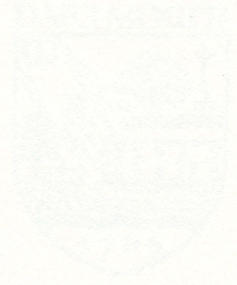


JAMES OLIVER FARRINGTON

A COMMONWEALTH

A COMMONWEALTH
OF LIBERAL LEARNING



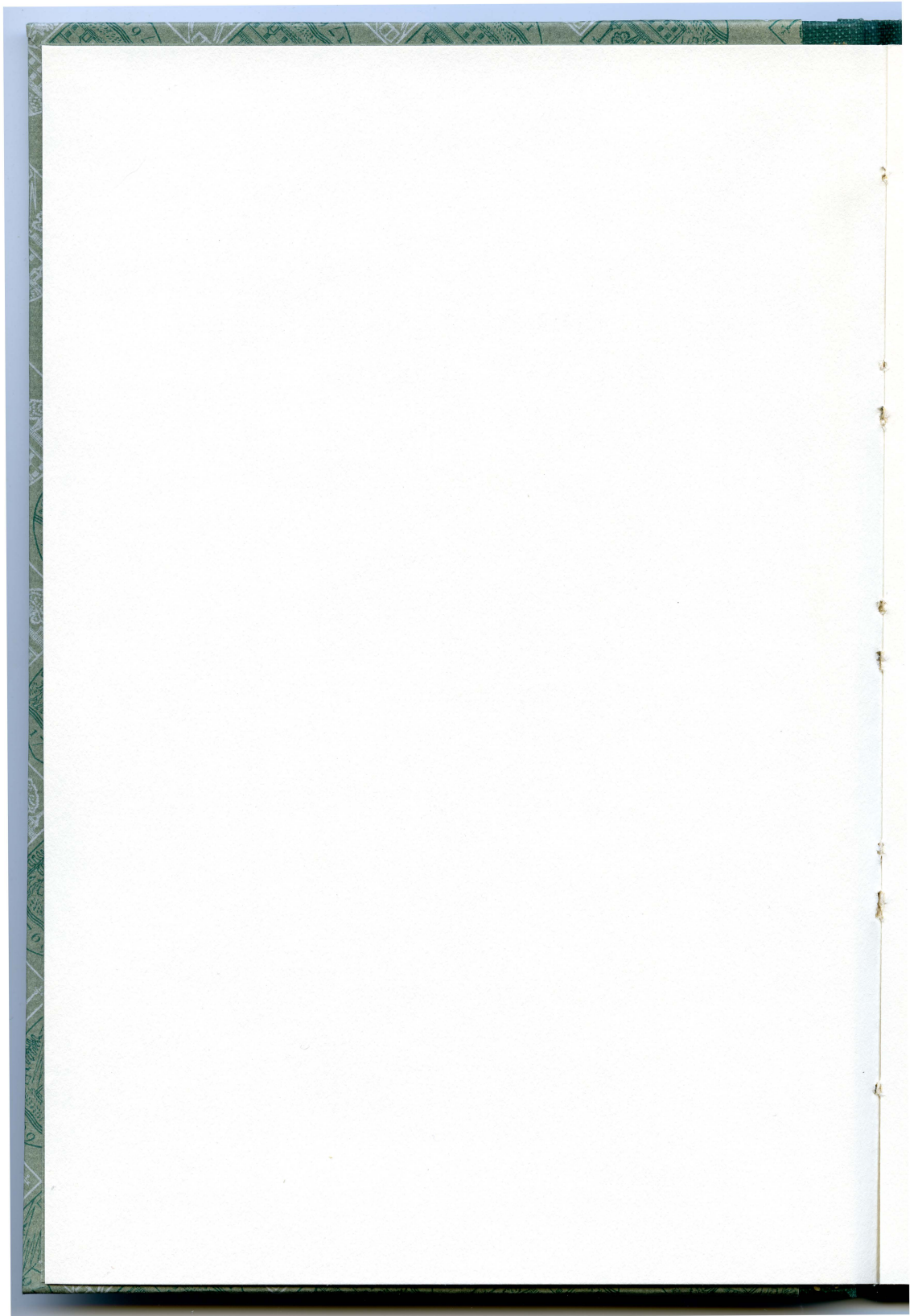
Author of "The Commonwealth of Massachusetts"

Editor of "The Commonwealth of Massachusetts"

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JAMES OLIVER FREEDMAN
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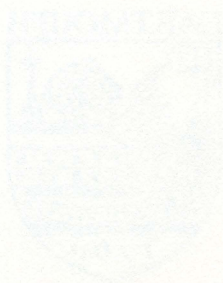


Inaugural address of James O. Freedman
delivered at his installation as fifteenth
President of Dartmouth College

HANOVER · NEW HAMPSHIRE

SUNDAY, JULY 19, 1987

JAMES OLIVER FAY
A COMMISSIONER
OF LIBERAL LEARNING



Professor of Education
and
Director of the Institute of Education
University of New Hampshire

HANOVER, NEW HAMPSHIRE
1964

I ASSUME the office of President of Dartmouth College with enthusiasm and humility—enthusiasm at the prospect of seizing the opportunities that our future presents, humility at the responsibility of preserving the splendid achievements of our past. I do so conscious of the high standards by which my performance will properly be judged, standards that have been reinforced by the remarkable men who were my immediate predecessors in the “Wheelock Succession”: Ernest Martin Hopkins, John Sloan Dickey, John G. Kemeny, and David T. McLaughlin. And I say to all of you who love Dartmouth, to our faculty, students, alumni, and staff, who are so justly proud of this College, “Dartmouth is your College—and now it is also mine.”

During the years since Eleazar Wheelock received his charter from King George III in 1769—twenty years before the Constitution of the United States was ratified—Dart-

mouth has become recognized throughout the world for the excellence of its academic programs, not only at the undergraduate level, but also at the graduate and professional levels, where it has maintained respected doctoral programs and outstanding schools of business administration, engineering, and medicine. Dartmouth has changed greatly during the two hundred and eighteen years since its founding. But it has remained steadfast in its commitment to excellence in educating students for lives of leadership in their communities, their nation, and the world; for lives of contribution to the arts, the humanities, the sciences, and the professions; and for lives of personal satisfaction and individual fulfillment.



These inaugural ceremonies, like education itself, are an exercise in reflection and renewal. As part of that exercise, we reaffirm our historic conviction that Dartmouth College must be a commonwealth of liberal learning. This conviction binds us to our past, fortifies our present, and illuminates our future. It recommits us to the values of intellectual excellence, personal integrity, and respect for

human dignity that are central to this College's character. It inspires us to be worthy of our past and equal to the challenges of our future.

As an institution devoted to liberal learning, Dartmouth College has a special responsibility for preparing knowledgeable citizens and imaginative, vigorous leaders—men and women who are capable of maintaining and enlarging the democratic values that are this nation's most basic strength. A compact to maintain and strengthen our commonwealth of liberal learning is essential to achieving this purpose. It is essential if we are to preserve the noble principles of due process and equal protection of the laws, embodied in the Constitution. It is essential if we are to continue to appreciate the important stake that the strong have in protecting the civil liberties of the vulnerable. And it is essential if we are to continue to envision this nation as a harbor of fairness and opportunity for human beings of both sexes and of all races, religions, and nationalities. And it is essential, too, if we are to understand the importance of promoting the public good by insisting upon open discussion and reasoned judgment, by supporting humane values and civic virtues, and by defending with moral imagination the principles of democratic government.

As we affirm our dedication to educating men and women for the demanding responsibilities of citizenship, we remind ourselves that the foremost commitment of Dartmouth College is to ideas. What Thomas Jefferson said of the University of Virginia in 1820 is true for Dartmouth today. "This institution," said Jefferson, "will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind. For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it."

Dartmouth College will be strengthened by continuing "to follow truth wherever it may lead." The great issues, educational and moral, that face Dartmouth—indeed, that face the nation and the world—must be debated and discussed fully. No one doubts that Dartmouth will thrive upon differences of opinion among those who love it. But maintenance of that sense of community that unites Dartmouth College will depend upon the civility with which we express those differences and the respect and tolerance that we show for those who hold opposing views. In the end, we will be judged not by the shrillness of our rhetoric or the self-dramatization of our actions, but by the quiet, measured force of our reason. And so I appeal to the entire

Dartmouth community—in its stimulating diversity of people and points of view—to be guided by what Learned Hand once called “the spirit of liberty”—“the spirit,” as Judge Hand said, “which is not too sure that it is right.” And I ask, as we pursue our common goal of a stronger Dartmouth, that we recall Judge Hand’s frequent citation of Oliver Cromwell’s exhortation, “I beseech ye in the bowels of Christ, think that ye may be mistaken.”



Let me turn, now, to speaking more specifically of the College’s mission as we chart our course toward the Twenty-first Century.

Liberal education is the very soul of Dartmouth College. It is the surest instrument yet devised for developing those civilizing qualities of mind and character that enable men and women to lead productive and satisfying lives and to make significant contributions to their society. Society’s need for liberally educated men and women has never been greater than it is today, as we ponder still the transforming horror of the Holocaust, as we live daily with the existential possibility of nuclear annihilation, as

we experience the awful anguish of failing to meet the simple imperative of feeding all the peoples of our planet.

By stressing the value of a liberal education, we encourage students to seek the infinitely precious affirmation of their most authentic selves. We set in motion a process of critical examination and imaginative introspection that leads students toward personal definition. And we help them to develop an independent perspective for reflecting upon the nature and the texture of their lives. We inspire them, as well, to delineate the foundations of their moral identity and to seek a sense of balance and proportion in the conduct and shape of their personal lives. We offer them an opportunity to develop the humane empathy and moral courage required to endure uncertainty, anxiety, and suffering. And we challenge them to make a difference in the world they will inherit.

A liberal education acquaints students with the cultural achievements of the past and prepares them for the exigencies of an unforeseeable future. It provides them with standards by which to measure human achievement. It engages them intellectually and fires their minds with new ideas—powerful and transcendent ideas that will trouble them, elevate them, and brace them for new endeavors. A liberal

education stirs students to probe the mysteries of the universe, to reflect upon the rise and fall of cultures, to find meaning in the enduring achievements of Western and Eastern civilizations, and to consider the ambiguities and arguable lessons of human history. And it awakens them to the power of art to shape, question, and impose order upon the human experience and upon human destiny. For it is art—the language of words, of paint, of sculpture, of music—that enables us to express the hopes and despairs, the dreams and the nightmares of the human condition.

In short, a liberal education invites our students to explore the ordeal of being human—the drama of discovering the darker side of the self; the responsibility of imposing meaning on one's life and one's society; the challenge of transcending the ambiguity-entangled counsel of arrogance and modesty, egotism and altruism, emotion and reason, opportunism and loyalty, individualism and conformity.

Acquiring a liberal education is an arduous undertaking (Socrates taught us long ago that self-knowledge is not earned easily), but it ought also to be a joyous one. More than any historical datum, any statistical result, any interpretation of a text, we need to convey to our students

a sense of joy in learning—joy in participating in the life of the mind; joy in achieving competence and mastery; joy in entering the adult world of obligations, intimacies, and relationships; joy in experiencing the diversity of our community; joy in engaging in the converse among our several generations.



At the heart of a liberal education lies a conception of intellectual wholeness, an ideal of coherence within that expanding array of specialties and subspecialties, disciplines and subdisciplines that composes the universe of knowledge. But that conception of wholeness has been threatened by this century's widening separations between literature and politics, science and religion, reason and faith, tradition and experimentation. Too often, the increasing tendency toward specialization has had fragmenting consequences for the life of the mind. It has sheltered men and women of broad-ranging imagination behind narrowly drawn disciplinary bounds, thereby discouraging them from becoming educated in the fullest sense of that worthy term. It has reduced the opportunities for

collegial discourse among faculty and students from different departments and disciplines, as each has become the master of material of more slender scope. And it has denied faculty and students an understanding of the premises and assumptions of disciplines other than their own, thereby inhibiting inquiry across disciplinary lines.

We are fortunate that Dartmouth College, in its wealth of academic diversity, has retained a scale that permits it to function as a collegial institution. Dartmouth has been and must continue to be more than merely an association of fragmented academic specialties. It must be *one* commonwealth of liberal learning, and its task must be to preserve and convey the indivisibility of human experience and knowledge.

We must emphasize the importance of creating new bonds between the arts and the sciences, new alliances between undergraduate education and professional preparation, new opportunities for synthesis between liberal education and advanced research. For it is this emphasis upon the unity of knowledge and experience that enables our students to grasp the connectedness between their private selves and their public selves, between their personal lives and their professional careers, between their

discrete personhood and their common humanity. And it is this connectedness that, in the end, gives coherence to our entire mission as an integrated commonwealth of liberal learning—a commonwealth in which the contributions of every scholar, every discipline, and every professional school are essential to achieving the intellectual wholeness for which Dartmouth must always strive.



As we emphasize the role of Dartmouth College as a commonwealth of liberal learning, we must pay special attention to helping our students develop an international perspective on their lives.

During the decades since the conclusion of World War II, the United States and the other nations of the world have become increasingly interdependent, through political and military relationships, through international trade, through exchanges of technology, and through scientific, educational, and cultural cooperation. This process has been accelerated by the fact that, during the same period, the developing nations of the world have assumed greater

political prominence and asserted greater independence of thought and action than in any prior time in our history. For this reason, the need is urgent for citizens and professionals with an understanding of other nations, other cultures, other literatures, other modes of thinking, and other languages.

Dartmouth has been farsighted in developing an impressive set of international programs. We must continue to offer our students an opportunity to widen their angles of vision on the world, by infusing our curriculum with an international perspective and by emphasizing the study of foreign languages. We must support teaching and research programs that hold special promise of enlarging the global dimension of the College. We must facilitate the enrollment of students from foreign countries, in order to increase the cultural and ethnic diversity of the College. And we must encourage the appointment of visiting professors from foreign universities, in order to expand the intellectual breadth of the College.

By helping our students to comprehend the complexities and subtleties of the international environment, to see themselves, as it were, as inheritors of only one among many different cultural traditions, Dartmouth can con-

tinue to make a special contribution to meeting an essential educational and national need.



Dartmouth College is one of the nation's outstanding institutions of liberal learning. It is worthy of our love and of our respect—not only for what it has been, but also for what it is capable of becoming. Indeed, I believe that Dartmouth is just beginning to reach the fullest measure of its rich potential and that its greatest opportunities still lie before it.

Our primary goal in the years ahead must be to enhance the intellectual distinction of our academic enterprise. That will require us to strengthen our undergraduate programs and to give thoughtful consideration to a responsible and selective development of our graduate programs. As we make these decisions, we must be guided by a commitment to maintain this institution's hard-earned emphasis upon excellence in teaching. We must achieve a mutually nourishing relationship between undergraduate education and graduate and professional education. And,

above all, we must preserve “the Dartmouth Experience,” at the heart of our enterprise.

The fulfillment of these aspirations for the future will depend most centrally upon the people of Dartmouth—upon the talent and imagination of our faculty and the quality and ambition of our students. As this College approaches the Twenty-first Century, we will need to continue to attract to our faculty men and women who are distinguished scholars and extraordinary teachers—those very special human beings whose intellectual power will move them steadily toward the leadership of their disciplines and whose brilliance as teachers will illuminate the lives of our students. In addition, we must attract our full share of the most gifted, most academically qualified students in the nation—diverse, idealistic, imaginative students with the motivation and promise of making significant contributions to American life and thought. And we must hold them to the highest expectations of academic rigor.

We must strengthen our attraction for those singular students whose greatest pleasures may come not from the camaraderie of classmates, but from the lonely acts of writing poetry or mastering the cello or solving mathematical

riddles or translating Catullus. We must make Dartmouth a hospitable environment for students who march to “a different drummer”—for those creative loners and daring dreamers whose commitment to the intellectual and artistic life is so compelling that they appreciate, as Prospero reminded Shakespeare’s audiences, that for certain persons a library is “dukedom large enough.”

Dartmouth graduates have made distinguished contributions to the public and professional life of this nation for more than two hundred years. We now enter an era in which I hope that Dartmouth graduates will enlarge even further the contributions they make to the intellectual life of the nation, as novelists and painters, as critics and composers, as scientists and historians, as explorers of the human experience.

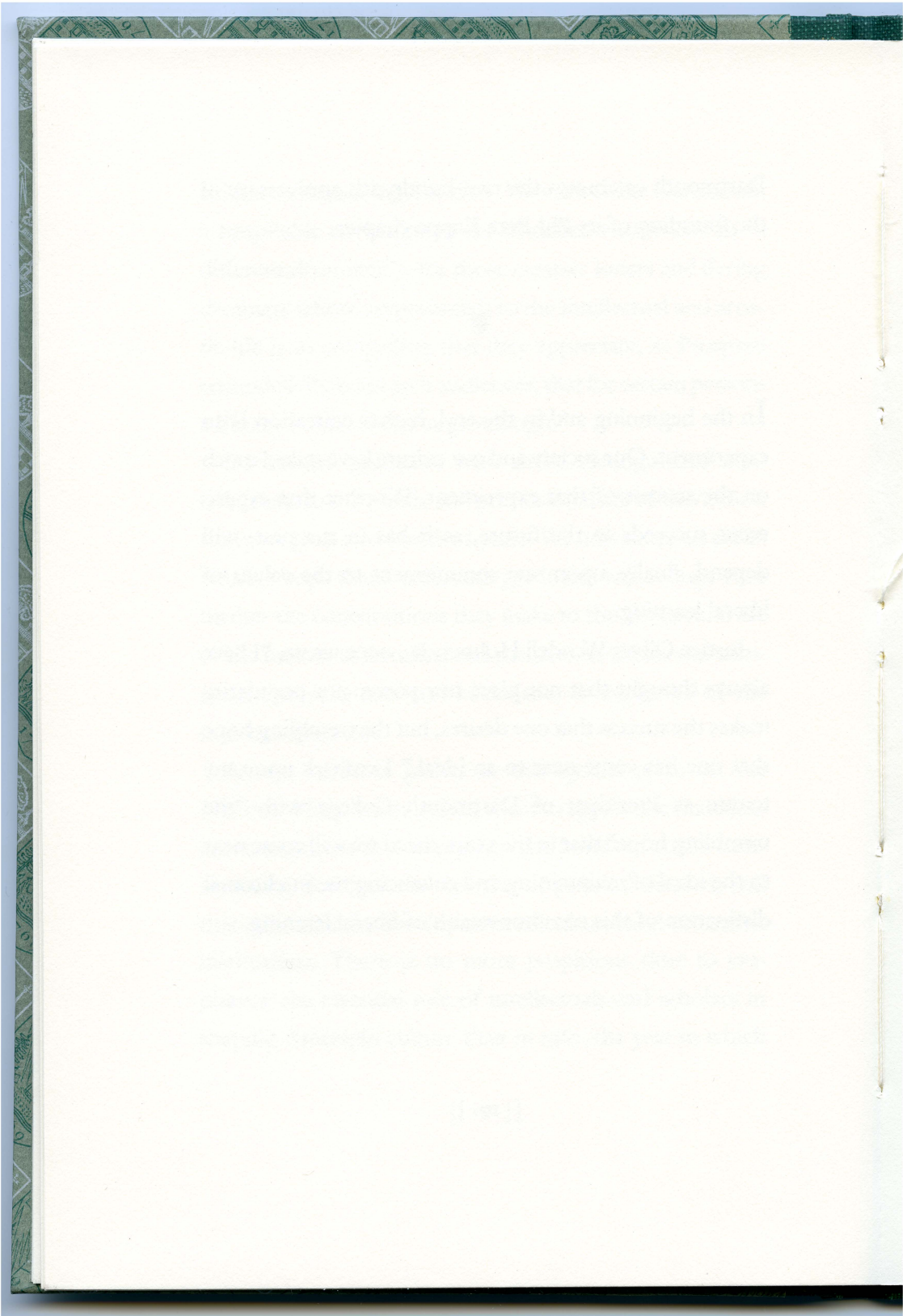
As our students gather at this special place on the Hanover Plain, we must lead them to appreciate that ideas are instruments that strengthen the bonds of social communality, that heal the wounds of political discord, and that stimulate the development of cultural and economic institutions. There is no more propitious time to emphasize the essential role of intellectuals and scholars in shaping American culture than in 1987, the year in which

Dartmouth celebrates the two-hundredth anniversary of the founding of its Phi Beta Kappa chapter.



In the beginning and in the end, higher education is an experiment. Our society and our culture have staked much on the success of that experiment. Whether that experiment succeeds in the future, as it has in the past, will depend, finally, upon our commitment to the values of liberal learning.

Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., once wrote, “I have always thought that not place nor power nor popularity makes the success that one desires, but the trembling hope that one has come near to an ideal.” I embark upon my tenure as President of Dartmouth College with “the trembling hope” that in the years ahead we will come near to the ideal of maintaining and enhancing the intellectual distinction of this commonwealth of liberal learning.



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