



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

**Inaugural Address  
October 25, 2024  
Jeff Frederick, Ph.D.**

Good morning and thank you, chair **Walt George and to Carter, Dr. Van Arkel, Kelli, Winter, and Scott**, for the kind and generous introductions, well wishes, and greetings. Thanks to our musicians and singers, to **David Harrison the Poet Laureate, to Dr. Peter Browning and Provost Harville, and to Chris** for leading our responsive reading, and for our delegates and faculty marshals, and to Dr. Sorenson who will lead us in the Alma Mater in a bit. I'm grateful to our brilliant faculty, tireless staff, wise trustees, devoted alums, and great students who have participated in a range of events over the last week or so and who make this university a great one, worthy of the acclaim it has received over the last 151 years. To everyone who takes and teaches classes and conducts and mentors research, stops to help a student, cuts a patch of grass or a slice of pizza on this or any of our campuses, processes a financial aid form, sorts, combs, and files the data that make this



place work, cleans a building, coaches a team, and everything in between: you make this place special.

I have yet to meet a stranger on this campus or in this town, and I have yet to meet someone who has passed through this university that doesn't have a **Drury Story**—a narrative of times and moments when someone from this university poured into them, helping them through political science, psychology, chemistry, or calculus, a grad school application, or the loss of a loved one, **lifting them up to do those things that they were certain could not be done**, and empowering them to believe that the lessons of success and failure alike are stair steps to a life of meaning and fulfillment. **Drury stories** are reminders of the simple axiom that *we can do hard things*. This place makes sure of it, creating a chorus of practical values like **resilience, character, passion, excellence, growth, and character**. Drury stories are the personification of our institution's soul, and they have echoed for



151 years, cemented through mentorships and friendships, intellectual roadblocks and eureka moments, bus rides home from difficult losses and the jubilation of national championships, heartbreak and partnerships, marriages and a rhythm of life forged in the times and treasures of four or more years along Drury Lane.

I'm grateful for so many who have travelled to be with us today and throughout the week. Thank you. I offer glad tidings to those leaders who have served this institution in its past and whose legacy cascades through today. Our people extend all throughout Springfield, the Ozarks and beyond, where the love of what we do and how we do it echoes far and wide. For those of you from our wonderful community, other institutions and universities, educators, leaders, business folk, artists, non-profit warriors, and everything in between—thank you for being here. I offer special mention to **John Beuerlein**, who loves and believes in Drury, has



given deeply of his time, talents, and treasure, and whose steady influence on our university helped sow the seeds of a bright future over the last academic year.

My own story includes the love and admonition of my parents, Terry and Marilyn, as well as my older brother and sister, John and Jackie, whose love for the youngest in our household, me, undoubtedly tried their own patience and self-control. You all shaped me in dozens of ways. I'm grateful for my father and mother-in-law, for aunts and uncles, nephews and nieces, brothers-in-law and sisters-in law, friends from all across the fruited plain and for the lessons they taught me even when they were certain I wasn't paying close enough attention. Which I probably wasn't.

Classmates, professors, and mentors at the University of Central Florida became brothers and sisters for life, as did those at Auburn



University, with whom we walked together for five years. My career journey started in the business world, but belief in the power and meaning of teaching and writing and serving brought me to this work we share together. To that end, I am forever blessed to have started my teaching career at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke and to have served at Wingate University, each a school dedicated to the premise that we are all better when we take our work seriously, but refrain from taking our own selves too seriously. We are in the people business and my time at UNCP and Wingate were reflections of people at those institutions who showed me how to place students first, confident that all good things would flow out of that mission. My previous 21 years in higher education brought me to my 22<sup>nd</sup>, here at Drury, and I am grateful for every colleague, mentor, and, without a doubt, student that I've encountered along the way.



But most especially, I note my children: **Logan and wife Grace, Jack and wife Brittany (who could not be here today because they are just weeks from the birth of their first child and our first grandchild), and Quinton**, who individually and collectively gave me the gifts of a lifetime-- none of which could ever be repaid-- through the simple act of letting me walk with them over the years, sometimes holding their hands, sometimes pushing them to believe deeply in their own limitless future, and sometimes seeing whatever good is in me through their own eyes. Today as often, I rest in the comfort of who they are as people that see the good in others, take steps to make the world simpler and kinder, and stand strong for the principles that give hope to this world. Thank you for what you have taught me. As I have said to my children many a time, when I grow up, I'd like to be just like them.



And, of course, to my **wife Melinda**, my North Star and a one-of-one unicorn, who married me almost 33 years ago and has been my everything since. You are so deeply talented and accomplished, but take your greatest pleasure in serving and loving those around you. I love you and I'm forever grateful for all the steps of all the adventures we have taken and will take together. Thank you for being my best friend. Your spirit carries me each day.

On January 2 of 2024, I wrote a letter to the Presidential Search Committee at Drury University noting among other things that "Drury University is crystal clear that student interests come first. If I come to Springfield to work, I will be active on campus and in the community, meeting with and speaking with students regularly, and will commit to teaching a course as soon as time and other responsibilities allow. Why? An institution whose mission and values seeks to grow the whole student can't be led by a person



whose work routine is exclusively behind a desk away from the reach and grasp of students. More than ever, a college education rooted in a dynamic student experience is the single most powerful predictor of future success economically, in cultural understanding of citizenship in a diverse, global society, and in uplifting individuals, families, neighborhoods, communities, states, and the nation. *I believe in college* as a critical and transformational opportunity to create lifelong learners that solve problems, think creatively and critically about their place in an interconnected society, and make informed decisions.” [end quote]

Today, ten months after writing those words, I stand here in affirmation of the relationships that happen here at this place: the intellectual and developmental transaction between student and faculty member, the social contract of mentoring between student and staff member, professor, or coach; and the





relationships forged between student and community as Panthers volunteer, serve, engage, create, innovate, and uplift wherever they go. A college experience at a place like Drury is, with the possible exception of a military experience, the most critical and a defining experience of a young journey and a veritable launching pad to a life of meaning and fulfillment. What we do matters. **I say again, the work we do matters, because it launches a process whereby students find their people, their purpose, and develop skills that allow our graduates to change their world.** If you believe that this is important in a world where we should be names and not numbers, then you believe in Drury. And I believe in Drury.

The application of skills within the concept of a sense of purpose or calling, bridges the connection between campus and community. Great universities do more than prepare students for success on their academic transcript. They invest in knowledge



and skill development, but also in application on and off campus. Great institutions also stand for values that teach students outside of lecture, lab, or studio. The confluence of people, learning, and values creates the aforementioned Drury Story, that narrative of exploration and discovery that fashions a **whole person** ready for a fulfilling life of meaning and accomplishment.

In fact, one way to describe our institution is we create Drury stories **because of the values that define our institution: resilience, growth, character, passion, excellence, and respect.**

To be resilient is to be committed to overcoming that which stops others. And to seek help to do so. To value growth is to acknowledge that none of us are finished products and that our commitment to learning should last a lifetime. That seems pretty important in a world that changes faster and faster each day, if not each hour. We believe character's roots are believing in something larger than yourself and acting in concert whether people are



watching or not. None of us are perfect, but our community is built on the bedrock of character. Passion is connected to calling and vocation- and as theologian Howard Thurman once noted, “don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes **YOU** come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” Excellence is the relentless drive to interconnect your purpose and the skills you acquire to do your best. Excellence is a mindset, an approach to all things, grounded in a way to approach life as an unfolding journey, not a destination. And respect is a commitment to timeless ideas like the golden rule—treat others as you would have them treat you. Respect for ALL others is an expectation at Drury, and part of our sense of focusing on those things that bind us together, not those that others might use to divide. These six core values are critical to how we teach, how we learn, and where Drury positions itself in this world. Some of these values might seem a little old-fashioned, but I think they are a meaningful way to forge a college



experience. To believe in Drury is to recognize that values matter, individually and collectively. And I believe in Drury.

Like any institution, we are capable of falling short as anything that has 151 years under its wings has done from time to time. Any university's greatness is not in its ascendance as a finished product, but **rather in the way that it has learned, changed, and grown** through those same values: resilience, growth, a commitment to character, passion for our students and our community, a search for excellence, and respect for each other. Continuous improvement is more than a business philosophy; it's a belief that by looking inward AND outward we can become better. All of this was said much more eloquently by Maya Angelou who succinctly noted "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."



Higher Education has faced increased scrutiny in recent years, perhaps somewhat deservedly so as our Ivy and Ivory Towers have developed a bit of a reputation for rigidity and tradition. Costs and expenses are rising locally and nationally, and some critics have decided we cost too much, OR proffer from time-to-time that we teach the wrong things. Sometimes folks conflate peer-reviewed research and scholarship with the bluster of opinions all of us have after a third cup of coffee or an evening beverage of our choice. And like all institutions, the necessities wrought by the pandemic and aftermath forced us to adapt.

But our work in higher ed and especially at Drury is more than separating away the tangled knots of our fiercest or most vocal critics. The work here at Drury is practical enough to be emblematic of what we used to call the **Public Good**—those things which uplift and allow society to be characterized by flourishing citizenship, vibrant civic participation, and a general



will toward community and individual well-being. To believe in Drury is to believe that it's possible to grow individually AND in concert with the public good. **And I believe in Drury.**

The founding generation of this nation used the language of virtue—knowing the difference between right and wrong and consistently choosing right, even when choosing wrong might have more immediate benefits to an individual. Making moral choices to do good **was then and is now** grounded in a set of skills whose origin story is in learning, contemplating, assessing, and implementing that which we have come to know and understand. The Public Good, then, is dependent on learning—that essential aspect of all human development which begins so early that language absorption literally starts in the womb. The practical application of learning is but one aspect of what an individual does in pursuit of individual and collective good. We learn to advance ourselves, AND we learn to advance our families,



businesses, hospitals, schools, neighborhoods, churches, non-profits, banks, states, and nation.

In an information-based economy forming and transforming at the speed of light, those that cannot or choose not to learn, face uncertainty. And while any one person can certainly choose what to learn and what to learn more of, it seems unsustainable for anyone to move forward into a future without the learning of new skills. This is precisely where Drury fits into the conversation of 21<sup>st</sup> century Springfield, the Ozarks, Missouri, the Midwest, the South and beyond. What Drury offers that is so valuable in this moment where learning and developing skills is so critical, so unavoidable, and so completely essential, *is a way to learn*. The Drury Difference is grounded in the premise that when we learn individually and in small groups with direct access to experts, and when we have the ability to find our people, and our purpose, and the skills we need to change our world, and when we start to



apply our skills directly into the broader community, **something magical happens**. The learning that we practice at Drury, absolutely depends on a **relational approach** where faculty know their students by name and not by a number, where staff are professional problem solvers, where coaches prepare a student as devotedly for the day when the uniform comes off for the last time as they do for the conference or national championship, where students connect with each other in a community that finds value in each of us as individuals no matter our similarities or our differences.

**It is possible, I say to you today, to lift yourself even as you endeavor as well to lift others. So, to rephrase John Kennedy, Drury asks: *not only* what you can do for yourself, but what you can do for others. To believe in Drury is to believe in the power of learning and ideas, and I believe in OneDrury.**





Each time you are on our campus, I hope you will pause long enough to spend a moment looking at the trees. I am out and about on campus most days, walking our dog Briggs, or taking an occasional run, and I never cease to notice the trees. We actually have an official designation as a Tree Campus USA university. And especially in the Fall semester, as the leaves change, the trees become living postcards. Some of those trees may well trace their origin to 151 years ago, before the light bulb, let alone computing, arthroscopic surgery, antibiotics, Panther athletics, or possibly even cashew chicken. In some ways, those trees are visible monuments of what happens when roots grow strong, sunshine fills the air, and water comes from the clouds to the ground. These trees have survived plenty of storms and overcome many threats, with more, sure to come. Some have a few gnarled branches or have twisted themselves over the years to find the sun; that is part of their beauty and a testament to their learning how to thrive when conditions changed. The trees have so much in common



and serve a collective purpose of cleaning the air, providing canopy, shade, and beauty, and hosting multiple ecosystems. **And yet none are exactly like the other.**

For those that grew up in the Springfield area or have come to school or to work here, these Drury trees have become part of your lives. And they are home for the squirrels that seemingly are the real owners of this campus, darting among the limbs, occasionally tossing black walnuts at us mere mortals that walk beneath. That's a Drury story as well. And like Drury students, the trees are both individually distinctive and collectively part of something larger than themselves.

Like the trees outside of Stone Chapel and across the campus, Drury University has grown stronger but also different than when it was planted in 1873. We didn't grant degrees in architecture, engineering, or Physician Assistant in 1873, but we have grown in



these and many other ways in the years since, all while holding fast to the fundamentals of the Drury Way. Inasmuch as Drury grows trees, Drury grows leaders, problem solvers, and solution seekers, people who leave here ready for what's next, even in a world where none of us are always sure what is around the corner. We carry this mission forward because we believe in Drury.

I accept the charge to be the 19<sup>th</sup> president of Drury University. I will do my very best to keep our university anchored in our mission, connected to our community, and growing leaders one at a time in a way that positively and enthusiastically lifts each student and graduate, while building partnerships everywhere we go and championing the public good. Together, our goal is to be One Drury—an institution whose commitment to all our students—in person, on-campus, online, grad, local, residential, commuter, veteran, international, of color or not, of every faith or none, of every gender or identity, of any age or place of origin, and



everywhere in between—**unites us in common cause to rise together in the determination that fully together, Drury is an answer to what Springfield, the Ozarks, Missouri, and this country need. And I believe in OneDrury.**

Thank you to Salia Manis and the Inauguration Committee for their tireless work throughout this week. Thank you to those that have devoted themselves to so much planning and organization for this week and this day. Many of you have travelled to be here. I am grateful. Many of you have devoted your time and treasure to this institution; I am thankful for your belief in this place and our values. I ask you to continue your good and great service to our university and our mission.

As I close, over the last couple of weeks, I've had a chance to teach, connect with students, staff, and faculty be part of a civil discourse event, attend several athletic events, art openings, and plays, be in



the community, connect with our partners, orient our new trustees, and meet with our whole board. Along the way, I've had dozens of individual conversations with students, sometimes about what they wanted to study, sometimes about national or international events, sometimes about sports or books or music, and a couple of times about how to jump-start a car battery after you left your lights on all night. That's a Drury story as well. We have done a little bit of everything that universities do to serve their students this past week or so and I wouldn't have it any other way.

We have an afternoon of visiting, live music, food, drink, and games ahead of us. I hope you can stay for lunch and be here or come back for the late afternoon, early evening events so we can visit a little bit.



With a final note of appreciation and gratitude, I say what I have said since I said yes to working alongside of you. Believe in the work we do, and in each other.

Jeff Frederick, Ph.D.

October 25, 2024