

The College of Wooster
Inauguration Address
“Independent Minds, Working Together”
Grant H. Cornwell
April 26, 2008

Let me begin by expressing respect and gratitude for all who have come before me. The College of Wooster has had ten presidents before me, and I would like to recall their names as a way of honoring their service:

Willis Lord, D.D. - 1870-1873

Archibald Alexander Edward Taylor, D.D., LL.D. - 1873-1883

Sylvester Fithian Scovel, D.D., LL.D. - 1883-1899

Louis Edward Holden, D.D., LL.D. - 1899-1915

John Campbell White, LL.D. - 1915-1919

Charles Frederick Wishart, D.D., LL.D., Litt.D., L.H.D. - 1919-1944

Howard Foster Lowry, Ph.D., Litt.D., LL.D. D.C.L., L.H.D. - 1944-1967

J. Garber Drushal, Ph.D., LL.D., L.H.D. - 1967-1977

Henry Jefferson Copeland, Ph.D. - 1977-1995

Raleigh Stanton Hales, Jr., Ph.D. - 1995-2007

I know that I am on a path that has been paved with love, devotion, and lifetimes of hard work by others. I am a new steward of this great college. My duty is as much to those who have come before me as it is to the current students and faculty and the generations who will follow them.

I want to express my gratitude to the Board of Trustees who steward The College of Wooster with the generosity of their time, expertise, and resources, and especially to Jim Wilson, the Chair of the Board, and to the Honorable

Solomon Oliver, the Chair of the Presidential Search Committee, for their sage counsel throughout this transition.

Thank you to the Alumni Board, to all of the alumni who have sent me greetings, good wishes, and advice, and to the citizens of the community of Wooster. My family and I cannot imagine a warmer or more generous welcome.

Thank you, especially, to the faculty. Every day I encounter a new reason to be inspired by your commitment to the mission of The College of Wooster. It is because of your unbounded devotion to your profession, to your students, and to the college that we have a deep historical reservoir of alumni accomplishments that we can boast about. Thank you, too, for your openness to change; Wooster can only remain the vibrant learning community that it is if we are constantly reshaping ourselves in response to changes in knowledge and changes in the world we are preparing our students to lead.

I also wish to acknowledge the wonderful work of the senior Cabinet and all of the College's staff. I have had the benefit of joining a team of colleagues who are outstanding in their leadership, vision, and professional expertise.

Finally, let me express my love and gratitude for my wife, Peg, my boys, Kelsey and Tosh, to my extended family, many of whom are here today, and most of all to my parents, Ellen Margaret and Grant H. Cornwell, Sr., who have passed. They are my foundation.

In my address this morning I am going to share my insights into the heart and soul of the college. I will draw upon our history in order to imagine our future. To begin, let me unpack some of the resonances of the song we heard at the beginning, "Amazing Grace". What fascinates me is that the threads of this one song, taken from both Scottish and African-American heritage, are woven into the fabric of Wooster's identity.

We can learn much about how cultures move across space and time, buffeted by the dynamics of globalization and intercultural encounters, by tracing the history of "Amazing Grace". How is it, after all, that one song can become part of the canonical repertoire of two cultural traditions – Scottish bagpipes and Gospel choir - both of which have deep roots in Wooster's heritage? "Amazing

Grace” was written in the 1760s by John Newton, the captain of a slave ship, who for many years profited from the triangular trade that delivered thousands upon thousands of souls stolen from Africa and pressed into slavery for the profit of Europe and America. Lore has it that on a voyage back to England, Newton’s slave ship, The Greyhound, encountered a fierce storm and almost sank. After surviving this storm he went through a dramatic religious conversion, saw his moral failings, and renounced his trade. He became active in the abolition movement in England and wrote “Amazing Grace” as an ode to his repentance.

The song’s adoption as a bagpipe standard is more recent, actually, but it is interesting to reflect on the historical resonances of this song in Wooster’s own Scots Presbyterian heritage. The College of Wooster was founded in 1866, at the end of the Civil War, by members of the Presbyterian Church who wanted to do “their proper part in the great work of educating those who are to mold society and give shape to all its institutions.” Willis Lord, the first President of Wooster, said in his Inaugural Address:

The College of Wooster should not only be a place of all studies; it should be a place of studies for all. Let the tree of knowledge be as accessible as God has made the tree of life. The essential test of citizenship in the commonwealth of science and letters should be character, mental and moral quality, and attainment, not condition, race, color, or sex. [1]

These were bold and visionary words in 1870. In post-Civil War America, they were a declaration of a new era. From its inception, then, Wooster has had an explicit commitment to inclusivity, to an understanding that diversity is constitutive of excellence for an institution of higher learning.

If we speed over a century of history we see Wooster become the preferred institution for Presbyterian missionaries, spread across the globe, to provide their children’s education. These connections opened wide pathways for international students to find their way to Wooster; these pathways have remained open so that today on campus we have over 100 international students representing 30 countries. But from its post-Civil War beginnings until today, the College has also been mindful of its commitment to African-Americans and other

students of color traditionally underrepresented in higher education; today 10% of the students at The College of Wooster come from these populations. It is because of this history that we have a Black Alumni Council and an International Student Alumni Network, each with distinguished and committed graduates spanning many generations.

It is important to notice, then, that The College of Wooster was formed by movements and overlapping histories in a dynamic we now call globalization. This is a cosmopolitan institution in its bones, a place formed and framed with a social conscience. This is important to remember as we imagine our future; precisely because the pace of globalization has accelerated, The College of Wooster has to remain focused on the world we are preparing our graduates to lead.

Last night, many of you heard the wonderful lecture by Martha Nussbaum on the goals of liberal education and her concerns with its current state and direction. She made the case that, in order for our students to graduate with the moral, intellectual, and leadership capacities they will need to conduct themselves as responsible and effective global citizens, we must concentrate on cultivating certain abilities in our students. In Professor Nussbaum's words: "democracy needs citizens who can think for themselves, rather than deferring to authority, who can reason together about their choices rather than simply trading claims and counter-claims." A modern democratic citizen needs "the ability to see oneself as a member of a heterogeneous nation, and world, understanding something of the history and character of the diverse groups that inhabit it" and "the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have." [2]

Notice that each of these abilities resonates with the words of Willis Lord, and fills out the answer to why communities of liberal learning must be inclusive and diverse if they are to fulfill their missions.

As a critical elaboration of Professor Nussbaum's talk last night, I would say this. As a liberal arts college, I believe we have the obligation to graduate

students who have the intellectual and moral wherewithal to do well in the world and to do good. I believe we owe this to our students and to the world they will inherit. A Wooster education is a profound investment in the development of each student who passes through here. Families and students themselves stretch a great deal to make this education possible. Almost all of our students receive some sort of financial aid. But even those who shoulder the full burden themselves are benefiting from a subsidy provided by generous alumni and donors who have come before.

These material realities have ethical implications. First, it is right and fair that students and their families expect a Wooster education to empower them to do well in the world. An education of this quality provides access to leadership and, for many, prosperity. Access to leadership and prosperity is also, therefore, access to influence, and with the ability to influence comes the obligation to apply influence in the service of justice, fairness, respect, and decency.

Education is a social good that is deserved by all people simply by virtue of their humanity, but in reality only a small percentage of our population has access to an education of the quality offered here. If we consider only the U.S., less than 2% of those enrolled in higher education are pursuing their studies in selective liberal arts colleges. And, of course, the majority of our students' college-age peers do not attend colleges of any kind. If we think globally, the rarity of the privilege becomes all the starker; only a fraction of a fraction of our students' global peers will have the social access and life prospects that a fine liberal education promises. This privilege entails responsibility.

As Professor Nussbaum put it so well last night, and I quote:

An education for human development as responsible global citizenship has a twofold purpose. It must, first, promote the human development of its students. And it must, second, promote the students' understanding of the goals of human development for all, as goals inherent in the very idea of a decent minimally just society – in such a way that when they are empowered to make political choices, they will foster these capabilities for all, not only for themselves. [3]

It is this understanding of liberal education that is written so deeply into the text of Wooster's history and character. As Loren Pope says of Wooster, we are a college that changes lives, but not only the lives of our graduates. As I will develop further, Wooster alumni are engaged with the world in ways that have a positive impact on human development locally, nationally, and globally.

The College of Wooster ranks near the top of the nation's best liberal arts colleges in producing graduates who go on to earn their Ph.D.'s; we rank 20th out of 206 colleges in producing Ph.D.'s in physics and chemistry, 24th in the humanities, and 28th in the geosciences and in religious studies. I don't boast about this because these outcomes are our mission. They aren't exactly. But these data are evidence that transformative learning takes place here, that we are a college that changes lives. Why is this? What is it about the culture of teaching and learning at The College of Wooster that opens students to possibilities they never imagined and gives them uncommon access to higher learning?

To answer these questions I turn to the voices of our alumni themselves. What I will do in the remainder of my time with you this morning is focus on Wooster's unique approach towards mentoring students in the research process, the independent search for understanding, insight, and new knowledge, and link this cornerstone of our educational program to our overall mission.

I begin with the story of the Honorable Solomon Oliver, a long-standing trustee of the College. Sol had a great deal to do with me standing here now, since he was the chair of the Presidential Search Committee, and his hopes and aspirations for Wooster captured my imagination.

Solomon Oliver Jr. grew up in the segregated south, in Bessemer, Alabama, a small town outside Birmingham. Although blacks were not allowed to work as bus drivers, hold skilled jobs in the steel mills, or serve in local or state government, Sol's parents instilled in him and his nine brothers and sisters, in his words, "a sense of hope and a belief that one day things would be different."

In 1966, Sol transferred from Miles College in Birmingham to Wooster, where he double majored in philosophy and political science. After graduating

from Wooster, Sol earned a master's in political science from Case Western Reserve and a law degree from N.Y.U. He returned to Wooster and taught in the political science department for three years, before joining the U.S. attorney's office in Cleveland. In May 1994, Sol was appointed by President Clinton to the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio, where he has served with distinction ever since.

In an interview several years ago, Sol told the Wooster Voice, "There was a great sense when we left the College we would be going into the world to make a difference — to improve our society by making it more just and equal." When reflecting on how he found his way to his Independent Study project, Sol says the following:

I was a student at the College of Wooster during the widespread urban unrest by young African-Americans during the late 1960's fueled in part by high unemployment, poor living conditions, racial discrimination and police brutality. Partly because of these events, I became interested in learning about some of the legal issues associated with the plight of African-Americans. I became interested in the question of when might a person be morally entitled to disobey a law or legal authority.

The title of his Independent Study is: "The Problem of Civil Disobedience and the Philosophy of Law," which he wrote under the guidance of Ron Hustwit, Professor of Philosophy. Sol says of his experience:

Independent Study provided me with the critical skills of organization, reasoning, analysis and independent thinking, which I have found useful ever since. As a judge, my ability to research and properly decide cases in a wide range of legal areas and contexts is bolstered by the skills I learned in the first instance while doing I.S. My interest in the issue of civil disobedience and the philosophy of law is part of my general interest in law as a means of assuring fairness and equality. I went into the field of law because as a child growing up in the segregated South, I came to believe that committed lawyers could make a difference in changing the negative circumstances under which we lived.

As Vice Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Donald L. Kohn has been described as being “at the vortex of a \$13.3 trillion national economy.” A 30-year Fed veteran known for his analytical skills and curiosity, he is one of the people to whom Chairman Ben Bernanke consistently turns for input and counsel, as did Alan Greenspan before him. Don is a little busy right now, but he was not too busy to spend time with me reflecting on his Independent Study experience at The College of Wooster.

After earning a bachelor’s degree in economics from Wooster and a doctorate from the University of Michigan, Don joined the Kansas City Federal Reserve Bank in 1971. Five years later, he moved to Washington, where he has held a series of positions. He was appointed to the Fed’s Board of Governors in 2002, and named Vice Chairman in 2006.

Though he jokes that as a student he devoted considerable intellectual energy to “figuring out ways to avoid chapel, in favor of a cup of coffee and a cigarette at The Shack,” Don also says that in his work at the Fed he relies on “patterns of thought that were developed and encouraged at Wooster.” The title of Don’s I.S. was “Flexible exchange rates as a means to stable markets: theory, practice and evaluation”, which he wrote under the guidance of Professor Richard Reimer.

Don saw his I.S. as a warm up for a Ph.D. dissertation. He says:
It gave me a leg up on how to find an interesting topic that would remain interesting over a long time; how to organize a literature search to get the relevant background; and how to structure a logical examination of that topic. It has served me well because I have been thinking about closely related issues my entire career. So it formed a strong foundation for a good part of my graduate work and my subsequent career in monetary policy.

In offering advice to current students, Don has this to say. Please listen for the resonances with Professor Nussbaum’s thoughts about the goals of liberal education: “Another strong thread in the Wooster tradition has been putting the knowledge acquired here to work for the common good as well as for individual

gain. In that tradition, I suggest to students that (they) consider government service.” Don says to students:

Governments at all levels have the power to help or harm. To increase the odds on the former, we need to apply the kinds of knowledge and analytic skills (students) are obtaining here. I can tell you from personal experience that going to work each morning knowing that how well you do your job could affect the welfare of your fellow citizens can be a little scary, but it is also tremendously challenging and rewarding.

Karen Lockwood left Wooster in 1972 with a degree in sociology, with an Independent Study written under the guidance of Professor Chuck Hurst. After a couple of years of teaching mathematics in middle school, she shifted gears and earned a law degree from American University.

In almost three decades of legal practice since then, she has handled numerous complex commercial trials, arbitrations, and appeals across a wide variety of industries. Karen served as president of the Women’s Bar Association of the District of Columbia in 2005-06, and spearheaded a joint initiative among the association, her firm, and the Georgetown University Law Center to improve the advancement of senior women in the profession.

When I asked her for her advice to undergraduates facing Independent Study, her answers were so insightful I share them with you here in her own words: “What I.S. does, 30 years later, becomes increasingly apparent with time. The very process itself is something learned, and needed, for life.” Wooster’s Independent Study program she says, teaches the following:

1. ***Do something.*** I.S. forces the undergraduate to face the ultimate truth behind success: you may not know how to begin, and you certainly cannot see how the project will end, but you nevertheless have to *do something* and you will, in the end, have done much.
2. ***Get others on board.*** I.S. is not a solitary exercise. To yield a great result, you must interest others, share your thoughts, seek their thoughts,

restrain hasty judgment, and thus empower the refinement of everyone's thoughts into something truly new.

3. **Lead.** I.S. may not be solitary, but the student and only the student owns it. No student has earned a Wooster degree without facing the simple truth that she or he had to act singularly without guideposts in order to make it happen.
4. **The precise subject is not the most important element.** Age brings deeper insight into the many things in society and business that deserve doing, that need change, or that beg for help. For each of us, the subject of our life's endeavors will constantly shift. The process, though, is the essential piece without which knowledge cannot be gained, be shared, or have an impact. This ability to engage in the process is learned best in the formative early 20's, all in a big brave swallow that risks your own safe identity as an accomplished student. After that, risk-taking seems easier, and insights abound. Wooster students make a difference because they have conquered the fear of doing so.

I must move towards my conclusions, so I am not going to talk about:

- Debra A. Schwinn, a distinguished physician scientist, who received the American Society of Anesthesiologists' 2007 Award for Excellence in Research. She earned her medical degree at Stanford, and later joined the faculty at Duke University Medical Center. Last year, she was named chair of the department of anesthesiology at the University of Washington School of Medicine. While at Duke she revised the research curriculum for the medical school: "It was easy," she says, "because in essence it was Wooster I.S. all over again."
- I am also not going to talk about Samrat Upadhyay who came to Wooster from his native Katmandu, Nepal. After graduating from Wooster, he earned a master's degree at Ohio University and a Ph.D. from the University of Hawaii. Now a well published author, whose portrayal of Katmandu in his novel, *The Guru of Love*, the San

Francisco Chronicle called “as specific and heartfelt as Joyce’s Dublin.”

- It is hard for me not to talk about Professor Ronald Takaki, a person whose scholarship has shaped my own. Ron graduated from Wooster in 1961 with a major in history and with an I.S. written under the guidance of Professor Helen Osgood. Ron’s remarkable academic career has spanned five decades, much of it at the University of California at Berkeley, where he founded and chaired the department of ethnic studies. Ron’s major scholarly works include *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*, a book I have taught dozens of times in my own courses.
- I am not going to talk about...Danny George, who is here today, and who graduated in 2004 and had the audacity to slip his Independent Study under the door of Dr. Peter Whitehouse, who directs the Memory and Aging Center at Case Western Reserve University and University Hospitals. Was he impressed? This January St. Martin’s Press published a book, *The Myth of Alzheimers*, co-authored by Danny George and Dr. Whitehouse. Danny is now pursuing a degree in medical anthropology at Oxford.
- Finally, I will not say a word about the eight graduating physics majors last year, 100% of whom are enrolled in top graduate programs like Purdue, Cornell, and Carnegie Mellon, nor a word about Colleen Burkett, who, while doing research in the lab of Paul Edmiston, Professor of Chemistry, came upon a remarkable discovery of a material that absorbs hydrocarbon pollutants from water, like gas and oil, but not the water itself, or that this material is now patented and being developed for environmental clean-up applications, while Colleen is in graduate school pursuing her doctorate in chemistry.

In conclusion, let me offer some of my own thoughts about what has to be the case for a college to produce alumni of this quality, commitment, and impact. First, of course, a theme that you heard again and again, is that our program of

faculty mentoring students in the process of inquiry and research should not be called “Independent Study” but “Interdependent Study”. Over the decades this faculty has developed an unparalleled culture of mentoring: independent minds working together. These collaborative relationships between faculty and students are paradigmatic examples of the social nature of knowledge production. Knowledge is developed in and through human relationships, through searching dialogue and inquiry. These relationships call for trust, patience, persistence, and a constant commitment to listening.

This year I have had the great honor and pleasure of working with a senior philosophy student, Jaimy Stoll, on her Independent Study. In this work we have both been mentored by Professor Ron Hustwit, whom you will recall as the mentor of Sol Oliver’s I.S. Ron has demonstrated time and again a cultivated capacity for intellectual empathy and generosity. Like Socrates in Plato’s *Meno*, he grasped what Jaimy was reaching for even while she was still reaching. He led her to clarity through very finely honed questions.

In my short time here it has become clear to me that our unique educational program that culminates in the senior Independent Study is what we do that makes us who we are. Our excellence is to be understood in these terms. Our integrity measured in it. We are a college that changes lives one by one, but we do so as a community.

True integrity of mission is our most valuable asset. It is not one that can be bought, or faked, or developed quickly were it missing. It comes from decades of commitment; it is the product of passion. We have challenges before us, some particular to our situation, others the result of national and global dynamics. But The College of Wooster rests on an admirably rock-solid foundation, not so much of bricks and mortar, but of history, of the humanity of our graduates, of the hearts of our faculty, and of the promise we find in each of our students.

I am impressed with what I find to be the ethical potential of a life shaped by a Wooster education. In our alumni there are decades of evidence, in the

form of lives well lived, that Wooster is doing just the kind of work Professor Nussbaum has articulated as our mission.

Here is what I wish for our students, and what I will seek to support while I am here. I will look for them to be engaged and responsible global citizens, doing well in the world and doing good. I will look for them to manifest in their lives an intolerance of injustice, the wherewithal to intervene, compassion for the frailty of happiness, and a sense of humor sufficient to take joy in the adventure. And of course, I will look for independent minds with a highly developed capacity for working together with others equally independent. Finally, like John Newton, our graduates will encounter storms, moral upheavals, both personal and political. I wish for them, perhaps above all, a capacity for amazing grace.

For all of these bountiful reasons, I express my profound gratitude for the opportunity to serve as The College of Wooster's 11th president. Thank you.

[1] Lucy Lillian Notestein, *Wooster of the Middle West*, vol. 1. 1937. Reprint: Kent State University Press, 1971, p.45

[2] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Education for Profit, Education for Freedom." Speech delivered at The College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio, April 2008.

[3] *ibid.*