

## **Defining the Future of Heidelberg College**

Remarks by President F. Dominic Dottavio  
in response to Program Review Recommendations  
April 19 & 20, 2004

I joined the Heidelberg College family because I fell in love with the place! I saw bright possibilities for this already marvelous college. In the past ten months, I have found an institution that is energized by its talented students, elevated by the scholarship of its distinguished faculty, and enriched by the work of a dedicated staff.

On this beautiful campus, the new Gillmor Science Center is emerging from mud and metal to take shape as a signature building for our new century. It is a symbol of our rising aspirations and our commitment to a quality experience for every student.

Heidelberg is a uniquely warm community, a family. The people of this college try every day to live its mission of preparing graduates to lead a life of purpose with distinction. What a wonderful opportunity we have: to enable people to live principled, purpose-driven lives.

This is the lofty ideal against which we should measure our decisions and actions. Today, it is a particular challenge to maintain and exceed this standard when resources are scarce and costs are rising. Like our colleagues in higher education from Yale to Notre Dame to virtually all of our OAC counterparts and most institutions around this state, we are challenged to keep tuition affordable, excellence attainable, and salaries competitive.

Over the past few years, this institution has experienced cuts – as you well know. Across-the-board reductions trimmed what little fat there was. And then moved very close to bone.

Faced again with balancing a budget, we simply cannot repeat this approach. This is not a time for half measures or holding actions. Or for taking the easy step of spreading the “pain” to everyone equally. We will not let circumstances drive the institution down what I fear may be a slippery slope toward mediocrity.

Today, we have both an opportunity and an obligation. An opportunity to shape who we want to be, to define our future. And, an obligation to make the decisions that will move us forward.

The revised strategic plan recently submitted to me by the Strategic Planning Council helps put a vision into action by suggesting strategies for academic excellence, the student experience, resource enhancement, and community engagement. It outlines an agenda that supports our mission.

The Program Review Process helped us to assess how our academic and academic support units align with the strategic plan. Every academic program and administrative

area was asked how they contribute to our mission. This process has focused us on who we are and who we are becoming.

Using a common set of criteria, each program identified its contributions to the institution, its strengths, and its potential. Internal and external reviewers studied and evaluated the information, identifying programs meriting enhancement and those requiring further examination.

I want to take this moment to thank all of you -- and our reviewers -- for the time spent on this important assignment. I know it was time consuming. Be assured that this was not an exercise in "administrative hazing." I believe that the process was as valuable as the outcome. Program review is a valuable tool for program enhancement. It helped us take stock, refocus, and recommit. You provided many pearls of wisdom and explicit recommendations that will help us shape our future. I believe we are already stronger for having gone through this.

We have been charged by the Board of Trustees with setting a direction for the college that is both intentional and strategic, and one that gets underway now. With our strategic plan as a road map, today we stop coasting, start the engine, and move Heidelberg forward.

The program review process identified hundreds of very specific needs and actions. We examined those in light of the four major goals of the strategic plan: academic excellence, the student experience, resource enhancement, and community engagement. This process has yielded three broad recommendations that are at once ambitious and achievable.

First, we must develop the resources and programs to assure that students, faculty, and staff experience a high level of satisfaction with Heidelberg College. To achieve this, we must purposefully strive to have more than 2,000 students at Heidelberg College, including at least 1,200 traditional residential students in Tiffin, by the year 2010. And, to address the many facility improvement needs that you identified, we must implement a detailed space utilization study. We must have places that match our purpose and our pride. Quality facilities will help us grow the College's academic stature along with our enrollment.

Second, we must embark on a more purposeful integration of the traditional liberal arts with our professional studies programs. In a world that expects change and embraces innovation, the lines between professional preparation and intellectual engagement -- always an artificial distinction, in my view -- are further blurred. Our graduates need to understand the human condition and the world in which they live, knowledge that derives from the core disciplines of academe. At the same time, they must be armed with a broad arsenal of skills that will lead to success. The personal approach inherent in our small liberal arts tradition is a great strength. With it, we must embrace the diversity of offerings found at more comprehensive universities. Words were put to this model by our new Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Laura Niesen de Abruna. She called it the New American College -- an apt description that reminds us that we must move the

college forward so that it combines the best of our undergraduate history with the opportunities offered in a larger university context.

As a third and related recommendation, we must look at the curriculum as it impacts our ability to attract and retain students. I will charge Dr. Niesen de Abruna to conduct a comprehensive curriculum review that focuses on integration across programs and matches the varied interests of our students in a changing economy and increasingly diverse society. We must think in new ways, or our organizational rigidity will be detrimental to student success.

Across all the activity that is being generated by the program reviews, we have an obligation to maintain open and effective communication. We have a transparent process, which I believe is essential so that you know what is happening and understand why. You might not like it, or agree with it. I invite your response, as we prepare to present recommendations to the Board in May.

As we get closer to reporting the bottom line to you, I can readily identify with the concern I see on some of your faces. Those of you who are intent on “keeping score” are thinking that there will be “winners” and “losers.” In the very short run, maybe. But I ask you to look at this through the lens of my discipline, natural resource management.

When I was with the National Park Service, I was involved in recovery efforts for the Florida panther, bald eagle, and other endangered species. One of the principles of ecosystem management is that we manage a total system. Likewise, we shouldn't look at our programs at Heidelberg College in isolation because one program cannot survive without others to support it. Many parts of the college contribute to the total student experience.

The father of wildlife management, conservationist Aldo Leopold, said that, quote, “the first rule of intelligent tinkering is to know that all things are connected.” Decisions we make about any program affect all programs, in this case, all parts of the college. Therefore, we must ensure that our decisions strengthen the connections and maintain a balance.

By managing the entire ecosystem, you not only support and save the indicator species like the panther, but you save other flora and fauna that live in the same environment. By further strengthening some of our strongest programs, we will, indeed, bring up the whole.

I think I can hear a cynic saying: what about extinction? Well, candidly, all species have a definite span of existence. Alas, look at what happened to Latin programs. But some species are remarkably adaptable. And so are most faculty.

To be a better Heidelberg, we need to be a little bigger, a lot brighter in our decision making, and occasionally bolder in our actions. This will be an exciting time for Heidelberg, as we take important steps toward the future.

While we work diligently to increase our resources, we will not stand still. The set of recommendations presented today will selectively invest in excellence and in programs that serve our mission.

We know, for example, to be successful we must embark on an ambitious fund raising campaign that invests in endowed chairs for faculty, provides the funding for building and renovating facilities, and grows our endowment to an unprecedented level. We need to develop new and exciting ways to energize and engage our students during their first year on campus so that we are more successful in helping them reach their academic goal of an excellent education and a Heidelberg degree.

Many people have told me that we must make “hard” decisions. No doubt they are complex and they are important. But it would be harder still to stand by and watch the college diminished by the absence of action and commitment.

The students here today deserve our best efforts. The graduates who love Heidelberg expect nothing less. The students yet to come will find a college that equals their eagerness and exceeds their expectations.

Know that in this time of budget restraint, Heidelberg is not “hunkering down.” Quite the opposite. We will rise up and seize the competitive advantage. We will nurture programs that are central to our purpose. Programs that increase resources and enlarge our influence. By making strategic investments, we will see the College grow in quality and spirit. With your help, we will become a better Heidelberg.