

**June 5, 2004**

**Inaugural address**

**Mark Schulman, President of Goddard College**

**I: To the Greeters from the Greeted**

I feel a bit of a sham, standing here and being inaugurated as your new president, because I have already been here seventeen months. Indeed, I was heavily engaged with Goddard from the moment I accepted the presidency—and that—I can hardly believe it—was twenty-one months ago.

So we're talking about not a new president but a used president—or maybe that car dealer euphemism, pre-owned? How about just “seasoned”?

To be candid, that period of seasoning was a complicated and tense time, and waiting from January 1, 2003, to June 5, 2004, for this ceremony, strange as it may seem, made sense. First we needed to stabilize Goddard. And we wished to inaugurate formally my new presidency when we were all sure we had something to celebrate.

In the spirit of better late than never, then, I accept today the conferral of this tremendous honor. I pledge to devote myself to this college and to you, those who know and love it, and on occasion have been made crazy by it.

And so: on with the show!

My thanks to our wonderful greeters. You were so praising and optimistic that I only hope I can achieve the standards you have set for me.

I am so happy my family is here—my kids, Saranella and Saul and Alicia (love you guys) are here today in person and here today in spirit are Susannah and Sophie.

My brother and sister-in-law, Ken and Barbara, are here. And my parents, Sol and Ev, are no longer with us but we wish could be here.

My in laws and others from my wife's side—Ann, Sandra, Butchie, Jimmy, Steve, Pat, Mikael, and Donna.

And my wife Sheila, my soul mate and partner, who all my Goddard colleagues say is a terrific asset for our college (oh, you're not so bad either, Mark, they add).

My thanks to the entire Goddard Family—staff, faculty, students, Board, and alumni—I won't try to name everybody because I'm sure to forget someone.

A particular shout out to all of you Goddard folks who worked so hard and so long to make this

day special. You know who you are, and I have only one word to say to you: relax. Now we're doing it—planning it is finished.

I do need to mention Frances Malgeri, who with Sheila co-chaired this event. Frances is not with us, even though her indomitable spirit and indefatigable energy pulled her through her terminal illness almost to today. We miss you, Frances, and thank you for helping us to make this happen.

A special welcome to the Goddard Presidents who are here—John Hall, Barbara Mossberg, Jackson Kytte, Victor Ehly, and Jack Andrews. You know the saying about standing on the shoulders of giants? Well, that applies to you.

Representatives of colleges and universities, thank you for attending. We are honored that you chose to join us in today's celebration.

And a final thank you to my colleagues past and present, including those who said, upon hearing I would be taking this position, “Well, that will be ... challenging.”

Challenge it is. But I'm ready—and we're ready—for it.

Here's something we can all agree about: Risk-taking, questioning everything and taking on challenges are at the heart of Goddard. Frankly, I came here because I am a person who takes risks (just ask my wife, Sheila) and neither shirks from accepting nor is shy about offering a challenge (just ask my coworkers).

I don't find it to be a bad idea that at Goddard we question everything. In fact, lose the double negative: It's a good thing that Goddard is a place where everything is questioned.

Picture this: Goddard defined as a place of an aggressive questioning posture. Maybe we should call it education that cops an attitude? Maybe not. Certainly we can and should demonstrate that the Art of the Question and the Dance of Dialogue are generative themes essential to Goddard's existence. The equation is Goddard equals questions greater than answers, as we shall see this morning.

But there is one thing that we shall not question today:

My friends, we're all here today to say: “We are Goddard College and we are up to the challenge.”

## **II: Radical To The Roots**

I remember what Tim Pitkin, Goddard's first president, said: “Many people would regard what we did as radical ... I didn't think of Goddard as a radical College. As I look back on it, it was. We attempted to get down to the roots of education.”

I want to begin my remarks to you by talking about classical progressive education. As you will see, I will move into a distinction between that project and what I believe is our new project:

emancipatory progressive education.

Goddard College as it began in 1938 was a progressive institution of higher education. But before we examine what that meant, let's take a few steps back in history to the College's predecessors, the Green Mountain Central Institute and Goddard Seminary.

Chartered in 1863 as the Green Mountain Central Institute by Vermont Universalists, our predecessor opened in 1870 in Barre as Goddard Seminary. It's not too complicated to explain why the name changed. The money to allow the institution to begin operations came from a wealthy merchant, Thomas Goddard, and his wife, Mary. The Goddards also gave money to Tufts University where there is a chapel named after them. Let the record show that today we have laid to rest the rumor that Goddard was a sister institution of the Goddard Space Flight Center and their Goddard, Robert Hutchings, the father of modern rocket propulsion. Thus we know that this is not rocket science.

Goddard was a devout Universalist and Universalists started several seminaries and colleges in the nineteenth century other than Goddard. David Robins, a Unitarian Universalist Minister, sermonized in 2002 about how his forebears felt about education:

“We gain a sense of pride and history in learning about progressive educators and institutions of higher learning which were founded by Unitarian and Universalist forebears. [Our] [m]inisters accept as a part of their mission and calling in ministry to advocate person-centered education, to look to keep education progressive and of high quality and of equal opportunity.”

As we can see, Goddard was different as a Seminary and the transition to a college—actually to a junior college, for Goddard then was grades 11-14—in 1938 accentuated its uniqueness.

The meaning of progressive higher education in the 1920s and 1930s as applied to Goddard and a few other non-traditional colleges is important for us to understand. So much could be said about this topic, but I'll let suffice three major points.

First, we know that the discussion of progressive higher education has to be framed in relation to the equally complex discussion of progressive ideas in the K-12 sector. When we invoke John Dewey and his adherents, we will of necessity situate a good chunk of the discussion in elementary and secondary educational initiatives of the last century.

Second, though Goddard came toward the end of the cycle, it was part of the formation or reinvention of liberal arts colleges as progressive colleges. Bard, Sarah Lawrence, Bennington, a new Antioch—these and several other colleges formed an informal movement of new initiatives in this realm for about twenty years. There were differing rhythms and developmental phases post-1940 for all these institutions.

Third, not only were the childhoods and adolescences of these colleges divergent but also they had different DNAs. In Goddard's case, scholars of the era cite Pitkin's interest in the Danish Folk School movement, the lingering effects of the Universalist roots in Goddard Seminary, the propinquity of the College's founding to issues of the rise of fascism in Europe, the aftermath of

the mentality induced by the Depression, and the influence of Vermont's scale and ideology, town meetings in particular, as differentiating factors.

What linked these progressive colleges was a commitment to values that are no doubt familiar to all of you: whole person learning, experiential learning, democratic practice, and—mark my words because this is sometimes left out or forgotten—academic rigor.

In his 2000 dissertation that studied this cluster of progressive colleges and their evolution, Stephen Coleman, who is a former Goddard Board member, identified what distinguished them as different:

“The combination of living, working, and learning together in a closely-knit community dedicated to the development of all its members was for many a liberating experience. The differences between a progressive and a traditional college were marked. Instead of sitting through lectures in order to satisfy distribution or course requirements, students read about, applied, and discussed things that really mattered to them. Rather than cramming for exams and being graded in comparison to others, students set their own goals and their teachers and their advisors wrote narrative evaluations on their progress. And much could be accomplished when energy was directed to just three areas of study per semester. Outside of class, they set their own policies governing campus life, instead of coping with rules administrators imposed on them. More was expected of these undergraduates than showing up for class, completing assignments, and passing exams. They weren't only students, but members of a community. All of their interactions with others on and off campus were part of their education.”

Flash forward over the next five decades and we see that some but not all of the 1920s and 30s progressive colleges have held fast to these values. But we also see the widespread influence of the ideals of progressive higher education.

We know that ideas that began in progressive colleges—independent study, service learning, adult education, and interdisciplinarity—have been appropriated from the Goddards of the world to one degree or another. Emulation may be a form of flattery, but, as we also know, there are many places that have adopted the rhetoric but not the substance of Goddard and other progressive colleges. It becomes harder to differentiate even though I am convinced, as I suspect you are, that Goddard is truly unique. I sometimes feel our maxim should be “Accept No Substitutes.”

Be that as it may, as part of this celebration of a new era at Goddard, I accept as my task to sketch out for you where we are going in the next several years. I confess: I love the history of this wonderful place, and I would like to spend the rest of the day reminiscing with you, sharing our stories of 140 years of unparalleled rollercoastering.

Did you know, for example, that Goddard was the football power in the state of Vermont in the 1920s? Football teams from Burlington to Brattleboro to St. Johnsbury quaked in their cleats when they knew they had to face the ferocious boys from Goddard, and...

But I digress.

In my remaining time, I hope to demonstrate how what I am calling classical progressive education can be reinvigorated at a 21st century Goddard. In other words: How do we rearticulate the experiment of the last century as a new, fresh, relevant version for the next century? This does not imply that we are rejecting the past but we must recognize the changed and changing world in which we will invent a future.

A braid of three strands is what we craft to create the future for Goddard, one that we can call emancipatory progressive education.

### **III: Braiding the Threads**

Picture three intellectual threads that we wish to braid into a new entity, one that retains the three distinct elements and yet becomes, because it is combined, something different.

The threaded concepts are progressive pedagogy, adult learning, and emancipatory education.

I remember what Audre Lord stated:

“For we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectation and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are a result of those structures. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.”

And that reminds me of the conceptual thread of progressive pedagogy.

You'll recall I began my words to you today with the notion that Goddard questions everything. Thus as we look at our three concepts it makes sense to frame the exercise as a questioning session.

To look at progressive pedagogy, join me in listening to Steve Schapiro, an important personage in Goddard's recent history who I'm pleased joins us today. As editor of *Higher Education for Democracy*, a 1999 book about Goddard in theory and practice, he wrote that these were the questions underpinning a contemporary progressive pedagogy:

“How can we help students to acquire the skills, attitudes, dispositions, and knowledge they will need in order to be active and responsible democratic citizens, able both to: (1) participate in democratic deliberation, discourse and decision-making, and (2) examine critically and when necessary reconstruct our economic, political, and social institutions?

“How can we create democratic learning communities which recognize and affirm the diversity of all our members; that is, how can we remove the impediments and assure that all can participate with equal voice and equal access to power?

“How can we affirm and develop each student's individual and particular identity while also helping each of them to develop a commitment to the common good?”

“How can we help students to work for social, political, and environmental reconstruction, as they define such terms, without falling into the traps of dogmatism, political elitism, and sectarianism; that is, how can we help them to become both committed and searching?”

“How can we affirm new epistemologies and new ways of constructing meaning, while maintaining a common discourse and common standards of scholarship?”

I remember what Bertold Brecht wrote:

Praise of Learning

Don't be frightened to ask, comrade!  
Don't be talked into anything.  
Check for yourself  
What you do not know yourself  
you don't know.

Scrutinize the bill,  
it is you who must pay it.  
Put your finger on each item,  
ask: How did this get here?

And that reminds me of the conceptual thread of adult learning.

Let us not forget that Goddard started its academic-credit-bearing Adult Degree Program, an extension of earlier work in adult learning, forty years ago. Contemporary Goddard College is an institution that serves adult students. We think of this population somewhat differently than the rest of the education world.

For instance, Ball State University says this in its catalogue:

“Adult students, often referred to as 'non-traditional' students, are defined ... as anyone age 23 or older who is entering college for the first time. Another good definition, however, is that adult students have life concerns outside the university that take precedence over their academic needs in times of crisis.”

I've seen that formulation describing adult students mentioned in other places in the adult learning literature. It has always seemed a bit curious to me. I think people under 23 (and, for that matter, over 83) also neglect their textbooks in a crisis.

For the Goddard adult student context, we tend to discount definitions such as this one, concentrating instead on all our students as persons in a person-centered educational environment. And we should not forget that we have been an exclusively adult education

institution for two years.

Be that as it may, we must now take a leadership position—or more accurately continue our leadership in new ways—in the theory and practice of how adults learn. To that end, let's sort out some of the questions applicable to this thread. These take a different form than the Schapiro-generated questions cited above.

Lee Herman and Alan Mandel in *From Teaching to Mentoring*, published this year, ask:

- “What do you want to learn?”
- “Why do you want to learn these things?”
- “How do you want to learn them?”
- “What do you believe you have already learned?”
- “How do you decide that you have done so?”

And they clarify what these five queries mean:

“...the dialogues initiated and sustained by these questions will sufficiently provide both the content and process of learning in academic, workplace, community, and personal life. Moreover, these questions, when asked of oneself in self-reflection, create a lifelong course of learning which is at once entirely coherent and meaningful and yet entirely open to endlessly diverse and unexpected discoveries.”

I believe that Goddard, today exclusively in adult learning but throughout its history as general principles, exemplifies the dialogue of which Herman and Mandel speak.

I remember what Bob Marley sang: “Emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds.”

And that reminds me of the conceptual thread of emancipatory education.

Susan Imel, in 1999, published through the ERIC Clearinghouse a brief article, entitled “How Emancipatory is Adult Learning?”

“The goal of emancipatory learning,” she states, “is to free learners from the forces that limit their options and exert control over their lives and to move them to take action to bring about social and political change.”

And she quotes Jack Mezirow as suggesting that emancipatory education is only applicable to adults because “it is only in late adolescence and adulthood that a person can recognize being caught in his/her own history and reliving it.”

Here's where it gets interesting.

When we begin to consider such questions as Imel raises in her piece, we can see the hands intertwining the threads for the braid.

Listening to what she says requires examination in relation to adult learning and emancipatory education:

- “Should adult education foster emancipatory learning?”
- “Do practices designed to foster emancipatory learning have the desired result?”
- “Is emancipatory pedagogy empowering?”
- “Is emancipatory learning individual or collective?”

Progressive pedagogy, adult learning, emancipatory education. The threads, through our questioning approach, are intertwined.

Now our braid is ready. What remains is to situate it—that is, to view its colors and its consistency in the light of a new day.

Our colorful and multifaceted braid shimmers in our field of vision as we seek the optimal spot from which to examine it. Steadying our legs, balancing our bodies, and assaying the terrain, we unpack the essence of the progressive paradigm.

#### **IV: Between Erewhon And Babylon**

Since I've recently evoked the spirit of Brother Bob, Babylon is an appropriate metaphor. Jack Johnson-Hill defines Babylon as “an artificial affluent society of self-absorbed individuals who worship idols and live decadent lifestyles at the expense of the poor.”

I also invoke now Brother Samuel (Samuel Butler, that is) and I'm using the Erewhon he created as a metaphor for unhealthy collectivism. As Butler's traveler to the fictitious land states, “Nothing struck me more during my whole sojourn in the country than the general respect for law and order.”

I'd like you to picture a balance scale.

On one side: Individual Development—shall we call it the Self?

With qualities of:

Personal gain

Individual achievement

Self-centered ambition

On the other: Community Development—shall we call it Society?

With qualities of:

Social and Economic Justice

Collective Concern

Civic Responsibility

I would argue that none of these qualities are, by themselves, either good or bad. They are in a constant tension within and between, and the objective is to maintain equilibrium. The trick is, in an educational context, to avoid both a Babylonese selfish decadence and an Erewhonesque lazy conformity. The history of progressive education, and of Goddard, seems to me to be a diligent and rigorous effort to put Individual and Society into equilibrium, neither Babylon nor Erewhon.

For the new century, these characteristics, in healthy and balanced interaction, can be thought of as the foundation of the intertwined collaboration of adult, progressive and emancipatory educational concepts.

I am not prepared this morning to lay out a full report on the state of emancipatory progressive education. But please consider a Goddard that embraces what I consider the two essential characteristics of this educational vision:

The first characteristic is creative praxis. I define this as the dialectic of theory and practice—the usual meaning of praxis—but we must add a particular spin: that the construction of new knowledge trumps all orthodoxies. That's the creative addition.

The second characteristic is principled engagement. I define this as a reasoned and reasonable stance of resistance to an oppressive, exploitative, and anti-democratic social, political and cultural order with the intention of building a better world.

With those two characteristics as the foundation of our educational and structural practices, an emancipatory, progressive Goddard will have at its core seven imperatives. They are:

- To embrace difficult dialogues.
- To strive to be a good neighbor—locally, nationally, and globally.
- To sustain a just and humane work place.
- To engage in committed scholarship.
- To center on the learning experience.
- To practice radical democracy.
- To dwell in the world with panache, grace and humor.

One consideration remains, and we have addressed that collectively. In our planning process and strategic thinking of the last year, we have as a community identified a set of shared values in four areas of consideration:

- The value attached to Our Ethical Commitments that asks “What ideas form the essence of our shared ethical space?”
- The value attached to Our Educational Project that asks “What forms the basis of our shared intellectual space?”

- The value attached to Our Learning Community that asks: “What characteristics define our shared learning space?”
- The value attached to Our Organizational Ethos that asks “What motivates the ways we use our shared work space?”

## **V: About Your President**

My focus in my talk with you today has been on what I know—a good progressive principle, don't you think? I have drawn on my academic and administrative careers in the outliers—institutions on the margin for one reason or another. In my personal history, that has meant my service at a women's college, a Catholic college, Antioch, City College of New York, The New School, and Pacific Oaks, a college devoted to early childhood education.

Note that what all these colleges have in common is that they are values-based. While my career has most often been attached to institutions that are up front about their values, I think you will probably agree with me that all colleges have a values basis. Some hide it or ignore it or pretend they are value-free.

Colleges such as those where I have served are on the margins but not marginal. In fact, like Goddard, these overtly values-based colleges take on willingly a task vital to social change: adjusting the margins.

What will my values-based presidency do to lead Goddard's adjustment of the margins?

It wasn't that long ago—1997, to be exact—when an advertisement for a new Goddard president included the following intriguing requirement:

“In the past, presidents at Goddard have resigned, due in part to conflicts with a community committed to complete participation in all important decisions affecting the college. Goddard needs a leader who is sensitive to a politically radical conception of education and governance. We need someone who is prepared to lead us through a process that questions the necessity of a President in the first place, and can, if necessary, conceptualize alternative governing methods.”

While we have moved beyond this point in our history, I am aware that the contradictions of leadership in a Goddard context are part of the daily lives of Goddard presidents.

In that vein, I would be remiss if I didn't include in this new beginning another Goddard tradition: struggle.

Now let me hasten to assert that there is a difference, in my mind, between fighting and struggling.

At our best, Goddard folks are always engaged in struggle, with their own being, with each other, and with the world. But struggle is different than fighting, and, at our worst, we Goddard folks fight something fierce within ourselves, with one another, and in the world.

I hope to be a president who helps us to struggle but stops us from fighting.

Again let's seek some of the important questions, this time from Richard Schramm who reported in a fascinating chapter in Steve Schapiro's aforementioned book on the elements of a 1995 group study on the topic "Business and Democracy at Goddard College." They hoped to answer:

"What does it take to operate a college successfully as a business? How well is Goddard College doing in this regard? What are its strengths and weaknesses as a business?"

"What does it take to operate a college as a democratic organization? What do we mean by a democratic organization and how do existing democratic organizations operate effectively (or do they)? To what extent is Goddard operated democratically, and how well is it doing in this regard?"

"Can a college operate well both as a business and a democracy? Can governance, administration, and operations be conducted both democratically and efficiently? What types of structures, processes, and education are needed for individuals at Goddard to participate responsibly and effectively in democratic management of the College?"

It won't surprise you to learn that they could only partially answer those questions. Now, almost ten years later, the questions have a different spin, but they remain on our agenda.

And I think that's terrific.

## **VI: Let Us Begin**

Now here's a question for you: How many questions have I asked in the last thirty minutes?

Including this one, the total is forty. That may be a record for an inaugural address, where I presume there are traditionally more answers than questions. In truth, however, I'm not the questioner, I'm the conduit for what we should all hope will turn out to be the right questions.

That's because I'm the President of Goddard College and, in some fundamental way, my job—

our job—is to ask the questions, all the questions, especially those that rarely get asked. For unless you find questions that help you to achieve knowledge—really useful knowledge, as Richard Johnson calls it to differentiate from ivory-tower elitism—there's little reason, it seems to me, to celebrate your answers. And in the never-ending cycle of thesis/antithesis/synthesis, there is never a dearth of good questions for which Goddard should provide the asking place.

Let's not go so far as to call it the college that cops an attitude, but we certainly are the locus of a struggle and a questioning unparalleled and unmatched, I believe, in an institution of higher education.

As we address the new issues and build emancipatory progressive education, we will keep the equilibrium, we will keep the values, and we will keep the faith.

Thank you.

Mark Schulman, President