

## Inaugural Address

It is a great honor and privilege to stand before you today and dedicate myself to the service of Bryn Mawr College.

I am deeply grateful for the confidence of the Board of Trustees. Your devotion to this institution inspires and guides me.

I am humbled by the reception I've received from the Bryn Mawr faculty, colleagues whose wisdom and judgment I will seek at every turn.

The wonderful staff of this College have wrapped me in their good will and also wrapped me in the gift of a gorgeous hand-knit afghan.

I am delighted by the warm welcome I have received from our students. It will be a pleasure to be part of your educational journey.

Alumnae/i of the College have shared with me their recollections of happy and absorbing days on this hilltop. I am thrilled that so many of you could be here today.

And I am especially fortunate to enjoy this extraordinary moment with the distinguished representatives and speakers who share this stage, particularly Dr. Johnnetta Cole, whom I first met when she was president of Spelman College and I was a very junior faculty member at Emory University.

So many family members and friends bless me with their presence today, but my greatest gladness are those seated in the front row: our four children, Jamie, Meg, Katie, and Liz; our four grandchildren, Kevin, Elena, Georgia, and Vivian; and most especially, my lifelong love, Dennis.

Whenever I'm asked, "How do you balance work and family?" I have only one true answer: Marry the right man. My husband, Dennis McAuliffe, is incredibly supportive. He is also an outstanding educator and a selfless scholar. Minus a few fights over the years about who does the dishes, we've managed to figure out the balance that works for both of our professional lives.

Today, family and friends, mentors and colleagues, alumnae/i, faculty, students and staff—we all take part in one of the most beautiful and meaningful academic traditions. We are players in a bit of theater rooted in the universities of the Middle Ages, apparently very drafty universities, which is why we are all robed like monks. Actually, most monks gave up this dress long ago, but we academics do cling to our customs.

The inaugural ceremony recognizes the distinction and continuity of the scholarly life. In its history, Bryn Mawr has staged an event like this for seven of its eight presidents – three of whom are here today!

Eight presidents in 123 years is not a lot of job turnover. My predecessors have clearly treasured—and held on to—this role. I intend to invest my tenure with the same devotion.

Since my arrival at Bryn Mawr on July 1<sup>st</sup>, I've wanted to get to know the College by walking every path and exploring every building on this beautiful campus. What a pleasure these explorations have been!

During one tour, I climbed a splendid circular staircase tucked into a third-floor corner of Taylor Hall. As I ascended its spiraling wrought iron steps, I took turn after turn until finally reaching the very top of Taylor. In every direction, the view was magical. Here were splendid stone buildings, rolling green lawns, and tree-shaded paths, a vibrant campus beloved by generations of students and sustained by devoted alumnae/i. And in the distance, the exciting, challenging, ever-changing city beyond.

From that vantage point, I felt the sweep of Bryn Mawr history and I saw its promise. This is a place to honor and to cherish. This is a place with a proud past now facing a future rich with possibility.

Today, I'd like to begin a conversation about that future—to contemplate where Bryn Mawr, born in the nineteenth century, developed with distinction in the twentieth, might venture in the twenty-first. Together, I wish us to consider our responsibilities to the liberal arts education of women, to graduate education and productive research, and to civic and global engagement.

Let me be clear: I offer no “to do” list of specific projects. Instead, I'd like to ignite a few sparks that start us thinking about the history we will write together.

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It is an honor and a privilege to walk in the footsteps of the powerful, even heroic, women and men of Bryn Mawr. When Joseph Taylor, James Rhoads, and M. Carey Thomas set the college on its bold, historic path, the right of women to an equal—to say nothing of an exceptional—education was a revolutionary concept.

They assembled a stellar faculty fully committed to academic rigor. Florence Bascom came to Bryn Mawr from Johns Hopkins, where she had to sit behind a screen to pursue her own graduate studies. She endured that indignity, became the first woman to hold a PhD in geology, and on this campus educated a generation of geologists.

Then as now, extraordinary faculty attracted exceptional students. Emily Balch, an inveterate organizer, established the nation's first student self-governance association here at Bryn Mawr in 1892, and then went on to found the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. She entrusted her Nobel Peace Prize to her *alma mater*, and recently, as part of my continuing campus exploration, I held that prize in my hands.

In 1889, Umeko Tsuda left her home in Japan for an education at Bryn Mawr. Inspired by her experience here, she returned to Japan to establish that nation's first private college for women, an institution with which we continue to nurture close ties.

Since those earliest days, Bryn Mawr has never wavered from its founding ideals. Despite challenges, its lantern has stayed lit for generations to follow.

Now our hands lift the lantern. With that responsibility, our vision must be equal to the needs and circumstances of the 21<sup>st</sup> century world. We are ready for this task.

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Medieval scholars divided the liberal arts into two realms: the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*. The *trivium* embraced foundational skills and methods—grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric. Once mastered, they were the scaffolding, the support of a student's future studies. Those further studies were the *quadrivium*, the four-part curriculum that encompassed advanced learning.

Let me appropriate that structure to frame some thoughts about challenge and opportunity for Bryn Mawr. I'll use *trivium* to identify the fundamental values that define us as a women's college in the liberal arts tradition, in other words, our core commitments and abiding concerns. These values—excellence, access, and agency—are the foundation for all of our aspirations.

*Excellence* was at the heart of the animating vision for Bryn Mawr, and it remains so. This is the nation's pre-eminent undergraduate college for women, dedicated to research and scholarship of the highest order and distinguished by its commitment to outstanding graduate education in select fields. Bryn Mawr stands in the top 10 of all colleges and universities in the number of its graduates who earn a PhD. In a recent analysis of names listed in *Who's Who*, Bryn Mawr ranked 14<sup>th</sup> of the best 225 universities and colleges in the proportion of graduates listed—the only women's college in the top 20.

*Access* to excellence was the reason Bryn Mawr was born. From its earliest days, this College has sought to offer the most rigorous education to those who were otherwise excluded from the best undergraduate colleges and the most challenging graduate programs. With each successive generation, the College has expanded this originating mandate as it seeks to enroll the most qualified women from all parts of this country and throughout the world. A recent survey of highly selective liberal arts colleges placed Bryn Mawr among the top 5 in terms of its socioeconomic diversity.

Our third core value is *agency*. We not only educate our graduates to become engaged citizens of the world but we as an institution act as a force for social justice and social change. With its founding in 1915, the Graduate School for Social Work and Social Research oriented Bryn Mawr toward an ethos of engagement. Subsequent programs reinforced this orientation, as have more recent initiatives that connect us to the people and the needs of our surrounding communities and of the city of Philadelphia.

So with *excellence*, *access*, and *agency* as our core commitments, where can they be effectively deployed to achieve 21<sup>st</sup> century goals?

Conjuring up the *quadrivium*, let me suggest four points of challenge and opportunity.

The first is foremost: We must continually strengthen the educational experience for every Bryn Mawr student. This means recruiting and retaining the best scholar teachers, fostering a culture of intense intellectual activity, and sustaining a community whose connections and friendships will nourish a lifetime.

To this task we bring a legacy of remarkable accomplishment and a willingness to think creatively about how best to teach and learn in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Right now faculty members are asking these questions as they tackle an extensive rethinking of our curriculum.

We have a national reputation for science and math education. Our students major in these fields at four times the rate of undergraduates nationwide. We can build on this distinction to create the most innovative science and math programs in the country.

Many prominent scholars and practitioners of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were alumnae/i of our Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research. We can honor their impact by exploiting the advantage of our small size. We can encourage close and careful graduate mentoring. And we can enhance our emphasis on undergraduate research through better integration of the strengths of all three schools.

We face a second challenge and opportunity—the creation and re-creation of community, on this campus and beyond. Bryn Mawr is blessed with generations of devoted alumnae/i whose dedication to the College is boundless. We are the proud heirs to a history of deliberative community formation and governance.

Yet we can do more to energize and enhance the connections of students, faculty, parents, and alumnae/i; we can do more to inspire community that spans generations, religions, cultures, and life experiences.

We can do more to assure that our community offers students opportunities for leadership in which they can forge the skills and the spirit needed to live responsibly, ethically, and reflectively in a fast-changing world.

Essential to our commitment to community is our aspiration and obligation to reflect the growing demographic diversity of this country. In the last 15 years, Bryn Mawr has been notably intentional about diversity in its student body and faculty, but more remains to be done to enrich our community and extend the opportunity for a Bryn Mawr education.

One woman in six in this year's freshman class is the first in her family to attend college. Through a foundation partnership we enroll 10 students each year from Boston public schools—students who might otherwise be overlooked in the admissions process of selective colleges.

Such initiatives are part of Bryn Mawr's DNA. But they entail significant cost. To meet student need, we have increased our financial aid budget by 50 percent over the last decade. Today about three quarters of our undergraduates receive some form of financial assistance.

Our third challenge and opportunity centers upon our bi-college and tri-college connections. Bryn Mawr's history has been interwoven with the history of Haverford and Swarthmore from its founding moments. These three Quaker colleges stand at the pinnacle of liberal arts excellence. Together the three are much more than the sum of their parts. Together they make smallness a virtue, not a constraint.

But here, too, we can do more to strengthen existing connections and to forge new ones for our mutual betterment. Close access to the many fine schools in this area, especially the University of Pennsylvania, can further advance this collaboration.

Our fourth challenge and opportunity takes a confident stride into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this generation, globalization will profoundly alter the landscape of higher education. Bryn Mawr stands poised and well-positioned to lead and to benefit from this evolution. We have long had an international orientation; our faculty research has a global range; our students come from all parts of the world and study in all parts of the world. We are ready to open our doors wide and to welcome, in the words of one of our greatest leaders, the 'world house'.

In 1964, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered a powerful, prescient Nobel Lecture. Speaking of what he called "the great new problem of mankind," he said:

"We have inherited a big house, a great "world house" in which we have to live together - black and white, Easterners and Westerners, Gentiles and Jews, Catholics and Protestants, Moslem and Hindu, a family unduly separated in ideas, culture, and interests who, because we can never again live without each other, must learn, somehow, in this one big world, to live with each other."

Taking our lead from Dr. King, higher education must seize this threshold moment. We must prepare our students to inhabit this world house, to be genuine world citizens, released from boundaries and barriers that constrain our thinking.

Our student body must itself reflect the world. In the class of 2012, an unprecedented number of international students bring to our community the perspectives and experiences of 37 nations. In this class, we see our future.

Technology is providing us with tools that make distance as irrelevant as distinctions of class or color. Telepresence equipment, collaborative teaching, robust relationships with other institutions around the world, and international campuses are realms for us to explore.

123 years ago, Bryn Mawr blew the doors off American higher education when it tapped women's hunger for academic opportunity. Today, that hunger is growing in countries around the world where women encounter few options and many obstacles.

About 12 years ago, I took a sabbatical from my faculty position at the University of Toronto and spent a semester as a student in a Muslim university. I did this for several reasons. As a scholar of Islamic studies, I wanted the experience of living for an extended period in a Muslim country; as an Arabist, I wanted prolonged exposure to the language; as a specialist in the Qur'an, I wanted to see how the Qur'an was taught in a graduate school of religion.

What came as a surprise was the reality of being a woman in that environment. I had to sit in the back of the room. I had to huddle with the few other female students and strain to hear the professor conversing almost exclusively with the male students in the front rows.

A few years later I visited another university in the Middle East. At one point, my host proudly showed me the newly renovated and refurbished university library—for men. At my request, he directed me to the women's section of the library. The contrast was stark—and disheartening.

Our world is ill-served by an asymmetry of educational access. We need all our best minds to solve the great needs of this planet: ending poverty, expanding health care, sustaining the environment. Here is where Bryn Mawr has the experience, the enthusiasm, and the heart to lead the way.

As we reaffirm our foundational *trivium* of excellence, access, and agency, as we embrace the *quadrivium* challenges of enriching an outstanding educational experience, nurturing a close and caring community, enhancing the advantages of our tri-college consortium, and embracing the adventure of global education, we light a lantern whose glorious glow will radiate far beyond this well-loved hill.

Let me conclude with the image of another lantern, an image drawn from one of the Qur'an's most beautiful verses:

*"God is the Light of the heavens and the earth;  
The likeness of His Light is as a niche;  
And within it a lamp: the lamp enclosed in glass;  
The glass as it were a glittering star;  
Lit from a blessed tree;  
An olive, neither of the East nor of the West;  
Whose oil is near luminous, though no fire touched it;  
Light upon Light; God guides to His Light whom He will."*

Yes, I am fortunate to arrive at this exciting, important, defining moment for Bryn Mawr. There is much to be done and I relish the chance to work with this extraordinary community.

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Bryn Mawr College  
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