



NAROPA UNIVERSITY
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Inaugural Address

Naropa University, October 31, 2009

President Stuart C. Lord

Rinpoche, members of the board, faculty, students, staff, trustees, alumni, distinguished guests, neighbors, family, and friends, thank you for your gracious welcome both today and in the days since my arrival to Naropa. Your generosity and enthusiasm are contagious and I look forward to seeing our excitement continue as we move Naropa University forward.

I want to thank the Chair of the Naropa Board of Trustees, Marty Janowitz, for his faithful and dedicated service to the University. Marty's solid leadership has helped position Naropa at this critical time in its history, and I want to acknowledge his diligent labors on behalf of the institution.

It is a deep honor and profound privilege to accept the office of the fifth president of this auspicious university. I accept it with humility, respect, and excitement, knowing full well that I follow in the footsteps of predecessors who have provided Naropa with exceptional leadership, all of whom are present to witness this beginning of a new presidency. They have provided us with a legacy that is evident in the mission of this university, a legacy that we all cherish and protect but also one that we will use as a strong foundation on which to ensure and build our collective future.

Acknowledging the contributions of Naropa's great leaders, it goes without saying that our University owes much to its former presidents. From founding president Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, who had a vision of an enlightened society, to Barbara Dilley's passion for contemplative education, to John Whitehouse Cobb's devotion to learning, and Thomas Coburn's dedication to making Naropa a distinguished and truly excellent place, we are all blessed to have had their leadership.

For a moment, I would like to say just a word about President Coburn. His kindness and warmth have been indispensable to me as I have stepped into this role. Without Tom Coburn's leadership, my presidency would not have been possible. So I want to thank you, Tom for your relentless efforts, thoughtful presence, and brilliance of mind; our community is forever in your debt.

As I embarked upon this journey at Naropa, I knew I was given a great responsibility. I am at the helm of an institution with an amazing history, a powerful mission, and an opportune future. Meeting the members of this community, individuals who have shaped this institution into a space for true contemplative education, has left me in awe. Such individuals have enabled Naropa University to expand and grow; enabled it to seek new horizons; and have further its mission to help educate students to become the leaders of their generation.

And as I stand here before you now, I can only say we are not ...done... yet.

This moment marks our collective beginning. And it is precisely this moment that I find so exciting – and so challenging. Our history is vibrant and rich. We are an institution forged from its inception with a deep purpose - providing true and well-rounded education. And it is with this purpose in mind that I endeavor to build on our foundation. This purpose has led me here today to assume this great honor as the president of Naropa University.

Since my first visit to campus, I have said that Naropa University is too good not to be better. Heeding the words of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, I share my vision for Naropa with you. My vision is not a new direction or a change in institutional philosophy, I only aim to enhance and build upon the strengths that Naropa already has. Using our link between traditions of the past along with our present experience, we will build a stronger and better Naropa.

In Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll paints a picture of Alice coming upon the Cheshire Cat in a tree. Not knowing how to proceed, Alice asked the cat, “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” The Cheshire Cat replied, “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.” Alice answered, “I don't much care where –” The cat profoundly stated, “Then it doesn't matter which way you go.” Carroll summed it up by saying, “If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.”

So before we talk about what roads we wish to traverse, I want to share with you where I believe Naropa needs to go.

First, I want to build on the foundational philosophy that Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche set for higher education. His vision for higher education was fundamentally different than the traditional mold. The vision that the founder had in mind is that we would not only transform students, we would transform the world by changing the way we delivered education. His vision sought a school where a student's heart, soul and mind were all engaged, equally. He burned for a place where students could translate their passions into learned skills to better our world.

But understanding Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche's vision, we are still poised with the question: if we're true to ourselves and the mission, what does that mean? Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth were founded to train leaders. Naropa was founded not only to train leaders but also to transform higher education—to transform the way that students learn.

This was— and is— fundamentally different. It's an experiment. We have to be the pebble that causes a ripple throughout higher education.

As schools across the world view this holistic approach to education, they will recognize what is fundamentally different about Naropa. We have the capacity to transform higher education—not just our students and the local community, but individuals throughout the world.

We have a mission to educate students but will we also take on the mission to become a model for other schools across the country. We will need to be willing to offer other schools a way to connect back to their heart and soul. The world is calling for holistic leaders: leaders with sound ethics, a compassionate heart, a curious mind, and an open soul. There are a lot of examples of leaders who have been disconnected from heart, mind, and soul: Bernie Madoff, Enron executives, Bear Stearns bankers, mortgage lenders. These are disconnected leaders. The world is calling for a more accountable, transparent, compassionate leader. This is the kind of leader that Naropa University must produce.

Second, I want to build upon the foundational precept that contemplative education is a distinctive and valuable educational philosophy for both the students who receive it and the world on which those students will make an impact.

Society expects students to engage in the world with a strong sense of civic responsibility. This expectation means that those of us working in higher education should be asking the questions: What are we producing? What are we creating? How are we engaged with the world's problems?

The world's problems are our problems. The future of higher education depends on graduates addressing the problems of the world, our global community. It depends on graduates being able to recognize our connectedness and interdependence.

Naropa University is graduating compassionate leaders who have the ability to think in new and creative ways, to challenge prevailing orthodoxies, to depart from the status quo. Naropa's approach to education can never be the status quo. Our institutional aspiration is to produce students that always challenge the status quo; thus, we can never be what we seek to change. We believe it is crucial to produce graduates who search and explore deep problems that vex our society. Finding solutions, working to better the world around them. Is this not the purpose of their education?

Third, I want to build upon the foundational principle that spirituality and service play a meaningful role in the education of the whole student.

As Robert Bellah wonderfully said, developing habits of the heart is essential to our individual development as humans. If students are truly going to be contemplative and give deep consideration to the issues of our day, we must help them build the context in which their values can be evaluated. While students have much to do in the realm of the academics, it is how students interpret that learning in light of the world around them that will make them productive and influential members of it.

While at Dartmouth, I led the development of a program called the Katrina Education and Service Trips, which took students to the Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and gave them opportunities to serve people who were in need. Yet we did not just load them on buses and in vans and send them down south. They received training in some very practical skills such as mold removal and drywall installation. They also were required to spend some time understanding the politics of poverty and how people might interpret the efforts of these Ivy League students as they swooped into a community for a short time.

Upon their return, students were required to attend debriefing sessions and discussions with their trip leaders regarding the experience. The students were expected to reflect upon and share what they learned about the community and their role in it. It is one thing to send students to accomplish tasks, but it is another to give students an educational and contemplative context to approach those tasks.

For some students, this reflection time involved discussions about their own spirituality and how that spirituality played a role in their service. For other students, it was taking the principles of the classroom and seeking to understand how those principles might explain the images that they confronted once placed in cities devastated by Katrina and Rita.

We MUST develop students with habits of the heart. It is imperative to developing and deepening our contemplative practices. For some it may mean, meditating on a cushion, going for a hike in the woods, having a deep conversation, or pondering at the bank of a river. Naropa students should and must engage socially, in the local, national, and international communities, in the spirit of service. Students need the opportunity to serve others so that the people they share the world with can color their experiences.

This distinctive educational approach requires that we develop habits of leadership and service simultaneously. It requires that we not only instruct students in how to live a life of service but we must model this behavior.

But now that we know where we are going, we know that not just any road will get us there. So what priorities will we set to build on the foundation that has already been established? As we look at the role of the academy in the world around us, we must rethink its very meaning. Academy comes from the name of a Greek hero Academus. Based on his accomplishments, Plato taught in a school named after him, which was a place designed to challenge young minds to think and reason. Likewise, I believe that in building on our foundation we need to construct the future of Naropa in three ways:

One, we need to construct a consistent curriculum. This is not to say that we do not have a strong faculty nor a quality educational experience. However, if we are going to have a significant impact in transforming higher education, we must develop an academic rigor that is unparalleled. We need to begin constructing academic programs that support and encourage its faculty, that challenges its students to pursue intellectual excellence, and that fosters logic, reason, and applies those concepts in every aspect of life.

Naropa University can be a model for other schools in many ways. We can introduce contemplative education at conferences and among colleagues, and we can demonstrate the value of thoughtful reflection, and the education of the whole student, not just the mind. This heritage that we have accepted involves merging both eastern and western philosophies in order to develop students who are able to think in both abstract and concrete ways.

But if we are going to transform the way higher education is viewed, we must commit ourselves to the establishment of the highest academic standards. We must commit to teaching excellence of language so our students can articulate the truths they hold. We must commit ourselves to teaching excellence in sciences from a contemplative perspective so our students comprehend the world in which they live, and offer advanced solutions for the problems that confront us. We must commit ourselves to teaching excellence in the arts so that Naropa students and alumni present the values that they have come to embrace through authentic and original expressions.

The academic plan recently adopted by the Board of Trustees is an excellent start on this part of our journey. If we want Naropa's students to be the best, then the educational experiences that we offer them must be the best, as well. This involves developing the academic arts for undergraduate students, enhancing a Naropa undergraduate college, re-instituting study abroad programs, creating opportunities for languages and the study of science, taking all our graduates programs to the next level, and offering an executive authentic leadership program in cities throughout the country. This means being thoughtful concerning our mission, and understanding how that mission drives our academic and business decisions. Truly contemplative education must excel in both contemplation and education.

Two, we must construct a cohesive community. Since my arrival on campus in July, I have met with countless individuals representing a number of constituencies. I have met with staff, faculty, students, alumni, friends, donors, community members, parents, and leaders in the community. I have learned much about the history and traditions of Naropa and one truth stands out. The community of Naropa is passionate.

You care about this great institution. It matters to you what happens and where things are heading. It is somewhat daunting to accept this auspicious role, to stand before you and have your support, which emanates from your hopes and dreams for the University. You want Naropa to succeed; in fact, you crave that Naropa becomes a place of excellence.

And yet, I am not sure that everyone agrees just how we get there. For some, raising our endowments and putting the University on a sustainable financial footing is the key objective to moving the University forward. For others, it is enhancing the Naropa name in the community of Boulder and its surrounding communities. For some, it is re-connecting with an alumni base that at times feels disconnected from what Naropa is doing. For yet other groups, it is the creation of a more rich and vibrant student experience, encompassing all aspects of student life from the buildings in which we operate to the extracurricular experiences we offer.

And yet, all of these issues are significant. Not one of them can occur without the others. Yet, we operate as if they each were completely independent of the others. In order for Naropa to move forward, we must build a cohesive community that is interested in a holistic approach to a unified direction for the University. What affects one of us, affects all of us.

I have started my presidency by keeping my ears to the ground. I have established listening circles to hear what is on the minds of students, alumni, staff, and faculty. I am seeking to connect with our partners in the local community to find out how we can establish stronger ties with the people who live in this warm and open environment. I am asking for feedback and information, not just on the problems that members of these constituencies might note, but also feedback on how we might solve those problems collectively.

I believe that we must have a solid and sustainable financial plan that both shows regard for its employees and simultaneously models sound fiscal accountability. I believe we must provide a positive student experience that recognizes inherent basic goodness in all of us. I believe that we must champion the vision of Naropa to prospective students and model that vision within the local community.

Yet, can you imagine building a new house one part at a time? Could a builder first plan and build the structure and then later add the plumbing and even later the electrical? It must be built with an overall plan and each distinctive system needs to be viewed in its relationship to the whole. We must move in concert, so that at each stage our collective progress is in sync.

I recognize these problems cannot be solved unilaterally, and certainly not instantaneously. However, I will listen to those who wish to share. I ask in return that you allow me time to process your suggestions, allow me to find common themes that many members of the community share, and allow me to seek constructive solutions to building this community in a more cohesive and unified fashion.

I ask that you become my partners in building ONE Naropa, dedicated to its core mission. I ask that you help me by working to establish an institution with a unified constituency.

And three, we must construct character. As students move forth from college and assume their roles in society, they are often challenged to develop character. Such character often takes the form of talents and skills, whether it is calculations pertaining to scientific concepts, speaking in group settings, or acumen in the fine arts.

Yet no one speaks much of the character required to be able to serve one another, or how to provide ethical leadership in a world that is almost scared to promote any values at all. We need leaders with this type of character, who understand that embracing diversity is more than just fulfilling a quota. We need graduates who understand that inter-faith dialogue is not just something scheduled for special sessions, but is part of developing themselves as well-rounded individuals.

In my own personal journey, I sought out professors who cultivated my rigor, heart, and soul. Something that I learned as a child from my mentors was that I had a responsibility to use my education for the benefit of others. I was not being educated to make a lot of money; it was to connect to people and to inspire them to reach their goals and aspirations as holistic human beings. Meeting people where they are and working with them to become who they want to be even when they don't think it's possible. My understanding of faith and religion has always been global and interconnected. I can't remember not having Jewish, Christian, and Muslim friends and being engaged in lively dialogue with them. As a kid in New Rochelle, NY, I saw Juma na-mas on Fridays, went to bar mitzvahs on Saturdays and sang in gospel choirs on Sundays. I went to Texas Christian University and studied world religions and cultivated my spirituality in expansive, new, and diverse ways. Last month, I fasted for Ramadan. All of these experiences have helped me become a peaceful warrior in the world.

Thus, I believe that if we take our mission seriously, we cannot help but be inspired as a community to educate students to value respect, honor, and civic responsibility; to have aspirations for ideas and values, intellectual openness, and rigor; to practice and participate in civil discourse and a sense of civic responsibility; to be engaged in a world by confronting these troubled times.

Further as a community, we must maintain our connection to our alumni. We must openly appreciate our alumni who answer the call of service, who have the skills necessary to transform their professions, their communities, and their daily lives, by doing so through leadership with courage, compassion, and generosity.

President Tom Coburn once wrote that, “[This] is what we are doing at Naropa University: helping students wage the war against hatred on the internal front, creating a new kind of human being... The cornerstone of this work is contemplative practice...”

It must be through a Naropa education that we find the wisdom to see an honorable and yet effective path in a world where terrorism, racism, sexism, and homophobia is a thing of the past. We must listen carefully to one another and speak our minds through our hearts, and be guided by the principles that we hold dear as a human family while still engaging in difficult discussions without prejudice or anger. We must stand together for tolerance, civil liberties, and the right to dissent by holding firm to the core principles of justice, freedom and human dignity. This university will serve the global community well. By doing so, we will ensure our collective future.

We will develop in this way through the contemplative process of education and by encouraging students to heed the call to service. Wouldn't it be wonderful if our teams of service in the local community garnered more attention than the Buffalos? (Not to disparage athletic prowess, since many of the skills I have learned were developed through my athletic experiences.) I would be delighted if the community recognized the great value of service. In summary, we will realize our ideals through a strong and holistic educational process, forged in the context of a strong and unified University community, producing strong and enlightened graduates who are ready to confront the

issues that await us. I began with a quote by Lewis Carroll, and want to share another as I close. “Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end; then stop.”

So here is the end, and then I will stop.

If Naropa is to be the model for transforming higher education in the days to come, it cannot happen without this group of individuals, those of us here today, being committed to making that happen. It will not happen as the result of a few constituents advancing their own agendas while others languish behind. It must be the combined efforts of all members of this community, working together to make Naropa a place where higher education is transformed, where contemplative education is at the core of that transformation, and where service and spirituality are not adjuncts to the educational process, but are essential components of a complete education.

We must never forget that our students cannot make a lasting impression on the world through their intellectual obtainment—without the use of an equal amount of conscience and heart.

It is to this end that I seek to lead Naropa. I call upon the students, faculty, staff, board members, alumni, parents, and the community to join me in ensuring that a Naropa education—reflects the interplay of discipline and delight—prepares its graduates to meet the world as it is and change it for the better.

This is my hope. This is our work. It is now time to begin.

Thank you.