President-elect Daniel R. Porterfield’s Remarks to Campus

Presidential Announcement
November 16, 2010

Thank you, Sue. It is an indescribable honor to be here today.

I would like to thank the Board of Trustees, led by our chairman Larry Bonchek, for its dedication to Franklin & Marshall and its faith in all of you who work and teach and learn here.

Chairman Bonchek and his wife Rita and their family have been for many years devoted, generous leaders for Franklin & Marshall and for greater Lancaster -- and I am proud to be Dr. Bonchek’s partner in moving this great College forward.

I would like to thank the Presidential Search Committee and, of course, our indefatigable chair Sue Washburn -- a wise and dedicated daughter of Franklin & Marshall who made history as part of the first class of women to enter the College in the modern era. A force for good in all she says and does, this is a leader who listens, one of “those passionate serving kind.”

I would like to thank interim President John Burness, a high-spirited leader legendary in higher education for helping bring Duke University to the very top echelon of research universities. John, thank you for coming home, looking forward and giving back.

One small worry, though: I saw an internal email that President Burness sent last week in which, to avoid leaking today’s announcement, he referred to me as, “He-who-shall-not-be-named.” I didn’t give it a second thought ... until a minute ago when I noticed above his left eye that big lightning bolt scar.

Finally, I would like to thank an absent presence, a man of vision and action, a can-do leader who loves this place with all his heart, President John Fry.

Joining me today are my wife of 20 years, Karen Herrling, an attorney who works on behalf of vulnerable immigrants all across the country; and our daughters Elizabeth, Caroline, and Sarah ....

They’re great kids who have grown up in a residence hall at Georgetown and so know all about the aspiration, joy, fun and love of college life .... They can’t wait until their own freshman years when they too can re-set their body clocks on China time.
And, finally, I would like to thank my dear friends, colleagues, and students at Georgetown University, where I’ve worked for fourteen years and always felt -- as I do right now -- a profound communal commitment to learning, discovery, the common good, and the eminence of individual need.

What an honor to join you. A couple days ago I called my mom to tell her the exciting news. After signing her confidentiality agreement, she asked what drew me to Franklin & Marshall.

That was easy. “Mom, I did my research. I made an objective and scientific discovery. What I’m going to tell you is NOT opinion. This is a rigorous, empirical, measurable, verifiable fact: Franklin & Marshall is the single finest liberal arts college in the country.”

Look at the assets we gather here:

A remarkable history bound up in the American story and the lives of not one but two iconic heroes.

Academic excellence expressed by faculty and students as a tradition of individualized learning at the mind’s limits.

A lovely campus that’s been growing and morphing before our eyes.

A location in a strong city and a bellwether state that gets liberal arts learning as well as any in the country.

A tradition of alumni achievement in all fields and visionary philanthropic support.

A financial platform that is weathering a recession quite well, thank you, and is defined by upside and opportunity for further investment in financial aid and other forms of academic excellence.

A vibrant new House system, excellence in D-III Athletics and a vibrant campus culture.

We even have the most dignified mascot in higher education. Most mascots run around on four legs. Ours negotiated the Treaty of Paris. It’s great that our mascot is a human being, because, of course, people are the greatest asset of any community.

This community is known for striving students, brilliant scholar-teachers, traditions of faculty governance, shared responsibility, professionalism, civility, administrative excellence, alumni engagement, and collective self-government that I honor in joining you.

People are any great College’s greatest resource. In fact, at the end of the day, people are the only resource that really matters.

So what I’m most excited about right now is meeting all of you. In the search process I met and was dazzled by Mona and Sam from the student community, Professor Aronowicz, Billig, and Fields from the faculty, and Cathie Ferry from the professional staff.
Today I’m going to walk the campus a bit. Tomorrow I’ll go see our new mentoring program Project LAUNCH at McCaskey High School. Saturday I’ll go to our men’s basketball game. I’ll be here one day a week until starting on March 1. I’m going to roll up my sleeves right away and take part with President Burness in the meetings of the Financial Review Task Force because that work is on everybody’s mind and I want to lend a hand.

As you get to know me, you’ll see that I’m passionate about students, teaching, learning, community, social justice and my family.

I believe that a liberal arts education is a gift that keeps giving, a way of life.

I believe that even acting alone, each of us can make a contribution and all of us should try.

I believe that young people are this country’s greatest natural resource, and that it’s a noble calling to challenge and empower those who will someday lead.

I believe that the liberal arts values of reason, research, questioning, conscience, and democracy are really synonyms for the big word “freedom.”

Our mission as a liberal arts college is to nurture greatness in our students and to create new knowledge that stretches one mind and many, right here, now, and for all those tomorrows we will not see.

We live the life of the mind for the life of the world -- in a lovely patch of space and soul in Lancaster that opens into everything. Thank you for this joyful welcome.