

Lewis & Clark President Barry Glassner's Inaugural Address

Delivered on April 8, 2011

Thank you, Ron. First I would like to acknowledge that we are here today, as a great and enduring institution, only because of the dedication and talents of generations of faculty, staff, students, alumni, friends, and leaders who came before us.

In particular, I want to thank three groups. (I'm a sociologist, we think in terms of groups, but in thanking these groups, I have in mind the individuals who make them up.) I want to thank the Board of Trustees for their support and steadfast commitment to Lewis & Clark College. I also want to thank my colleagues—the faculty. I have worked at several institutions and come to know several others. Nowhere have I seen faculty as accomplished and devoted to their scholarship and teaching as on the three campuses that comprise Lewis & Clark.

Finally, I thank my friends, family, and mentors, many of whom are here today, and some of whom are unable to be here. My mother is no longer able to travel, and my father passed away some years ago.

More than anything, I so wish my father could have been here. He would be proud of me, and he might actually understand a little of what I do each day.

An accountant and businessperson, he found the life of a professor baffling, no matter how many times I explained it. I suspect he'd find the life of a college president perplexing as well, but at least I'd have budgets and spreadsheets to show him.

My father's love of learning and precision; his self-discipline and work ethic; and his commitment to people who worked for him and with him, continue to inspire me every day.

I also want to thank several members of my family who are here today—above all, my wife, Betsy Amster, the love of my life, my friend, and the smartest person I know. And I'm thrilled that my brother, Jonathan, sister-in-law, Mara, and much-loved nieces are here—Samantha, Megan, and Delaney—as well as my extraordinary godson, Jan Haldipur.

Well, I got this guitar and I learned how to make it talk.

In speeches such as this, it is customary to anchor the central theme in a quotation from classical literature or a revered philosopher or scientist. Mine is from Bruce Springsteen, that critically acclaimed bard from Asbury Park, New Jersey—someone I suspect many of our students consider as ancient as Aristotle.

Many times I have found that a line from a poem or a song is as profound as any treatise. Like an elegant mathematical equation, it is at once brilliant and efficient. And this particular line from “Thunder Road,” Springsteen's song from 1975, captures precisely the point I want to make today.

I got this guitar and I learned how to make it talk. The lyric expresses what every student at Lewis & Clark tackles in becoming truly educated, and what every professor faces in preparing a class, devising an experiment, painting a canvas, or mentoring a student. Indeed, the lyric captures the exciting but demanding course we face together in moving Lewis & Clark

forward—to take what we know and what we discover, and to go well beyond proficiency, well beyond even that endlessly overused word, “excellence.”

A great liberal arts college or professional school is ultimately not about the learning or teaching of how to play a musical instrument, operate a computer, make a free-throw, write a legal brief, control a class of third graders, or score well on a test.

Those are important skills, and no one can thrive at any of our schools without mastering what we might call the tools of the trade. But we go farther, much farther. In our law school, our graduate school, and our College Arts and Sciences, we make knowledge and learning talk in new and astonishing ways. Let me show you what I mean.

During one of my visits to campus last Fall prior to taking over as President, I witnessed a stirring case in point. Betsy and I attended the performance of a play written and performed by Kemi Coutinho, a third-year student from Uganda who attended high school in Swaziland. The performance transported us from our seats in a campus auditorium to a teeming outdoor market in Swaziland, and into the lives of four remarkable women, all played by Kemi herself. Vendors in the market, these women became our guides into the struggles and triumphs of the human heart.

The play was directed by Stephanie Arnold, a professor of theater at Lewis & Clark for the past 25 years, from whom Kemi took a “Fundamentals of Acting” class. One day, Kemi told her professor, “You should have more material from Africa in your textbook.” She told Stephanie about a national arts festival that takes place every year in South Africa: the largest celebration of the arts on the African continent. “You should go there,” Kemi said.

To which Stephanie responded with a challenge of her own. “I will go,” she said, “if you come with me.”

Their conversation led to a collaboration that made Kemi’s play talk. She had already written a draft that was full of imagination and great language. But Stephanie realized it needed a strong theatrical foundation in order to fully engage a sophisticated audience for an hour.

Together, the two of them reconceived the work. Stephanie taught Kemi how to maintain balance, timing, and emphasis. She stressed the importance of crafting moments of silence to let the audience register their own response rather than tell them what to think or feel.

Each rehearsal brought new insight.

And Stephanie learned as well. Kemi taught her about another culture and the lives and circumstances of these women. The play continued to evolve over the course of many months. Then last summer, supported by funds from a number of Lewis & Clark departments, Stephanie and Kemi arrived at the National Arts Festival not simply to observe but to participate. As Kemi performed her play, word quickly spread that this was a show not to be missed.

Kemi has subsequently performed in Uganda, Canada, and in the U.S., from Portland to New York to Chicago.

And Stephanie Arnold is now completing the sixth edition of her textbook. The new edition includes a section on Africa.

That’s what making it talk means at Lewis & Clark: taking your talents and passions well beyond what you initially thought possible.

We make it talk in diverse and inspiring ways on all three of our campuses, and often, through faculty-student collaborations. Nicole Schubert, a student who began her studies this

year in our Graduate School of Education and Counseling, first came to Lewis & Clark in 2006 as assistant director of catering for Bon Appétit, the company that provides our food on campus. At that time, Nicole supervised 20 of our students who worked with her on an on-call basis.

Nicole quickly became more than a boss to several of them. She became a mentor. At down times of catered events the group would huddle and ask Nicole for advice about life. “I was just four to six years older than most of them,” Nicole recalls, “and they came to me with questions about being an adult.”

Although Nicole had already graduated from a university in Washington state and earned an M.B.A. online, she came to feel she wanted more: she wanted to take her skills in a different direction, and to a different level. So she applied to and was accepted by our graduate school.

When assigned to a sixth-grade class this year for her practicum, Nicole knew what she wanted to accomplish. As she puts it, “I want to work with the kids who are failing math—because I had been one of those kids.” So she started working with eight children whose grades ranged from D to F. “These kids look at a whiteboard full of chicken-scratched numbers and are scared,” she says.

Working with our Graduate School faculty, Nicole has started finding ways to change that situation. In Nicole’s class, chicken scratch on the board gives way to tactile models—things the children can hold and manipulate. Math becomes tangible, real, and fun, and the kids’ confidence is soaring, along with their grades.

And Nicole is not the only one who is giving. She receives that same measure of attention from her professor here at Lewis & Clark, Kasi Allen. Even when Kasi was on sabbatical, she made herself available. “Kasi is here not just to get us through the program,” Nicole says, “but to make us incredible teachers. She gets so excited watching us grow and succeed.”

Making it talk involves working to perfect your craft—and then working even more. Some of you are probably familiar with our law school’s successes in moot court competitions nationally and internationally—how our 2010 environmental law moot court team, for example, took the national prize for the third time in a row. In winning that championship, our students triumphed over teams from eighty-three other law schools.

What does winning at that level really entail? To be sure, in many ways, moot court represents the quintessential practical skills endeavor. Says Lizzy Zultoski, a member of that winning team: “Moot court is about improving oral advocacy skills and more. It’s about learning to analyze issues, conduct research, and craft arguments. It teaches you to think on your feet and to think out loud in a composed, knowledgeable, and professional way in front of judges.”

Or as Professor Craig Johnston, advisor to the moot court team, puts it: “There is nothing quite like finding out that even after you have written a brief and done 20 or more practice rounds, you still need to keep learning and finding new ways to think about the issues.”

Not only do *individual* students and professors at our law school think in new ways, the school as a whole does. Our International Environmental Law Project is the only campus-based, faculty-led international environmental law clinic in the nation. And that project is but one dimension of a global law program that also includes business law, dispute resolution, comparative law, and a curriculum that has been codified through a new Certificate in Global Law.

Before I arrived at Lewis & Clark, I was familiar with the College's reputation as a leader in international programs. I knew that this year our undergraduate students represent not only 48 states, but 62 countries. I was struck by the statistic that two-thirds of undergraduates pursue off-campus or overseas studies before they graduate and—even more remarkably—that two-thirds of Lewis & Clark's programs go to countries outside Western Europe.

Most colleges and universities would be thrilled to achieve numbers half that high on either measure. And now that I've been here for awhile, I know that those numbers barely begin to tell the story. This institution lives the international experience every day.

Whenever I can, I drop in on students during lunch or dinner. If I'm lucky, someone will invite me to join them and their friends at a table. And more often than not, the topic of conversation I stumble upon is about some part of the world outside the United States, and their connection to it. They talk not just of a place itself, but of the people and the culture that give that place life. They share stories about their host family in Kenya, or the e-mails they're receiving from friends studying in China.

Or they talk about research trips they've taken or are about to take. Right now, Peter Kennedy, an assistant professor in our biology department, is in alder forests outside Mexico City with a team of researchers that includes scientists from Mexico and France—and undergraduate students from Lewis & Clark. Supported by grants from the National Science Foundation and the Murdock Charitable Trust, they're investigating an ecosystem just below the surface of the earth. Their work—which is quite literally groundbreaking—has implications for improving tree health and managing forests around the world.

One of the student researchers who worked with Professor Kennedy, Biology major Logan Higgins of the class of 2011, said about her experience, "When most people think of ecology, they think big: rainforests, elephant herds, coral reefs, that sort of thing. Working with Peter has shown me that biodiversity can be encountered absolutely anywhere you care to look. And working with him has given me a glimpse of what my own life and career might look like in another decade or so, if I work hard and continue to ask good questions."

Our alumni and trustees tell me similar stories, expressing profound appreciation for how their time abroad and close connection with Lewis & Clark faculty imbued in them a lifelong passion for working hard and asking good questions.

This is a song that Lewis & Clark has been perfecting for half a century. In 1961, Jack Howard, then in his second year as president, announced his goal of sending faculty-led groups of students overseas to learn about international issues and gain firsthand knowledge of other cultures. The following academic year, 135 students traveled to six destinations, and our overseas study program set sail.

Today we complete a trifecta rare for any college: We send students in large numbers overseas for intensive study. We receive students from many other countries for study here. And our students continue their international engagement after graduation. To take but one of many indicators, we are a top provider of Peace Corps volunteers—in the most recent ranking, we tied for third place among colleges and universities with fewer than 5,000 undergraduates.

Many schools excel in one of these three dimensions, some in two of them, but very few in all three. Having all three means that a student can come here from anywhere, and after four years, go places she and her family never imagined. A student can come from a tiny town in northern California, for instance, and end up a Rhodes Scholar about to embark for Oxford.

I'm not speaking hypothetically. Some of you will recognize that I am talking about a young woman named Tamma Carleton, class of 2009. A native of Elk, California, population 250, some 150 miles north of San Francisco, Tamma excelled in the classroom and as an athlete here at Lewis & Clark. A star of our women's cross-country team—a team that this year won the Northwest Conference Championship, by the way—Tamma is a great Ambassador for Lewis & Clark, for the integration of athletics and scholarship, and indeed, for our nation.

We are hardly the only institution to see the value in being connected to the world beyond our own borders. Many schools are now developing or touting global programs. I respect their initiative and resolve. But when I compare our established history with their emerging programs, I can't help but think that we are playing ever more complex arrangements while they are at home on Craigslist, still looking to find a guitar.

Which brings me back to a point I mentioned earlier, and with which I'll close: the exciting and demanding course we face together in the coming years. We need to do more than excel; we are poised to make this College a leader—regionally, nationally, and internationally—the place to which others look for models of how to design and operate their own programs in key fields for the twenty-first century.

In some areas, we're already well on our way to achieving that ambitious goal: international engagement is a conspicuous example. Environmental studies is another. Law schools that want to develop programs in environmental law already look to our 40-year-old program, which is routinely ranked number one or two in the nation.

Anyone with an interest in the relationship between mental health and the environment is likely to turn to the Ecopsychology program in our Graduate School. And our undergraduate environmental studies program recently received a grant from the Mellon Foundation that makes our highly successful interdisciplinary approach a learning magnet for other colleges and universities.

In the coming years, we must and will become even more strategic and intentional in the ways we align these and other efforts across our campuses. And we will get the word out farther and wider, firmly establishing ourselves as the national leader in these and many other fields—some of which we've only begun to envision.

In the Springsteen song I have been quoting, there is another lyric that's pertinent here. It goes like this:

"The night's bustin' open, and these two lanes will take us anywhere."

I doubt that The Boss had Terwilliger Boulevard in mind when he wrote those lines. It would be another 10 years, after all, before he was married in Lake Oswego, just down the hill from here. But indeed, those two lanes *will* take us anywhere. The programs we create here and the knowledge we perfect here will travel as far and as wide as we're willing to take them.

I am proud and honored to lead the way, and to leave each of us with the charge to grab our guitar, play it loud, play it strong, *make it talk*, for all the world to hear.

Thank you.