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Dinner at Davidson Keynote Address

Clark Ross, Frontis W. Johnston Professor of Economics

Let me begin by thanking our student hosts Aditi Ghatlia and Jacob Cole for the kind invitation to speak to you. They deserve so much credit, for doing so much, so well.

The challenge of accessibility, broadly defined, has been of interest to me since I arrived at Davidson in 1979. I associate greater accessibility with greater diversity. For I would assert that a necessary condition for a diverse student body, in today's United States, requires that education be financially accessible to all of talent and good will.

I relate my involvements, not to claim credit for any success, but to help establish in your mind an evolutionary process that has led to a continually improved Davidson College, with a continuity of important values: appreciation, humility, challenge, honor, respect, and reverence; values that have contributed to the uniqueness that Davidson has cherished fervently since 1837.

My own involvements aimed at the dual goals of accessibility and diversity, have included working with Roman Catholic students and with gay students, and, I might add, with the occasional intersection of the two. In the 1980s, I was asked to establish our "Second Family Program," for non-majority students, a program modeled after our host family program for international students. Two task forces, one on student service and one relating to the international student experience. With the support of President Kuykendall we organized a conference dealing with the issue of faculty diversity, really the lack thereof, in higher education. Then as Dean of Faculty, I took an active role in the issue of faculty diversity and, working with Ann Todd, was able to establish a program of student involvement in faculty searches. So, I was, needless to say, proud to have been part of President Vagt's executive team that in 2006 and 2007 worked on the challenge of affordability, and formulated what we eventually named in 2008 "The Davidson Trust." For, I think we knew then that such efforts at accessibility would lead to a more diverse, a more welcoming, and a better Davidson.

On March 19, 2007, following approval by the College Trustees, Davidson College became the first national private liberal arts college to offer its students a financial aid package that would meet 100% of demonstrated need without any required loan component.

At the time, President Robert F. Vagt stated "We believe this new policy is the necessary response to the financial situation facing many applicants and their families, and know it is consistent with a core value of the College—that a Davidson education should be affordable for all students regardless of means."

So, while previously meeting full financial need, but with a loan component, the College extended its commitment by eliminating loans as part of the financial aid package. This action signaled two very positive messages: First, Davidson was increasingly affordable to those talented individuals who had financial need. Second, we were saying, you will graduate from Davidson College, without a mandatory loan, without an encumbrance on your future. You need not concern yourself that your choice of study

and employment lead to a compensation package that will repay student loans. Study that which best correlates with your interests and your talents. In January of 2008, we announced that the College's program of a debt-free education would be named the Davidson Trust. Now, the Davidson Trust, as a concept, has evolved to include the entirety of our commitment to need-based financial aid.

As we speak of the success of the Davidson Trust, and there is marvelous evidence to support that contention, let us be aware that any success today is likely to have been influenced by the work of those before. In this case the work dates back to the founders of this institution who wanted to provide a quality education for its students, granted that the expectation then was for a white, male, and Protestant student. In fact, Davidson was founded as a work college, to ensure accessibility for those of talent who sought higher education, regardless of ability to pay. Over time, our sights broadened to be more mindful of our lack of demographic diversity. Professor of Religion Dan Rhodes in the 1960s pushed the college to fulfill its Presbyterian mission by educating some from Africa identified by Presbyterian missionaries. So, began a breaking of our "color barrier."

The Davidson Journal of Spring 2007 echoed this sentiment reminding us that Davidson has long been committed to accessibility and diversity. "Sociological and geographic barriers have fallen steadily over its history, but the most pernicious barrier—the economic one- has been resistant. In the last thirty years (since the Kuykendall years, circa 1987), Davidson has dramatically increased resources for financial assistance and reduced the amount of loans packaged with financial aid." With the firm commitment of our trustees, our recent Presidents, our Dean of Admissions Chris Gruber, our alumni, and generous external donors, we have continued our efforts to make Davidson more accessible: "Our successful Davidson Trust."

But with a true sense of humility, let us recognize that the contributions of many, since 1837, have led us to today, where we celebrate our success. Our legendary U.S. history professor and long-time Dean of Faculty, Frontis Johnston '31, would on occasion caution those whose egos might exceed their knowledge of the past, with these words from Deuteronomy, Chapter 6.

".. when the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to give you—a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant—then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord...."

An example of one who has helped us plant our current vineyard, one in which accessibility and diversity today flower is our own Revered Brenda Tapia. Of Davidson origin, Brenda grew up here, where her father worked at the College. She could not think of coming to Davidson College: as a female, African American, and of limited financial means. So, she went to Howard University. She returned eventually to Davidson College and established the Love of Learning Program. We had gifted young African American students from local school systems here during the summer, studying academic subjects, but more importantly learning lessons of values. Back in the 1980s, she demonstrated to us the merits of diversity,

and, concurrently, the need to make Davidson more welcoming and more accessible, if we were to have that greater diversity.

And, so as we think of the success of the Davidson Trust, let us remember that it is the fruition of the work and the commitment of generations past, really even pre-1837, when the ideals of Davidson were being formed. The determination of the founders, and I quote them: was to keep the cost of education “within the reach of many in our land, who could not otherwise obtain it.”

Let me review some recent measures of that success. Pre-Davidson Trust, only about one-third of the student body received some need based financial aid. By 2011, in the fifth year of the Davidson Trust, the percentage of students receiving need based financial aid had increased to forty-six percent. Currently, under President Quillen, we are closer to 48 percent, with nearly 860 students receiving an average financial aid package of roughly \$38,000. Pre Davidson-Trust, financial aid represented about 20 percent of the College’s budget. By 2010 26.3 percent of the budget was allocated for financial aid. In this academic year, fully one-third of the budget is devoted to financial aid. With pride we can say that Davidson’s financial commitments are fully matching its words.

The diversity of our student body has unequivocally increased. In 2003, pre-Davidson Trust, only 19 percent of our official on-campus students were not counted “White non-Hispanic domestic” (i.e., students of majority). By fall 2011, that percentage had increased to 29.3, a very significant change from my first days in 1979. Today, nearly one-third of the student body would be non-majority. Moreover, and as importantly, perhaps, the income and geographic diversity all students, majority and other, has increased. The combination of more aggressive and proactive recruitment of talented non-majority students, coupled with the Davidson Trust that provides the complementary funding, has made this significant difference.

You have heard from some our current students. From Savannah Haeger with her interest in Brazilian politics to Will Naso with HIV research, nearly a score of students have demonstrated their successes as our undergraduates. Let me tell you about one more student. Earlier this semester, I asked senior Rashaun Bennett to discuss the Davidson Trust with me. I have known Rashaun for his four years; I had the pleasure of teaching him economics. Rashaun chose Davidson over other excellent institutions, for a variety of solid reasons, including that he could afford to attend Davidson College without mandatory loans. Since here, he has excelled in his academic work, including an urban study-away semester, in three cities, Sao Paulo, Cape Town, and Hanoi. Devoted to service and the Bonner Program, he has set an example for his peers. Finally, he is the recipient of a prestigious Harry S. Truman Scholarship for graduate study. In his words, the affordability of Davidson and the welcome of Davidson made him a more confident and comfortable person, ready to seize the myriad of opportunities that we afford our students. Rashaun, please let us recognize you and express appreciation to you, for being such a distinguished member of Davidson’s Class of 2016. Yet, despite such proven success, we cannot be complacent; we must confront six significant challenges. Let me review these with you.

Challenges to the Davidson Trust

1. Financial

Our financial aid commitment for this 2016 fiscal year has reached \$46 million or 33 percent of our budget. As a necessary condition of continued success, we must appeal to a broad community of alumni and other donors, to help support the Davidson Trust and preserve our commitment to access for the excellent. With pride, we state that Davidson College is a committed leader in this quest for affordability. Help President Quillen and Davidson in this quest. Show your personal appreciation and gratitude.

2. Academic

We need to continue to have the highest academic standards so that we can instill in these gifted young people a strong work ethic, the love of challenge, and the satisfaction of “work well done.” To do this properly we must nurture our students in many ways, ways that may be different than twenty years ago, offering them the academic challenges of the 21st century. We are doing this; an excellent example is our new Africana Studies major, now headed by an esteemed teacher and scholar, Dr. Tracey Hucks, who came to Davidson College with the 2014 academic year.

3. Community

Hopefully the Davidson Trust will help us form a community of students, faculty, and staff that represents the world, in the richness of its demographic diversity and with a reflection of its social pluralism, from income to religion. In a similar spirit, I seek community where learning is promoted with a diversity of opinion and debate of today’s critical global issues. My ideal world is one with diverse faces and diverse opinions, and with varying, unpredictable combinations of the two.

The alternative I fear is a world where we have proscribed beliefs, and we have associations that are more like strategic alliances, not personal friendships that are grounded in affection and shared values. I sometimes fear that in today’s bifurcated world people seek to associate with those who think like them. For frequently, they have as a goal the persuading of non-believers to the righteousness of their beliefs and causes. Such an environment, to me, is more a college boot-camp than a campus of inquiry. We owe our students an environment of true learning and growth.

4. Development of the whole person

We like to think of Davidson as reinforcing and/or developing good character in our students, and really, in all on the campus—students, staff, and faculty. By this we strive for honest and caring interactions with people. Meaningful student –faculty interactions, as well as staff-faculty interactions are of great importance to us on this campus. Whether through a warm, sincere greeting or an appreciative e-mail, we can and should remind people of their value and their importance, something that has marked our interactions here since the founding, I presume.

5. The Spiritual

Another aspect of developing the “whole person” relates to an engagement with spirituality. While our ties run deep and formally with the Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Tradition invites a more open spiritual engagement with all of humanity. From the Chaplain’s office to the faculty office, from courses in economics to those in the natural sciences, we should recognize that our students are shaping values and forming beliefs, considering the possibility of a higher power and their relationship to that power. We can assist them in this important journey in many ways, supporting their varying religious beliefs, or even lack there-of.

6. Instilling gratitude

All of us should recognize our good fortune to be associated in one way or another with Davidson and with this community. I speak particularly to our students now. Just as we need to recognize what you, our gifted students, have given to Davidson, we hope you will also see that you have been the beneficiary of the foresight and largess of many who have gone before you. You have been living in those cities that you did not build and drinking from the wells that you did not dig. So, please be aware of the need to give back, in two broad ways: to use your talents and any financial resources to benefit your community and to help us at Davidson maintain and expand the Davidson Trust, so generations more can enjoy the education that you had.

Now, let us join together to reach those beyond this room. By example and by word, we can demonstrate the wisdom and virtue of Davidson’s commitment to academic excellence, regardless of ability to pay: The Davidson Trust.