

President to Presidents Lecture
AASCU Annual Meeting, October 29, 2019

Phoenix, Arizona

“Where Are We Going?”

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Many thanks to Dianne Harrison for the introduction. I’ve learned so much from Dianne over the years.

Thanks to the AASCU Board of Directors for this honor. It is deeply affirming to be asked to address you, my valued colleagues.

I want to thank and recognize my husband Mort. During our 23 years in AASCU, Mort has been active in the Spouse/Partner program and one of the authors of the guidebook for new spouses. Mort has supported me on every mile of my journey.

I’m glad that this year’s annual meeting is in Phoenix. That has made it convenient for a true colleague, now retired here, to join us. When I was the head of the West campus of Arizona State University, I began a 21-year partnership spanning three universities (ASU West, University of Alaska Anchorage, and Governors State University) with the best executive vice president and chief financial officer in the nation, Dr. Gebe Ejigu.

It’s somewhat ironic to be delivering a lecture, since I firmly believe in active learning and high impact practices. But I also respect tradition, so a lecture it is. I do appeal to you to listen actively. In the writing across the curriculum mode, please jot down comments and questions. We may have some time for questions from the floor, and I’ll be available for conversation immediately after the lecture and throughout the afternoon and evening.

My topic is moving forward, “Where are we going?” Where are we going as AASCU institutions at a pivotal moment for US higher education?

I’m haunted by a movie from my childhood, “Quo Vadis,” translated from the Latin, as “where are you going?” Although I didn’t process it at the time, the film focuses on spiritual encounters in Nero’s Rome. It was the phrase, “Quo Vadis, where are you going? that resonated in my child’s mind. The question seems simple, but it’s not. Where are you going, Elaine?

During lunch you heard Diana Ross’s great song, the theme from the 1976 film, “Mahogany.” How many remember the movie and the song, “Do you know where you’re going to?”

As much as I'm tempted to sing, you will be relieved to know that I won't. I don't want to taint anyone's memory of Diana Ross's version.

Here are the lyrics:

Do You Know
 Where you're going to?
 Do you like the things?
 That life is showing you
 Where are you going to?
 Do you know?
 Do you get?
 What you're hoping for?
 When you look behind you
 There's no open doors
 What are you hoping for?
 Do you know?

Please note the line that says, "When you look behind you/There's no open doors." That's sometimes missed. It means that an escape to the past is not available. Those doors are no longer open.

Without open doors, we can still look through windows. And I'd like to start with that look into my own past.

Let's look through the window at six-year-old Elaine:

A curious neighbor asks: What are you going to do when you grow up?

"I'm going to college—and get married." Yes, that was then the mantra, although many families assumed that once the MRS was attained in college that would be enough.

Knowing how to go somewhere requires guidance. I have always been lucky in my guides and mentors.

My first mentor was my mother. She would be so proud today. She was a widow from the time I was 8 years old. Even though she had many challenges in making do with the salary she earned as a secretary, I never felt deprived.

It was assumed that I would go to college, even though my parents never had a chance to go.

My mother always encouraged me to go places, to aspire-- toward independence as well as toward satisfying relationships. She also had a knack for doing more with less—something important for a public university president to learn early. I remember as a high school senior glancing at the college financial aid forms my mother was filling out: I said, “**My God, Mother, we’re poor.** You never told me.”

Philanthropy made it possible for me to move forward. The Ivy League University of Pennsylvania awarded a full-tuition scholarship to the top student in each Philadelphia public high school. It was my good fortune to be the top student at John Bartram High School.

Two weeks after my high school graduation, my dear mother died of cancer. The University of Pennsylvania increased my scholarship to cover room and board. Penn took me in. Penn changed my life by supporting my forward movement.

Where am I going? I’m going to Penn. I stand before you today because philanthropists in my hometown of Philadelphia made quality higher education possible for me. For that reason, I made a life-long promise to pay it forward, to help other students attain a college education.

At Penn, I majored in English, participated in Penn Players (performing in a play with Candice Bergen). Obviously, she went her way; I went mine.

Faculty mentors encouraged me to consider university teaching and research.

I still have an undergraduate research paper that I wrote on Shakespeare’s Othello. I’m going to read the professor’s comment because it tells its own story. In its own way it asked, “Where are you going, Elaine?”

Here’s what it said:

“This is a brilliant paper. You have a promising future as a scholar and writer. But instead you will probably marry some worthless fellow and make him happy, as my wife did, thank God.”

Talk about mixed messages. The professor meant well, but he clearly could not imagine a life for a woman that combined a career and marriage—making some worthless fellow happy.

But luckily I was able, as the song says, to get what I was hoping for, a fulfilling career and a great marriage:

I've already introduced the worthless fellow I married, Dr. Mort Maimon.
(applause)

Thank you again Mort for being a true partner and defying the family/career dichotomy.

Where was I going after my bachelor's degree? Immediately after college graduation, I entered a full-time, fast-track Ph.D. program also at Penn, under the National Defense Education Act. Isn't it wonderful that there was a time when the United States considered it in the national defense to educate more English professors!

Four years later there I was at 25 years old with a Ph.D., a worthless fellow, and a one-year-old daughter (our son would be born 2 years later). Where to next?

My first job as an English professor was substituting for professors on leave at elite, all-male Haverford College (lots of tales to tell later over drinks!)

Then I was hired at Beaver College (now called Arcadia U.) as a part-time composition instructor. Students there were hungry to learn to write. Even as a part-time, adjunct instructor, I was appointed Director of Composition. As a friend said, "There ought to be a crisis center number to call when something like that happens to you."

But that assignment turned out to be a directional signal for my future.

It became my life's mission to help students become writers, not necessarily to write the Great American Novel, but to become independent thinkers with a voice in our society.

I submitted a paper to the Modern Language Association, meeting in San Francisco that year, on linguistic approaches to teaching writing. Beaver College was willing to give a munificent \$50 for the trip from Philadelphia to San Francisco. Are you going there, Elaine? Yes—one of the best directional decisions I ever made.

There I heard Mina Shaughnessy, the director of writing programs at City University of New York, give a deeply meaningful talk about teaching writing to underserved, open admissions students.

Afterward on a cable car I met Harriet Sheridan, Acting President of Carleton College, who became my mentor.

The Carleton Plan became the basis for writing across the curriculum at Arcadia. We won the first of several huge grants from NEH. And writing across the curriculum was born.

I'm proud to say that writing across the curriculum was not a fad, as some predicted then, but a program that has moved forward to outlive the century in which it was named.

Early on I learned a SECRET about forward movement:

It requires a balance between focus on goals and peripheral vision:

- Balancing career and family—becoming an English scholar AND marrying the worthless fellow.
- Being part-time but accepting the role as writing program director
- Having formal Ph.D.-level education in literary criticism (then and to some extent now more prestigious than composition) but finding ways to transfer literary skills to the revolution in the teaching of writing.
- Having absolutely no institutional power but working to involve the whole faculty in the teaching of writing.

My status at Arcadia (Beaver) could not have been more marginal. Although I had been assigned a full-time, tenure-track position for the following fall, I was the most junior of junior faculty members. Furthermore, in those days, no one really knew much about directing writing programs.

As composition director, I developed a passion for teaching students to write that has informed my entire professional life. I saw very early that writing and learning were intertwined in complex ways. Consequently, a composition director could only go so far without full campus cooperation. Before writing across the curriculum became a movement or even had a name, it was clear to me as a young, marginalized assistant professor that it takes a campus to teach a writer. My career as a university

administrator is rooted in that early passion. I learned to do curriculum design, faculty development, strategic planning, budgeting, and fund-raising because I needed all those skills to rally the campus to use writing as a tool for learning and to see student writing as the signature of the institution.

I'm proud to be one of the founders of writing across the curriculum, WAC as we now abbreviate it. WAC is a movement that continues to inform curriculum and pedagogy in the twenty-first century and is the acknowledged seed-bed of learner-centered education and other cross-cutting strategies. WAC sharpened my double vision: focus and peripheral. My focus was on a project that by definition had to involve the entire institution; yet I had to manage the project from the periphery, without any formal institutional power. I developed expertise, and these skills have made me a better and more effective president:

In 2019, we as AASCU presidents must balance focus and peripheral vision in order to move our universities forward and to move U.S. higher education forward. Where are we going?

We have been the first to see that we are educating a New Majority in US higher education: students of color, first generation, adults, and military veterans. The New Majority is not new to AASCU. We served these students when they were on the periphery. It's now our job to shine a spotlight on this majority.

In Illinois, the focus of government leaders has been on the upper middle class students who leave the state to attend college in other states—your states. Illinois is second only to New Jersey in the out-migration of students. It baffles me that elected officials should be surprised that in 2016 and 2017 students decided to leave a state that had no budget and was openly and loudly threatening state financial aid. That's changed now in Illinois under a new Governor. But the handwringing over students who go elsewhere continues.

At Governors State University our biggest competitor for first-year students is not an out-of-state university. Nor is it an in-state university public or private. And it's not a community college either. Our biggest competitor, according to the National Education Clearinghouse, is NOWHERE. Each year about 34% of the qualified freshmen we admit go nowhere. The top reason is fear of financial ruin for their families. The headlines have done their work in exaggerating student debt so that we have a hard time being heard over the negative noise. Governors State University's tuition and mandatory fees are the lowest in Chicagoland. If students have full federal and state scholarships—their

loan liability is low or non-existent. We have developed debt-free pathways from our 17 partner community colleges and four-year merit scholarships to supplement federal and state funds for students talented in art, theater, and debate.

The problem is getting the word out. When we ask students with great potential where they are going, the response cannot be, "I'm going nowhere." And for those who do manage to enter our universities, we must help them move forward. Too many disappear. We must also reach the millions of adults who have some college and no degree. As the song says, we must find ways to ask them whether they got what they were hoping for. And if not to stop looking behind at those closed doors and instead to set a new future direction at our universities.

Helping New Majority students to move forward requires transformations in higher education. We cannot complain about the negative narrative about higher education without recognizing the need for fundamental change. AASCU institutions are ready to be in the forefront of that change. We are in the process of rethinking everything:

- **What should be learned?**

Traditional ideas about conveying information can no longer be dominant when information can be found with a click of a key. We must transform the college classroom into a place for evaluating information, creating knowledge, and applying knowledge to new, unfamiliar situations.

- **Who deserves prestige?**

We must explode what I call the Maimon Hierarchical Fallacy. It goes like this:

If I teach graduate courses, and you teach freshman composition, I must be smarter than you.

We must recognize that first-year courses make the difference between students' ultimate success and failure in college.

GSU assigns only full-time faculty members to first-year courses. Not only do our best and brightest teach freshmen, they also do research on unexplored areas of college learning. For example, what's behind the U.S. college student epidemic of ignoring reading assignments?

Using underpaid and overworked adjuncts to teach students in their first crucial college year makes no sense at all. We must change this.

- **How do we prepare faculty members for the twenty-first century university?**

For those presidents at institutions that offer Ph.D. programs in English and the humanities, let's make radical changes. Let's encourage interdisciplinary research on topics like remediation and trauma. Let's stop growing our own problems and instead prepare future faculty members to understand the team work necessary for quality higher education. Scholars can also be administrators. If the culture in graduate school implies that administrative work is the dark side, that's what future faculty members will believe. Let's, of course, emphasize high quality, systematic preparation in college teaching.

We can also let our colleagues at flagship universities know that we will hire only those PhD recipients who have been prepared and mentored in the exciting work of teaching and doing research on undergraduate learning.

- **How do we form true partnerships with community colleges?**

Many students who are now going nowhere might not be willing or ready to begin at a four-year institution and might be well-served by first achieving an Associate Degree at a community college and then transferring to an AACSCU institution. But the university must take an active role in helping these students know where they are going. In the past we have asked first generation students to navigate not one bureaucracy but two. Articulation agreements are not enough to guide New Majority students through a four-year program starting at the community college and finishing with us. Taking a student-centered approach, as GSU has done in our award-winning Dual Degree Program—DDP--will provide navigable pathways. Close to **90%** of students from GSU's 17 community college partners who transfer to GSU with Associate Degrees complete their bachelor degrees in 2-3 years. As one DDP student told us, "I was on a dark, winding road at the community college, until the DDP provided a flash light." Where are you going? Let's shine those flashlights. You can't get anywhere if you can't see where you are going.

Let's stop regarding community colleges as competitors and adopt a both/and, not either/or approach—4-years with us **or** 2+2 shared with partner community colleges. Several of you sent teams to GSU's Kresge Institute last June. Please watch for this June's 2020 dates.

- **How must we transform our institutions to meet students' needs?**

Conventionally, we have used a deficit model of instruction. We identify what's wrong with students and try to fix it. This clinical approach may work for some—those already fully directed toward achieving higher education goals. But even for those students, it might work better to identify and build on strengths. The Gallup organization has done excellent work on the strength model. Shaun Harper at the University of Southern California is a top scholar on this subject.

- **How do we connect high quality academic study with career preparation?**

First of all we must defend liberal education at all costs. We cannot buy into the idea that New Majority students deserve less than the traditional student population. It's always interesting when members of the general public tell me that it's most important to train other people's children for a first job. I mention that this first job—let us say at a distribution center—may be shifted to robots even before the student's first-job training is completed. That often falls on deaf ears. But then the next thing I know that same individual is asking me for tips to get his own daughter into Penn.

Liberal learning is important for all students. Educating the imagination in the arts and humanities is essential for all, not just for the privileged few.

And yet we must be more explicit in making connections between liberal learning and work outside the classroom. We must teach students to transfer what they are learning from one setting to another that might look radically different. We must highlight linkages between the classroom and careers.

The vast majority of our students have or need jobs. Let's increase the number of on-campus jobs, which, when managed properly, can accomplish some of the same goals as internships. Let's make sure that students can articulate what they have learned in what they think of as irrelevant jobs, like serving fast food. They are learning inevitably about customer service. And when the potatoes don't arrive, they are learning about the supply chain.

Let's also help students find paid micro-internships. These are especially valuable for adults who already have long-term full-time jobs to support their families. Paid micro-internships provide gig opportunities for short periods—2-4 weeks. Students can compete for these gigs and work on them online at their own convenience. Consult the Parker Dewey website for more information.

- Finally, **What does it mean to be a steward of place in 2019?**

That's the theme of this conference: Stewards of Place: Reimagined

AASCU institutions have never been ivory towers, situated on a hill with academics professing to the population below. An AASCU university is by its nature a public square—an *agora* like the place where Socrates walked, connecting learning with the public good.

AASCU institutions are way ahead in understanding that we prepare students for life, careers, and citizenship. Our communities will only be as strong as our citizens make them.

We live during challenging times. Cartoonist Mike Luckovich draws a picture of **endangered species**. What are today's endangered species? **truth, competence, morality, facts, sanity, science, compassion, and honesty.**

It's up to us to steward the protection of these 2019 endangered species.

So, as we depart from this luncheon, let's think about that simple yet profound question: Quo vadis? Where are you going? Where are we going?

Here in Phoenix, I remember vividly where I was on September 11, 2001. I was the chief executive officer of Arizona State University West—only a few miles from here. We did not close the campus on that fateful day. We stayed open. When I addressed the campus community, I said that in years to come, people will ask where we were on 9/11/01, and we will answer, "We were here on our campus, engaged in education."

Eighteen years later in 2019, where are we going? We are stewards of place, leading our universities to a future serving the public good.

As H.G. Wells has said, "**More and more, history becomes a race between education and catastrophe.**" By reforming higher education, we are doing nothing less than protecting our democracy from catastrophe.

I know we can go forward to meet this challenge. We must.

Thank you.