

# UC Office of the President

## Working with University Constituencies, Within and Without

### Title

Inaugural Address, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6q95t2ns>

### Author

Gardner, David P.

### Publication Date

1984-04-12

### Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>



this, for those who are engaged in the work of this institution, those who assist it in so many ways and those who care deeply about the University of California, share but a small span of time within its abiding life. This knowledge, rather than diminishing, should enlarge our pleasure and enliven our effort, for to be engaged in an enduring as against an ephemeral cause excites the spirit and awakens the mind.

Generally, an inauguration ushers a president into office rather than sweeping him out of it; and to the extent that universities experience endings and beginnings at all, today marks a transition--the fifteenth time the University of California has asked a new president to help sustain and contribute to the building of this renowned University. The University's nine campuses, centers of culture and learning, dot the California landscape, bringing education to the young and knowledge to the service of mankind. The University's agricultural extension and public service programs span the state from north to south and east to west. The University's research illuminates truth and advances civilization. Fiat lux, the University's motto, is no idle expression of hope but an affirming declaration of the University's raison d'etre.

I wish, therefore, to focus my remarks on the University's future and my hopes and aspirations for it during the years I am privileged to serve as its president.

To help me think about this topic, I did what other presidents have done before me: I looked back at what several of my predecessors had said at their inauguration, at what seemed to them important to say at a significant moment in their lives. I very much benefitted from having read these inaugural addresses, given over the years by persons informed about the world and the place of universities in it. I also gained the impression that many of them talked for a very long time; in some cases it must have been for an hour and a half at least. Although an admirer of tradition, that is one precedent I intend to break.

My predecessors tended to repeat certain themes in their inaugural remarks:

- ° Most acknowledged the commitment Californians had made to the establishment, support, and maintenance of a world-class university--a nonsectarian university, within the economic reach of the average citizen, open to both men and women, and free from political influence. From the very beginning, these conditions were understood as essential to the University's development and to California's long-term economic, social, and cultural well-being. To preserve these principles over time, the founders of the University embedded them within the State's highest law: the Constitution of the State of California.

- ° Most presidents discussed the University's financial position. For example, in 1899 President Wheeler lamented the fact that, as far as the University's libraries were concerned, "instead of an income for purchases, of four thousand dollars, there ought to be thirty thousand." Today we measure the cost of library acquisitions in millions, not thousands, but the problem is the same. No president has escaped the need to seek funds for the salaries of faculty and staff, for the construction of new facilities and the renovation of old ones, for the acquisition of books and of laboratory and scientific equipment, for financial aid, for our special collections, museums, and galleries, for our athletic programs, for grounds and buildings, for research and public service. Neither has the president escaped the need to balance one compelling need against another in the allocation of scarce resources among worthy but competing programs.
  
- ° Most of my predecessors sought to improve teaching and to obtain a consensus on what should be taught. President Reid in 1881 discussed the relative value of learning Latin and Greek as compared to the writing of English. A century later we seem to be interested in English alone. And today there is perhaps even less unanimity in general about what should be taught and how it should be imparted. This problem arises in part from the vast expansion of knowledge--although it is not unique to us, since

President Gilman mentions the same issue in 1872--but it also stems from the ferment of curricular change in the 1960s and early 1970s that weakened undergraduate education and reduced its already fragile coherence.

° Most presidents discussed issues of academic standards, standards of admission, and related themes. One early president spoke about "youths from the raw west who lack the training of traditional eastern preparatory schools." Although our views about acceptable preparation for college level study are somewhat broader and more complicated these days, we remain today no less concerned about the preparation of the students who seek admission to the University. Indeed, we should be more than concerned. We should be an active partner with the schools, the community colleges, and other institutions of higher education in helping better to prepare young people for further education. California is a very large state with an ethnically and socially diverse population. Thus, the twin goals of equitable treatment in our admissions and academically exacting standards for our students assume a special meaning for us in the years ahead.

° Most mentioned what we have collectively come to call the academic freedoms, namely, the freedom to search for the truth and the freedom to impart it. The University of

California's official statement on this matter says it best:

The function of the university is to seek and to transmit knowledge and to train students in the processes whereby truth is to be made known.... The University is founded upon faith in intelligence and knowledge and it must defend their free operation. It must rely on truth to combat error. Its obligation is to see that the conditions under which questions are examined are those which give play to intellect rather than to passion.... Its high function--and its high privilege, the University will steadily continue to fulfill, serving the people by providing facilities for investigation and teaching free from domination by parties, sects, or selfish interests. The University expects the State, in return, and to its own great gain, to protect this indispensable freedom, a freedom like the freedom of the press, that is the heritage and the right of a free people.

I drew two conclusions from my look at the past.

First, the present is more like the past than we might suppose, owing to the enduring nature of the University and the unchanging essentiality of its purposes. While the leadership of the University has now changed for the fifteenth time, the work of the University proceeds intrinsically undisturbed.

This conclusion both humbles the observer while also easing his anxiety, not so much about the good he might do but the bad he might inflict.

Second, nothing is more crucial to our future than how we approach it. Daniel Coit Gilman, arriving in 1872 in a state that was barely two decades old, sparsely populated, largely lacking in institutions of culture or learning, had a vision of a university that would "be a place where all the experience of past generations ... and all that is known of the laws of nature, shall be at command for the benefit of this generation and those who come after us." What the average citizen of California--the prospector, the farmer, the entrepreneur, the immigrant--made of Gilman's vision we can only guess, but it must have seemed incredibly naive and impossible of attainment in that rough frontier society. Robert Gordon Sproul, inaugurated in the midst of the Depression, talked about the University's "magnificent task" of standing "for even-handed justice, for unstinted service, for the life more abundant." Something about their association with a university enabled these men to look beyond the difficulties of the moment to the more lasting goals of the University they so ably served.

This open attitude toward the future has special meaning for us today. The University of California has just emerged from two of the most difficult decades in its history. It has had to struggle, among other things, with dwindling financial



support, internal turmoil, major student unrest, periods of public alienation, and nearly ruinous inflation. During this same period the University somehow managed to sustain its fundamental excellence while developing three new campuses and expanding the other six. For this University to have maintained its academic standing and to have grown so dramatically, under conditions as hostile as those to which I have made reference, is a profound tribute to everyone associated with the University of California, to their ability, their loyalty, their dedication, and their hard work: former Presidents Clark Kerr, Charles Hitch, and David Saxon, Acting President Harry Wellman, and those who worked with them and the Chancellors in the administration of the University; the faculties, the staff, the students, the alumni, and those who have been burdened with the Constitutional obligation of trusteeship for the University, The Regents of the University of California.

Fortunately, some of the difficulties they had to face seem to have given way to more favorable and promising circumstances. Public confidence in higher education, opinion polls tell us, has risen from its nadir in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The improvement in California's economy, gifts from our alumni and friends throughout the world, and the recently enhanced commitment of State government to the University, are bringing dramatic and crucial improvement in our financial circumstances, and just in time. A few months ago, the University was on a financial precipice, buffeted by ill winds which

threatened the University's capacity to sustain its campuses, together with the educational opportunity they represent and the academic and professional programs they house. Today, with the Governor's 1984-85 budget request and the Legislature's friendly reception of it, we can begin to rebuild the University's fiscal health and financial strength.

If we are successful in obtaining this budget and others to come, we will at last be freed from our preoccupation with fiscal survival and enabled to focus more on troublesome questions to which strategic answers must be found. For example:

- ° How can the University's academic freedoms and institutional independence be secured when the former functions within an environment that tends to politicize every issue and the latter, when asserted, only evokes efforts to further centralize governmental authority?
  
- ° How can the University preserve and enhance its academic standards when the average graduate of our high schools today is not as well educated as the average graduate of twenty-five or thirty-five years ago, when a much smaller proportion of our population earned the high school diploma?

- ° How can the University assist the schools in helping to educate California's greatest wealth, its young people, especially in light of the changing demographics in California's population, which by the year 2000 will find our state composed primarily of ethnic minorities?
  
- ° How can the University be more effective in drawing to its student body, faculty, staff, and administration persons whose ethnicity and sex more fully reflect the heterogeneous population of our State; that is, how can we afford in larger measure for those persons the same opportunity for education and social and economic mobility that Americans have always sought?
  
- ° How can the University infuse its general education programs with more coherence, and its upper division programs with more significance, so that we liberate more than we confine the educational, career, and life choices of our students?
  
- ° How can the University preserve and magnify the quality of its graduate and professional schools, while remaining alert to our opportunities and protective of our present strengths?
  
- ° How can we discover better ways of sharing more widely what we know without coming into conflict with our

freedom to seek and to impart knowledge and the conditions that accompany the funding of our efforts?

- ° How can we strengthen the ties that unify the parts of the enterprise into a single University while loosening the bonds that constrain creativity and thwart individual initiative?
- ° How can we secure solid, public support for this University, sustainable support that will permit us to count upon Californians and those who represent them in elected public office to wish us well both in spirit and in sustenance; and
- ° How can those of us, more responsible than most for the University's present and future condition, discern the winds of change that blow across our social, economic, political, and cultural landscapes such that we, rather than the force of circumstances, position the University for its future?

Ladies and gentlemen, universities exist for many purposes and they serve many ends. One of those purposes is to remind us of what has lasting value, of what endures beneath the currents and eddies of everyday life. We would do well to adopt what Lord Ashby once called an "attitude of constructive defiance" against the times, especially when those times are demanding

and difficult, such as the period through which we have just come. English history illuminates the point. I draw from J. R. Green's Short History of the English People. The year is 1648. In that year we are in the midst of the Puritan Revolution, of civil war in England, and we read of the outbreak of the Royalist revolt in February, the revolt of The Fleet and of Kent in May, of the campaigns of Fairfax and Cromwell in Essex and Wales in June and July, of the Battle of Preston and the surrender of Colchester in August, and of Pride's purge in December. And at the end of a gloomy, bloody recital, we come to this entry in italics: Royal Society begins at Oxford.

In the midst of all that is transitory in our age, we may yet discern something permanent, something that will outshine and outlast all the violence in our contemporary struggles for power. I believe that the University of California bears the standard of significance in a world awash with trivia. It is one of civilization's authentic triumphs. While conserving the past, it helps mold the future--a wellspring of ideas, beneficial to our society and the world of which it is so pivotal a part. With your help, and that of our alumni and friends throughout the world, we shall keep it that way. It is my pleasure and my great privilege to be in its service.

Thank you.