



The INAUGURATION of

*Ralph W. Kuncl*

11th PRESIDENT of the UNIVERSITY OF REDLANDS

Wednesday, February 20, 2013 | Memorial Chapel

## President Kuncl's Inauguration Speech

Today is a day that will live in memory. You might remember the light from behind the window, or the sounds of students singing, or your hair raised on end by the organ or chorus or orchestra, or the carillon on the way out. It's like a bar mitzvah and a wedding, all rolled up into one!

But the people who brought this to you today will remember being thanked from my heart:

- First and foremost to my beloved wife Nancy, without whom I would not be here today.
- Dick Fisher, my partner and confidant.
- Carole Beswick, whose committee chose me, and who leads with me.
- The three producers and directors of this emotional and memorable event for us – Anita West, Char Burgess, and Andrew Glendening.
- My colleagues, for their words today – Art Svenson, the most masterful of teachers and artists, and you now know why; Sona Andrews, my friend to the end; Tom Jackson, the surprising mentor who sparked my interest in Redlands; and Marlene Ross, whose picture hangs on my wall of fame because no one was more important than she in making this possible.
- John Walsh, a new mentor of mine.
- The incredible Fred Swann at the organ.
- And all the student and faculty musicians, who have just torn open my heart today with their music.



I stand in this magnificent house today, with you, because I am blessed. Not deserving, but blessed . . . by each of you. After all, I stand before a huge Palladian stained-glass window, an artwork on just that theme: “Blessed are they who\_\_\_\_\_” It beckons us to fill in the blank as we need it. That’s the way it’s supposed to work. I’m blessed, yes, but surely not deserving . . . rather, humbled . . . hoping inside that perhaps I can give some little service, spark some vision.

Jim Appleton told me I'd now be "off probation" when I took the oath today. But I know better. I won't really be "off probation" until I've performed my third miracle!

For my first miracle today, I won't subject you to what No. 2 President, Victor Duke, offered up at the first-ever Redlands inauguration—talks that lasted eight and one-half hours! He never got sainthood but did get an English bulldog mascot named after him. A further miracle I will bestow upon you is that I will not succumb to the kind of gaffe made by No. 5, George Armacost, as he stood where I'm standing right now. According to our former long-serving University Marshal with us today, Rob Stuart, one of the most notable moments in Memorial Chapel history was at a baccalaureate service when that serious Sunday school teacher and lion of Redlands, President Armacost, waxed eloquent over the "Beatitudes" window and said, "I invite you to examine this glorious stained glass in my rear." It will be a miracle if the same doesn't happen to me.

It's customary on these occasions to begin with a bit of history. I trace my own historical roots to 1922 and the creation of the Och Tamale chant. It was an ironic, satirical counter to the Latin elitism of Oxy's chant, Io Triumphe. Fast forward 90 years, and now Redlands beats Oxy at its own game by hiring an Occidental Tiger instead of a Bulldog, then trounces Oxy in football in October. Coincidence? I think not! I am not certain that being a University President is more difficult in 2013 than it was in 1907 when this University was born. Growth has of course been rampant, and here are some numbers. In 1910, the population of California was 2.5 million, and there were all of 16 degree-granting institutions in the state. A century later, California's population has ballooned 15-fold to 38 million. So naturally it takes a few more schools to accommodate those millions – now 443 colleges and universities, and counting.

Our first President, Jasper Newton Field started with 59 students in 1909. I started with close to 5,000. Too often the histories of universities over-emphasize the timelines of their presidents, or buildings, or key faculty. In 1914, Nellie Hill Lolmaugh, one of our original students, got it right when she put down on paper her "Memories & Impressions of the First Five Years of the University of Redlands," and I quote:

"With all the planning and preparation to start a college – campus, buildings, equipment, and housing, administration and faculty – it still would not be an educational institution without . . . students."

We can't possibly give enough credit to the young people who were willing to come to a "one-horse" institution of higher learning with no history, no background, no traditions, and no accreditation. Diplomas from such a college would have almost no value.

Such was the situation in Redlands for those who pioneered in those earliest years. And it was real pioneering! The earliest chemistry courses were taught over in the kitchen of the Redlands First Baptist Church. But I have never heard of any student or alum saying, "I'm sorry I went to Redlands" instead of some other college. Choosing college is about what fits, not what's convenient.

In his masterpiece, "The Road Not Taken," frequent Redlands visitor Robert Frost writes of the choice that most of us confront at sometime in our life:

*I shall be telling this with a sigh.  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I  
. . . I took the one less traveled by.  
And that has made all the difference.*

Now I understand many of you may have jumped to the conclusion that the choice of this text and image was a literal reference to my career path from neurology to Redlands. Not so. It means anything you wish it to, and of course that's the projective gift of poetry. The creative minds who designed today's experience thought the "road less traveled by" . . . the one that "has made all the difference" . . . was more likely an allusion to the kind of institution we have been and our distinctive path to the future, because that's how we hope our students and alumni think: they might say, "the joy is in the pursuit of discovery." We are here today because of the road Nellie and pioneers like her paved over a century ago.

Earlier you heard another masterpiece performed by our faculty and student ensemble, this one by composer Aaron Copland. Copland spent some time on our campus in the early 1940's – that was before he became famous – and again in 1977 when he received an honorary doctorate. Appalachian Spring is a most appropriate segue for me – and all of you at U of R – because the past five years have been chaotic at worse, and challenging at best. Interestingly, the music was originally composed for a ballet, and the story it told is of a springtime celebration of American pioneers of the 19th Century after building a new farm house. We are here now, hopefully, to celebrate a spring renewal of our own mission as scholars and teachers. We are starting anew after the greatest recession we've ever faced. We lost our way for awhile. And some of us still feel it deeply. But like spring, today we are putting our past disappointments of recent years behind us. Like Simple Gifts, let us "find ourselves in the place just right."

So where are we right now? Are we in a "just-right place?" Several on the faculty have told me that they've already discerned my vision for Redlands and given it an acronym – "ADMI" – affordability, digital media, and internationalization. Admittedly, I have talked a great deal about these topics in the past 6 months. But it doesn't take a visionary genius to come up with that! It simply takes rudimentary awareness of the news.

So, let's examine in the next moments where we are at Redlands right now, and where American higher education is going in the immediate future.

When Fitch Ratings threatened to downgrade the credit rating of the United States a year ago, people gasped. It turned out it probably wouldn't have mattered. Now Moody's Investors Service

has publicized a negative outlook for virtually all of American higher education, and people believe it. Look at Moody's "moody" factors and how they line up with our reality.

First, affordability. Yes, tuition keeps rising nation-wide, often 3 to 5% per year, and often above the market-basket consumer price index we're used to hearing about. But so does the cost of all services, especially high tech ones in the new "knowledge economy." College graduates still have much higher incomes than those without college degrees, and the real-dollar value of a college education is actually increasing. Graduates still have far better employability, and families remain willing to pay for college despite the debt they often take on. It's an investment of the greatest magnitude, not a commodity. Realize that American higher education is sector-differentiated – that's its strength. The true costs in some sectors, mainly public institutions and some elite privates, have escalated greatly. What have we done on our part at Redlands to increase affordability? We mounted a significant and noble response to the economic realities our families face, because in the past 5 years, the net tuition cost, that is the actual price our freshmen paid on average after financial aid, rose only a total of 6 % compared to a 18 % increase in average net cost for freshmen at four-year public universities during that same period. And after adjusting for inflation, the net cost increase at Redlands over those years was . . . zero. The public's currently increasing price sensitivity is really the result of unemployment, but employment will certainly cycle back. Therefore, it remains that the biggest financial mistake one can make about affordability is not going to college.

But is a university merely operationally defined as preparing for certain financial return from one's first job? Emphatically not! What becomes of all those English majors anyway? We now know, from the actual data of a mathematician at Williams College. It's instructive to know they mostly go into law and communications and healthcare. Our own English major Robert Adams won Guggenheims, exhibited photography to critical acclaim at the metropolitan Museum of Art in NY, and was considered the foremost writer of the America West. And those poor history majors – are we to pity them? You will find them mostly in banking, financial services, and law. Glen and Les Charles, who created the television hit Cheers, and David Lee who produced and wrote Frasier and the Jeffersons, were our graduates, and all attributed their creative success to their liberal arts breadth. The best college liberal arts experience remains as propitious as it was for the likes of Galileo and Vivaldi, the generation Ys of the 16th and 17th Centuries – it's to learn to deal with ambiguity in an uncertain future and to be flexibly prepared for multiple careers. Maybe even a college presidency. And who can prepare for that?!

A second of Moody's factors is the use of digital media for online learning. Moody's would have us believe that the evolution of massive open online courses serving hundreds of thousands at a time, [Quote] "signals a fundamental shift" in education that threatens to "destabilize the residential . . . university's business model . . ." A moment ago, Marlene Ross discussed some reasons why MOOCs are immensely promising for access. And satisfaction with online teaching is high, as high as 99% with some EdX courses through MIT. The experience is so flexible that students can fast forward the video at up to five times the speed and still learn. Try that at home the next time you're in a conversation! But almost everyone makes faulty assumptions way

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overestimating MOOC revenue generation and the paltry rate of completion of courses. “Faster, cheaper,” in order to increase mere throughput of students in college is not what we’re about. “Online” only matters to me if we can show it enhances actual learning. And the research shows it definitely can in certain circumstances; yet the same research shows it can definitely degrade learning in others. The future lies in hybrid approaches to online learning that combine the best of “place” and the best of distance.

The pundits who have lost their nuance have argued that our residential campuses and traditional teaching will become relics like Mayan temples. Wiser commentators point out how humans yearn for meaningful places, like cathedrals, modern libraries, walkable neighborhoods, and places like this gem of a University in Redlands. And that doesn’t even begin to conceive of football and track, theater and orchestras, the Salzburg campus experience, and, even more than that, the viral learning among peers who experience the simultaneity of this place. The residential college of the future will create an experience of place for people who are otherwise “solo, tech-savvy nomads after high school,” in the words of one of our faculty. So, let’s go eyes-open into online learning; yes, let’s do what a great many students and faculty want and need. But let’s do it for the sake of learning. Students are not consumers, but architects of their own education.

But I will stop talking about those so-very 2012 issues now. You didn’t come here to listen to me talk about the past or even the present. You came here today to dream with me about what we can imagine together.

So the Shaker’s dance lyrics ask us to “turn, turn.” Let’s all do that. Let’s turn away from the past. Come, envision the future with me. This is New Years Day, and we all resolve to lose 15 pounds. This is having a new Secretary of State, and there really can be peace in the Middle East. This is the spring of our campus renewal, when everything is green and growing, fresh and hopeful. Imagine with me . . . What will the memories be for a Redlands student 100 years from now? The past twenty “Appleton” years have seen an absolute physical transformation of this campus greater than its previous 90 years. It’s become the most beautiful campus one can imagine. And we owe a debt of gratitude to President Appleton for that achievement.

What’s next? Robert Kennedy’s most famous line was: “Some men see things as they are and ask why; I dream things that never were and ask, why not?” That is the thinking of a visionary. And while I don’t claim to be even a dim shadow of such a great man, I do constantly look to the future, to see how we can continue to evolve.

If there is one thing I’ve learned in my career in academic medicine, it’s that trends in medicine are almost always followed a decade later by parallel trends in higher education. Here’s the future of your healthcare in a decade or so. You and I will have digital sensors the size of a pea implanted under our skin that will monitor the hundreds of blood substances in our metabolome and the organisms in our entire microbiome. They will be smart sensors like those that monitor freeway traffic in real time. Massive data crunching of hundreds of thousands of

such sensors across the globe will create new algorithms that tell physicians how to manage difficult but common health problems. Those algorithms will continuously update, like the smart electric grid, and will continually evolve with new research. Yes, our physicians will still talk to us, and still practice the art of medicine, but they will become more like coaches as we become increasingly responsible for our own wellness and in possession of our own medical data. So, how will those trends of massive data, and digitalization, and internationalization, combined with the preservation of the “art,” play out in higher education?

Two years ago, my colleagues here conducted a survey of faculty wishes, or dreams of what they would envision might help them better perform their mission as teacher-scholars. Those were aspirational goals. To implement them all, it was estimated it would cost between 450 and 700 million dollars, depending on how you count. These are certainly large numbers, but that should not deter us at all! I will tell you all today that the campaign for Redlands started the day you called me last June 2nd and asked me to serve you as your president. I started dreaming with you that very day.

I see in that campaign a revitalization of the quality of liberal arts. But it won't be your father's liberal arts! We will ask students to acquire 21st-Century skills. What do I mean? If I could, I'd reach back and teleport Thomas Jefferson on to the current Redlands faculty. Rest assured, he would teach not only the classic liberal arts of mathematics, astronomy, music, grammar, logic, and rhetoric (and by the way, he could do it all), but also the 20th-Century “liberating” domains of philosophy, history, literature, languages, natural and physical sciences, and psychology. But I'm absolutely certain that Jefferson, a creative architect, would be teaching far more. He would be extolling what Michael Staton of the Facebook spinoff Inigral has called the “New Liberal Arts” of our time: graphic design, animation, photographic and video production, geodesign, public policy, comprehensive computational and communication skills, and modern data literacy – especially statistical inference, data storage and management, algorithms, and information design. And our faculty, who I want to say are really among the best and most noble of the professoriate I have known, could add a surfeit of even better ideas. Faculty, you've turned out in record numbers today, and I take notice and appreciate that vote of hope. You've already begun innovating with visual and media studies and the diffusion of spatial learning into virtually every corner of the curriculum, whether anthropology, English, history, race and ethnic studies, and religion. And the students in the audience, they actually know and live what I'm talking about! And their generation will teach what we cannot even conceive. They will do so, because their education will be global in ways we cannot imagine.

Friends, it's just so obvious what we must do to internationalize. We live on the Pacific Rim, with a third of the Earth's population across the pond, many of them ready and anxious to try out something they cannot get at home – an American liberal arts education. And we've ignored the obvious neighbors to the south, where the world's 6th largest economy, Brazil, has the most college-ready, able-to-afford, presidentially-supported, and willing-to-come students of any developed country. We owe it to our current students to provide the peer group that will give them a global perspective and help turn them into citizens of the world.

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I can imagine a very different physical future for us as well. Many of you know the old 1950 George Armacost story of his meeting young John Townsend, just off the train, bewildered and on the steps of the Administration building. The venerable president invited the 17-year-old stranger to breakfast, got him admitted, and decades later the then Reverend John Townsend became a trustee and a member of the Cortner society for his integrity and philanthropic spirit. [Stand up, John, and be recognized on behalf of all alums out there.]

I have a dream that within a decade a young woman will step off the light rail extension of the Metrolink ending at the new University Village station. She will find herself on our new, progressive South Campus and be exploring the most impressive advanced college community she could ever imagine. She will be coming here to study in our five-year-old program in geodesign. So what is the buzzword, geodesign? Well, maybe we'll know it by what it isn't. The metaphor for how 20th-Century designers envisioned our environment might be cell towers with plastic palm trees attached. You've seen them. 21st-Century geodesign, however, encompasses planning and design practices that are supported by entirely new and always changing geospatial tools. Designers apply their traditional professional practices of sketching, iterations, collaboration, and feedback, but they undergird it with a rich collection of relevant and massive data sets that represent both the natural world and the social world. These are the tools of geographic information science in an era of so-called "big data" complexity; it's the design side of art, but fully integrated into systems-thinking, information technology, and environmental sensitivity.

That University Village our 17-year-old enters will, in fact, be the archetype in our region of the application of geodesign principles and futuristic thinking.

Imagine a marvel of the most current, sustainable, and energy-self-sufficient college towns, with all the usual accoutrements of pubs and fine dining and boutiques but also a wholesome green grocer who sells the best seafood, produce, and organic teas; a bookstore (if they still exist) with coffee – of course coffee! – and open green spaces where casual musicians play and groups perform in the evening; our Glenn Wallichs and Frederick Loewe theaters are next door; and the adjacent new building for 3-D arts has an outdoor sculpture garden and art gallery overlooking a lake. We'll have the best living spaces for both our younger faculty and those 30-something grad students from our world-class master's programs in public policy, geodesign, fine arts entrepreneurship, the business of theater, and educational justice. I can see the path along the Zanja creek down toward town is now a tree-lined green, the fully realized "Orange Blossom Trail." Town and Gown . . . united. Redlands historian Larry Burgess will write that "The University Village at U of R Station has become the place to be."

An older generation talked about "going to college." College was a place to go and then leave. In the future, they'll talk about University Station as a place to be. A destination. It's vintage Redlands, a just-right place with the arts, trees, and the amenities that entice the most talented, newly recruited staff to the ESRI Corporation and U of R – the two largest Redlands employers – into a village that is as advanced and sustainable as the new cities in the desert of Abu Dhabi.

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Or as regenerative as the New Los Angeles 50 miles to the west, where Lillian Disney some 20 years ago envisioned a renewal of downtown LA, donated funds to build the Walt Disney Concert Hall, and sparked the Grand Avenue Project. If you've visited lately you cannot help but see Lillian's dream materializing.

Imagine . . . just . . . imagine!

Our University is real-estate-rich by about 28 contiguous acres and can make a huge contribution to the Redlands community by making it available for private development. This can be a win-win for all, creating essential new revenue streams for the University and quality private development for the community. It can be accomplished through a diversified funding portfolio of private investor's equity, federal and state transportation support, HUD grants, state loans and tax offsets, regional transportation authority grants, new market tax credits, philanthropy from donors who otherwise might be unlikely to give, land rents, savings from increased efficiency in the use of energy and materials, and the University's valuable real estate.

Our University is an integrating force in this community. What better way to be that, than by creating a new quality-of-life initiative to attract quality talent?

And that 17-year-old woman who stepped off the light rail? Because she will have become so successful, and because our alums are so grateful for their transformative experience here, she will in 50 years be the greatest philanthropist in our history.

But surely, you of the faculty, you students, and my colleagues on the trustees – you have dreams, too. Let us dream together . . . and continue to ask, "Why not?"

To all of you gathered here . . . it won't always be pomp and circumstance like today. We will almost certainly face a tough time or two together . . . and from time to time may even dislike one another, hard as that is to imagine right now. But the essential point is this: that we are all in this together, acting in good faith and good conscience. Today is a new day – and may we simply set out right now to make it work . . . for the love of the University of Redlands. In my heart, I committed that to you today, as I took an oath to serve you. At last night's concert in this very hall, a composer spoke these words: "At the start of life, all doors are flung open wide. Every future is possible, every choice presents itself." . . . So begins this season.

Come with me . . . if you will. And as we jump off together into the dreams of our future, let's remember what Cornel West said about faith: ". . . We've forgotten that a rich life consists fundamentally of serving others, trying to leave the world a little better than you found it . . . . In many instances we will be stepping out on nothing, and just hoping to land on something."

Listen closely to the music that ends our event today, a lyric that refers to laughing. Let us take seriously our relationship together, and, yes, let us be impassioned by the visions we dream, but . . . let's always feel like laughing together . . . at ourselves . . . never taking ourselves so seriously that we forget this moment . . . this feeling . . . this spring!

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