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1ST ANNUAL SPRING CONVOCATION ADDRESS

CFA *Where Traditions Meet: Continually Striving Towards Critical, Creative, Collaborative Excellence*

Thursday, January 24, 2013
[The convocation began with Wojciech Kocyan, Clinical Professor in the Music Department playing the Andante and Allegro from Mozart's Sonata in C Major on the piano].

Introduction:

Good Afternoon. Thank you for joining me to for my first convocation presentation as the new Dean, College of Communication and Fine Arts here at Loyola Marymount University. I am indeed honored to have joined the fine community of Teachers, Artists, Professionals, and Scholars in CFA. I am grateful to have joined a devoted congenial group of administrative colleagues, a stellar Development Officer in Tara Frates, as well as a great support staff in the college and around the university. I am moved by the continued support of dedicated donors, the devotion of grateful parents and the enduring legacy of proud alum, who maintain such meaningful connections to CFA and the university at large. And I am inspired by the spirit of LMU, a sacred space, a practiced place with sacred traditions in which the mission of the university is real in the dailiness of what we do, here. And to all of you I say thank you for your generous welcome and for offering me the comfort of your support as I deepen my transition into and becoming a greater part of the LMU family.

It is appropriate that we are meeting here today in Murphy Recital Hall in the Fritz B. Burns Arts Complex inclusive of the Thomas P. Kelly Student Art Gallery, The Laband Art Gallery, Terry Leavey-Lemons Hall, and Edward and Lynn Hogan Hall. The facility as a whole is the home of the Music Department, the Art Department—Studio Arts and Art History, and the home of our Dance Program. At the heart of the complex is the George A.V. Dunning Courtyard—which in many ways is the nexus of the complex and serves as the heart of the dynamic life of the College of Communication and Fine Arts inclusive of the Theatre Arts Department and the Department of Communication Studies located in Foley Hall, the Graduate Program in Marital & Family Therapy located in University Hall, and our program in Interdisciplinary and Applied Studies currently located in St. Robert’s Hall along with the main offices of the college.

Today I have structured my words around three major frames: First, a kind of reintroduction of myself and how and why I believe that this is the “Right Place and Right Time” for me to be at LMU. Second, a reflection, if not explication of the title of my overall presentation as I believe it speaks to some kernel components of my current observations of the college and my vision of the direction that we might travel together; maybe in the process of confirming LMU President David W. Burcham’s construct of the LMU campus community as being a “constellation of relationships,” and for me, a constellation of relationships always striving for the ultimate in collaborative excellence; realizing the idiom that Jesuit Education relies on a spirit of a community amongst all who make what we do possible at LMU. Third and finally, I want to offer a more discerning set of visions for the college in alignment with and promoting our current efforts in the unit-level strategic planning process.
BODY:

Right Place/Right Time (Revisited)

I arrived at LMU in July 2012 and it is has been a whirlwind of an experience, but one that I am truly enjoying. Being here, for me, now, is The Right Place and Right Time. After being in higher education for a little over 20 years as a professor of Communication Studies, a Chair of a Department of Liberal Studies, an Associate Dean and Interim Dean of a College of Arts and Letters—not unlike the College of Communication and Fine Arts here at LMU—being at LMU feels right. I entered LMU at a critical time—right when the university ended its highly successful Right Place and Right Time Fundraising Campaign with over $411 million dollars raised, with CFA raising $16.6 million under the leadership of former Dean, Barbara Busse and the efforts of Tara Frates, Development Officer. I first thought that the amount raised was impressive, as of course it is—but then later I came to understand that the efforts of administrators, development officers, parents and friends of the university in reaching and exceeding campaign targets over and over again spoke to me not just of a particular level of giving and efforts at stewardship and solicitation, but a level of care and commitment to the mission of this fine university: to the encouragement of learning, the education of the whole person, and the service of faith and the promotion of justice. The fact that the campaign was framed as The Right Place and Right Time simply reinforced my decision to accept the opportunity to work in such a vibrant and committed educational environment.

I also entered at a time when LMU had just ratified a new and progressive strategic plan grounded in six major themes3, which I will speak about shortly. I enter the College of Communication and Fine Arts as someone with a unique academic and performance background to engage the multiple disciplines and activities of the college. Some may see my PhD in Communications Studies as a weighted anchor situating me more heavily in one side of the CFA house and not the whole. But while my academic training has always been grounded in Communication Studies, an academic field that deals with understanding processes and the nature of human social engagement across differing fields of knowing and encounter. When fully understood and engaged, Communication Studies is always and already interdisciplinary drawing on resources from the social sciences, humanities, and fine arts, amongst others.

With a doctorate in Speech Communication and particularly in Performance Studies my work as an active scholar has always explored the potentials of performance on the stage and in everyday life; a focus on artistic and aesthetic performances like theatrical events, dance, art, performance art and film; but also everyday human behavior in the performance of race, culture, gender, and sexuality; the performative nature of sporting events; social, political and religious events like rituals, ceremonies, religious events, as well as the performance of religiosity and catholicity; the use of language, embodied engagement and articulated skill as analytics towards understanding and expressing human nature and desire; performance as a doing but also a means for critique, of argumentation, of engaged social consciousness, of informed human expression and mindful self-knowing.4

And I have a history of varied engagements with traditional performance relative to the disciplines of CFA: choirs and choruses (both sacred and secular), in college I sang in a Chamber group directed by now celebrated Peter Tiboris.5 I served as a cantor in my church for a number of years while living and working in Minnesota. I have performed in college theatre, community theatre and children’s theatre along with a traveling one-man show on Black masculinity, only 16 years ago. I participated in speech and debate for years as competitor, and later as a Director
of Forensics. I also have a slightly storied history taking dance classes in modern, jazz, tap, and ballet. I am a former trombone player and currently a budding guitar player with lessons from one of our own music students—Mr. Eric Nestor Escalante.

I offer this brief performance resume not as a defense, but as a way to broaden your understanding of my deep and abiding commitment to the power of the arts to entertain, inform and transform the lives of our students—providing them with deep and critical understandings of themselves and the world; and the ways in which students are empowered with fierce tools. As education scholar Howard Gardner might suggest—these particular, distinct and multiple intelligences are practical and particular, they document the extent to which students possess different kinds of minds and therefore learning, remembering, performing, and understanding in different ways and thus through their art and artistry, their talent and modes of expression as tools of illumination, transcendence, and transformation that our students can help others to see and know themselves and the world anew. In CFA we value multi-intelligences.

And as we now fully engage President Burcham’s $100 Million Scholarship Initiative, which forestalls for a moment an emphasis on the proliferation of new buildings—but works towards easing the increasing financial pressure felt by families and students seeking a Loyola Marymount University education. We will strive and will encourage the university to increase what are sometimes called “talent-based” scholarships for students in the Fine Arts—knowing that students in the Fine Arts have both talent and intellect that inform each other. Recognize that when you encounter these students in their art and artistry—you are already engaging their critical performance of intellect. This is not distinct from the activities of faculty and students in the Department of Communication Studies, who wonderfully engage in a dialectical discourse; a critical search for truth and the rhetorics of knowing involved in the analysis of the presidential debates as in the panel discussion depicted below or in everyday conversation. All CFA activities demand a critical articulation of expression grounded in a sophistication of knowing.
My interests in Communication Studies and the Fine Arts have always been interdisciplinary and serve as a part of my vision for the College of Communication and Fine Arts in that we continue to embrace the advantages of interdisciplinarity—helping students to know the world through differing paradigms and methodologies and the ability to engage in a critical dialogue on society, culture and humanity. As well as helping students to understand the relationships between history, theory and practice; between intellectual knowing and practical engagement—all made manifest in a critical praxis of thinking, living and doing.

CFA Where Traditions Meet: Continually Striving Towards Critical, Creative, and Collaborative Excellence

The framing title of my presentation today: CFA Where Traditions Meet has now become my tagline for engagement and describing the college. It is now the new name of the CFA Newsletter. And little does he know, the phrase was inspired through a discussion with Father Randy Roche; a discerning conversation while we broke bread together and spoke of the unique qualities of CFA—a college with a department of Communication Studies and departments that focus on the Fine Arts—as the nexus location where the critical intellectual and artistic traditions of three religious communities at Loyola Marymount University: The Jesuits, The Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange find its most bracing presence at Loyola Marymount University. A college where we seek to enliven and further explore the ways in which these critical traditions are always grounded in Catholic Intellectual Traditions and a particular respect, exploration and expression of expansive constructions of spirituality, of faith communities, and a search for truth through varied mediums.

In a couple of rather discerning conversations with Father Bob Caro—he has helped me to reactivate the spirit and understanding of my Catholic belief; the one undergirded in my
upbringing in a large Catholic family in Southwest Louisiana, memories of my short stint as an alter boy at Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church, and later my time serving as a Eucharistic minister at a number of Catholic Churches in my travels to LMU. Father Caro has also helped me to begin understanding the particular interpretative frames and embodied engagements of a Jesuit education and Ignatius teachings that are now grounding my commitments to the mission of LMU.

In regular conversations with Bishop Gordon Bennett I am deepening my understanding of the Characteristics of Jesuit Education. With me seeking to explore how these qualities are present and need to be present in my leadership of CFA, as well as how these qualities might be identified as fully present in the college as a whole.

• serves the faith that does justice.
• seeks to form “men and women for others.”
• manifests a particular concern for the poor.
• prepares students for active participation in the church and the local community, for the service of others.
• pursues excellence in its work of formation.
• witnesses to excellence.
• stresses lay-Jesuit collaboration.
• relies on a spirit of community.
• takes place within a structure that promotes community.
• is a “system” of school with a common vision and common goals.
• assists in providing the professional training and ongoing formation that is needed, especially for teachers.
• world affirming.
• total formation of each individual within the human community.
• includes a religious dimension that permeates the entire education.
• an apostolic instrument.
• insists on individuals’ care and concern for each person.
• emphasizes activity on the part of the student in the learning process.
• encourages life-long openness to growth.
• value-oriented.
• encourages a realistic knowledge, love and acceptance of self.
• provides a realistic knowledge of the world in which we live.
• provides adequate pastoral care.
• celebrates faith in personal and community prayer, worship and service.
• preparation for active life commitment.²

In the title of this presentation, like my efforts thus far in CFA, I am pushing the college to continually strive for critical, creative, and collaborative excellence.

Certainly in CFA we understand the nature of creative activity—the ability amongst many to make new combinations and expressions of the human mind and spirit that is the core of what we do in dance, combining exacting realism and unbridled imagination with an athletic aestheticism of expression. It is what we do in theatre, using the stage as a laboratory for the study of life, a rehearsal space for social justice and a venue for political activism. [As in this production of “Stages of AIDS” directed by Neno Pervan].
It is what we do in music an arena to promote the study of culture, time and place; in differentiated arenas and modes to fully explore passions of expression.
In our diverse programs in art and art history—we are engaged in deep processes of gaining a keen perception and understanding of *art and its visual and symbolic language*. To recognize that fundamental to all forms of *individual and cultural expression* is the activity of studying and making art—as cultural performance and the performance of culture.

And of course this is not a recursive process of critical entrapment, like the *hand drawing the hand*.13
But like the important work being done in our Graduate Program in Marital and Family Therapy—art making becomes a process of sense-making and meaning-making—a tool, method and mechanism of deep self-reflection and analysis for personal transformation [as depicted in the image below created by Diana Muhs, a Rehabilitation and Art Therapist at Patton State Hospital, California].

In CFA we also know about collaboration of working with each other in productive ways---I would like to push us further in this arena—in the spirit of interdisciplinarity, in the spirit of
having our students have diverse interactive experiences across what sometimes seem as fixed borders called departments or programs. I am encouraging more programs like *Matsukaze* based on the original by Zeami, a fusion Japanese Noh play adapted and directed by Kevin Wetmore in theatre, with an originally composed score by Music Professor Paul Humphreys and his gamalan troupe, and choreography by dance professor Theresa Heiland. 15

A performance that was staged in the George A. V. Dunning Courtyard this Fall and intricately programmed by Carolyn Peter, Director of the Laband Art Gallery as part of the “Return to the Sea” salt exhibition of Motoi Yamamoto, which brought together diverse groups of the campus and community to engage the art and sentiments of the exhibition at differing levels conceptualization, construction, deconstruction and the return of the salt to the sea.

Carolyn Peter is engaged in a wide range of interdisciplinary collaborations on behalf of the college and throughout the university, like the current exhibition of the “daring aesthetics” of iconographer Eric Gill that combine images of sensuality and spirituality. Carolyn’s curating of
this exhibition also includes collaborations with sister Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU)—the University of San Francisco from where the main show derives, and framing assistance from Loyola—New Orleans.

And in CFA we also know about being critical—critique is a discerning component of what we do. But I would like for us to push the nature of being critical further or maybe deeper, so that it does not reside in a place of breaking down possibility, fault finding, blaming or judging with such severity that it becomes debilitating, thereby establishing a place of entrapment for us all. Or, that we critique as a first line of defense against past practices in a way that we become entrenched in past relational politics forestalling opportunities for renewal. I want us to revisit the nature of critical investigation that opens up spaces of growth. In talking about the nature of doing critical work—I often turn to the words of D. Soyini Madison writing on the nature of doing critical ethnography. She writes: Critical work seeks to articulate and identify hidden forces and ambiguities that operate beneath appearances; to guide judgments and evaluations emanating from our discontent; to direct our attention to the critical expressions within different interpretive communities relative to their unique symbol systems, customs, and codes; to demystify the ubiquity and magnitude of power; to provide insight and inspire acts of justice; and to name and analyze what is intuitively felt.16

Linked with Madison’s construct I also turn to the work of scholars in critical pedagogy, particularly the work of Henry Giroux who speaks of the necessity of having both a language of critique and a language of possibility. Giroux stresses developing a language of possibility as an integral part of being and what makes a person critical. In his construction, the aim of the critical educator should be "to raise ambitions, desires, and real hope for those who wish to take seriously the issue of educational struggle and social justice."17

In what ways in the CFA can we continue to engage in a critical discourse about the politics of place and practice in our planning, but also work towards engaging a language of possibility that is constructive and moves us forward—capitalizing on the past, to be more productive in our processes of (re)imagining our potentials—for the benefits of our students and the university at large?

**Strategic Planning**

I entered this year as all the units in the university have been charged to develop their own strategic plans—recognizing as President Burcham has noted that the university’s work takes place within individual functional units. This is an exciting way for a new leader to enter in any organization—and for me as the dean to begin working with faculty, staff and students to explore the grounding foundations of the disciplines in the college and to critically reflect on the overlaps and touch points of our plans, pedagogies, policies and practices—and to begin charting the direction for future growth and development for next 5 years. Our process has been productive, and we are working towards finalizing a new strategic plan based on university timelines—recognizing that our document will be a living document, subject to shift and change/subject to flow and flux overtime. Following the completion of the college document individual departments will develop plans to particularize their activities for the future—in relation to the college and university strategic plan—ensuring alignment and a commonality of intent. In
reference to each of the themes of the strategic plan I offer these brief vision statements:

**Theme 1: Excellence in Transformative Education**

*We engage the performative and expressive aesthetics of human communication, theatre, art, music and dance that provide pleasure and opportunities to critically examine culture, self and society to live an informed life while advocating social justice.*

During the Fall semester I engaged students in Professor Saeri Dobson’s Experimental Typography class in a branding project for the college, charged with creating images that represent the college: intent, content, construction, and formulation-- the students presented a series of images that to me were breathtakingly powerful--- but what was even more powerful than the images, were the narratives that accompanied the images—in which students spoke of what it means to be a student in CFA, what the relationship of the departments in the college mean to them—all grounded in empowerment, transformation, possibility, the practicing of voice, the expression of emotion, activism and social change through artistic forms--grounded in the traditions and histories of LMU.

In Objective 4 of this strategic theme linked with strengthening support for students’ post-baccalaureate success-- we are engaging a critical discussion about what we are currently calling “Pathways to Careers in CFA” in which we are producing individual documents of each department that begin to lay out pathways that our students travel, and that our programs prepare them to travel--in terms of careers, jobs, service, and advance graduate or professional studies-- and our commitment and support of their journey.

**Theme 2: Leadership in Graduate Education**

*Capitalizing on the success of the Master’s Program in Marital and Family Therapy, CFA sees a future with a critical increase of specialized niche programs that foster student mastery of their chosen field.*
We are currently exploring such innovative programs in theatre (pedagogy, playwriting and performance) in collaboration with programs in Bellarmine College of Liberal Arts, the School of Film and Television and the School of Education along with other potential programs that will engage in critical exploration of potential based on feasibility and fiscal responsibility.

**Theme 3: Promoting the Teacher-Scholar-Artist Model**

*CFA is committed to the teacher-scholar-artist model, recognizing the intricate relationship between creating, translating and projecting scholarly and intellectual knowing in creative/artistic ways that inform students in production, pedagogy and practice. The tripartite relationship of being a teacher/scholar/artist is at the core of CFA and is displayed and demonstrated in every department. Students in CFA benefit from engaging faculty who are effective and actively engaged in shaping their disciplines as scholars and artists.*

In CFA we have recently completed a booklet that documents the Published and Creative Activities of faculty for 2011-2012. It is an impressive bibliography of effort and activity with 44 pages that represent contributions of 37 out of 51 full-time faculty in the college (with the contribution of 1 clinical faculty). The document is designed as both celebration and motivation for us to continually document our accomplishments in these areas and continually measure how our scholarly and creative activities inform our teaching. I join faculty in this endeavor, as I continue my own efforts as an active scholar and creative artist—seeking the opportunity in the future to teach, and once again fully engage that holy trinity of being a teacher-scholar-artist in CFA. In this image you also notice the use of the efforts of students—as I promote their critical and artistic production. The inside of the cover gives the students credit and lists their individual names as appropriate citation of creative activity.

**Theme 4: Commitment to Local and Global Citizenship**

*CFA engages local and global citizenship through a cultivated understanding of critical and creative human expression across the domains of race, culture and the politics of place and space in the particularity of the disciplines within the college. We are a college that offers critical and creative activities that challenge the mind and body while instilling a sense of cultural and political responsibility to local communities as well as sensitivity to change in a global society.*

**Theme 5: Advancing LMU’s Role as a Premier Catholic University in the Jesuit and Marymount Traditions**

*Through offering distinctive graduate, undergraduate and credential programs in CFA that meet and exceed accreditation standards; and through engaging the critical aspects of our disciplines in a faith-based community that encourage a critical reflexive process of self-knowing in relation to others; and through assisting students to explore the relationship between our disciplines and their faith-practices--CFA is a college that celebrates and embodies the LMU mission.*

**Theme 6: Promoting Competitiveness and Accountability**
CFA is a college that recognizes the changing nature of technologies of knowing and doing as it relates to the disciplines of the college. We are constantly seeking ways to assess the quality and effectiveness of our methods, techniques, pedagogies, facilities and delivery systems to provide students with viable educational experience that inform and prepare them for the next steps in their personal and professional lives.

In this light we are also seeking to enliven all our performance spaces with renovations and the prayer for new facilities to better facilitate the safety of our students, the educational experiences of our students, to increase the visibility of our programs and to evidence the university’s commitment to the arts.

In offering my closing comments, I want to allow this last image from a production that opens today in the Virginia Barnelle Theatre.¹⁹

I want the image to linger with you: an image for me that juxtaposes flowers and grenades, signifying the fragility of life and the politics of war and protest. The image like the performative engagement, speaks to what I have been referencing as a needed language of critique and a language of possibility. The image is representative of so much of the activity in the College of Communication and Fine Arts—in which the power of language and art are used not just to create pretty aesthetics—but the craftiness of art and artistry used to force a critical engagement of human issues, social issues, political issues and the dynamism of human social engagement.

CONCLUSION:

So, in this short period of time I have tried to offer an overview of a vision for the College of Communication and Fine Arts:
A vision longing to become real,  
A vision that is still developing,  
A vision still waiting and wanting to crystallize, and  
A vision imbued with a hope that it is not singular but plural.

A vision that may exist somewhere between flowers and grenades,  
A vision that cannot be exclusively what I want for CFA, but a vision shaped by critical collective discourse.

A vision that invites participation and governance with others--for as President Obama recently told us—maybe, in this case, faculty “engagement can lift the suspicion” of administrative intent.  

So I invite the creation of a shared vision,  
A collective vision,  
A vision that collectivizes,  
A vision that is shaped by kind hands,  
charted with clear eyes,  
and engaged with good intent.

As Myrlie Evers-Williams spoke in her recent invocation at President Obama Inauguration--in my leadership of the college thus far--I believe that I have, and will continue to act courageously but cautiously when confronted with danger and [I will] act prudently but deliberately when challenged by adversity.  

As we work collectively to further our goals and objectives in the College of Communication and Fine Arts, I will ask for your support and your recognition.

I ask for a recognition that my actions will never be guided by conceit or guile, but guided by a commitment to how we must all strive towards forming programs that are always in service of the university’s mission and the Ignatian spirit of being men and women with and for others.

I thank you for joining me here today.
NOTES

1 I am particularly grateful to the staff in the CFA Dean’s Office: Judith Scalin—Interim Associate Dean, Gerohy O’Connell-Assistant to the Dean, Judith Delavigne-Academic Affairs Associate, Elaine Walker—Sr. Coordinator of Academic Services, Blanca Pauliukevicius—Budget Manager, Charisse Smith—Budget Analyst, and Rachel Van Houten—Administrative Coordinator. <http://cfa.lmu.edu/about/deansoffice/>


7 See LMU President David W. Burcham’s Scholarship Initiative http://www.lmu.edu/Giving/scholarship.htm.

8 In the actual presentation of the convocation this reference to the Department of Communication Studies was inadvertently cut in a last minute edit of the text. Accompanying the phrase was also a power point slide of an image, one of the three staged public viewings and discussions of the 2012 Presidential Debates. Each viewing of the debates projected in varying university locations was followed by a panel discussion. The panelists were from varying disciplines in the university, with the second and third debate events inclusive of a mixture of faculty and students. In this first event panelists spoke to the debates from the following perspectives: New Media & LGBTQ Issues: Christopher Finlay, Energy and Environmental Justice: Traci Voyles, Women's Reproductive Rights: Jade Sasse, Race and Class-The 1% vs. the 47%: Brad Stone, Immigration & Labor & Presidential Rhetoric: Nina Reich, Immigration & Labor: Herbert Medina, Debate/ Argumentation: Emily Ravenscroft, and Presidential Rhetoric: Philip Wander. I extend my personal regret to the faculty for this omission.


11 I am conscious of the third religious community that further shapes the distinctive nature of LMU as a Jesuit institution: the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange. In the performative presentation of my convocation speech this acknowledgement was not include. I extend my most
sincere apologies for that lack of recognition. I working to ensure this tripartite inclusion when referencing the construction of “Where Traditions Meet” in CFA.

12 “Characteristics of Jesuit Education.” Published by the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education 1986—a handout provided to me by Bishop Gordon Bennett.


14 The descriptive phrases describing the departments/programs are mostly drawn from the CFA webpage. http://cfa.lmu.edu.

15 “Matsukaze” is a fusion NOH play based on the original by Zeami. Zeami, is also called Kanze Motokiyo.


18 Images designed by students in Prof. Saeri Dobson’s Experimental Topography class: Carolyn Bell, Aristotelis Courcoubetis, Kyle Crowther, Katlin Dela Cruz, Rachel Fell, Michael Fullem, Nicholas Garcia, Ashley Gudenzi, Deborah Herrera, Jazmin Infante, Sara Layon, Cooper McKenna, Leanne McNamee, Juni Min, Jessica Wong and Matthew Yamane.

19 The production was entitled, “Tears of Rage” written by Doris Baizley and directed by Judith Royer, C.S.J. chronicles the experience of “five best friends caught in the conflict between the Vietnam War and the Anti-War Movement.” Each performance was followed by a post play discussion with the write and educated experts speaking from personal experience and historical knowledge of the period.
