

OCTOBER 17, 2017  
PRESIDENT TIMOTHY LAW SNYDER, PH.D., CONVOCATION ADDRESS

# COLLABORATORS *in* CREATION

LMU|LA

# COLLABORATORS IN CREATION

## PART 1 STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY

Thank you, Executive Vice President and Provost Poon. Provost Poon has been here not even six months and he's already committed to increasing our teacher-scholar successes, our global footprint, and our creative partnerships. Provost Poon is also poised to usher us into a new era of success founded on diversity. Welcome, Provost Poon!

Another new blufftop arrival: Vice President for Mission and Ministry John Sebastian. His generous spirit and his profound understanding of our combined heritage of the Jesuits, the Marymount Sisters, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange have already made a mark on our campus. Welcome, John!

As we undertake initiatives that propel our community forward we benefit from all those new to our campus. Thank you.

We welcome today

Members of the Board of Trustees here with us: Fathers Allan Deck and Scott Coble.

Members of our Board of Regents, led by the fabulous Maria Salinas;

LMU Faculty, Staff, and Students;

Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange, Marymount Sisters, Jesuits, our interfaith clergy;

Alumni and Friends;

The LMU Gospel and Sacred Heart Chapel Choir, led by Professor Diane White-Clayton,

Let's thank them once again for that electrifying performance.

Thanks to each of you for joining us this morning!

## GRATITUDE

Our great LMU work continues. And I am infinitely grateful for what we have achieved together this past year:

We are continuing to expand LMU's diversity in all dimensions. As I outlined in last year's convocation, diversity is indeed the font of human creation.

We are exercising *magis* in our faculty hires, making our extraordinary faculty yet stronger. This has been made possible through new revenues associated with our Playa Vista Initiative.

And we are increasing the diversity of leadership within our faculty. For example, in last year's promotion and tenure process, 56 percent of those promoted or tenured were persons of color. And this is no small number, for we had over 30 colleagues up for review. Meanwhile, we continue to advance our Implicit Bias Initiative for our entire campus community.

We are refreshing our strategic plan by expanding our ambitions and prioritizing next steps, while also convening our first-ever Campaign Planning Council, charged with preparing us for a comprehensive campaign slated to begin, in its quiet phase, in summer 2018.

Our Playa Vista campus will be open and active next fall.

Our newly restructured marketing and communications organization is conducting our first-ever branding exercise to determine how we might amplify perception of our accomplishments.

We continue to receive more applications than even our best predictions anticipate and yield student enrollments beyond our expectations. We have enacted new agreements with community colleges to forge new pathways for top-quality transfer students.

We continue, in all our enrollments, to set new records in diversity, GPA, and incoming standardized test scores — for example, we broke the 1300 mark in SAT scores of this year's incoming class.

We continue to strengthen our Boards of Trustees and Regents.



In yesterday's LMU This Week, I outlined a robust sampling of these and other recent accomplishments, ranging

- from SFTV's Netflix successes;
- to CFA's Arts in Corrections conference;
- to the national excellence in teaching award bestowed on Professor Michael Genovese of BCLA;
- to the School of Education's procurement of significant grants;
- to Professor Jeremy Pal of the Seaver College and his landmark work on South Asian climate phenomena;
- to Loyola Law School's Immigrant Justice Clinic and Project for the Innocent;
- to CBA launching the Institute for Business Ethics and Sustainability;
- to our guardians of the truth at William H. Hannon Library, helping students navigate the information ecosystem.

I spoke of

- the accomplishments of TSEHA's groundbreaking Harriet Tubman Press;
- the successful conclusion of our \$100M Scholarship Initiative;
- our record-setting procurement of grants — over \$10 million;
- our first- to second-year retention rate climbing from 88.7 percent last year to 91.2 percent this year — a jump made possible through effective partnerships among Student and Academic Affairs;
- our 60th Anniversary of KXLU radio, and their upcoming Fundrazor;
- our continuing ascension in meaningful rankings, including rising to No. 2 in the West for Veterans;
- our new programming, including our San Bernardino theological degree-completion program;
- our continuing environmental efforts, being the first Jesuit institution to join the United Nations' Principles for Responsible Investment, and our placing No. 1 in the nation's RecycleMania competition;
- our welcoming of members of each of the eleven regions of our new Jesuit West Province — and 500 yogis on National Yoga Day;
- and our accelerated progress in getting the word out — moving from a best-kept secret toward an institution of world-class renown.

And, of course, these accomplishments are only part of our story. Every day — in ways unnoticed by the highlighting of a new initiative, a grant, or an award — our students strive and thrive. They model how we might create a better and wholly inclusive world.

Also, often unnoticed — the true moment of matter at an institution like ours is that between a faculty member and a student or students. Every day — every moment — our faculty guide our students toward deeper engagement in academic wonder.

Our Student Affairs and Campus Ministry staff help guide our students through co-curricular and faith-based initiatives that help transform students from youthful seekers to independent actors who are women and men for and with others.

And, yes, the support of all the above is indeed critical to our success. Necessary, through the lens of St. Ignatius' *magis* — that restless desire to do better, for others.

Speaking of St. Ignatius, none of us can go forth and set the world on fire without the tinder, kindling, and fuel to help the fires flourish: Could our benefactors — anybody who has donated to our institution — please stand.

The state of our university is strong, vibrant. But to keep evolving, succeeding, and thriving, we require a harmonizing force: *Creative Collaboration*.

Today I will speak to creativity and our imagination, starting with our zeal for infinite wonder. I will move from there to why our world needs imagination. Why such imagination needs a center. And why LMU is that very center: a center for global imagination and its impacts.



## **PART 2 NEED FOR CENTERED IMAGINATION**

### **INFINITE WONDER**

Let us begin with Infinite Wonder. Foremost, we create. In the Genesis story, God breathed life into us in God's image. That is, God created, and we ended up in such an image — born to create.

Even a casual observer witnesses the seeking of Infinite Wonder taking place every day, especially at a university like ours. But recently, we saw a corona of infinite wonder captivate our entire nation. Here at LMU, with the guidance of physics Professor John Bulman, our community gathered under the flags at Ignatian Circle to participate in the Total Solar Eclipse. We put our lives on pause to stop and gaze through Professor Bulman's telescope.

And we were not alone. Fascination swelled across our globe. Some traveled thousands of miles for a few hundred seconds of cosmic wonder, while we at LMU witnessed the event, only to return, as I did, cyclically, to the back of the line to witness it again. All present were in awe, inspired ... in Infinite Wonder.

Our ability as persons to engage in Infinite Wonder is a gift from God, one that we are ceaselessly compelled to honor. It goes to great lengths: We seek not just the likes of eclipses, but even things that most of us believe are not real as we continually yearn for "something more": dreams that come true, coincidences that adopt empyrean meaning, good acts that reflect off some "cosmic mirror" and then return to us as cosmic ... favors. So, even in ways in which the hocus tends to poke us, we live to anticipate, to desire, to create, to transcend our limits.

The Jesuit paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin spoke of this longing to transcend limits as part of our call to collaborate with God in the work of creation. "Our duty, as humans," Chardin wrote, "is to proceed as if limits to our ability did not exist. Life has made us conscious collaborators in a Creation which is still going on in us, in order to lead us to a goal much more lofty and distant than we imagined."

Our capacity for Infinite Wonder leads us to seek it not just in the cosmic and transcendent, but also in the particular and the concrete. Pope Francis is fond of quoting a 17th century epigraph on the life of St. Ignatius that summarized Ignatius' teaching as follows: "To suffer no restriction from anything, however great, and yet to be contained in the tiniest of things, that is Divine." Consider how this connects two seemingly opposite tendencies in the Ignatian vision: the call to transcend all limitations for God's greater glory; and yet also to be aware of God in all things — that God can be found within us and around us at every moment — including within one another. Infinite Wonder calls us to the divine that is beyond us; the divine that is within us; and the divine that is all around us.

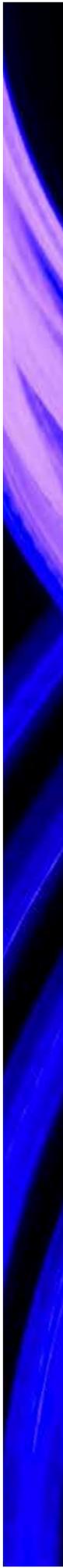
This perspective helps us understand better what Teilhard means in calling us to be "conscious collaborators" in God's creation. In his work, Teilhard uses all things knowable and all things experienced — that is, all data available, including that from the spiritual. That leads us toward not just openness, but also toward collaborative interdisciplinarity.

But a monster is in the mix, for our universe features truly humbling limits to what we can know. Inflationary cosmology tells us that the universe, in the first trillionth of a second of its existence, expanded at a rate far greater than that which we witness and measure today. Space itself expanded at a rate that outpaced the speed of light. If inflationary cosmology is correct, then the vast majority of what exists in our universe has already moved beyond what can ever be reached by our measurements or observations. This means that the majority of what exists will never be accessible to us, hence cannot be known. Ever.

### **WHY OUR WORLD NEEDS IMAGINATION**

How do we respond to this situation? Our Infinite Wonder, and where it leads us, and limits to what we can know lead us to consider why our world needs our creativity, our imagination.

First, if indeed most of what exists is forever beyond our grasp, we must be as inclusive as possible of what we can know. This inclusivity and openness drive us to invite the whole human mind into our work — in particular, including the data of our imaginations, and including our theological and humanistic traditions and experiences, rather than privileging strictly the logical and the observable. It also compels us to explore the frontiers of the interdisciplinary, to break down inherited and self-imposed barriers to intellectual exploration, to draw on our different ways of knowing and combine their insights in new and distinctive ways. Faith. Reason. Interdisciplinarity.



Together these factors summon us to embrace an ethic of collaboration—courageously promoting a culture of encounter, truth, and growth.

Our world needs collaboration, because the challenges we face today can only be solved through collaborative creativity. Consider the critical issues our students believe will define the world in which they will live. According to the Global Shapers Annual Survey 2017, the top-5 concerns for Millennials are

- 5) Religious conflicts
- 4) Poverty
- 3) Inequality (income, discrimination)
- 2) Large-scale conflict (wars)
- 1) Climate change (for third year in a row)

Each of these problems will be solved only if we expand the reach of our collective resourcefulness. Their seeming intractability shows how urgently we need fresh thinking and a willingness to try something new. They also require greater empathy and compassion.

And, as a side note, let us be aware, as educators, that too many of our students arrive on our campus with a passion for creativity, but have not had the opportunity to be rehearsed in acts of creation. Our challenge is to help them understand that acts creative are usually accompanied by risks and repeated failures. And that includes education in the arts: As Jeanine Uribe of CFA recently wrote to me, “Seeing artists in action gives permission for others to dream, visualize, and be free to pursue what they may have believed was beyond them.”

In short, what the world needs now, in this moment and increasingly into our future, is more imagination, and not a small dose of it.

## **WHY IMAGINATION NEEDS A CENTER**

I have spoken of Infinite Wonder and our eagerness and capacity for it, and our accelerating need for imagination. Now let’s consider for a moment what creative imagination requires from us as a community.

I have said that my vision is for LMU to become the definitive center for global imagination and its impacts. I have spoken to how we can become so by expanding three footprints: global, creative, and interdisciplinary. Many, when hearing the phrase “global imagination,” simply see this vision as becoming global, more global, and globularly global. Indeed, we must expand our global offerings, in study abroad and in curricular and other innovation. But the “global” in this phrase is and has always been an adjective: the noun is “imagination.” And: for imagination to do all that we need, our imagination needs not just to be active. It needs to be centered.

We talk as though creativity happens in a vacuum, or at least with an individual. But our best work exhibits collaboration, from quiet conversation to all-out concerted work — like that of the 1,700-plus co-discoverers of the Higgs Boson. To create, collaborators must share something in common, something that keeps them centered. We think of imagination as existing at the edge of the unknown: and indeed, imagination needs an edge. But it also needs a center.

This should not surprise us, because, as any creator can tell you, and as Professor Ray Toal reminded me in a recent Faculty Forum, while imagination does require freedom, it also requires constraints: 14 lines and iambic cadence define a Shakespearean sonnet; key signatures and metronomic regularity parameterize music; bounded palettes blot bounded canvases; photographs succumb to lenses; gravity enforces architecture. These are constraints. But they enable, not inhibit. They center our creation.

When we collaborate, we inevitably constrain one another, but often in ways positive, and even in ways inspiring. Nowhere is this truer than within a university, because scholars ultimately join a university community, in part to help center and stimulate one another’s work. We embody this centering every day in the classroom, the library, the lab, the studio, the residence hall, the playing field, the chat room, the department meeting, the worship service. Some examples:

In her theological studies courses, Professor Cecilia González-Andrieu encourages students to go out and find the world’s treasures, discovering that aesthetics is the connective tissue between science and theology — a playground for expanded conversation.

Chemistry Professor Nicole Bouvier-Brown helps students learn that the burdens of air pollution are not equally shared among all people, thereby connecting students to environmental justice issues in ways that provoke action.



The Academy of Catholic Thought and Imagination, led by Professor Brian Treanor, challenges our assumptions while cultivating our curiosity, as you can see in ACTI's exhibit, "Mystery, Imagination, and the Catholic University," currently on display at the William H. Hannon Library.

Or think about last year's Bellarmine Forum, as Professors Paul Harris and Brad Stone accompanied us in understanding Slow Time.

In all these scenes and many more, we encounter and challenge one another, centering one another's creativity.

Imagination's need for a center applies especially to interdisciplinary frontiers. As we expand our interdisciplinary footprint, we must practice a disciplined interdisciplinarity — one that proceeds from a firm grounding within the various disciplines and then combines and catalyzes their approaches. With that in mind, I have asked Provost Poon to explore, as a priority for this academic year, how we can expand our interdisciplinary successes, a topic he will address in his convocation. In addition, as we plan for our next capital campaign, I have urged our academic leadership teams to aim for ambitious achievements in areas of interdisciplinary opportunity and to identify the resources necessary for us to make meaningful impact.

Creative constraints also underpin university life in the productive tensions between academic freedom and civil discourse. Last year, I spoke to the importance of a culture of encounter. Universities must be places that require us to live together in dialogue, in conditions of mutual listening and questioning — where each of us is prepared to melt a bit, to move a bit, to walk away changed and for the better, by virtue of our engagement.

Academic freedom is the foundation of such a culture: and at LMU, that freedom is and will remain intact and assured. Provost Poon, our deans, our faculty leadership, and I stand beside and behind our faculty and students as they freely explore ideas — even when the temperature rises. For all of us who enjoy academic freedom, the corresponding duty is to preserve civility in our discourse. In doing so, we each self-impose certain constraints — we constrain ourselves to be fair-minded, honest, charitable, courageous and brave — but these are liberating, ennobling constraints that inspire and engage us more fully. They encourage us to imagine together, amidst the spiraling discord that surrounds us — a better way of being.

So, where have we been today? We are creators, inspired by Infinite Wonder. Our world depends on our creativity and imagination. Our imaginations are at their most creative when they are centered; and what centers us is a culture of encounter and the collaborative community it generates.

Where, then, can creativity flourish best?

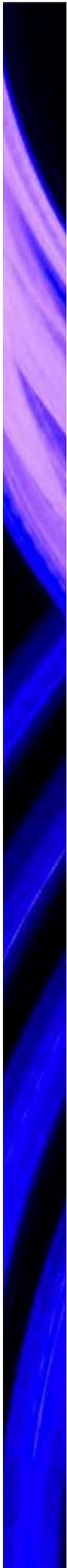
## **WHY LMU CAN AND SHOULD BE THE CENTER FOR (GLOBAL) IMAGINATION**

You guessed it: LMU. Every university can and must serve society as a center for imagination — but this university is poised to be the definitive center. Because what most animates my professional life, what helps get me out of bed each morning, joyfully committed to our shared endeavor, is the belief that LMU's opportunity for helping to center the global imagination that our world so needs is unparalleled. Imagination and its impacts — these are in our wheelhouse. Let's consider how our location, our curriculum, and our mission, together, position us to provide that center for imagination, definitively.

Consider first our location. Los Angeles is the world's capital of creativity, one of the world's most diverse and culturally rich cities, home to the largest archdiocese in the United States. Our city is a place where the humanistic, technological, creative, and marketing/startup spheres collide, as is happening especially in Playa Vista. Each of these is an area in which LMU thrives. In our backyard: LAX, the world's 4th-busiest airport. Adjacent to us: a hub of aerospace technology and innovation, including the company likely to lead humankind to other planets in our solar system. We are a Pacific Rim university; a Latin-America-adjacent university; we can engage boldly with the cultures, values, and future growth of those regions in a way that few other American universities can. This makes us uniquely poised to promote a sense of global imagination.

Consider next our curriculum. Our undergraduate Core Curriculum, grounded firmly in the liberal arts and sciences, offers not just a broad spectrum of learning, but also an integrative layer that makes our experience unique. In nearly every other core, even at our sibling Jesuit institutions, integration and interdisciplinarity are left in the hands of the individual student — a hope, rather than a guided discernment. And make no mistake: the ability to be creative will increasingly become a key value sought by those who seek to employ our students and a necessity in their being of service to our world.

Our Jesuit and Marymount heritages also position us toward imaginative collaboration. St. Ignatius, in the Spiritual Exercises, inspired a tradition of contemplative prayer in which the seeker employs all parts of the mind and spirit, including the imagination.



Our Marymount Tradition places central emphasis on the creative arts as “the expression of the human spirit sharing in God’s creation.” The late Sister Peg Dolan, R.S.H.M., summarized LMU’s goal as forming students with “compassionate minds and intelligent hearts,” a phrase our Student Affairs staff have adopted as a motto. That is what we do here — and because we are Loyola Marymount University, we can do it better than any other university in the country.

Imagination also enables our commitment to the service of faith. Faith, scripture tells us, is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” — that is, it aids us in knowing that those things for which we most deeply hope are indeed substantive. Our university can be, and must be, a bridge between substantive academic and public discourse and the substance of things hoped for. Imagination is the girder of that bridge. It teaches us to peer beneath and see beyond the mere image to the imagined: to the truth that at once transcends the world around us and yet inheres in every part; constrained by nothing, yet contained in the tiniest of things.

## **CONCLUSION**

When I contemplate LMU’s future, I am proud that we are poised not only to continue LMU’s tradition of greatness, but to expand on that greatness.

All around us we see tangible signs of this emerging reality. Our global footprint expands as we welcome more international students than ever before; as we support more international immersion experiences than ever before; as faculty and staff gather this Friday to plot our future course on internationalizing our curricular and co-curricular offerings. Our creative footprint expands with the achievements of our students and alumni in the fine, performing, and visual arts, alongside our engineers, our marketers and entrepreneurs, our philosophers and theologians, our future classroom teachers; and as our Campaign Planning Council explores how we can build out a truly “creativity-centered” campus. Our interdisciplinary footprint will expand through Provost Poon’s new initiatives; through our engagement with Playa Vista and Silicon Beach; through new intellectual synergies being tapped within and between our colleges and schools. And these footprints will deepen as each one of us locates our collaborative spirit, experiments or innovates, breaks down silos, encourages one another to think big and take risks.

Reflecting back to our time together viewing the Total Solar Eclipse, experiencing the Infinite Wonder “out there,” I delight in knowing that, together, the people behind the telescope — we — cherish our shared experience, where the sublime reveals itself to us every day in the heavens above, and here, within and between ourselves.

Emboldened by our Jesuit and Marymount traditions, and in collaboration with one another, we embrace challenges; we vault over limitations; we work for, and with, each other. Together, let us resolve to create, with purpose, with boundless energy and copious joy, on this bluff and beyond, the Definitive Center for Global Imagination — as Collaborators in Creation.