

“Thinking Forward: Hamline University 2004”

Kenneth Woodrow

Chair, Hamline University Board of Trustees

These remarks were made by Ken Woodrow, chair of the Hamline University Board of Trustees, at Hamline’s 150th Anniversary Gala on October 16, 2004. The theme of the anniversary year, “Looking Back, Thinking Forward,” celebrated Hamline’s illustrious past while looking forward to a bright future. Mr. Woodrow addressed challenges faced by Hamline University—and indeed all colleges and universities—as we look toward the future.

This is indeed a special evening where we have gathered to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Hamline University.

Much of what we have seen and heard during this celebration has dealt with the past. And what a past it has been – we can be both grateful and humbled by the vision and dedication of those who have come before, each contributing to make Hamline what it is today.

Viewed from the perspective of History, there is very little I can add that would be of value. Fortunately, the Gala Planning Committee has asked me to say a few words about what is likely to be important in our future.

In response, I wish to pose two questions tonight for your consideration.

Here’s the first question: Is Hamline University still relevant?

After all, we’ve been around for 150 years, just one lifespan short of the age of our entire nation, and a lot has changed since the time Hamline was seeking to attract students from the prairie surrounding Red Wing, Minnesota. Institutions are like living organisms: they must grow and adapt to a changing environment, or risk obsolescence and eventual demise. The causes of that demise are often not well understood until after the fact; hence, it’s a good idea to challenge the idea of relevance up front, even when you think things are going just fine.

One way to address the question I've posed is to try to look at the world through the eyes of our young people, that is, from the point of view of our future students. It seems to me that the average teen in America today must be somewhat overwhelmed by these turbulent times, and by the breakneck pace of change that seems to characterize our modern world. To be successful, our young people need something permanent to hold onto, something they can rely on for guidance and support no matter how fast events transpire.

Unfortunately, traditional sources of support and shared values and beliefs that we in this room experienced are no longer as effective.

Membership in organized religion is plummeting; apparently we expect teens to develop an understanding of theology through other means;

Primary and secondary schools are under attack for failing to educate, particularly in our major cities; and so-called drug czars have been problem of substance abuse;

Saddest of all, too many parents have opted for alternative, more attractive pursuits than investing the time, effort, and selflessness required to raise their offspring.

Today, more than 44% of our young people are medicated, and 24% have taken a weapon to school. For the first time ever, the leading cause of death among young people between the ages of 10 and 24 in the United States of America, after automobile accidents and thrill seeking gone wrong, is... homicide.

While trying to comprehend all this, our young people are subjected to network media where discussion of any problem, no matter how complex, is distilled into a momentary sound bite. They witness experts invited to debate the issues of the day who engage in shouting matches which totally obscure the topic at hand, let alone the chance to hear and evaluate arguments that might lead to clearer understanding of another point of view.

Is Hamline relevant?

Did you know that new students who arrive at Hamline are quickly surrounded by upperclassmen wearing a sweatshirts with the logo “SOS” which stands for “Students Orienting Students”? The SOS Team quickly unloads the car and hauls all the gear up to the dorm so that the newcomers have a place right off the bat to call home. Shortly after, a golf cart approaches driven by no less than the President of the University. The President drops by to reassure the parents, grandparents, aunts, or uncles that they have made a wise choice in bringing their child to Hamline. He reinforces the fact that their child will be safe, cared for, valued, and fed good food on a regular schedule.

During the next several weeks, the newcomers begin to notice some compelling attributes about Hamline. People are civil toward one another. Differing viewpoints are tolerated, indeed encouraged, as members of the community strive to comprehend the mind-expanding richness of a liberal arts curriculum.

Academic excellence is the order of the day – no sound bites here. To them, Hamline appears to be serious about the business of bringing multiple disciplines to bear on the problem of increasing understanding. Moreover, learning at Hamline seems to take on a decidedly practical aspect where students are encouraged to relate theory to practice.

These newcomers come to appreciate other attributes as well over the weeks that ensue. They begin to see that they are important! Professors take a genuine interest in them, and, yes, even know their names. Indeed, the students begin to feel that their success is the principal criteria of achievement for the Hamline learning community as a whole.

Finally, these new students come to understand that Hamline promises all students the opportunity to have a unique educational experience, one that holds the potential of transforming their lives, and their capacity to live as confident, productive, fulfilled adults.

Hamline is a beacon of light that shines across upper Midwest society, a symbol of respect for the views of others, a belief that a quality education is necessary to prepare for a more productive life, and the acceptance of the responsibility to utilize that education to make the world a better place.

Sometimes this beacon reaches far away places. Did you know that Hamline has been directly involved in promoting peace efforts in the Middle East? Under a grant from the U.S. Government, Hamline has sponsored joint sessions with Palestinian and Israeli government officials, small town mayors for example, who seek alternatives through education to eliminate the violence that threatens the very existence of their countries.

During a dinner at the last conference, one mayor from a small town in Israel stood and gave a moving speech. He said that he and his wife were seated at the table with the mayor of a small town in Palestine and his wife. The wives had gone shopping that day at the Mall of America. The mayor pointed out that the couples had met for the first time only after traveling 10,000 miles to Hamline University in search of peace, this despite the fact that their homes were 1-1/4 miles apart.

Hamline is a community of learners, with students at the center, and has taken on the mission of accomplishing nothing less than transforming lives. As a result, I would submit to you that Hamline is arguably more relevant and more needed today than at any time in its history.

This conclusion leads me to the second question: how do we remain relevant as an institution?

First and foremost, I believe we must define ourselves in terms broader than that which relates strictly to the current student body and the confines of our physical campus. There are 21,000 living alumni of the University, 15,000 of which reside in Minnesota. The success of our recently completed capital campaign dedicated to raising \$150 million is testimony to the fact that our alumni are taking renewed pride in this university. That success also testifies to the hard work and dedication of Roz Ridgway, Larry Osnes, Dan Loritz, and many others in driving the campaign toward a goal thought unachievable as little as one year ago. Thanks to their efforts we have real momentum, and have arrived at a point from which we can build.

Our alumni are an integral part of this university, and we must honor that connection in a way that becomes second nature. Hamline simply cannot succeed without the ongoing, generous support of its alumni. Today about 28% of CLA graduates support the

University. We need to raise this level significantly if we are to fulfill the potential of this institution.

But the importance of strong alumni relations goes well beyond donations. Our alumni represent Hamline throughout the state and beyond, every day in all walks of life. Alumni that feel valued and connected become advocates for the university.

Alumni who take pride in this University because this University takes pride in its alumni will exemplify through their civility, intellectual curiosity, and self-confidence what it means to be a Hamline graduate. They will become walking billboards for Hamline, communicating positively about their alma mater in a personalized manner, one on one with others, in a way that cannot be duplicated through any advertising campaign no matter what the cost.

Improving alumni relations is one key priority for preparing to meet the future here at Hamline. The other central issue is recognizing we exist within an increasingly competitive marketplace, and learning to respond accordingly.

This competitive challenge is intensified by the fact that *U. S. News & World Report* keeps score of who is winning and who is losing the battle. Institutions complain about the fairness of the statistics employed by U. S. News, but that doesn't matter. The fact is that this information receives serious consideration by students and parents when making a choice about college. As the saying goes: "you can run, but you cannot hide."

Today in the Twin Cities, law schools have too much capacity. That means we're locked in a competitive battle to get the students we want at a level of tuition both they—and we—find acceptable.

The University of Phoenix is coming to Minnesota. Founded in 1976 and catering to the adult learner, UoP is now the largest university in the United States. They have a powerful business model, and will initially target students we would find attractive in our graduate schools.

Predictable and significant demographic changes are on the horizon. Minorities are the fastest growing segment among prospective students for Hamline. That likely means institutions will compete even more aggressively over a declining pool of students with traditional demographics while trying to adapt to the needs of minorities who likely will be more sensitive to tuition levels, and the campus environment.

The computer and the Internet offer opportunities for education unheard of 20 years ago. Today it is possible to get an undergraduate or advanced degree without ever leaving the house. "Online education" will not obviate the need for brick and mortar institutions any more than "online retailing" eliminated the need for retail stores, but the Internet does offer significant alternatives to more traditional models of teaching.

I don't know the answers to these issues, but I do believe competition in education is here to stay.

Our response must be to demand that each of our schools has a clear, compelling strategy in place to do business.

This will enable us to evaluate how each of our key managers views the future, and is preparing to respond. This will help us assure that each strategy, taken individually, resonates properly with our vision for the University as a whole. This will motivate us to confront the challenges posed by technology, turning what would otherwise be a competitive weapon for someone else into an additional asset for our own arsenal. This will permit us to allocate scarce resources much more efficiently, and make difficult decisions to discontinue funding of initiatives no longer consistent with the realities of the marketplace. This will enable us to monitor progress, and modify accordingly. This will help us to recognize outstanding achievement among our faculty and staff.

Defining business strategy is a difficult task, and it is not always a task with which academic leadership is comfortable. That said, we need to move forward on this issue in a supportive manner, but forward nonetheless.

During its history Hamline has witnessed two world wars, a great depression, and is now entering an unprecedented era of globalization. Great changes are in store for our

country, and therefore for this university. Still we have come through it all, not without some pain and anxiety, to this place and this time, stronger than ever, more relevant to the society of which we are a part.

With your support, the support of our university community, and guidance from above, we will continue to do “all the good we can” to make the world a better place.