



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, DC

CORNELIUS KERWIN
PRESIDENT

REMARKS

**As delivered at the President's Inauguration
11 a.m., Friday, February 8, 2008
Bender Arena, American University**

Colleagues, friends, honored guests: thank you for being here this morning.

This morning, gratitude is an overwhelming emotion and words will fail to express my debt to many people:

- To our trustees for the honor you bestowed on me.
- To my parents.
- My brother Paul whose values and strength have inspired me.
- To my cousin, Connie Kerwin and her husband Don Kerwin, whose generosity literally made it possible for me to attend this university and whose gentle but strong civilizing influence has never left me.
- To my cousin Liz Sweeney, who could not be here today, but whose strength and help, I'll never forget.
- My sons, Michael and Alex, whose strength of character is a father's greatest pride. And whose insights and accomplishments belie their years.
- Above all, my wife, Ann, the love of my life, the true reason I am here and the person I most admire.

For this remarkable institution words come easier.

Among national universities American University is one of the youngest. Still, our history is rich; our traditions are deep and distinctive.

They are the disciplines—some centuries old, others we embraced at their emergence—that form the intellectual foundations for our work that form our distinctive academic character. Our history is one of intense engagement with this great city of Washington. It is our stage, it is our laboratory and, most important, it is our home. That engagement reaches from our Washington gateway to the nation and then to the world. Our traditions are anchored in actions that defied attitudes and practices that would make gender, race, religion, sexual orientation and ethnicity reasons for

separation instead opportunities for inclusion and enrichment. As you heard, we were born a Methodist institution and those ties remain strong.

The university's earliest years were fraught with challenges that threatened the dreams of our founders. But, problems were overcome and the dreams came true. They were followed by new dreams until today we are the strong accomplished and influential institution that is American University.

A new president must speak to the future. I see one that honors our past and present by avoiding complacency.

The urgency, creativity, and courage that mark so many decisions and formative actions of our past must be our guides. The legacy left us deserves far more than self-regard and caution. The strategic planning process on which we have embarked must define new heights.

Consider with me for a moment just a few milestones in our rich history and how they can illuminate a path to an even brighter future.

The College of Arts and Sciences was chosen as our first major academic unit, a conscious and wise decision to root this institution deeply in the liberal arts. This commitment has informed, disciplined, and enriched the academic work that followed. A dedication to deep inquiry and learning was then unmistakable; that same must be a hallmark of our future. It promises a breath of education never more essential for fruitful lives in a complex and changing world.

Let us take from this tradition a goal: to be for our undergraduates the institution that best combines the values, the learning environment and the experience of the finest liberal arts colleges, with the power, the resources and opportunities of a great national university located in one of the most important cities in the world.

The first degrees granted by this institution were two doctorates and a masters degree. Ever since, graduate education has been elemental to our mission, critical to our stature, and key to our influence. True distinction in graduate education must be central to our future. Each program a recognized leader in their field is an appropriate goal well within our reach; but so to a compulsion to innovate and improve is essential to meet the changing needs and expectations of our professions—including the professoriate—and the larger society they serve.

For every level of our academic work part of our future should be spent at the shared boundaries of disciplines. We've been there before. We know that exciting work awaits us at the edges of our fields and on the bridges between our academic units. Every element of our mission stands to benefit as we narrow the gaps and accelerate movement across intellectual divides.

In 1934, our School of Public Affairs was created to meet the educational needs of the public service. It arrived in time to help with one of the greatest crises in American history. It has since become one of the most highly respected schools of its kind in the world, educating students at every level of degree and stage in career, and producing distinguished scholarship for their fields of study and for the practice of governance. Public service is ever changing, the boundaries of sectors are now porous. We must continue to prepare leaders for this evolving public service, our education easing their movement to and from government to business and the nonprofit world and back again.

The great issues of today are every bit as difficult as those that met the first graduates and students of the School of Public Affairs. America's role in the world, the perils in our fiscal future, the physical environment and the state of our planet, profoundly changing demographics, the tragedy of

world poverty and the sad persistence of poverty in America will occupy us for decades. Can you imagine, would you want to imagine, a future for American University that does not include being one of the leading institutions supplying expertise and experience to meet these and other great challenges?

Great problems like these exempt no discipline nor field of study at American University; they demand the best of both basic and applied research. The best does not come easy. We will need a fierce adherence to the principles of free inquiry, a rigor borne of the highest scholarly, professional and artistic standards, the resilience to accept a complex landscape with the proper mix of skepticism, honesty and civility and finally, the wisdom to confront ignorance—or worse—with our one overwhelming force: knowledge.

The legacies of Ellen Spencer Mussey and Emma Gillette joined American University with the merger of the Washington College of Law in 1949. Their valiant action removed obstacles in the path of women who sought a career in the law. Their creation is today one of the largest and most highly regarded law schools in America, a beacon of quality and influence in legal education and scholarship, providing compelling evidence that diversity and the pursuit of social justice are indispensable contributors to excellence.

Many actions in our own past have advanced diversity with vision and courage. Other opportunities await and we must seize them with enthusiasm and dispatch. We will be diminished if we do not reflect the diversity of society to inform and enrich the American University experience.

That Washington would one day become a global center of business was the uncommon insight of those who founded the region's first business school at American University. Our Kogod School of Business is now respected for the exceptional leaders in local, national and international commerce it has produced, the insights of its research and its drive to innovate.

Let us chart a future suffused with entrepreneurial spirit, creating new programs that match our strengths with emerging educational needs.

The Kogod tradition also reminds us that our management and administrative practices have been integral to our effectiveness in the pursuit of our educational mission. Divisional lines can be as difficult to negotiate as the boundaries of academic fields; we must transcend the secondary in service of the fundamental. Social responsibility today is a watchword in American business. Given the values articulated in our mission statement—our Statement of Common Purpose—it is a special obligation of ours. Our past is replete with principled decisions. From early actions to open our doors to those excluded elsewhere to living wage to onto Darfur—and our future must hold the same. Stewardship of the environment commands particular attention; our future must include strong actions, like the new green home for our School of International Service.

Technology and techniques of information, the lifeblood of work, commands a special place in our future anticipating demands for new modes of access and, as important, new standards of reliability, continuing encouragement and support for of innovation and experimentation emerging from our Library, our Center for Teaching Excellence and our Office of Information Technology is crucial.

Our records show that the earliest classes at American University included students from other nations; we have been global since birth. This history and this tradition coalesced in the creation of the School of International Service fifty years ago today, giving our global commitment stronger form and a sharper purpose. The School of International Service deals with the complexities and differences of the world, the challenges of development and communication, the physical environment as a global resource and a global responsibility and peace as a precondition of human

progress. Fifty years since its founding, our SIS is now the largest in the nation and one of the best of its kind.

Now remember, being global is no longer distinctive. Asserting leadership in global education for American University is a given; we are already there. Our aim must be more ambitious, pursuing innovations—like dual degrees and study abroad experiences for international students—that deepen the global experience with a quality unsurpassed in higher education. For study abroad, for joint scholarly, professional and artistic work, for advancement of our model of education in other parts of the world where it is welcome, partnerships will form an important piece of our global strategy, but only when they are grounded in shared values, trusted working relationships and mutual benefit.

Sixty years ago, American University awarded its first degree in communications. It was then a sparsely enrolled field it has since grown into our School of Communication with its tradition of locating itself where professionalism and creativity in journalism, film, public communications, and the web converge. The lessons from this experience are many, reinforcing the need for persistent innovation and demonstrating that the strategic value of partnerships with leading organizations is hardly confirmed to our global work. Let us employ their examples of ingenuity and leadership in all forms of communication to our own institutional efforts to project the great strength of this university throughout the nation and the world.

An expansive spirit drove the creation of our Washington Semester Program. Its founders wanted everyone to benefit from the American University experience. Over sixty years Washington developed into a center for global business, science, communications and the arts transcending the stereotype of a government-only town, and our Washington Semester Program grew and diversified along with it. Thousands of students from around the nation and the world accepted our invitations. They came to Washington, they came to American University—and changed their lives, and ours as well.

Our future is bound to Washington—the relationship is symbiotic. It is both our responsibility and great opportunity to participate fully in its life and to promote its well-being. Service is deeply embedded in our mission; Washington is our home and it must command a strong call on our immense capacity to serve. And, Washington's limitless opportunities must be our deep reservoir for teaching, learning, research and art.

As we look back over this history, there is a simple, but profound lesson. The greatest lesson of our past is the supremacy of the human resource. American University has arrived at this place of strength and influence through the talent, energy and dedication of people.

In the days ahead we must focus on staff and the crucial role they play in the support of our scholarly, professional and creative work and in the education and in the education and care of students, promoting both their learning and their development as whole persons. Awards from national and international organizations fill our walls thanks to their leadership in finance, campus life, recruitment and admissions, legal affairs, public safety and physical plant creativity. We must draw heavily on their deep well of insight, experience, and capacity to advance our academic mission.

Our alumni would grace any institution. Rapidly approaching 100,000 strong, they are leaders in every sector.

- Elected and appointed officials at every level of government, chief executive officers, directors and senior managers in the world's leading businesses and nonprofit organizations;
- Physicians, attorneys, award-winning scientists;
- Judges, journalists, diplomats, university presidents;
- Authors, entertainers and professional athletes;
- Peace Corps volunteers, college professors, social service workers and leaders in dozens of other occupations.

You—our alumni—are the most persuasive and impressive evidence of the power of this institution; the best examples for our students of what awaits them if they take what this institution has to give. Nearly 40 percent of you live in our region; the rest are scattered across the nation and throughout the world.

With all their differences our alumni have one crucial thing in common. Individually and collectively you can change this university's future in profound and positive ways. Already generous with time, information and funds I will ask you to do more. But this familiar request comes with a special promise—we will build one of the finest alumni organizations in higher education. We will link you, our alumni to your university more deeply and extensively. When you give with mentorship or money you will know it is to advance American University's future because you will know they go to the needs of our faculty and students.

Those current students set high standards for our future. You, our students, are bright, accomplished, motivated and ambitious. You are athletes, interns, volunteers, founders and leaders of organizations, voices for those who have no voice, political, passionate. Your calls for greater spirit on campus have reminded us that there is a common experience to tend to that includes an important role for intercollegiate athletics and other forms of sport. You compete in the most demanding and prestigious competitions for fellowships and scholarships, and each time we emerge victorious. You are very serious about academic work but determined that your mark in the world will be more than a resume, a career or personal gain. You will leave this world a better place and you will extend your university's influence as you do. We will do well to reproduce you in the generations of students that will follow.

But this goal carries a great challenge, to ensure that financial obstacles do not prevent access to American University for students like you, for students like me. We must dedicate ourselves, indeed dedicate this presidency, to making financial assistance for students one of the two highest priorities for future fund-raising efforts.

Faculty are the heart of our future. Decades of surveys carry the praise and gratitude of your students who understand deeply the quality of your teaching and the learning in them that it has engendered. Among our faculty are the most frequently cited scholars in their fields:

- Winners of national and international prizes for their published works, their works of art and their contributions to society;
- Recipients of lifetime achievement awards from grateful professions and organizations;
- Editors of leading journals, artists and performers represented in the most respected venues;

- Consultants to the highest levels of government, business and the nonprofit world;
- Providers of countless hours of service to communities here and throughout the world.

Your influence on our students, your influence on your fields and your influence on our society is outsized and more testimony that the scholar–teacher ideal, long an aspiration at fine universities and colleges is, a reality at American University.

Our great and enduring accomplishment is that our faculty has proven—time after time—that the creation of knowledge and art is fully compatible, indeed essential, to teaching and learning.

The demands on faculty have grown with rising expectations, technology and the needs of the outside world. So ours must be a future devoted to the protection and advancement of the scholar–teacher ideal. Why? Because we must create knowledge and art, for their own sake and for the betterment of the human condition—because it is vital to our students’ learning and their ability to make their way in the world—because it is vital to preserving this University’s distinctive place in higher education. This presidency will seek to make a historic contribution to our faculty through endowed chairs and other forms of support through our fundraising efforts.

There is great satisfaction in being part of something that makes a positive difference in the world, an institution that makes important commitments, works hard and delivers on its promises. Universities can such places and, with all their shortcomings they are treasures and must be treated as such. Among universities, American University is special in all the ways I just described and many, many more. We are a place where knowledge is created, where knowledge changes lives and those lives go on to change the world. Trustees, faculty, students, alumni, staff and friends can be proud that we are part of such an institution. American University is ours now to protect, ours to advance and ours to pass on to others stronger than we found it. American University will always command the best that I have to give and I will ask the same from each of you.

If we can deliver that level of commitment and that level of effort, a generation from now, perhaps on the occasion of American University’s 150th anniversary, another president on another stage will be able to convey a new history and he or she will list all the wonderful things that would not have happened without our creativity, our courage and our dedication. Whether we expect to be around to hear those words or not, we should be drafting those words for that President’s speech by creating just such a future.

I thank you for this magnificent start.