



**Randolph-Macon
College**

Ashland, Virginia

**Robert R. Lindgren
October 27, 2006
Inauguration Speech**

Now is the Time for Randolph-Macon

Distinguished guests, Faculty, Staff, Students, Alumni, Delegates representing many outstanding colleges and universities and higher education associations, Friends and Neighbors,

Thank you for your presence today...your being here this afternoon brings honor to me, but more importantly, much more importantly, to Randolph-Macon, and I am grateful to you.

This magnificent inauguration today would not have been possible without the work of two significant committees. To Chairman Harold Stark and your colleagues on the 2005 Presidential Search Committee, I say "thank you" for the unwavering confidence you showed in me. My heartfelt thanks as well to our fantastic inauguration committee, chaired by Interim Dean Bill Franz and co-chaired by our marketing impresario, Anne Marie Lauranzon, and to all those at the College who have helped make this weekend so successful.

And I would like to add a special word of thanks to Randolph-Macon's devoted physical plant employees. They not only make this extraordinary campus lovely for festive events such as this weekend -- they enable each of us in the R-MC family to teach and learn and play on one of the most serene and beautiful campuses in America.

Robert Frost once said "A poem begins as a lump in the throat." ... I think a journey begins that way, too.

Rest assured that I had a lump in my throat as well, precisely one year ago, this very afternoon, when I received a life-changing telephone call. On the other end was Macon Brock, our distinguished board chairman, and I recall two memorable phrases from that conversation, spoken from Macon's heart and in his own incomparable style of candor, warmth and friendliness. (A style, by the way, that I have come to realize, characterizes

all of Macon's interactions.) First, he said something that excited me, something we all love to hear. Macon said to me, "Bob, You're the one."

But it was the second phrase of Macon's that I found even more significant, and even prescient, when he said to me: "**Now is the time for Randolph-Macon.**"

It almost reverberated. And I remember thinking at that instant, "I know exactly what he means by that simple phrase." And now, coming to this special place and becoming a part of this special community, I can say it myself: **Now is indeed the time for Randolph-Macon.**

Let me hasten to add that it is not my arrival, or even this ceremony, that signifies that now is the time; rather, it is all that you have done...everyone here today, and those who came before you...to bring this special College to its calling at this single moment in time.

Today, I recognize that I stand on some very broad and tall shoulders, and indeed, we are all here, standing on those shoulders, not the least of which are those of my three distinguished predecessors who have joined us this afternoon. In fact, having four Randolph-Macon presidents on one platform may well be a record. Gentlemen, I am honored and touched by your presence.

Randolph-Macon's proud past is magnified by a record of outstanding service and dramatic accomplishment. Since we were founded in 1830, by foresighted and courageous Methodist laymen, Randolph-Macon has held true to its liberal arts mission with an almost laser-like focus. This afternoon I would like to share with you a few personal thoughts about that mission, about the importance of liberal arts education, and about our opportunities, challenges, and advantages at Randolph-Macon in the years ahead.

When I contemplate the importance of the liberal arts, I think first of the ancient story of the student in search of true understanding, who went to the far mountaintop home of a great sage. Exhausted after many weeks of walking, the student fell to the ground at the feet of the sage and said, "Tell me, oh wise one, what is the answer?" There was a long pause. "It depends," came the reply. "What is the question?"

The essence of a liberal arts education resides in the recognition that, as in so much of life, it is the questions that really matter. At its core, a liberal arts education enshrines the value of cloistering eager young learners in a small classroom with an inspirational teacher, whose sole purpose is to stimulate their intellects and light fire to their vivid imaginations. While rooted in ancient Athens, it remains relevant in present times.

In today's world, one altered fundamentally after September 11, 2001, our students must acquire a sophisticated and nuanced understanding of profoundly different cultures. They must appreciate the historical antecedents leading to our allegiance to the rule of law, and possess the imagination to grasp the consequences of breaking with that tradition. They

require a comfortable familiarity with scientific method, hypothesis, and theory. They must have the math skills to grasp issues of probability and accuracy, and to comprehend the use and abuse of statistics. And ultimately, in the deepest sense, they will need the ability to find beauty -- and something of their own reflection -- in the face of the other.

As you know, I was trained in the law, and while I didn't practice law, I have often reflected that it is a training that has served me well in my life, and in my career. But note the semantic difference: my education at law school I refer to as training. There is a fundamental difference between education and training – or as Aristotle first observed, between the “liberal and illiberal” arts, the latter of which he thought “less fit for the practice or exercise of virtue.”

It is in the liberal arts that we find, and confront, the great issues of truth, of the moral life, of good and evil. Our College's mission statement speaks to developing both “mind and character.” This is not training in any conventional sense of the word, and therein lies our greatest challenge in defending the value and relevancy of a Randolph-Macon liberal arts education.

The meaning of truth, the value of a poem, the importance of scientific literacy, the treasure of a magnificent painting, are, in and of themselves, nearly impossible to quantify. Yet it defies the American experience, to suggest that some things of great value may at the same time be immeasurable. For deeply rooted in the American character is a love of practicality, efficiency and measurability. That great American sage, Ben Franklin, instructed us to always remember that “time is money,” and we have taken that lesson deeply to heart.

So, a liberal arts education may be well and good, but is there really time for it? Today there are many voices outside the academy – and a surprising number within – who advocate that the standard of all education must be that it is practical, that it is measurable, that it fulfills a means to a productive end, such as a job. Perhaps the extreme of this position is foreshadowed by the recent Spellings Commission report on higher education, which portends the unthinkable: standardized tests for college graduates.

I reject this approach. I would argue that the essence of a liberal arts education is not the mastery of some defined body of knowledge that one can blindly regurgitate at test-time. Rather, the immeasurable value of a liberal arts education is, quite simply, learning to think. The practical outcome we infuse in our students is learning how to learn...not in semester-length servings, but for a lifetime. And I should add, the skills our students master in the course of our liberal arts study – to read critically, to think, to analyze, to write, to communicate, to work in teams – are all skills that employers actually treasure.

We simply must do a better job, all of us, in telling the success story of the strengths our outstanding graduates possess when they graduate...and how those strengths connect to the future. That message is what should inform any discussion of higher education.

Now is the time for Randolph-Macon.

Our beloved late professor, Burnell Pannill, once wrote: “Randolph-Macon is not a place or a program, but a purpose – a purpose of orientation to life.”

Indeed, we know that Randolph-Macon is not of just one place. We were founded at Boydton, a tiny town 100 miles southwest of Richmond, and remained there until just after the Civil War. Several weeks ago, I joined Trustee Emeritus Jack Russell, and his wife, Patty, for a visit to our College’s birthplace. One cannot help in looking at our once-massive original building, now decrepit and decaying, covered with vines and shadowed by leafy trees, and not still see the majestic promise it must have presented 176 years ago. As I strained through the underbrush to touch a patch of its crumbling brick surface, I could vividly imagine the dreams and aspirations of the young students and their faculty members who dashed in and out of that building so long ago -- the very same kinds of dreams and aspirations that are conceived and realized, right here, on our campus today. Yes, it has been an incredible journey for R-MC, filled with lofty ambition and hard work, tough luck and external challenges galore, and most importantly, filled with ever so much success and countless transformed lives. I am certain that John Early, Hezekiah Leigh, and the many others who worked tirelessly to give life and meaning to this College, would be proud and amazed of where we presently stand. But our purpose today is not to simply sustain our position...for we all know that merely pursuing a strategy of standing pat is, in reality, a death wish.

Now is the time for Randolph Macon...and to make our College even better.

We start from a position of immense strength. This is a College with many, many superb qualities and fundamental core values: the most consequential of which is our commitment to each other. Indeed, the essential, over-riding, redeeming value of this community is the steadfast commitment of our faculty to our students.

Take a walk with me, any day, on this beautiful campus, “along these avenues of trees” as our resident poet laureate, Willie Chappell, would say, and we will not stroll far before encountering a faculty member and student, in animated conversation, enjoying a “teachable moment.” It might be Professor Bruce Unger, outlining the most recent UN deliberations, while crossing the historic campus...or first year Professor Ben Huff leading his class on Virtue and Ethics just outside of Fox Hall. In our fabulously renovated Thomas Branch Hall, you might discover Professor Aouicha Hilliard helping a student plan a semester abroad, so as to better understand that complex world into which she is about to enter. In the dog days of summer you may see a student who stays on campus, immersed in academic research...another of our core values....working along side Professors Kelly Lambert or Serge Schreiner.

On weekends and many late afternoons you will find our Yellow Jackets, nearly 40 per cent of our student body, representing us...with grace, spirit and skill...in fifteen intercollegiate sports; upholding a tradition dating back to our earliest days in Ashland. Nearly everyone on campus works out at the Brock...or at least meets there, wearing

natty gym clothes and looking like they are working out. On a quiet, cool evening you might just discover Professors Beth Gill and John Rabung, with a group of freshman, enjoying dessert and discussion. In the College's nerve-center, the Bookstore, our goodwill ambassador extraordinaire, Barclay du Priest, is hugging a sophomore, which in turn reminds that student of the values which drew him to R-MC in the first place. And on Sunday mornings, church bells remind us that the Methodist heritage by which we were founded is still alive and very real.

We remain committed to our residential character. In the newly renovated Freshmen Village...which for some reason is still known as the Motel Dorms...our amazing students learn to live together. As they do in historic (and, dare I say, still un-renovated) Mary Branch, our fraternities and sororities and special interest houses. Our commitment to be a more diverse Community is unremitting, and walking through the Frank Brown Student Center, you might spot one of our newest groups on campus, Brothers for Change, planning their next outreach service project. And speaking of community, we are in an absolutely terrific location: very close to the wonderful city of Richmond, and not far from Washington DC and even Virginia Beach. Let us promote even more this fantastic location.

Yes, we have many advantages. And so **Now is the time for Randolph-Macon.**

The charge before us today is simple: Randolph-Macon is among the most selective, residential liberal arts colleges in America and among the very best true liberal arts colleges in the Commonwealth...our goal is to be a leader in all that we do, all the while ensuring that the liberal arts education we offer remains the best educational experience for undergraduates anywhere in the world.

Randolph-Macon must lead.

Leadership does not mean focusing narrowly on the first job a college graduate lands; leadership means shaping the hearts and minds of our students for a lifetime of learning, service, achievement and fulfillment.

Leadership does not mean blind adherence to a pedagogy more appropriate to bygone era; leadership means continuing the innovation in curriculum and teaching that has characterized Randolph-Macon from our earliest decades and in our most recent years.

Leadership does not mean losing sight of the importance of the individual in the name of efficiency; leadership means continuing to deliver an R-MC hand-tooled education, where the value of the person, and his or her mind and character, remain paramount.

Finally, leadership does not mean settling for something less; leadership means holding each and every part of this College to the highest standard of excellence in each and everything we do.

To be a leader among all of America's liberal arts colleges will require extraordinary levels of passion, energy and resolve, new and creative ideas, and an equally extraordinary level of help from each of you.

Our agenda is not immodest, but in the words of Daniel Burnham, the 19th century architect who rebuilt the Chicago skyline after the great fire: "Have no small dreams; they have not the power to stir the hearts..."

After listening intensely for the past nine months, my own heart has been stirred by what you have shared with me, and I believe we should work side-by-side to address these important objectives:

First: strengthen our operating budget to levels commensurate with our academic aspirations and dreams. I have often commented our faculty and staff do more with less, than any college I know. That, however, is an unacceptable legacy.

Second: Our prized faculty, the heart and soul of Randolph-Macon, need unqualified support—both enhanced salaries and funds to stimulate their teaching and research. Inherent in our history and our destiny is the promise that Randolph-Macon will be the career destination for America's finest teacher-scholars. Likewise, our dedicated staff members need to have the tools and resources to continue to do their jobs at the highest level.

Third: We need additional scholarships and financial aid to enable us to attract, and equally important, to retain, the very best students we can to Randolph-Macon. And I don't use that word "best" as a simple placeholder for grades or SAT scores; rather, our goal at Randolph-Macon is to build upon our greatest achievement: adding significant value to students who want to be here.

Fourth: It can be said that our facilities are currently in the best condition in our history; yet there are essential ways we can expand, equip, and modernize them – as well as upgrading our technology, campus-wide -- in order to serve better our students, faculty and staff, particularly in the sciences. And that may mean building a few things...

Fifth: We have to remain committed to our strategic goals of enhancing student engagement, at all levels, and for all students.

Finally, Randolph-Macon deserves to enjoy a reputation corresponding to our achievements and contributions to the Commonwealth and to our nation. In some regards, our jewel of a college is relatively unknown. We all have a responsibility to proclaim the success story of this institution. To those who may doubt we are as good as I claim, I have a simple request: *please lower your voices*. Let the rest of us press forward to sing out, clearly and strong, the incredible advantages of this College, this place, this wonderfully special community.

You might ask, “where do we begin?” Working together: our outstanding board, our valuable faculty and staff, our dedicated alumni, parents and friends, we start by launching the most ambitious capital campaign in our College’s history...a campaign that not only adheres to our financial needs, but is fueled by the expanse of our aspirations as well. While the campaign will ask each of us to give more than ever before, our efforts will also, I hope, inspire greater participation by our alumni -- back to a level equal to the days when Randolph-Macon College graduates were counted among the most supportive in America. Churchill once said “you make a living by what you do; you make a life by what you give.” And no where will this sentiment be more celebrated in the coming years than here at Randolph-Macon.

We have also begun looking at the possibility of growing the College. We do not want to be larger for larger’s sake. On the other hand, if our costs can, in fact, be spread over a larger student body, and, most importantly, if we are convinced we can grow our numbers of students and faculty without losing the essential character of this wonderful institution, it is incumbent on us to explore this opportunity. Likewise, we cannot lose our commitment to being as efficient as we can, and keenly sensitive to holding down tuition costs.

Because now is the time for Randolph-Macon.

On a personal level in order to help achieve these goals I am making my own commitments to you: first, to continue to listen...you have helped me learn so much already about this special place...and I know that I can be effective only if I stay intently in that listening mode in the months and years ahead. Likewise, I will strive to actively seek out your opinions and your advice...and ultimately search for consensus, whenever possible. And, as I have said often: I am firmly committed to the practice of shared responsibility and governance. To the greater community, and to those outside our environs, I pledge to communicate...vigorously, expansively, continuously...so that we can increase understanding, whenever and wherever possible. Deeply respecting the loyalty, dedication and superb quality of our faculty and staff, I will proudly tell our story, whenever and wherever I can. Next, I will pour my heart and soul into building relationships that will strengthen and sustain this College. Finally, I commit to you that I will seek to make decisions, however difficult, using one simple principle: what is best for Randolph-Macon and our students?

In return I make a few requests of you: first, that we, together, remain committed to Randolph-Macon’s important legacy of a high sense of civility...what professor and author P. M. Forni describes as “gracious goodness” ...in what we do, in all that we do. Second, I ask for your resolve to stand with me, whatever our minor differences, towards the great objectives of making our College better in every way, every day. Indeed, only by working together, collegially, determinedly, and regardless of our vantage point, will our College be afforded the greatest chance of advancement. And finally, I ask for your prayers, for me and for our beloved Randolph-Macon, for without them, this journey will be made infinitely more difficult.

You have entrusted me to be your president: to guide, lead, and steward this College. You have asked me to protect and preserve the traditions, values, and virtues that define Randolph-Macon, and to build upon the enormous achievements of the 14 presidents who have walked this path before me. You have called upon me as the president of Randolph-Macon to sturdy her keel, add to her ballast, re-supply her stores, and fill her sails. It is a profound responsibility and honor, and I relish, from the bottom of my heart, its challenges and its mighty opportunities.

Our own James Scanlon has said: “Randolph-Macon, in one sense, belongs to us...but surely in another sense, we belong to Randolph-Macon”

Yes, indeed, we all belong to Randolph-Macon...and the future of our treasured College belongs to all of us.

Now is the time for Randolph-Macon.

Thank you.