



State of the College Address



**Composing the Future of
Mary Baldwin College**

August 28, 2003

Context: The Mary Baldwin Miracle—Staying Ahead of the Curve

When I gave my first report as President to the Board of Trustees in July, I stated that I had been greeted by **only** pleasant surprises since my arrival. This continues to be true. I have been delighted to come to know the many personal success stories of our students and alumnae. They are powerful. These legacies weave together the ever-expanding mosaic of Mary Baldwin's soul. I have also been delighted by the evolution of our college.

I have heard the phrase “**the Mary Baldwin miracle**” many times in the past two months. Consider that we are the largest and fastest growing women's college in Virginia. As we reaffirm our commitment to women's education, we realize that although there were 264 women's colleges in 1960, only around 60 remain today with numbers dwindling annually.

We are a transformed institution.

We celebrate the most diverse student body of any women's college. Moreover, with over 30% women of color on our residential campus, we are at the top with a select few among all private and public institutions of higher learning in the Commonwealth. 86% of our seniors report that they learn to interact successfully with individuals from other ethnic backgrounds. Compare this to the time when Lelia Lytle entered as our first African-American student in 1968, or even to 1982, when the institution remained 96% Caucasian.

The recent alumnae survey, summarized by Lew Askegaard, will be sent to you in early September. In the 2003 survey, 95% of alumnae rate their overall academic preparation as excellent or good. 97% said they would react positively if a relative were considering MBC. Two-thirds are active volunteers and nearly half have held leadership positions in volunteer organizations. 35% have earned graduate degrees. In assessing the 12 characteristics of a well-educated person in the new millennium, the highest rated, in order, were: developing a firm educational foundation, learning to communicate effectively, becoming a lifelong learner, becoming a problem solver, and developing ethics.

We have evolved by staying ahead of the curve. In 1976 we were the first institution in Virginia to initiate an adult degree program. We know that today 42% of all college students are adults over 25 years. The Master of Arts in Teaching positioned MBC to move into graduate education, which is the next significant growth area. We cultivate unique, signature programs such as MLitt/MFA, PEG, VWIL, and Quest. We are no longer classified as a regional liberal arts college, but rather as a comprehensive master's university in Carnegie and *US News and World Report* rankings. Indeed in the 2003 *US News and World Report* rankings we ranked in the top tier in the south among 573 institutions (http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/rankings/brief/univmas/umsouth/tier1/t1univmas_s_brief.php). This is a cause for considerable pride.

We are also well ahead of the curve in living our philosophy of liberal education. AAC&U published *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning As the Nation Goes to College* in 2002 (<http://www.greaterexpectations.org/>). It is garnering nationwide attention. *Greater Expectations* calls for a dramatic reorganization of undergraduate education to ensure that all college aspirants receive not just access to college, but an education of lasting value. They recommend learning-centered campuses, college-wide statements of learning goals, and an all-campus commitment to the necessity of a 21st century liberal education. Does this sound familiar? We understand that liberal education is a philosophy of learning—it liberates the mind, empowers individuals, and cultivates social responsibility. This has been affirmed by the excellent work last year of the General Education Taskforce.

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Composing the Voices of our Vision
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Intentional Planning for A Critical Decade of Opportunity

As you can see, Mary Baldwin is in a position of strength. We will share our Mary Baldwin miracle broadly so that our success may be nationally recognized. It deserves to be. However, we must also look forward to stay ahead of the curve.

When I visited campus this spring, I promised that I would spend this year listening to the many voices of our extended family. I will draw from my musical background as we weave the counterpoint of our experience and dreams into a deep and harmonious polyphonic vision. Our vision has space for the most inclusive range of voices, for consonance and dissonance, for a wide range of styles. Therefore I have titled my remarks today “Composing the Future of Mary Baldwin College.”

In global musical society—western and non-western—composition is the creation of a unique musical event. At the fundamental level, the act of composition is the ordering of materials in musical time and space. It is the process of putting it together, whether laboriously and meticulously worked out through sketches and revisions such as the “fate-knocking” motive that generates Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony; or upon a venerable Indian raga, a melodic framework for improvisation based on a given pattern of notes and characteristic rhythmic pattern. Composition--whether prose, poetry, painting, architecture, or academic strategic planning- is a process and product of intentional construction. So through our conversations this year, we will work as an empowered, confident, and responsible community to compose our future in the next critical decade of opportunity for Mary Baldwin College.

We will look at least 10 years ahead. What will Mary Baldwin be in 2014? My view of strategic planning is not based on national trends nor a single specific business or academic model. Rather I propose a flexible process. We will seek a shared vision guided by historic strengths. We must be entrepreneurial and innovative. The process will foster a unifying all-college view.

- ✿ It will balance internal and external challenges and opportunities.
- ✿ It will maximize and coordinate our individual area planning efforts and guide annual goal setting and assessment.
- ✿ It can empower a sense of control over destiny and nurture institutional confidence.
- ✿ We will need to fund the future, through endowment and augmentation of annual resources. This is a given. We are a lean institution. However, our thinking cannot be solely dependent upon resources. Our creativity and resource enhancement must go hand in hand.

How will we undertake this process? First I must state unequivocally that I am committed to an open dialogue. I ask for volunteers this morning to serve on the Strategic Planning Task Force. The path ahead will be charted with input of many constituent voices, especially those of established governance groups. The task force will plan an agenda for broad discussion, drafting a new discussion paper. We will conduct forums in September and October for the entire campus community and our broad parent and alumnae/i base.

Interspersed among the forums will be lunches and coffee hours for special topics related to key planning issues. The task force will communicate in various ways, including a “Composing the Future of Mary Baldwin College” website. Following the first round of discussions, we will post synthesized results and hold a town meeting. Early in the second semester the task force will begin to distill recurring themes and prepare a draft document by the end of March. We will share the document with the Mary Baldwin community in April and present it to the Board of Trustees in July.

There are three important reasons for this process

(1) SACS 2006-07

This academic year is the first in the three-year process leading to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools site visit in 2006-07. Dr. Tyson utilized the 1980s reaccreditation as a similar opportunity to re-evaluate. The result was a vision statement, endorsed by all of the college constituencies, containing the 12 qualities of a well-educated person of the third millennium, which has appeared since 1986 as the first item in the catalogue.

(2) Presidential Transition

The opportunity that a presidential transition provides for visionary conversations has been seized by every past leader of our institution. Before the opening of the academic year in 1863 as she assumed her role of joint superintendent, Mary Julia Baldwin invited Dr. W. H. McGuffey to collaborate in revising the curriculum in correspondence with her conviction that women had intellectual abilities equal to men's and should be taught accordingly. In a symposium preceding his inauguration titled "New Directions in the Liberal Arts," Dr. Samuel Spencer declared: "Many years from now, I hope it can be said that 1957-58 marked a renewed intellectual vigor in the life of this college . . . we are making our plans not for a year or five years, but for fifty years or more."

(3) Conclusion of the 1999 Strategic Plan

Our third reason is that our 1999 strategic plan was designed as a five-year planning focus. This is the fifth year of this successful strategy and we must therefore chart our next course. The Executive Staff has spent considerable time evaluating the 1999 plan. Its successful implementation offers cause for celebration and optimism. We will distribute the evaluation of the 1999 plan, often referred to as "the white paper," so you may study it in further detail.

Celebrating the 1999 Strategic Plan

The focus was: Maintain on-campus enrollment and increase quality while expanding adult and graduate programs.

After losing a little ground in 2000-01, enrollment has returned to near-record levels. We continue to increase student quality, as Scenario 1100 has elevated entering SAT's to slightly above 1070—the highest since the Spencer era. Retention is strong in VWIL and improving in PEG. MAT achieved record credit hour enrollment in 2002-03. The MLitt/MFA program received a \$1 million gift from the Carpenter Foundation. A new ADP office was opened in Northern Virginia in 2002. Other new graduate programs continue to be carefully explored.

As an institution, we learned vital lessons through the 1999 strategic plan.

First, in staying ahead of the curve, we affirmed that we are a college of courage. In the four years since the white paper was written, MBC has been buffeted with severe turbulence from the outside: the state's financial crisis, cuts in VWIL funding and TAG, the stock market decline. There is a tendency to "hunker down" in such an environment, to be reticent

We affirm that our mission is clear and manifest in all of our programs: We meet our students where they are, and lead them to meet their dreams. Here is the outline of the house emerging from the fog, the vision, if you will.
Mary Baldwin College will be recognized in the Commonwealth of Virginia and the nation as a model institution providing personalized, transforming liberal education for the future.

Let us begin with the lessons learned from the 1999 strategic plan.

Let us affirm our core institutional traits: empowering education for women in our residential programs and for adult men and women in non-residential and graduate programs; the fostering of leadership for life across the curriculum and co-curriculum; the innovative development of unique signature programs grounded in liberal learning.

Let us be mindful of but not constrained by the national trends in higher education.

Let us be mindful of the next decade of larger-than-expected enrollment projections in Virginia.

Finally, let us also anchor our discussions with three framing themes:

- ✦ Innovative traditions*
- ✦ Inclusive, supportive community*
- ✦ Dynamic linkages*

✦ Innovative Traditions

I return to Igor Stravinsky. “*Tradition is entirely different from habit, even from an excellent habit, since habit is an unconscious acquisition and tends to become mechanical, whereas tradition results from a conscious and deliberate acceptance. A real tradition is a living force that animates and informs the present.*” As we honor our tradition and prize our institutional innovation, we have the opportunity to creatively revitalize our undergraduate programs. We can envision further expansions of our Adult Degree Program and new graduate programs.



 **Inclusive, supportive community**

We care about each other deeply. Each individual is respected and vital to our mission. We are blessed with a diverse student population. We will continue to diversify our faculty and staff. As we do so, we must engage as a community in the exploration of learning from one another. Edgar Beckham, a cherished mentor, reminds us “diversity is difference in context.” We must understand how our differing strengths unite us as a community.

 **Dynamic linkages and connections**

We have many points of excellence. We can connect these points of energy by crossing boundaries and exploring our organizational structures. A spirit of collaboration will foster our connections. We need to seek partnerships with other private and public institutions. We can strengthen our relationship with the Staunton community and enhance our community service learning. The work of the ad hoc task force on Service Learning will continue this year. We will engage as active participants in the national arena of higher education.

This will be a decisive and exciting year. I look forward to our celebration of transition at the Presidential Inauguration on April 2. A committee has been established to guide our efforts.

I hope to hear from you as volunteers to serve on the Strategic Planning Task Force. Please e-mail me or call the President’s Office by September 5 if you wish to volunteer.

Please join me on our journey toward Mary Baldwin’s future.

I wish you a wonderful and rewarding year

Thank you.