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Advanced Studies at Notre Dame: the Essential Task

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Why is Notre Dame's program of advanced studies so important now, at this moment in the University's history?

This question arose during the planning for the Strategic Moment Campaign. And in a sense, it is a wonderfully optimistic question because of what it implies -- that Notre Dame's undergraduate programs in Arts and Letters, Science, Engineering, and Business have attained a superior level of excellence; that Notre Dame now has the potential to develop its graduate program in much the same way; and that, by extension, the University is poised to enter the ranks of this nation's finest universities.

If all the above statements are true -- and I am confident that they are -- then the key to Notre Dame's future as a world-class university lies in the development of its program of graduate studies and research, even as we continue to maintain and strengthen an undergraduate program that is second to none.

But, again, why the development of advanced studies at Notre Dame, and why now?

Let me begin to answer that question by saying, first of all, that the difference between a college and a university has almost nothing to do with quality, because in a general way all colleges and universities are judged on the basis of their quality. The best colleges are measured by the precision and rigor of their academic programs, by the quality of their students, by the values and standards they uphold, and by the success of their graduates.

A great university must measure up in each of these categories, as well. But in addition, we judge the merits of our finest universities through their contributions to research and to public policy, and through their service to the national community (and in Notre Dame's case, to the Church). It is the university, moreover, which produces the intellectual leaders -- the teachers and scholars who will instruct the next generation of college students. In this the university has one of its weightiest responsibilities: to provide the highest plane of scholarship, clarity of instruction, and standards of human behavior.

Overall, then, a university is measured by the extent of its influence upon society and upon education. Further, the extent of that influence corresponds closely with the quality of a school's faculty, its programs of advanced studies, its institutes and centers for research, and its library.

Through these distinct resources a university may provide a more comprehensive exploration of highly specialized fields of study. Along with the institutes and centers that deal profoundly and, in some cases, uniquely with the issues that bear upon the quality of life of a nation's citizenry and its public policy, a superior program of graduate studies touches all of higher education through its contributions in scholarship and the standards of achievement it sets and through the development of the most highly skilled people in the arts, sciences, law, medicine, and the professions, especially the teaching profession.

Notre Dame's Role

As a university, Notre Dame stands in an unusual position. We are already ranked among the top 20 universities in the country in terms of endowment, and we are the only Catholic university to rank so high. In a recent

U.S. News & World Report survey of "America's Best Colleges and Universities," Notre Dame was ranked 21st in the category of national research universities -- along with Carnegie Mellon, Johns Hopkins, the University of Pennsylvania, and Columbia University.

All of this is by way of saying that in terms of graduate studies we are not starting out at the bottom. In fact, given a commitment to advanced studies that is less than 40 years old, we have come a respectable distance. Certain of our departments and centers -- Chemical Engineering, Mathematics, Philosophy, LOBUND Laboratory, the Kellogg Institute for International Studies, to list a few -- are recognized nationally, even internationally. Certain recent additions to our faculty were recruited by the most renowned universities in the world, but they chose to come to Notre Dame.

With so much to take pride in, with an endowment close to \$400 million, may we not congratulate ourselves and relax a bit? The answer to this question lies in the historical significance of this endowment. Consider, for example, that 40 years ago, when Notre Dame's endowment was only \$4 million, we did not have any endowed chairs, our financial aid for students amounted to \$3,000 per

year, and our student SAT scores were within ten points of the national average.

Precisely because we have been able to build a strong endowment, however, Notre Dame now boasts 80 endowed professorships, financial aid is about \$40 million, and our students' SAT scores are more than 300 points above the national average.

Given this history, it is clear that the University will arrive at an eminent place among the nation's leadership schools not by resting on any laurels, but by pressing forward in those areas where we face our greatest challenges: the creation of endowed professorships for every senior faculty position on campus, the development of a strong library and campus-wide computer network, the establishment of a range of fellowships to attract superior graduate students, and the provision of resources to recruit and sustain brilliant young faculty.

Through such measures, which are merely a series of steps along a carefully hewn path, we can give substance to the vision that has been a part of Notre Dame since 1842, when Father Sorin founded his "university," then a small log cabin in the Indiana wilderness.

If someone were to ask me, "Is it really necessary for Notre Dame to aspire to such heights?" I would answer that it is absolutely necessary, not simply for the advancement of Notre Dame but for the needs of the nation.

Again, the ability of a university to address the most critical issues of our time and to influence public policy comes into play, and it should. Consider that the problems we face in the latter part of the 20th century are unique, unprecedented in the history of man. They present a challenge that is nothing less than ultimate: to preserve the earth, its living creatures, and the moral and cultural structures of its human inhabitants. We must do these things even as we extend the limits of what we already know about the planet and all of its natural and man-made systems.

Yes, I believe it is necessary for Notre Dame to aspire to such heights. Among those top twenty endowed universities, only Notre Dame remains grounded in its religious heritage. Along with our tremendous technological capabilities -- one might almost say because of them -- we also need a spiritual capability to replenish the purely human need for order, justice, faith, and values.

I am convinced that in the years ahead Notre Dame will play a central role, contributing new ideas that will effect positive changes in our society, and expanding the knowledge that will delight the intellect even as it provides bread and hope for the less fortunate.

But perhaps the most important thing we can contribute is our own unique perspective. The achievement of American education is in its diversity -- a mix of public and private institutions that supply an enormous range of intellectual experience and practical benefits to society at large. It would seem unconscionable to me not to have, among the those top 20 institutions, a Catholic university to enlarge that diversity and to encourage the profoundest questions.

Through your commitment and participation, we can reach that goal.