

Hendrix Board of Governor's
President's Remarks
August 27, 2011

Good morning and welcome. I'm delighted to welcome you to campus today and I'm looking forward to spending this time with you. Depending on when you graduated, I know you can appreciate how our beautiful campus today has changed and grown.

In fact, our growth and pace during the past eight years has been pretty astounding – and it hasn't been accidental. Eight years ago, at the 2003 Fall Faculty Conference, we announced what became known as “Your Hendrix Odyssey: Engaging In Active Learning” – a new approach, at the time, that placed our focus squarely on creating hands-on, liberal arts and sciences experiences for our students.

The result of our faculty's imagination and efforts during these years, supported by a dedicated staff, has resulted in our graduates having a distinctive liberal arts education. We recognize the completion of the experience we offer with an academic diploma – but also with a second transcript of their mentored Odyssey experiences. These, when combined, attest that our graduates are more prepared than ever before to add tremendous value either to their graduate school experience or in the work place ... but most importantly, to their own lives and the lives of others.

Making this happen took a great deal of inspiration and perspiration from many people. So I'll pose the question: “Why did we choose – back in 2003 – to develop and to launch Your Hendrix Odyssey?”

Well, here is the answer: First, we were living in challenging times. Financially, beginning in 2001 we were forced to make some tough decisions. And beyond that, our circumstances forced us as a community to raise a few questions: “What do we want Hendrix College to be?” and “What do we need to do to achieve our mission and to realize our vision for Hendrix ?”

In addition, coming out of those tougher times, we developed a common vision that was embraced and endorsed by our Board of Trustees, and then brought to life by our faculty and staff – and here it is:

(As you're looking at this, I've got to mention that, at the recent Fall Faculty Conference, I asked all Faculty members who joined us since 2003 to stand up. Believe it or not, most of that room came to their feet, underscoring our faculty growth over the past 8 years. It was amazing to see!)

By doing that, I wanted to be justified in taking time to share with our faculty this brief review of what has changed during the past decade. I want to share it with you, too, and this, by the way, is a partial list.

- ✦ We adopted “Your Hendrix Odyssey: Engaging in Active Learning” as our banner, supported by the creation of endowed Odyssey grants;
- ✦ We endowed 12 Odyssey Professorships; Odyssey Distinction Awards as a new form of financial assistance for all students and we created an endowment for Middle Income Scholarships;
- ✦ With directed gifts we created the Miller Center for Vocation, Ethics and Calling, as well as the Crain Maling Center of Jewish Culture;
- ✦ We became a member institution of Project Pericles. This association encourages and facilitates commitments by colleges and universities to include social responsibility and participatory citizenship as essential elements of their educational program;
- ✦ We reached a new level of Hendrix-Murphy Foundation funding, designed to enhance and enrich the study and teaching of literature and language at the College, but with a new focus on supporting Odyssey-type projects;
- ✦ We transformed International Education and created Hendrix specific programs in China, Belgium, Rwanda, Costa Rica and other countries;
- ✦ We’ve grown our student population from 990 in 2001 to about 1,450 students for this fall. It is amazing that we increased geographical diversity while, at the same time, increasing the quality and size of student body;
- ✦ We’ve grown full time faculty from 82 to 109 – a 33% increase, retaining our 12:1 student to faculty ratio;
- ✦ This past Spring, we successfully completed a 100 million dollar capital campaign and have added new, world-class facilities and technology on our campus;
- ✦ We introduced the Village at Hendrix, which offers our own community a more vibrant and enriched living experience than ever before, not to mention the positive impact it’s having on our larger community;
- ✦ We modernized our concept of a residential college, increasing the amount of housing offered by 25% through apartment-styled housing.
- ✦ We’ve just joined a new Division III Athletic Conference named the Southern Athletic Association and will be adding men’s football and women’s lacrosse in the Fall of 2013. 25% of our students are student athletes. Our new Wellness and Athletic facilities, our new conference, and these new sports add even more student diversity to our mix and enhance our community;
- ✦ We’re consolidating and strengthening our communications and technology resources on campus, to provide necessary tools and advantages to support our continued success;

- ✦ And it's worth noting that, during the past decade, we've successfully weathered two major economic downturns (prior to the one we are now experiencing).

To effect this type of change and to create this much success, we had to fundamentally reposition Hendrix College in the eyes of our audiences while staying true to our core values.

This not only included decisions to increase both our tuition and the financial assistance we provide to our students, but also to dramatically increase the take-away value that every student would receive from Hendrix upon graduation. This was, and is, at the heart of the Odyssey experience.

But, even given all of these accomplishments, can we now be satisfied that our job is done? After all, we **did** just raise over \$100 million on a base of 15,000 alumni and supporters. To put this in perspective, that is the equivalent of completing a \$1.2 billion campaign on the University of Arkansas alumni base.

And we've grown our faculty to provide greater academic breadth and depth. We have added a greater number of funded Odyssey projects not just supported by Odyssey Grants, but supported by the Murphy, Miller, and Crain-Maling Centers, among other entities.

Our stated goal of becoming nationally recognized as a leader in engaged, hands-on liberal arts and sciences education – this, too, has been achieved, if you believe the Princeton Review, *U.S. News and World Report*, and the book just released from the Association of Governing Boards – *Leading Change How to Build Exceptional Academic Institutions*.

The truth is . . . we have been pretty busy.

Yet, can we afford to sit still? What, if anything, begs us to expand upon our vision? And what are today's challenges to meeting an expanded vision and – most importantly – building on the momentum generated by our success? Let's talk about that for a minute.

First, other schools out there are emulating our success; they have paid attention to what we have done and they are catching up to us in what they have to offer. Although I'm proud of the fact that this year's entering class has an average ACT score of 29.4, the competition for the best and brightest students has never been as tough as it is today. In fact, we were short by about 10% in our Fall enrollment goals and, coupled with retention challenges, this resulted in a projected \$400,000 "hit" to this year's budget.

There are internal challenges, too, that have been expressed in various ways. Let's look at and consider these for a minute:

First: It's easy to for the faculty to experience the current reality in terms of radical change, overwhelming pace, and the struggle to balance priorities and demands;

Second: The tectonic plates of our Hendrix culture are shifting and have not yet reached a settling point. Part of this is the result of continuing to grow our faculty – which is what we want to do. But no matter how we grow, Hendrix must always retain its unique essence;

Third: As stewards of Hendrix’s culture, faculty, staff and our trustees must clarify our common communal goals, our purpose and our meaning, which have always been hallmarks of the Hendrix community and experience. For example: we are challenged to meet the students’ demand for privacy and independence, while still honoring our commitment to community-centered housing. This means we must continue to “re-think” the modern residential community as we move forward;

Fourth: As academics, we all feel this tension between the primary values of autonomy and discipline-specific loyalty, and the need to devote time to building an intellectually vibrant community;

Fifth: We want to be proud of and to support the institution we work for as a place that can be strong enough to support our scholarly pursuits and to provide a sense of security for our livelihood; but we are struggling to find clarity on what our role should be in that endeavor.

Sixth: We all want excellence in the curricular and co-curricular experience we offer our students. But we continue to work on a shared understanding of how to get there:

Yes, there are challenges. We feel them and we understand them. But that knowledge can’t deter us from moving forward and doing the right thing on behalf of the institution.

Now let’s have some fun and talk about some ideas of what Hendrix may be, and what it may look like, in the year 2022 – 11 years in the future. So please bear in mind the time horizon.

This is relevant right now because we are in a strategic planning mode for the College. So, given that, let’s play “what if?” for a moment with an eye toward 2022. (By the way, these concepts have been expressed by faculty members and others.)

What if Hendrix was able to further expand the faculty and our resources which, while maintaining at least the same student to faculty ratio, took us to the next level in offering students a richer curriculum and an even more powerful array of engaged learning opportunities?

And **what if** this generated new Odyssey experiences that would uniquely prepare these students for either graduate school or a professional life beyond our campus?

What if we found a way to create and implement a new holistic advising program designed to engage and advise students not only on their academic Odyssey but on their personal and professional development?

What if we called this new initiative “the Compass Program” because it served as a guide for Your Hendrix Odyssey – tying together for our students their major, their Odyssey projects, any certificate experience, and the capstone into some kind of coherent narrative?

And **what if** this Compass Program served as an orientation for the life they would lead once their campus experience was over. In other words, **what if** we helped them to discover a real compass for their life’s direction and journey beyond Hendrix?

What if “Your Hendrix Odyssey” connected to *Your “Life’s” Odyssey*, which would begin with a series of valuable college experiences to serve as the launching point for a directed, meaningful and fulfilled life – a life that would stay connected to Hendrix throughout its many phases and transitions?

What if we created new and exciting tools designed to benefit our students throughout their lives?

For example, **what if** we created a new “e-portfolio” for each of our students, one that, through today’s technology, would allow them (as well as others they would choose) to have a dynamic and interactive window on their life and work, both during and following their time at Hendrix?

And **what if** we were able to take full advantage of virtual presence and other emerging technologies to enhance the total educational experience of our students?

What if we were able to more sharply focus our teaching and better convey to the outside world our strengths, through the organization of Areas into, say, new schools? And **what if** these new schools added breadth and depth to our academic program? **What if** this reorganization gave our faculty new and greater resources with which to deliver this enhanced curriculum?

And **what if** these schools – nestled within our liberal arts tradition and animated by Odyssey – included some mix of these ideas:

A School of Literature, Language, Media, and the Arts (with a cutting edge facility for the performing arts as well as for the study and production of film and digital media)...

A School of Natural and Life Sciences, Mathematics and Computer Science (including Kinesiology/Allied Health, Psychology) and distinguished by a focus on Leadership in the Sciences and Green Science.

A School of Business, Government, and Public Policy distinguished by social entrepreneurialism and revolving around the “Triple Bottom Line” of people, planet and profits. What types of hands-on work experiences could be created at the point where business meets social consciousness?

And finally...

A School of Culture, History, and Human Communities.

...and **what if** one or more of these schools offered certificate programs, designed to give our students an advantage if they chose to move directly from their liberal arts experience into the professional world?

These might be modeled on our Crossings Program, which has developed coherent interdisciplinary clusters around topics in Documentary Studies, Development, Study of the Mind, Examined Lives, and Food, Culture, and Identity.

But these topical clusters could be expanded to include Leadership, Non-profit Management, Entrepreneurship and the Arts, Writing for the Media, Science, Business, and Public Policy.

And **what if** we countered the tendency in larger institutions for schools to become fiefdoms or silos, by creating interdisciplinary centers that would link the schools and allow for cross-pollination?

Such centers might include a Center for Sustainability and the Liberal Arts, a Center for the Study of the Mind, a Center for Leadership in the Sciences.

What if we developed a residential model that created true living-learning communities, retaining the sense of intimacy and distinctiveness that we value at Hendrix even as we reap the benefits of growth?

...and, finally, **what if** we reinvented the Collegiate Center and reimagined Journeys as a course that, in addition to including primary texts and great books, also examined big contemporary problems in the world, major themes or perennial problems of the human condition?

As part of some first year experience, students could participate in funded Odyssey projects or trips in teams focused on these problems or themes – perhaps even during a January-Term which we could establish.

Or possibly a fully-integrated first-year experience that may include residential living/learning themes, classroom in the residence halls, or other ways to create a seamless transitional experience for new students.

What if we think about how to make the core of our curriculum the cornerstone of “Odyssey 2.0”

“What if?” indeed.

Perhaps there are other, even greater ideas out there. As we consider what Hendrix may be in the year 2022, where can our imaginations take us?

Eight years ago, our students numbered under 1,000. Today, they number about 1,450. **What if**, by 2022, we had enhanced our programs, and grown our faculty, and could deliver a wider, even more life-changing education and experience to between 2,000 and 2,500 students?

And what if – **what if** – we could do this without changing the essence of what makes us who we are. **Our graduates of three months ago would tell you that their experience here was uniquely Hendrix – just as our graduates of eight years ago would. So we know it’s possible.**

Where do we go from here?

In addition to Hendrix’s reality of shared governance, we also have a unique shared responsibility. No single Hendrix constituency can make this vision of Hendrix’s future become reality. It didn’t work that way during the past eight years and it won’t work that way now.

What **will** work is if we have the benefit of this faculty’s best thinking and efforts, combined with, and supported 110%, by the College’s senior leadership team, administrative and all support staff, our Board of Trustees – and you. I give you my promise that, if we’re all on our “A” game, we can make this happen.

Of course, there will be bumps along the way as we participate in Hendrix College’s next, magnificent Odyssey. But by engaging in this process together, we will build our community and reaffirm our organizational culture.

Our success in this noble venture will result in an environment and create a resource base that will allow our faculty – and their students – to reach new levels of excellence. And that outcome is worth everything that goes into making it a new reality by – or perhaps even before – the year 2022.

Thank you, all, for listening today, for sharing my enthusiasm about our future, and for being a vital part of this institution.

I am deeply grateful that you’re part of the Hendrix family. And I hope your time on campus today is both productive and enjoyable. God bless you for being here!