

# THE GOODLAD OCCASIONAL

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The narrative that follows is entirely fictional. The general topic is simultaneous renewal, and the narrative will be continued into at least the next issue. All educational institutions are unique, but they also share some common characteristics. What follows is not intended to be a depiction of what is exemplary but rather one of real-life institutions endeavoring to improve themselves through continuous processes of renewal.



Dr. Philip Marcetti accepted the presidency of Northern Lights University on March 25, 2003, agreeing to assume his responsibilities on July 1. One of the conditions of his acceptance was that he would have access to the vice president for community relations to work with him on planning the address he would give to students, faculty, and trustees of the university and a diverse array of people in the community within six weeks of the beginning of the fall term. Northern Lights is classified as a Carnegie I institution granting doctoral degrees in all of its program areas. Consequently, although the criteria used for faculty advancement are research, teaching, and both professional and community service, the quantity and quality of research produced by each faculty member turns out to be given top priority. Nonetheless, the rhetoric of research, teaching, and service continues.

The interest in the event was such that the event scheduled to begin at 4:00 p.m. had to be held in the basketball pavilion. The vice president had done an excellent job of ensuring that representatives of diverse groups in the community were present in addition to business and political leaders. The faculty and student attendance was larger than usual for such affairs, and there was a significant representation of teachers and administrators from surrounding school districts.

Marcetti graciously recognized the reputation of the institution for scholarship advancing knowledge in an array of fields, teaching, availability of resources to the community, and so on. But then the substance of his remarks began to change. He spoke of responsibility. Interestingly, he spoke of individual and institutional responsibility as a given at a time when accountability was the word of common parlance. Without using the word, he addressed responsibility as a moral concept—responsibility to self, colleagues, students, patrons, the state, the nation, and indeed humankind. He titillated the audience with some joking remarks about faculty responsibility for cherishing academic life as a unique privilege. Then he moved into the incredible responsibility of teaching at all levels as a risk-laden responsibility, whether it was teaching the very young in nursery school and kindergarten or the most advanced students in doctoral programs. At the

higher education level, he singled out the education of health workers and teachers as a primary concern in the necessary renewal of a democratic society.

Needless to say, his was a much discussed and more than a little controversial speech. He did not neglect the contributions of the institution to such fields as molecular biology, the space sciences, and the like, but it was abundantly clear that his primary preoccupation was with the conduct of education as a moral endeavor devoted to attaining and sustaining a wise and compassionate citizenry.

Interestingly, Marcetti did not follow his address with the creation of an array of cross-disciplinary committees charged with shaping up the institution in the domains of academic responsibility that might have been deduced from his speech. Rather, the intrinsic message was that every dean, chair, and center director carried with him or her the responsibility of engaging the personnel of his or her unit in a good deal of introspection about the conduct of their responsibility to students, colleagues, the institution, the community, and so on: "Be clear on your mission and the conditions necessary to its advancement. Where you see yourselves falling short, develop short- and long-term plans for remediation and renewal. You are not engaged in a project that can be brought to fruition in a year or five or ever."

Marcetti was faced immediately with the appointment of two deans, one of these for the school of education. Discovering that the only person on the search committee for the education dean representing the arts and sciences was a professor of education who had a joint

appointment in the mathematics department and that there was no one from the schools or the larger community, he requested of the provost that these omissions be taken care of. A professor of English, a middle school principal, and a member of the business roundtable were added. Noting that the description invited applicants with distinguished research careers, past administrative experience, and the ability to walk on water, he requested that the committee spend some more time determining the comprehensive responsibilities of a new dean prior to advertising the position.

By April 2004, four finalists were invited to meet with the committee and with individuals from the university faculty as a whole, the schools, and the visiting committee of the school of education. The final choice came down to two people, both female—a scholar of national and international reputation having excellent recommendations with respect to philosophy, integrity, ability to make tough decisions, etc., and an individual whose scholarly publications were many but were addressed largely to practitioners and less frequently published in refereed journals. The latter's experiences were more varied and included teaching in a secondary school, serving as a program officer for a philanthropic foundation, and serving as director of a research and development center in a Carnegie II institution. Both candidates were recommended, with the majority of the committee members and the faculty in education more strongly endorsing the former. The president's choice of the latter came as a surprise and engendered considerable controversy. Dean Maria Chavez would begin her duties on July 1, 2004.

President Marcetti was pushed hard on the reasons for his choice. He said that the school of education had made good progress under the leadership of the previous dean in regard to the scholarly productivity of the faculty. A dozen people who had been appointed in the preceding five years had been chosen because of their scholarly record or potential and had helped to bring the rating of the school into the top twenty in the United States. It was time now, he said, to develop the other areas of the school's responsibility while continuing to strengthen the scholarly side. He said that in his rather extended conversation with Maria Chavez, he had been impressed with her awareness of the contingencies of the time and the need for schools of education to play a more active role in the advancement of education writ large. Faculty members, he insisted, need to become more active in advancing the public democratic purpose of education, whether it be in schools, through television and the Internet, in business

enterprises, or in public affairs. There needs to be, he continued, not only a greater integration of schools of education into the life and institutions of higher education, but also greater participation of professors of education in the conduct of schooling and the educational issues of our time. Dr. Chavez, he concluded, is well prepared by interest, experience, and personality to provide the necessary leadership, and he promised to give her his full support.

*(to be continued)*

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