

Inaugural Address Welcoming Dr. Paul Ferguson as 19th President of the University of Maine

By Dr. Michael Grillo, President, Faculty Senate, University of Maine

The Faculty of the University of Maine thank President Ferguson for a very promising and propitious first nine months, in which he has reached out so inclusively to the breadth of constituencies that compose the essential diversity that defines Maine's flagship University. The health of a productive and stable State, as Aristotle reminds us in his *Politics*, depends upon a well-educated citizenry, which forms the core of the Morrill Land Grant Act signed into law by President Lincoln in 1862.

To best prepare citizens for a participatory politic, sustainable economy, and strong cultural identity, the Morrill Act balances Classical, Scientific, Technological, and Agricultural studies, adding to, but not replacing the Mediaeval foundations of secular western universities, which started with the University of Bologna in 1088. The rapid growth of new universities ensuing in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries not co-incidentally paralleled the rise of those early guild city-state democracies that created the European Renaissance.

Placing universities historically allows us to better understand any current calls for change, for they make up part of a millennia-long discussion, which offers us a refreshingly relevant trove of experience. While current times might seem to offer unique challenges, we find numerous precedents that addressed the same, recurrent questions, of higher education's relevancy, contributions, and responsibilities to society at large.

Several constants emerge from successful universities and the societies they serve. Thriving universities address society's immediate needs, but more importantly operate with an eye to the long-view, actively creating the future through diverse, often complementary explorations rich with valent potentiality. Universities can only respond to rapid change if they maintain a deep inventory in diverse studies, for as any evolutionary biologist would explain, the over-specialised fail, because they have lost the necessary breadth of resources that would equip them to change fleetly to meet unforeseeable demands.

Whilst we typically think of our various disciplines as fixed over the centuries, any historiographic survey reveals the healthy dynamism of our evolving disciplines, morphing over the years, constantly creating what we might now have come to call inter-disciplinary initiatives, such as Neuro-Psychology, New Media, American Studies, Climate Change, Bio-Mechanics, and Material Culture. These innovative foci can only come from a university nurturing a healthy gene-pool of intellectually diverse disciplines.

As all of the participants at Runnymede in the year 1215 recognised, a healthy, sustainable, and enduring institution grows out of deep, committed collaborations among all of its members. The Faculty welcome President Ferguson, and look forwards to building an even closer partnership with him in implementing his Blue Sky Project, for we trust in his stewardship in uniting us all as we build a comprehensive vision for the University, so that we may continue to meet our evolving responsibilities to people of Maine, in teaching, research, and community partnering.