Inauguration Address

April 13, 1991

"The Promise of Rollins: Excellence, Innovation and Community"

April is an auspicious time in the history of Rollins. Imagine, if you will, a meeting of the Florida Congregational Association, April 14, 1885, 106 years ago tomorrow. This meeting is to select the location for Florida's first college. Nervous representatives from six competing communities have brought their offers. Frederick Lyman, real estate developer, is there on behalf of Winter Park, a frontier town of just 130 families. Lyman startles the group when he announces a pledge from Winter Park of financial support and property more than three times greater than that of any other Florida community. On April 15 skeptical association leaders travel by mule wagon from the meeting in Mt. Dora to inspect the property offered for the college. They have been warned by jealous competitors that Winter Park is under water most of the year. Once here, however, they are enchanted by this beautiful site overlooking Lake Virginia. On April 17 they select Winter Park as the location for Florida's first college.

Our history is replete with tales of the difficult early years at Rollins. The College was buffeted by Florida's unpredictable climate and economy. Every freeze, economic depression, disease, and real estate collapse that devastated Florida also brought the College near financial ruin. We admire the grit and determination of the presidents, faculties, and townspeople who made innumerable sacrifices over the years to keep the College alive.

Our founders designed an institution of the highest quality; the admissions standards and curriculum in the early years were no different from those at the New England colleges on which they were modeled. But it was not until the dream of excellence was coupled with the daring of innovation that Rollins gained the national recognition it so fervently desired.

In 1925, when the Board of Trustees elected Hamilton Holt to the presidency to save Rollins from imminent financial collapse, little did they know that this newspaperman and internationalist would lead the College in an educational revolution. In this unlikely southern outpost, Holt and his faculty were among the first in the nation to develop a student-centered curriculum based on John Dewey's progressive education principles. This golden era at Rollins left a powerful legacy of excellence, innovation, and community.

My three predecessors, Presidents Hugh McKean, Jack Critchfield, and Thaddeus Seymour, each in his own way and appropriate to his own time, pursued excellence, encouraged innovation, and built community. Under their stewardship Rollins College flourished. I am more grateful than I can say for their friendship, and for their presence here beside me today.

That I stand before you as president is testament to the courage and vision of the trustees and faculty who recognized that contemporary presidents may embody characteristics and biographies different from those of their predecessors. Women leaders are not new to Rollins. On the contrary, women have played a crucial role in the history of the College.

Lucy Cross, educated at Oberlin and principal of a school in Daytona Beach, was the driving force behind the founding of Rollins College. Cross later said, "Vocally I cannot sing, but the song in my soul... was a
college in Florida." Rollins was among the first American colleges to admit both men and women, and the first two Rollins graduates were women. Indeed, in 1890, when Clara Louise Guild received the first Bachelor's degree conferred by Rollins, she was receiving the first degree granted to a woman in the state of Florida. Guild later founded the Rollins Alumni Association and became its first president. Two of the first five Rollins professors were women, and in 1919 the trustees elected the first woman, Edna Giles Fuller, to the board. Fuller later became Florida's first woman legislator and was at the forefront of the struggle for women's suffrage and better race relations. In 1989, Betty Duda, who presides today, became the first woman elected to chair the Rollins Board of Trustees. And on the buildings and rooms in which we conduct our work we find the names of many women who supported this college, from Frances Knowles Warren to Harriet Cornell.

These foresighted and persistent women and men fashioned the admirable college we celebrate today. But as we muster the courage to meet the challenges of the new millennium, our view of the College must change. Instead of characterizing ourselves as a New England college, which happens to be situated in Florida, we will proudly portray Rollins as a Florida college with a national constituency and a global perspective. For many years, Rollins sought to convince northerners that a serious education could be had in a subtropical climate. William Blackman, fourth president of the college, devoted much of his 1902 inaugural address to assuring his audience that the climate in Florida is not "fatal to great achievement." Even now, a T-shirt can be found in our bookstore asserting that "latitude is not lassitude."

Today, Florida has become one of the most influential American incubators of new populations, new businesses, and new ideas. Rollins is fortunate to be housed in communities with the distinctiveness of Winter Park and the dynamism of Greater Orlando. Until 1967 Rollins was the sole institution of higher learning in Greater Orlando. Responsive to the needs of the community, the College mounted educational and cultural offerings beyond its traditional liberal arts program.

Now ranked among the top colleges in the South, with a nationally competitive undergraduate arts and sciences program, Rollins also boasts a noted graduate management school, graduate programs in education and counseling, a unique liberal arts curriculum for nontraditional students, and a satellite campus in Brevard County. Other strong educational institutions have emerged to help serve the community: the University of Central Florida; Valencia, Brevard, and Seminole Community Colleges. Together with Stetson University in Deland, our institutions provide the intellectual and cultural capital essential to Central Florida's quest for national and international preeminence.

Rollins' proximity to an urban area altered the College's character. Liberal arts institutions like ours, which have developed professional, graduate, and part-time programs to serve local populations, are now called comprehensive colleges. The comprehensive college is a hybrid of a liberal arts college and a university, and is emerging as the type of institution most likely to find solutions to problems confronting higher education today. These problems include the appropriate relationships between the liberal arts and the professions, between teaching and research, between a college and its community.

The mission of a comprehensive college is less clear than that of either a strictly liberal arts college or a university. However, a recent report by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, titled Scholarship Reconsidered, suggests that: "Comprehensive colleges . . . have a unique opportunity to carve out their own distinctive missions. Rather than imitate the research university or arts and sciences model, these institutions should be viewed as campuses that blend quality and innovation." At Rollins, quality and innovation are already blended as they course through our institutional bloodstream. It is time to unite as a community to celebrate our institutional diversity and richness, and accept as a central part of our mission the integration of our disparate disciplines, schools, and populations.
When I arrived at Rollins last August, I did the important things first. I found my way to the Beanery, attended my first fraternity party, and made peace with the squirrel who dominated my doorway. By September I was familiar enough with the College to initiate serious planning for the next decade. I appointed six task forces to consider our future and to assure that Rollins is as excellent, well-governed, innovative, and communal a place as can be conceived. These task forces have enlisted the participation of trustees, faculty, administrators, staff, students, and alumni who have deliberated alternatives for the future with great passion and wisdom. However, talk of change occasions seismic vibrations within any community concerned about preserving its culture and prerogatives. Terrence Deal cautions us that change can create an individual and collective sense of loss and grief.

Sensitive to such responses, the task force on governance and the task force on the twenty-first century are both seeking a broad consensus before the end of this fiscal year for a new governance structure and goals for the future of the College. Beginning next fall and every year thereafter, each department, division, and school will establish goals derived from the mission of the College and the changing environment. Each year we will assess our progress toward those goals. The three values nourished by our history and cherished by this culture--excellence, innovation, and community--find embodiment in the work of the planning committees.

First, and fundamentally, we value excellence. In his 1978 inaugural address, President Thaddeus Seymour asserted, "It is time for colleges to look to their standards." He called for hard work, rigor, and excellence. Today, I reaffirm those values.

We are committed to preserving and fortifying the historical liberal arts focus of the college and to that end we will continue to strengthen the arts and sciences disciplines. We will not increase the number of students in our residential program, but will recruit aggressively the brightest, most talented, motivated, and diverse students from around the country and the world. We will maintain our distinctive emphasis on the liberal arts for returning students in the Hamilton Holt School and gradually increase our enrollment. We will expand the offering and student numbers at our campus in Brevard County and explore the feasibility of establishing a metro-center in downtown Orlando. We will build on the acknowledged quality of the Roy E. Crummer Graduate School of Business, increasing the number of full-time MBA students and expanding executive education.

Excellence will elude us, however, unless we demand from our students nothing less than the highest level of performance of which they are capable; hire and retain only those professors, staff members, and administrators who embody the qualities we treasure; and ensure a rich, coherent, and balanced curriculum.

Our second value is innovation, one of the wellsprings of excellence. Not all innovations are successful or worthy, but professors and students need the freedom and encouragement to experiment. As President Jack Critchfield said in his 1970 Commencement address, "It is the role of the college and university to examine, to doubt, to test, and to project solutions."

We are proud of the important pedagogical and scholarly contributions to education made by Rollins professors. There are many examples: the new interactive software making calculus more accessible to students; the redesigned introductory biology course stimulating student interest in science; the integration of hypercard video technology into psychology classes providing breadth, depth, and interest to the curriculum. As I talk with community leaders and educators, I find that Rollins is known for its distinctive programs in the performing arts, Latin American affairs, environmental studies, Australian studies, classics, and values education. We shall continue to nourish the development of innovative, interdisciplinary, and collaborative ventures. We will explore new curricular options such as European, Pacific, global, and
democratic studies. We will develop the Master of Arts in Teaching, and consider increasing the number of double-degree programs we offer. We will establish a quantitative reasoning center, support additional Community of Learners programs, and expand the activities of the Teaching-Learning Center.

Our third profoundly held value is that of community--a value deceptively simple in concept but elusive in execution. Rollins is noted for its friendly campus and, in the words of our benefactor and friend George Cornell, Class of 1935, for its "homelike atmosphere." Nonetheless, there is a powerful yearning here for a greater spirit of community.

Basic to communities are friendships. Robert Bellah and his co-authors write, in Habits of the Heart, that the virtues of friendship "are not merely private; they are public, even political, for a civic order . . . is above all a network of friends . . ." If we wish to inspire community for our students, we must model it for them by building strong networks of friendship relationships within and outside our academic territories. Elizabeth Hayford, writing in the journal Liberal Education, asserts that "the existence of community among faculty members defines the environment for students." Friendship communities are based on relationships of equality and reciprocity, justice and fair play, tolerance and mutual respect. Communities are not without conflict, but conflict can be managed creatively and is an important part of the education we provide. I ask my Rollins friends to help me build a network of relationships that will begin to satisfy our hunger for community.

Let us nourish intellectual community, based on the fundamental premise that higher education is about a love of learning and intellectual adventure, of shared curiosity, of the lively exchange and confrontation of ideas.

Let us fashion an integrated all-college community without relinquishing the uniqueness and the pursuit of excellence within each of our units.

Let us create an integrated living and learning community for our students. Part of the progressive education legacy at Rollins is our focus on the whole person with emphasis on athletic, cultural, spiritual, social, and citizenship development as well as intellectual growth.

Let us forge a greater partnership with our external communities. Already we are working with schools to improve the quality of education, and with civic, planning, cultural, and commercial boards to improve the quality of life and the competitiveness of business. We will expand our connections so that we can play an important role in the shaping of Winter Park and Greater Orlando.

Let us also embrace the global community as context and content for our undergraduate and graduate programs. We are now inextricably bound to Japan, Poland, Nigeria, and the rest of the world through commerce, tourism, ecology, and family ties, as well as by disease and war. These connections will find expression through our discourse, curriculum, activities, and relationships, and will enhance rather than detract from work in the traditional disciplines.

Spinning these webs of connectedness, with filament that is both strong and distinctive, will test us. Our quest for excellence, innovation, and community will demand extraordinary courage. At a time when institutions of higher education compete for every student and professor, we must ensure that our drawing power has never been better, and that people will be attracted to Rollins not simply for the climate nor for the beauty of the campus, but for the excellence of our learning, our programs, and our people. We must assure that they will find here a dynamic spirit of adventure, and a community of ideas and values too powerful to resist.

I have been talking a lot with seniors these days. They are both excited and a little bit scared at being thrust into independence. When I spoke with a graduating student government leader earlier this week about an idea for next year, I detected a glaze coming over his eyes. As much as he loves this college, his main
concern these days is getting a job for next year. Many of our seniors wish they could remain just a little longer in the Rollins cocoon. Nineteen ninety-one graduates will never forget that their final year of college was framed by war and uncertainty. Although they celebrate the heroism of our military men and women in the Persian Gulf, they realize that world leaders have achieved no permanent resolution for the intractable programs that led to the conflict.

Our graduates will craft their lives within an uncertain global environment. They face the specter of new wars, insurrections, and terrorism along with the uncertainties of political and economic realignment. They will confront ethical dilemmas in science and technology, ecological disasters, increasing immigrant and aging populations, rapidly changing work places. The modern plague, AIDS, will haunt them. Unless our graduates are prepared to provide the leadership to address these problems, we will have failed in our mission. President Hugh McKean wrote in 1969: "[I]f Rollins . . . in the liberal arts tradition, aimed at preparing activists determined to make something fine of themselves and something always finer of the world, it would help students discover and achieve their own true identity . . . ."

We are committed to producing graduates who will take the responsibilities of citizenship and service seriously, who will have a global perspective on local and national issues; who will value and respect peoples from different cultures, religions, racial and ethnic groups; who will consider work a contribution to society as well as to their own lives; who will understand and cherish democracy and defend the freedoms guaranteed by the constitution and the Bill of Rights; who are exemplars of ethical behavior; and who engage in a lifelong pursuit of learning. To develop these strengths in our students, I propose that we undertake the following activities:

- initiate a student leadership program to promote self-confidence, involvement in governance, and respect for others;
- institute a student-developed honor code;
- develop and implement a common freshman course with a global focus;
- provide every undergraduate an internship in a business, not-for-profit, or government organization; and create a program focusing on the skills of oral communication, presentation, and debate.

We must also tend to the basic living, working and studying needs of our students. Therefore, I propose that we:

- renovate and modernize the residence halls to create pleasant private and communal spaces;
- build a new residence hall to relieve overcrowding and accommodate all students who wish to live on campus;
- provide additional living options patterned on the successful wellness floor in Elizabeth Hall and the Rex Beach living-learning program;
- create living spaces on campus for faculty and staff who would make themselves available to students for counsel, comfort, and company; and evaluate the need to build a new Student Center.

The goals I set forth today constitute a bold agenda. Endowed with a superb faculty, dedicated staff, enthusiastic students and alumni, Rollins lacks only the financial resources to become one of the top-ranked colleges in America. We will not permit our ambitions to be thwarted by our scant treasury. We will be unrelenting in pursuit of the resources necessary to support the flourishing of excellence, innovation, and community.
Today, I announce an unrestricted gift to the endowment, from Harriet Buscher Lawrence, Class of 1934, of $2 million. In support of our goals, I will set aside at least $50,000 of the income from that fund each year for student scholarships, $50,000 for faculty initiatives which promote excellence in teaching and scholarship, and $15,000 to support student initiatives which promote leadership, service, and community.

Let me conclude by saying that I accept the challenge before me with great pride and humility. I shall seek the courage to lead boldly and wisely; to listen well to the heartbeat of the College and to nourish its values and its dreams; to design a college for tomorrow, anchored firmly in the proud traditions of the past; and to enlist old friends and new in service of our mission. I look forward to the future with courage and confidence.