

State of the University Address
Emory University
September 26, 2006

James W. Wagner

Thank you all very much. And Ryan [Paddock, president of the SGA], thank you for that introduction.

Thank you also, Tara [Kneller Yglesias, Emory Law School alumna and associate director of the Truman Foundation] for so ably representing Emory to the wider world, and for representing the Truman Foundation in honoring Emory this afternoon. This recognition, which places Emory in the company of so many other distinguished universities, is a recognition not only of Emory's academic distinction but also, and especially, of Emory's continuing commitment to education as a public good. I want to say more about this later. Thank you.

And now . . . to the state of our university. We are in a period of great productivity and promise. Indeed, so much has been accomplished over the past year, and so much is planned for the coming year, that it has been difficult to compress my report into a brief presentation of 25 to 30 minutes. Please bear with me.

Let's begin with where we are at the moment. You should not be surprised to hear me say that the state of the University is very good. This would be a disappointing event if I started out otherwise. If we were to look through the various popular magazines that rank institutions of higher education, we would find confirmation of some of our optimism in those rankings. It has been a good "rankings season" for Emory, with advances of one form or another in all of our academic units, and with Emory Healthcare recognized for excellence in eight specialties.

Then there are rankings that keep us humble, such as those offered by *Washington Monthly* magazine, in which Emory barely makes it into the top 100 based largely on that magazine's measures of student financial accessibility.

It's appropriate to have a certain degree of skepticism about the meaning of these rankings, and we must never succumb to the temptation to form our institutional strategies merely around rankings. Still, they do attract a lot of attention from prospective students and their parents, and they generate a level of pride and bragging rights among alumni. So we should be pleased that our collective efforts over the past few years have sufficiently strengthened the University in key areas to make this kind of movement possible.

Along these lines, it came as news—but also as no news—that Emory was recognized by the Kaplan/*Newsweek* guide, *How to Get Into College*, as one of twenty-five "new Ivies"—that is, colleges whose first-rate academic programs and ability to attract top students have fueled our rise in stature, making Emory more competitive with the Ivy League. Although this is something that our own admissions data have indicated for some time, and, I suppose, we should

be pleased to be recognized in the company of the Ivies, it has never been and must never be our goal simply to compare favorably with any other school or group of schools. Emory must continue its quest to be the very best Emory that we can possibly be—competing in a most determined way to achieve our own goals and ambitions.

As one indication of this striving to surpass ourselves, this year's first-year class in Emory College may be the strongest ever. Out of more than fourteen thousand undergraduate applicants, we admitted about 32 percent and enrolled thirteen-hundred and thirty. To make the best use of Emory's increasing popularity, we have restructured our offices of admission, financial aid, and registrar. New appointments in enrollment management and enrollment systems have created a more seamless and stronger link between recruitment and retention. As Harvard and Princeton and the University of Virginia and other highly selective institutions look at phasing out their early-decision admission policies, we do not anticipate that Emory will follow in these steps, at least not immediately. Having said that, though, we are looking at our admissions and financial aid policies. We will continue our need-blind admission policy while studying the relationship between merit, need, admissions, and retention. We believe it is possible to develop programs for Emory to become more accessible to students from the full range of the economic spectrum, while maintaining both a reasonable aid program and the highest academic standards.

Across our campus, having put together a comprehensive, challenging, but achievable strategic plan, we have charged out of the starting gate to implement it. Over the past year the leaders of the various themes and initiatives have moved forward strongly in setting priorities for the coming year, and the Implementation Committee has established a sound process for reviewing achievements and providing guidance for the allocation of strategic funding. To give just a few examples:

- Under the rubric of *strengthening faculty distinction*, we anticipate disbursing some \$46 million over the next five years to support and retain our excellent faculty and to identify and recruit top faculty in strategic areas.
- Under the theme of *preparing engaged scholars*, faculty and staff have worked hard this year on University-wide plans to bring Emory and Atlanta into close partnership by means of student and faculty scholarship and service. Programs have been planned as pilots to help students explore what it means to accept the responsibility to be a scholar-citizen.
- With an aim of *creating community and engaging society*, we have begun work on a wide range of initiatives to develop and nurture a healthy living-learning-working community. This commitment requires partnership and leadership within the Emory community, and collaboration with others beyond the University. The goal is to create a lively economic, environmental, and social community in which we all can thrive.
 - Initiatives within this community-building theme include:
 - Expanding leadership development programs;
 - Imagining a mixed-use residential and commercial community on Clifton Road;
 - Launching an office to guide our stewardship of a sustainable environment;
 - Creating new patterns of transportation for commuting employees with a

- new system of park-and-ride shuttles; and
- Strengthening our relations
 - with the Druid Hills Civic Association,
 - with our county commissioners,
 - and with our neighbors to establish the Clifton Community Partnership.
- In the realm of *confronting the human condition and experience*, faculty committees have completed the five-year plan and budget for the Global Health Institute. Concrete plans are also moving forward in the initiatives of “Religions and the Human Spirit” (including a new Center for the Study and Practice of Religion) and “Understanding Race and Difference.” On this last point, Emory faculty members have played an important part in this year’s inter-institutional commemoration of the 1906 Atlanta race riot, and our own Transforming Community Project has gotten legs with major funding from our Strategic Plan Funds as well as a grant from the Ford Foundation.
- In the area of *exploring new frontiers in science and technology*, plans for the Center for Health Discovery and Well Being are being implemented as an arm of the proposed Predictive Health Institute.
- Finally, in the area of *internationalization*, members of the Emory faculty and leaders of The Carter Center, including President Carter himself, have developed a concept for a new Institute for Developing Nations, which will bridge the work of the Center and the University in new ways by supporting those who work to fill the chasm between the world’s richest nations and the poorest. This institute is intended to offer a forum, coordination, and a source of funding to amplify what we do and to realize more of what we are capable of doing in scholarship and research focused on nations of the developing world.

Having taken a great deal of time over the past two to three years to lay out a distinctive and compelling strategic plan, we have also taken pains to make certain we will have the resources to bring the plan to fruition. In addition to having identified existing internal funds to launch our strategic initiatives, we are building a very strong team of fund-raisers, marketers, and communicators. As we mobilize our alumni and tell the Emory story to wider audiences—including people for whom the name Emory is not yet a promise and sometimes not even recognized—we will attract the level of philanthropy needed to make our initiatives succeed and to help sustain them.

Clearly the Emory Strategic Plan will occupy a major part of our collective energy and attention in the coming years. For that reason I’m grateful that we now have a full complement of Cabinet officers and deans in place, for the first time in more than three years. It will always be true

- that the faculty of a university is its greatest resource, and
- the students are the *sine qua non* to the university’s mission, and
- the staff keeps the university functioning.

But an ineffective leadership team can limit the University’s progress and even squander opportunities and resources. I’m proud to report that the senior leadership team at Emory is among the strongest in the nation, and I’m grateful for their collective and individual

commitment to making Emory both a great academic institution and a good place to work and live.

So if I can summarize the past year, I would say that it has been marked by high levels of energy, a clear sense of direction, engaged collaboration and partnership, and a determination among all members of the community to see that Emory achieves its promise.

Now let's look briefly to the year ahead and how we will build on the past year's achievements. Of course we will continue to put to good use the results of our strategic planning exercise, now that it has grown from a study of our aspirations to become a discipline to achieve them. I am proud that we have chosen to pursue a list of strategic initiatives that are both meaningful and challenging:

- Religions and the Human Spirit;
- Race and Difference;
- Global Health;
- Predictive Health;
- Neuroscience and Human Behavior;
- Computational and Life Sciences.

But rather than rattle off the institutional "to do" list set by the plan, I would prefer to talk more broadly about the direction of our university using our strategic initiatives to illustrate how Emory intends to advance. Specifically, I want to consider:

- Importance of the Liberal Arts
- Ethical practice in the Emory Community
- Primacy of our Faculty and Students.

The first two directions, especially, fall under the heading of the university—of Emory—as a public good serving more than just individual, private ends. And here I come back to the presentation of the Truman Foundation honor a few minutes ago.

The foundation recognizes and supports students who have the commitment and potential to serve the public in distinguished and effective ways. Over the years Emory has been able to nurture that kind of commitment in more than a few individuals. Most of these young men and women, who have represented Emory so magnificently, have manifested in themselves a marvelous convergence of interests—the interest, on the one hand, in coming to Emory to learn everything they could that would make them successful as individuals in their careers and in their lives generally; and the interest, on the other hand, in using their knowledge and skills and gifts in behalf of their communities, their nation, and the world at large. In other words, Emory has been for them both a private good and a means to increasing the public good. At Emory they have found personal satisfaction in honing their gifts and in whetting their appetites to use those gifts for positive transformation in the world.

Attention to the public good is a defining part of the Emory character, and it is an element of our institutional ethos that we must strengthen in the year ahead. Waning support from public coffers and calls for regulatory intrusion into the running of our institutions of higher learning are indications of public dissatisfaction—indications that we may have been inattentive or

inarticulate in explaining the public good and not simply the private good that our universities serve. Of course, we can be proud of the public good performed through the research, education, and care-giving in our nursing, public health, and medical schools and through our healthcare division. We can be similarly proud that our School of Law is not merely training lawyers for their personal profit but is advancing the scholarship of the rule of law in civil society. Our Goizueta Business School is focused not merely on generating personal wealth, but in principled practice of business leadership and global wealth creation. Our Candler School of Theology calls students to learn and to lead the expedition toward the answers to ultimate questions, and the Graduate School is busy preparing our next generation of scholars and researchers. Our science departments prepare our students with the fundamental tools to better understand the universe, to shape theories and develop technology to shape our future. This year we will flesh out plans for expanded facilities in the sciences and we will pursue a program of targeted recruiting for science faculty. Still, we have the opportunity to do better with the other talents and missions given to the University.

Let me explain. Our Strategic Plan calls us to foster a discussion of what it means to be human, by examining the human experience and by confronting the human condition. This intention challenges us to re-establish the value of the humanities and the arts, as well as the sciences. But why?

Well, consider this. We all are aware of how advances in health care not only have extended human life expectancy but also have made more complex the answer to the questions, when does life begin, when does life end, and what is the difference between living and merely existing? My colleague John Sexton, president of New York University, recently recalled a comment by the graphic artist and MIT professor John Maeda, predicting that “the biggest breakthrough will be the realization that the arts, which are conventionally considered useless, will be recognized as the whole reason why we ever try to live longer or live more prosperously.” Think about that: Maeda’s belief is that all of our effort to eradicate disease, to discover cures for cancer, to invent life-saving devices, is simply so that we can enjoy and express ourselves through rhetoric, poetry, dance, art, music, theater, and literature. In Maeda’s conception, “the arts are the science of enjoying life.”

Even as the health sciences push back the boundaries of our understanding of what it means to be *biologically* alive, we must ask the arts and the humanities to help us define what it means to be fully, humanly alive, to live in community, to understand our souls, and to express ourselves with the full range of communication that goes beyond words to the celebration of our humanity. That is a tall order. It is one that we at Emory must invest in. And for that reason the theme of *creativity and the arts* is not merely one among many themes in the Emory Strategic Plan, it is one of the fundamental goals and building blocks of what we are attempting to become.

But how can we do this? How can we restore a focus on what it means to be human and to be alive, not merely to exist or even to exist comfortably?

Let me suggest that following a century of technological development, we might learn from our history in scientific advancement to better inform our efforts to advance also in the arts

and humanities. Although much of civilization's early technology—such as the wheel and fire—grew from innovation that happened serendipitously or by trial and error, many of the great advances in modern technology and health care over the past century have often followed a two-step model: first, the nation itself and countless institutions and individuals invested in science for science's sake—knowledge for knowledge's sake—and in so doing established reservoirs of knowledge about the world. Thus the ensuing technology owes its achievement to the inquisitiveness of someone in a laboratory or out in the field, who wondered how a thing happened to be or how it happened to work the way it did. That wondering, that imperative to do science just because it was worth doing for the sake of doing it, led to the creation of knowledge. It is a process, by the way, that must continue. And indeed the edification of the mind through discovery and scholarship remains a positive end, a public good, in itself.

But then a second thing happened to advance technology and health care. People made the effort to translate some of that good science, that reservoir of knowledge, into applications that could also be used for the public good. The world that we have created around us—our means of transportation, of feeding ourselves, of clothing ourselves, of healing ourselves, and so on— can be imagined as the result of this two-fold process of discovery and application.

I suggest that this history of research and scholarship, on the one hand, coupled with knowledge mining, on the other hand, should inspire us to strive more intensively to translate our knowledge of the humanities and the arts into applications to enhance human life, and thus to serve the public good further.

We can be encouraged that we already are addressing this opportunity in a variety of ways. Let me point to just a few recent examples. Earlier this month, with sponsorship by the Carlos Museum and funding from half-a-dozen departments, the Canadian novelist and poet Margaret Atwood enthralled a full house in Glenn Auditorium, as she talked about the importance of myth and narrative. The Schwartz Center for Performing Arts is the busiest nonclinical building on campus, and between it and other venues, there are more than a hundred and eighty arts events scheduled between now and the end of spring semester. Our Visual Arts Program has been one of the fastest-growing programs in Emory College, developing from a very small studio program a decade ago into a burgeoning enterprise in new space with a gallery full of stunning exhibitions. Not surprisingly, many of our double-majors in the College combine the arts and the sciences in ways that would not have been possible twenty years ago—music and neurobiology, dance and physics, chemistry and theater, and so on.

At the same time that we encourage our students and other community members to pursue the arts for art's sake, and for the sake of a deeper human understanding, we must continue to encourage the translation of this understanding for the sake of transforming our world. Along these lines, our Transforming Community Project has engaged more than three hundred faculty, students, alumni, and staff members in frank and probing conversations and scholarly inquiry about Emory's racial past, with the intention of creating a stronger community for the future. Our hope is that our experience in this transformative enterprise will have implications for other universities and other communities across America. And thus, Emory is and must continue intentionally to be a university engaged in using its gifts in the humanities and the social sciences and the arts for the sake of a better world.

This task of being more intentional about what it means to be human is a corporate, community effort, and so this year we will also continue our commitment to fostering a greater sense of engagement on campus. It has been heartening to see the level of activity spurred by student interest in traditions and community. Last year it was students who initiated a renewal of the old Emory tradition of “Wonderful Wednesdays”—on a somewhat different scale than the old tradition, but nevertheless in a way that brings together various elements of our campus for a celebration of Emory spirit and community. Students also took the lead in proposing and carrying out a contest to create a new fight song and athletics cheer to encourage our sports teams.

All of this is enjoyable and fun and celebratory. But our commitment to community engagement has other and perhaps more substantive directions as well. A committee of faculty and staff, working with Vice President for Human Resources Peter Barnes and University Secretary and Vice President Rosemary Magee, has been deliberating for almost a year now on how Emory as an institution can help each of us structure our work and the rest of life in ways that lead to the greater fulfillment of our humanity. It is no secret that Americans on average work longer hours than workers in other industrialized nations. Add to these longer hours the stresses of commuting, tending to family obligations, and participating in communities, and pretty soon people have a hard time maintaining spiritual and physical health. This cannot help but have an adverse impact on our campus community. We will continue to address these issues by looking carefully at our benefits packages, and engaging the Emory student, staff, and faculty community to think about how best to put in place programs like the proposed shuttles to commercial and restaurant districts, and taking steps to adjust the tenure clock for faculty where necessary.

Another important initiative that we are undertaking this year is to reinvigorate our common sense of stewardship of the public’s trust. Among America’s public institutions, there has long been a distressing decline in the level of trust we invest in our government, in business, and even in our religious organizations. Yet colleges and universities still enjoy a significant level of trust and high expectation, even though higher education has not been without its critics. We must continue to earn that trust.

Part of Emory University’s vision for itself is to be “ethically engaged.” Emory people overwhelmingly demonstrate a fundamental allegiance to the right and the good, and accept responsibility for ethical behavior. But we remain a human community and sometimes fall short of our aspirations. A large organization like Emory will from time to time experience instances of unethical behavior, from academic cheating to abuses of authority and even intellectual and financial fraud. Two recent developments have prompted my asking a small group of highly respected campus leaders to look into the best ways for us at Emory to enhance our accountability to each other.

The first development is that the cochairs of two of our strategic theme committees (the committee on “Preparing Engaged Scholars” and the committee on “Creating Community, Engaging Society”) have asked our community to consider ways to make our ethical practices conform to our ethical principles. The second development is the growing awareness that

employees—faculty as well as staff—need better training and education about the use of financial resources and the accountability that comes with certain responsibilities with which they are entrusted.

To help us be certain that our moral compass is in sound working order, I have appointed a task force of highly respected faculty and staff members and will look forward to receiving the report of the task force sometime in the spring semester. In the meantime, let me reaffirm that I believe the vast majority of our community members share a commitment to the highest ideals of intelligence, competence, and integrity outlined in the Emory University Mission Statement.

One final initiative for the year deserves special note and attention. It is a broader initiative than the more specific examples above although it derives directly from the first two themes of the strategic plan: 1) to strengthen faculty distinction and 2) to prepare engaged scholars. It is an initiative that requires those of us who are members of Emory's staff, myself included, to put our egos in check and reaffirm that the fundamental strength of any university lies essentially in the quality of its faculty and students. Such critical factors as promotion and tenure and curriculum development and delivery in the final analysis are owned, not by the staff, but by the faculty. Therefore, we need to recognize that our roles as staff are critical primarily to the extent that they help ensure the fullest achievement of our faculty and students.

The coming months will witness a series of focused discussions led by Provost Lewis—our chief academic officer—to solicit from our faculty what they understand excellence to be and how we who are staff can adopt practices and policies to help facilitate excellence in teaching, scholarship, and research as well as to make Emory increasingly able to recruit new faculty and retain the best who already are here—in other words, to become even more of a destination.

In closing, let me repeat what I have said in each of my previous State of the University addresses. Emory University is a wonderful community, a distinctive institution unique in many ways. I consider it a supreme privilege, indeed a gift, to be able to work with every member of this community in striving to meet our common goals. Thankful for this gift, I pledge once more to exercise my responsibility to the fullest in assuring that Emory continues moving forward with integrity, with energy, with a sense of direction, and with a commitment to manifesting what is best in American higher education.

With appreciation for all that you do for Emory and with best wishes for the coming year, Thank you.

James W. Wagner