WHITMAN COLLEGE:
OUR HOPE AND OUR PROMISE

Welcome and many thanks for attending this evening and supporting our College. Your gifts to Whitman’s “Now is the Time Campaign” has proven critical in the success we have achieved. Together, we have established a foundation of academic quality and financial strength to support Whitman’s future.

The reputation of our College has and will always hinge entirely upon the quality of learning and personal growth that our students attain.

Throughout the campaign we have witnessed profound changes in our campus, its programs and people. As John Stanton, noted your gifts have translated into significant advances in the academic and developmental experiences of our students and our support of all of the College’s people. The increased number of
tenure track faculty, internships, and new directions for the academic program have enriched and expanded our curriculum. The significant additions of scholarship support for students have increased access to Whitman. And the substantial increase in Whitman’s endowment will ensure greater financial stability of the college during periods of economic instability.

These impressive changes raise the issue of how the College helps shape the intellectual and personal development individual students. What difference is a Whitman education making?

Thanks to support we received from the Andrew J. Mellon Foundation, our staff has been studying a cohort of students who entered Whitman in the fall of 2012. The research has three purposes:

– Develop a greater understanding of the value and impact of a Whitman education,
– Identify the most influential aspects of our academic and co-curricular programs, and

– Document how students change and develop intellectually and personally over their four years at Whitman.

At this juncture we have conducted extensive interviews with and evaluated the written work of the cohort (N=75) for each of the two years and conducted email surveys with the entire class entering in the fall of 2012. After two years at Whitman here’s how our students respond to a series of questions about their academic development and personal growth

**Upon arriving at campus as a first year undergraduate:**

They confront independence, new types of people and what it is like to live and learn with others often very different from
themselves. Some representative reactions to questions after the first two weeks of school:

“I’m fairly forgetful sometimes. I’ve already lost my water bottle and my room key once, and my iPod touch, like, I lose everything. So I think that will be challenging, is just keeping track of my stuff. And also doing my laundry, ‘cause I’m super lazy about that. I don’t want to smell.”

“My roommate is a bit of an eccentric. He eats about eight oranges a day and he’s very bad about throwing the peels away, so that’s something that I’ve had to have a couple of conversations with him about.”

By the end of the first year, their answers are more analytical about the people around them:
“My section is actually fairly diverse. I know some people say Whitman isn’t very diverse, but I feel like my section is. And seeing people who have experienced so many different things than I have is really helpful, and that challenged how I see the world. Because I grew up in a very, very not diverse place. My high school is probably 90% white, middle class kids. And just seeing people from LA or East Coast or different ethnicities and how they view the world, it challenged how I’d seen the world previously.”

“My level of independence has gone up. I have to get myself out of bed, walk to classes, do my own laundry and dishes. I am now comfortable emailing my professors regularly and using their office hours if I have questions about subject matter.”

“Without a doubt, I experienced tremendous growth last semester. I think
most of it has to do with being in college -- living apart from my family for the first time, adapting to a new home, and having to find my way in a completely foreign social environment. For someone who not only is extremely close to her parents but is also very shy, this has required some serious adjustment and courage. Though it's cliché, I've become dramatically more independent.”

“I think I’ve become more bold and more open to change, and more open to confiding in people, meeting people, approaching people and introducing myself, talking to professors and being more assertive about what I need and what I want”

By the end of the second year, students attention has turned to their academic
work, what they are learning and how they feel about the experience:

“I think my way of thinking has changed, academically. Now when I’m faced with a problem, or faced with an argument, I’ve learned to look at it from all different angles, not just the ones that come to mind first. The impact of their experiences here clearly extends far beyond our campus and our community.

“Well originally I was going to do engineering, do the 3-2 program. And then I found out that um, I’m pretty bad at Physics. So I ended up taking a media studies class first semester, and just really being into it, I realized my interest in Film will lead to a major in Media and Film Studies.

“I took Intro to Geology just as a distribution filler, but then actually ended up enjoying it so much that I ended up choosing Geology as a major. I remember for, for the final research project, I picked a really good topic, as a project.
And the professor gave me a 100% on the project, and I had never gotten a 100% on anything. And, and then afterwards, she was like, the professor said, “you should be a geology major, you are really good at this.

**During this period, students comment on the important roles that Whitman faculty play in advising and guiding them:**

“My advisor has been really helpful. She has been really helpful helping me decide what I want to do and getting me on track and making sure I have everything done and she also organized a meeting for me with some other people who are interested in mixing the same two subjects.

“I came into college with the idea that I could write an essay, look over it once or twice, and turn it in for a solid grade. Since then, I’ve been challenged more and more to have my peers help me with the formation of my ideas, the organization of the paper, and the editing
process once my first draft has been finished. Once I started asking other people for help on my papers, I felt like the quality of my ideas came out more in my essays and that I was producing better essays.”

“By being around so many driven, inspired, talented people, I find that I am more motivated to discover what I'm passionate about. Personally, I found that people at Whitman are more inviting and open to new ideas than I'd seen before I came here. This has made me more aware of the kind of person that I'd like to be, and I hope helped me embody these qualities.”

Finally,

“I started making lists this year. Which...

*Helps a lot.*

My mom always made lists, and I never wanted to be that kind of person.”
Our students undergo a series of adjustments in their first two years and a learning process by which they become more independent, develop self-confidence and the ability and skills to engage and direct their own learning. In the next two years we will witness how they change, how faculty, staff and peers shape their conceptions of self and the directions they take in pursuing in depth studies in their major area of study. We also will develop a much better understanding of how their academic work, particularly their writing and thinking, as they progress through the curriculum.

A related interest, of course, are the transitions our students make when they leave Whitman. Where do they go and what do they do with the skills and abilities they’ve acquired?

Let me offer just a few examples of students I came to know in recent years and where they are now. Every case indicates that they are
reaching into all aspects of our society and our world:

Consider **David Fleming**, Class of 2014 and a music and psychology double-major who is now leading Search Engine Marketing for Redfin, a company that offers a wholly new approach to real estate sales and acquisitions via online technology

**Claire Noone [noon]**, a politics major in the Class of 2011 who was featured in a previous campaign video working on her thesis on Bosnia has gone on to found **Sovereign Threads**—an organization that sells traditional handmade products woven by women genocide survivors in Bosnia.

**Carson Burns**, Class of 2011, BBMB major, Student Body President, Varsity Soccer Player and in now completing his medical degree at Stanford University.
Al-Rahim Merali, Class of 2013 also a psychology major, Recruiting Coordinator at Google,
What about Maryn Juergens, Class of 2010 a double major in history and chemistry? She is completing her MBA at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth and has already held internships at Microsoft and Goldman Sachs, or

Curt Bowen, Philosophy, 2008, recognized by Forbes magazine's in their "30 Under 30" list as one of our country’s promising social entrepreneurs. Bowen cofounded a nonprofit called Semilla Nueva. His team invests in small farmers in Guatemala helping them enhance food security and production while also increasing their personal incomes.

Each of these recent graduates and many others are paying forward our investments in their education.
In his remarks earlier, John Stanton mentioned the goals we have achieved in the campaign and at Whitman over many years. One additional goal we have achieved that I wish to mention -- while not measureable in dollars given or commitments made -- reveals much about those of us in this room tonight and the many others who have supported the campaign.

What I have felt throughout this campaign and throughout my time at Whitman is an inspiring sense of unity. We have stood together united in purpose. We have lived and walked together in this campaign for nearly 8 years, 10 years with me in this role as president, and while
some have lived walked more years than others, but we’ve all been bound together by our affection for and belief in Whitman, how it shapes and advances the lives of our students and our commitment to supporting them.

Such unity among hundreds or even thousands is fleeting, lasting only as long as there exists a shared and abiding commitment to a common purpose. I want us to remember the importance of the unity we have shared – it is not permanent or nor is it necessarily be long lasting.

Whitman’s promise, now and in the future, is affording students from all backgrounds and orientations access to and support for the many exceptional opportunities we provide for young men and women to learn and develop.

We must remain faithful to this promise, welcome our new president, Kathy Murray, support her in developing a new vision for advancing the College and then support this
vision with our commitments of time, energy and personal treasure.

Our commitment to this vision and to keeping Whitman’s promise will only have value if we recreate a few years from now the unity that has spirited us through this campaign

Serving as Whitman’s President for a decade has an immense honor. Even in the most difficult moments, I have felt blessed to have served in this position. One of my colleagues describes our work with young men and women as dwelling in a sacred space. We work with talented students, alongside very accomplished and dedicated faculty and staff, and with inspiring volunteers.

We do this work at a time in the students’ lives that is marked by enormous change, fragility and growth. This period in their lives – this space -- is one that very few have the privilege of entering and occupying.

I believe a person can experience no greater satisfaction than to leave a position like mine knowing that we made a difference in the lives
of students. Further, we leave knowing that they have made a difference in our lives. Very few people are as fortunate as Kari and I to have been able to contribute to Whitman and our students in this way.

We sincerely thank you for giving us this opportunity and for joining us this evening.