of behavior is entirely consistent with the values we espouse and seek to inculcate in our students. Our students and their education should always be the end game for us, not the means to satisfy our own ends.

I want to make it clear, however, that I view the concept of a student-centered environment as more far-reaching and encompassing than the term “customer service” might imply.

Certainly, a student-centered environment extends to the classroom. Here it translates into a sensitivity to – and respect for – the special needs of adult learners, a tolerance for the diversity in their individual talents, levels of prior experience, and learning styles. It means increased support in career service, advising and placement, and other supports for success. It extends to the design of our facilities, and to the involvement with our students after graduation. We must continue to engage our alumni in meaningful ways, providing support and continuing education opportunities throughout their careers.

- 3. Academic Excellence and Holistic Education.** NLU 2020 will continue its focus on academic excellence. Our ability to measure learning will be the yardstick by which we provide evidence of our success. We will foster an evidence-based culture that allows us to demonstrate to all our stakeholders that there is a deep and meaningful return on our students' educational investment.

NLU will continue to prepare students *for life* as Elizabeth Harrison advocated; but it will be life in the 21st Century and all that this implies. Our graduates will be professionals who can live and lead according to a value system that allows them to build and sustain organizations and the people that comprise them.

Our programs and pedagogies must be designed, or in some instances, redesigned, with a view toward preparing our students to live and work in a world largely shaped and defined by rapidly changing realities such as the exponential increases in urbanization and globalization, or the explosion in information exchange and technological advances.

Higher education must take the lead in launching a "learning/teaching revolution" that matches and meets the revolutions underway in communications and information and interactive technology. Institutions should no longer debate the viability of technology-based education and technology assisted education. Rather, the debate and challenges should revolve around finding more innovative ways to optimize them. Continuing education must no longer be viewed as an adjunct to our mission but an integral part of it. The shelf life of the information we share with our students, regardless of discipline, is getting shorter and shorter.

Remaining true to its historic role as an educational innovator, I see NLU on the frontlines of this needed "learning/teaching revolution."

- 4. One Unified University.** NLU must be a more comprehensive university (adding other colleges to the existing three, expanding its curriculum to reflect new market demands, and operating as a global, multi-site institution). It will become a more widely recognized, highly respected institution among the nation's universities with a well established identity that is clear and compelling. Chicago will be our home but the globe will be our stage.

A common mission, vision and strategic plan will be a hallmark of the institution's culture in 2020. The decentralized foundation of colleges that were entrepreneurial in their own right in the 20th century must yield to a university who's sum is greater than all its parts. I envision, for example, that cross-unit initiatives, transdisciplinary programs and cross-disciplinary research projects will be the operational norm rather than the exception.

This change will be critically important, because any organizations' ultimate success is directly related to the capacity of its people and units to transcend their individual goals and achievements in order to create wider interpersonal synergy and pursue collective objectives and accomplishments. A we/they mentality (and lack of team work) always proves detrimental to an organization's efforts to excel and realize its greatest potential. Together, we must celebrate individual achievements while we share a collective identity as one coherent university.

- 5. Sophisticated Management Tools.** NLU 2020 will be characterized by sophisticated management tools and methodologies. This means, among other things, that we will be operating with a clear vision and well-designed strategies. Our organizational priorities and resource allocations will actually be determined by these and all our operational activities will be designed to support them. We will be data-informed in our management decision making. We will measure the right things, provide actionable data that will be relevant to our work and timely. Our progress must be built on a foundation of sustained self-assessment. We must assess if what we are doing works and, if it's not, determine what we need to do differently. If we do not, we are subject to the tyranny of complacency which we all know is the enemy of excellence. Literally, this approach will provide us with a "dashboard" of indicators that will help us chart and navigate the institutional ship through the challenging waters of this new century.
- 6. Diversity and Inclusion.** NLU 2020 will continue to be a richly diverse community. We will honor and build upon our egalitarian roots to broaden and enrich our institution and the communities we serve. Our university will be a global microcosm that demonstrates the value and strength of an inclusionary environment. I would envision NLU designing transcultural educational experiences that integrate rich multi-cultural and diverse populations and communities through many modalities. And finally....
- 7. Our Community Focus.** NLU 2020 will continue to deepen and broaden its community relationships. Through partnerships with local and global partners NLU will continue to focus on impacting communities through the power of education. Moreover, NLU must become a leader that addresses issues and challenges of modern global communities through an interdisciplinary, comprehensive research focus.

These are the elements I believe will position us for an extraordinary future. I look forward with anticipation and excitement to the conversations we will have about NLU 2020.

I have just a few thoughts I want to share with you in closing.

Toward the end of her career, Elizabeth Harrison took a forward look and shared her dream for the future of the institution she founded and loved. Briefly paraphrased she said, "my deepest prayer and most earnest hope is that long after I have passed into the beyond...it will still live and send forth each year a band of noble, earnest and intelligent [graduates]."

I believe firmly that the fate of her fervent hope and dream for the institution rests with us, the current NLU community. This is our turn, because the “torch has been passed” to us. NLU’s legacy is ours to preserve and advance. It is we who must design and forge NLU 2020.

If we are to be faithful stewards of the university we have inherited, we must be more than observers on the sidelines. We must make choices – many of them difficult. We must take actions – many of them challenging. Individually and collectively we must be engaged in this effort. But, the prize at stake, if we exercise the courage to seize the moment, is that we together can add the next chapter in the long and distinguished legacy of NLU, participate in a cause that is greater than ourselves, and pass to those who follow us an even finer institution than we signed on to serve.

It is our choice to make. And when we are called upon to make important choices in life, such as the one before us now, there is probably no literary reference more instructive or thought provoking than these poignant lines from Robert Frost:

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

Then took the other

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

I made my decision to choose this road when I accepted the presidency, and today I invite you to join me on a journey to a new place that allows this venerable university to realize its full potential and influence, and each of us to look back, years from now, and say, our decisions “made all the difference.”

Thank You.