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Dean's Address to the Graduate Faculty State of the Laney Graduate School

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Welcome to this year's Dean's Address, the 11th that I've had the privilege to deliver. As always, I am glad to have this time with you to report on our progress and to spend a bit of time looking ahead.

This address comes during a time of change at Emory, as our new president continues to define and frame emerging areas of priority and opportunity. At the same time searches are carried out to fill senior leadership positions, including the Provost. This year's Dean's Address also comes during a time of great change and uncertainty in our nation and world, and I will speak more about that in a short while.

As is now custom, I begin by extending my sincerest appreciation to the Laney Graduate School Executive Council, the graduate faculty elected governing body, for their outstanding work this year. As you just heard from Professor Nygaard, there was much to consider this year, and I am very grateful for the Council's thoughtfulness in addressing each and every item that comes before it. So many thanks to this year's Council members: Carol Anderson from History (humanities), Carla Berg from Behavioral Sciences and Health Education (social sciences), Larry Boise from the Graduate Division of Biological and Biomedical Sciences (natural sciences), Vincent Bruyere from French (humanities), Andra Gillespie from Political Science (social sciences), Roxani Margariti from Islamic Civilizations Studies (humanities), Council chair Lynne Nygaard from Psychology (social sciences), Jeremy Sarnat from Environmental Health Sciences (natural sciences) and Susanna Widicus Weaver from Chemistry (natural sciences). Thank you all for your leadership and service.

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Last year's Dean's Address came on the heels of the Laney Graduate School's five year review. Self-studies are seldom fun, but they do present an opportunity to benchmark progress against goals and, perhaps more importantly, to identify emerging areas of strategic focus. That is how I would like to structure our time together today - by updating you on our progress in several areas of priority, and to look forward to areas of strategic focus.

This year, we took important steps in the areas of student support and academic affairs.

As you know, twelve-month funding across all PhD programs has long been a priority for LGS. This past fall, it was my great pleasure to announce that PhD students in programs with eleven-month funding plans would immediately move to twelve months of funding.

The move was a tangible sign of our commitment to graduate education and program competitiveness. It represented a 9% increase in annual stipends for about 25% of our students, and was meant to help students advance their studies and research, as well as support the timely completion of their degrees. Needless to say, it was probably my most popular announcement of the year for a quarter of our student population.

To those of you in the room whose students were previously on 11-month funding plans, I would like to thank you for your patience as we worked toward this important goal. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the Laney Graduate School who have worked hard to improve and calibrate our budgetary and operation processes in order to make this possible. This is a goal I've been working toward for many years, and to see it realized this year was incredibly gratifying.

This year, we also accomplished an important goal in the area of academic affairs: revising our candidacy policy. Updating our policy was important for several reasons.

- The first was **time to degree**, which is an important indicator of program quality. Our previous policy's credit hour requirement was higher than many of our peers, as was the time limit for admission to candidacy. The new policy aligns us with many of our peers, reducing both the number of credit hours required for admission to candidacy and the time limit for admissions from four years to three.
- A second consideration was **fellowship opportunities**. Our former policy delayed some students' eligibility for external fellowships, including dissertation completion fellowships. The new policy helps to resolve this issue, allowing students to gain important experience in a grant environment by advancing to candidacy sooner.
- A third consideration was **clarification and simplification**. Quite frankly, our former policy could be confusing as it related to credit hours counting and advanced standing. Many of you – as well as our students – were kind enough to point that out over the years, and we heard you. The new policy resolves those issues by reducing and simplifying the credit hour requirement and eliminating advanced standing altogether.

We have received a lot of positive feedback about the new policy. We have also worked to address concern from some programs about the curriculum changes that will be necessary to align with the new policy. For those programs with curriculum that needs shifting, we have outlined a process and timeline that will accommodate the migration.

Again, many thanks to our programs' patience as we worked this important change through our governance and feedback channels.

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This year, we also made progress in the area of innovations in doctoral education.

As you might recall, last spring we received a \$50,000 pilot grant from the Luce Foundation's Higher Education Program to pilot the *Communities of Practice* project or COP. The project launched this past fall, and is moving into a signature phase this summer.

The COP consists of interdisciplinary teams of students – both master's and doctoral – as well as faculty and development practitioners who work in international settings. In addition to a yearlong seminar, the project also includes an international field work component. Throughout the academic year, the 15 or so COP students met with representatives of organizations devoted to international development in a weekly seminar to explore new directions in graduate education and development practice. I had the privilege of sitting in and sometimes adding my views on the many topics of discussion. The discussions represented the struggle to understand personal and professional space, and to uncover and debate assumptions -- theoretical and practical, useful and not so useful, culturally transmitted and organizationally transacted. This summer, the first cohort will embark on their first international practicum, with the goal of testing contours for defining global skills. It will certainly be interesting to re-convene with returning students this fall to reflect on their experiences.

This spring, LGS received a \$1.5 million grant from the Mellon Foundation to support the new *Mellon Humanities PhD Interventions Project*. The project will support advancement in humanities doctoral education, with particular emphasis on providing grant support to graduate faculty and students to be change-makers in their programs and curriculum, exploring how a greater awareness of the varied professional paths of humanities PhDs might be embodied in programs of doctoral training.

This project represents a new stage in an important set of developments that have been going on for some time. When I arrived at the Laney Graduate School ten years ago, there were a handful of programs focused on the professional development and training of students. This year, we offer nearly 60 events with a professional development and career planning focus. Where there was tangential attention paid to issues of career planning and professional development, there is now intense focus. Where there were few career planning opportunities and resources for students, there are now many.

While the growth of this programming has taken a lot of dedicated reflection, leadership and effort, it has primarily addressed low hanging fruit, and has been centrally organized and administered. We are gaining traction and seeing success. We are ready to face the next challenge, the high hanging fruit, if I may.

That challenge is cultural. For the most part, our graduate programs are structured to guide students to traditional faculty careers. But as a recent Mellon-commissioned report noted, intentionally or unintentionally, “close to half of humanities students will not achieve tenure-track positions, and only a fraction of them at research universities...” (*Reforming Doctoral Education, 1990-2015*) So if we are to truly better prepare humanities graduates for career success in the full range of careers they do in fact move into, then how should those career outcomes be reflected in graduate program curricula and other elements? That is the high hanging fruit the Mellon project aims to pick.

To address this, our Mellon project will emphasize opportunities and direct support for graduate faculty and students to design and implement change. Mellon funds will promote intervention at four levels:

- **First, we will offer PhD Program Intervention Grants.** We will invite program leadership to submit collaborative, cross-program proposals that respond to two or more challenges recommended by the commissioned Mellon Report that I mentioned earlier.
- **Second, we will offer Graduate Faculty Curriculum Development grants.** We will provide grants to design creative and effective ways to incorporate public scholarship and new competencies into existing or new graduate courses designed for humanities students from multiple programs.
- **Third, we will offer Student Intervention Grants.** These grants will support students' engagement and exploration of public scholarship, innovative teaching and non-academic career opportunities. This will include piloting two new completion fellowships, the Dean's Public Scholarship Teaching Fellowship and the Dean's Public Scholars.
- **And fourth, we will offer Humanities Interventions Programming and Events.** At the end of each academic year, we will hold a symposium where faculty grant recipients and student fellows will share projects, progress and notable outcomes. We will also invite scholars external to Emory to share their work and join our campus conversation about future directions of humanities scholarship and training.

This project is based on the principle that sustainable change must come from program faculty and students and be integral to the curriculum, not simply 'on top of' everything else. In this way, the project is similar in its planned impact that our NIH-BEST project has been to participating faculty and trainees in the STEM disciplines, and to the efforts that have emerged from NSF. In all cases, it is as important for a graduate dean to enable change as it is to lead it. While our newest Mellon project and framework will be introduced from the top, so to speak, through LGS, most of the action and change will occur on the ground, with faculty and students leading the way.

I believe that this project will empower more students and faculty to begin redefining the boundary conditions of graduate training and career planning in the humanities. We are currently working to form a faculty advisory board for this project, and I look forward to updating you on our progress as we go along, and certainly at next year's Dean's Address.

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A third area of progress I want to discuss is diversity and inclusion.

I would like to acknowledge the work of our Director of Diversity, Community and Recruitment, Damon Williams. Damon has been an incredible leader in this mission-critical work, and we are fortunate to have his perspective and expertise.

In addition to Damon's substantial recruitment and outreach efforts across the country and beyond, we are also making headway in other important ways. I'll say a few words about some that have been particularly important to us this year.

- I am pleased to announce that we have been invited, along with Johns Hopkins, to apply to become members of the Edward Alexander Bouchet Graduate Honor Society, co-founded by Yale and Howard universities. The society is named in honor of Dr. Bouchet, the first African American doctoral recipient in the U.S. and “seeks to develop a network of preeminent scholars who exemplify academic and personal excellence, foster environments of support, and serve as examples of scholarship, leadership, character, service and advocacy for students who have been traditionally underrepresented in the academy.” It is truly an honor to be invited to apply for membership.
- I am also pleased to share that this summer, in partnership with the United Negro College Fund, LGS will welcome the first cohort of Laney-UNCF Summer Scholars. Five STEM field students from local HBCU institutions, including Morehouse, Spelman, and Clark Atlanta will participate in Emory's SURE program for 10 weeks. We are looking forward to welcoming them.
- This year, all of our graduate programs, primarily their admissions committees, received unconscious bias training. Identifying and addressing unconscious biases and implicit associations at the admissions stage are critical to efforts to diversify the student cohort. The training was generously facilitated by Emory's Office of Equity and Inclusion, and we received a lot of positive feedback about the experience.
- And finally, after some consideration and at Damon's urging, we moved the annual STEM Research and Career Symposium from late spring to early fall in order to capture those students whose first research experience might occur in the summer. This year, we had 42 applicants for doctoral study who had participated in the STEM Symposium; 11 were offered admission, and seven accepted. Those numbers are dramatically higher than in previous years, so we will continue to host the STEM Symposium in the fall.

We have known for some time that efforts to truly diversify our applicant pool and student body would require significant investment of resources, feedback, reflection and patience. I am happy to report that we are beginning to see improved progress and greater momentum. The results, though still far short of where we would like to be, are promising and validating. We believe we are on the right track. But this is only one piece of the puzzle.

Beyond admissions, and in response to student feedback, we have also increased our programming with events and forums that address issues of and related to diversity, including how diversity and inclusion relate to ethics, mentoring, and professional development.

- This past fall, we welcomed back to Emory Theater Delta for interactive theater performances with graduate students and, separately, graduate faculty. The performances tackled faculty-graduate student mentoring, as well as communication, giving critical feedback, the impact of cultural identity and microaggressions. It is an engaging way to do meaningful training, and we will likely invite them back again.

- This year we also convened a monthly series called *Laney EDGE Forums*, EDGE standing for Emory Diversifying Graduate Education. Some of the interesting topics addressed were: Exploring the Double Consciousness of Citizenship as an Underrepresented Student; Where Do We Go From Here? The Future of Scholarship and Activism; and Social Media and Public Scholarship: How to Leverage Online Mediums to Incite Activism. The events were convened just for students and were well-attended. The space for these discussions is important, and we will continue to offer this series.
- This spring, we also hosted a Diversity and Inclusion Community Roundtable. In addition to Damon and me, the panel included Maurice Middleton Director of the Office of Equity and Inclusion; Danielle Steele, Director of the Office of Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender Life, Belonging and Community Justice; and Lisa Garvin, Associate Dean of the Chapel and Religious Life. Mackenzie Bristow and Angela Guinyard were also on hand to answer questions related to international student support.

One important message from the EDGE Forums and the Diversity Roundtable is that students want these opportunities, both for themselves and together with us as faculty and administrators. We need to provide opportunities to connect with our students in ways that are open and responsive to their concerns, especially in the context of the current national environment.

And finally, this year we awarded the first Kharen Fulton Diversity Graduate Award. Kharen was the longtime Director of Recruitment and Admissions at LGS with more than 33 years of service to Emory. But more than that, she was an outstanding mentor to many of our students, and especially to students from underrepresented groups.

We worked with several LGS alumni who were interested in honoring her memory in a way that supported graduate student diversity, inclusion and community – work that was so important to Kharen. This past fall, the fruits of those discussions materialized when Makendra Umstead, a doctoral student in Cancer Biology who is graduating this May, received the first award. She was presented the award at our annual Diversity Reception, by Kharen’s son and by the two alumni who were instrumental in the conception and establishment of the prize. It was a truly special moment, and I believe Kharen would have appreciated being honored in this way.

While there is more work to do, I am proud of the progress we made this year. I am also proud to say that the Laney Graduate School is a recognized leader at Emory in the mission-critical goal to add greater diversity to the Emory community and to be as inclusive as we can be.

Finally, a fourth area of progress I would like to discuss is development and alumni relations.

To meet our goals and optimize the student experience, we must continue to enhance funding to ensure that we are both competitive with our peers, and can offer programming that prepares our students to be competitive in the job market for a range of careers. Concurrently, we must keep alumni engaged and active in graduate education. They are ambassadors and advocates, and we need them to make the case for graduate education here at Emory, as well as at the state and national levels.

We have had great success this year, and I am pleased to share some highlights:

- First, we have already met and surpassed this year's fundraising goal, with five months left in the fiscal year!
- We also organized and hosted the first Bobby Jones Legacy Golf Tournament at East Lake Golf Club. The event was a resounding success, raising more than \$100,000 in cash and in-kind support for the Bobby Jones Program, including four new corporate sponsors.
- In collaboration with Emory College, we have documented a \$750,000 planned gift to support the Bobby Jones Program.
- As you heard earlier, we secured \$1.5 million from the Mellon Foundation for the Mellon PhD Interventions Project.
- We have also secured a \$100,000 endowment for the John B. Lyon Memorial Scholarship for the purpose of providing financial assistance to PhD and MD/PhD students. Preference will be given to students in the graduate programs of Neuroscience, Nutrition and Health Sciences, and Biochemistry, Cell, and Developmental Biology.
- We increased corporate sponsorship of the STEM Research and Career Symposium, and we are seeking to work more closely with the United Negro College Fund for that event.
- With support from the Frost Foundation, we will expand financial support to students in the Mellon Graduate Teaching Fellowship program.
- And of course, we have continued to engage alumni in professional development and career planning programming, particularly through the Pathways Beyond the Professoriate series and Mentors on Call.

We always ask that programs keep us abreast of alumni successes so we can reach out and engage them. Please also help us to lay an "alumni relations foundation" with current students. Our alumni are storytellers and advocates. Having been through the graduate experience and moved on to varied careers, they can best testify to the importance of graduate education and how the skills they honed as graduate students can be used to innovate and lead in many professional settings.

Throughout the year, we host "Pen and Pizza" events. Students stop by for pizza and write thank you notes to donors for their support of important programs such as the Professional Development Support Funds. Many students are surprised when they learn of the connection between donors and the programming that makes possible so much of what we do here. Please help us plant this seed and cultivate and grow the fruits that do ripen in time. If you want to learn more or need support, you will find a listening ear and good advice with our Development and Alumni Relations team, so please do reach out.

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Now that I've spent some time on updating you on our progress this year, I would like to talk briefly about several areas of strategic focus before I move to close.

First, we continue to focus on academic excellence and enhanced funding for fellowships.

Graduate education is essential to fulfilling Emory's ambitions. Emory worked very hard to meet the standards of admittance into the AAU. However, for Emory to enhance its place among our AAU peers, visible commitment and support for graduate education *must* be a University priority. I am about to say something that I know all of you have heard me say before, but I think it is worth repeating.

Excellent research universities attract and retain a world class faculty who are *field defining*. Our faculty advance excellence and innovation because they have access to graduate students who are *field changing*.

Our students positively contribute to faculty research productivity, adding to the research profile and standing of the University. For us to attract and retain the best students we must make sure they are connected to those *field defining* faculty. We will be in more conversation about this with programs as we approach the annual planning process.

Increasing fellowship funding is also priority. Increased fellowship funding not only helps us to recruit and enroll the most competitive graduate students, it also enriches the professional development experiences of students as they gain important experience that broadens their skillsets.

A second area of strategic focus for LGS is institutionalizing graduate program diversity and inclusion practices.

Our diversity team is engaged in ongoing work with graduate programs to develop program diversity plans. We are also working to develop a toolkit of recruitment best practices and resources, which will undoubtedly inform those diversity plans. We will continue to offer training to faculty and staff on issues such as implicit bias association and whole-file review of applications. We also seek to expand our partnership with diversity-focused organizations. In particular, we are currently working on a proposal of joint activities and programming between the Laney Graduate School and the United Negro College Fund. We will certainly share more about that when we are further along in the development process.

We also continue to focus on promoting contemporary interdisciplinary graduate education.

Our graduate faculty come from nearly every school at Emory. Our students are engaged in research in nearly every corner of the University. We are the keepers of interdisciplinarity at Emory. Our commitment to constructing interdisciplinary graduate programs and assembling diverse cohorts are two of the ways that we nurture and build on Emory's strengths and resources. And I am pleased to share that the Executive Council will soon review a proposal to develop a PhD program in Global Health and Development for which there is robust interdisciplinary and cross-Emory interest.

A fourth area of strategic focus is preparing graduate students for a range of professional pathways.

Building on the first step of the NIH-funded BEST program model, we want to expand programming to all students that emphasizes experiential learning, career exploration, mentor training and internship opportunities with Atlanta-based organizations. A first step beyond the STEM fields is our Mellon PhD Interventions.

We are also doing this with our Dean's Teaching Fellowships. In addition to traditional DTFs, we now offer DTF opportunities that focus on areas of professional development and public scholarship. One such DTF occurs at Arrendale State Prison, a facility for women in Alto, Georgia. The fellow teaches a class on research and writing skills, facilitates a seminar in which students present and discuss their research topics and advises the students on their projects, helping them to find sources. This is a really unique opportunity that nurtures our students' professional skills as they engage in important public scholarship.

Key to our efforts is creating a culture where students and faculty prioritize this training and where students take "ownership" of their professional development and career planning. It goes back to what I discussed earlier – addressing the "high hanging fruit" and firmly embedding this training in the graduate experience so that it is prioritized as both productive and necessary. But there is another side of this that has to be addressed as well, and it's one where graduate deans and other administrative leadership, has limited influence.

Graduate faculty and graduate program leadership must shape an encouraging and respectful environment where students feel that it is okay to talk to them about exploring careers beyond the tenure track. I understand that this is a difficult thing to do. When we were designing the mentoring guides for faculty and students, we heard from many faculty who either did not know how to advise for careers that were not like their own or who were not interested in mentoring students whose career aspirations did not involve the academy. In both cases, the environment created is counterproductive to graduate students who are facing an uncertain academic job market or who are more interested in applying the new skills developed as graduate students to non-academic careers. We, in LGS, will continue to raise this issue, and we are ready to provide support to programs or groups of faculty who want to take this discussion head on.

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There is much more to be said about our work this year and about our priorities moving forward, but I want to turn our attention now to national environment we are facing.

Our new administration in Washington has made clear what funding cuts should happen to accommodate what budget director Mick Mulvaney calls a "hard power" budget. Education and research are certainly no strangers to Congressional austerity measures, but this goes further. For example, the administration proposes eliminating the National Endowments for the Arts and for the Humanities –the first such proposals by any president since the endowments were created in 1965 through the Arts and Humanities Bill.

The arts and humanities are not the only targets. The administration's budget request also calls for deep cuts to federal science agencies, including an 18% cut to the National Institutes of Health.

And, of course, we are all aware of executive orders regarding immigration and travel, and the most recent call to “Buy American, Hire American,” which may profoundly undermine one great source of strength in U.S. graduate education – the steady influx of students and researchers from all over the world.

Now, more than ever, it is time to advocate *en force* for graduate education. In fact, I know some of you exercised your democratic voice and action just this past weekend in the March for Science.

In my Dean’s Address of 2015, amid a previous round of budgetary constraint, I issued a call to action to all of us to step up and make the case for graduate education, both at Emory and nationally. I asked that we move beyond the echo chamber where our arguments and defenses play on loop to those who already agree with us.

In today’s environment, I issue that call again with renewed vigilance and urgency.

It is up to us to tell our stories to our representatives, to our leaders, to the media, and to our families and friends. But in doing so, we must leave behind much of the lofty language we often use with each other. We must drill down to concrete examples that help people understand the tangible benefits of what we do. Put simply, we must make our case using language that is succinct and accessible. This does not come naturally to many of us, myself included. But it is something we are trying to instill in our students.

Earlier this month, ten students competed in the annual 3MT verbal competition. The rules are simple: using one slide and in three minutes or less, contestants must present their research to a panel of judges who come from a range of units and offices across campus and off campus, most of them not connected to graduate education. The exercise does not ask students to dumb down their research, but rather to explain complicated work to an audience that doesn’t know and doesn’t need all of the complex details. It is a great example of connecting what we do to the greater public good and to those who enjoy its benefits.

During last year’s Dean’s Address, I played the winning 3MT presentation at the conclusion of my remarks, and I am doing it again this year. It is a fitting way to close this discussion, to make the point about accessibly telling our stories, and to re-focus attention on the excellent research that our graduate students are doing. [The winning presentation this year comes from Dave Matthews, an MD/PhD student in our Immunology and Molecular Pathogenesis doctoral program.](#)

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I am pleased to again report that the state of the Laney Graduate School is strong. Thank you for listening. Thank you for all that you do to make this a top-tier research university where the best students and faculty want to be. Best wishes to all of you, and see you at commencement!