

Arts & Science 30th Anniversary Talk Dr. Gary Warner

I have had the privilege of two stints as A&S Director, a regular 5-year term and more recently a 1-year term, leading up to Jean Wilson's current Directorship. My congratulatory message to this wider Artsci community as we gather at this reunion is the same as I presented in my A&S yearbook remarks earlier this spring, where I wrote: "As the program prepares to celebrate its 30th anniversary, my wish for you, both continuing and graduating students, is that you will always remember the Arts and Science Program as a community of learning where you developed the knowledge, skills and creativity to be effective agents of positive change in whatever situation or environment you find yourself in later life. I also urge you to always recall these words of Martin Luther King, Jr. "Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality."

This message is not mere wishful thinking. It is based on an Arts & Science culture that was established long before I started teaching in the Arts & Science Program. My words were and are intended as a reminder to keep that culture alive. I see this culture alive in the strong commitment to community service, in the sense of shared community, in the readiness to ask questions that are not bound by disciplinary borders, in the willingness to be self-critical and engage in discovery of self and the human experience. I see it in the lives of the Artsci alumni engaged in a wide variety of careers and life choices.

I am a great admirer of the community of learning that has developed in the Arts & Science program. One brings an open curious mind to a community of learning in which all are sharers and recipients of insights. We have an impact on each other's life. For example, as an Inquiry class instructor earlier this spring I acquired valuable insights on Oportunidades – an anti-poverty educational program in Mexico - from a second term Level I student Inquiry paper – thank you Emily Trudeau! These insights will be useful to me as I travel to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in a couple of weeks to attend a conference to learn more about a Government-funded program called "The Promise" which is being investigated as a potential model for us here in Hamilton. The goal of this Promise program is to have educational institutions at all levels, from primary to postsecondary, as well as community and public institutions working closely so that disadvantaged children and youth have access to great schools and strong systems of family and community support that will prepare them to attain an excellent education and successfully transition to postsecondary education.

Interestingly, the Promise program includes a focus on skills identified as requisite for students to succeed in a 21st century global economy and society. These skills are said to include problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, creativity, collaboration, self-directed learning, a mindset of continuous improvement, and the ability to make ethical and moral judgments. Does this sound familiar?

However, education per se, even at the highest levels, will not protect us from engaging in barbarity (witness the Holocaust and other genocides); it will not protect us from engaging in activities that deepen the kind of inequality that results in a world in which 1/3rd is well fed, 1/3rd

is underfed and 1/3rd is starving; it will not protect us from activities that threaten the environment that sustains human and other life forms, if, as Elie Wiesel put it, that education emphasizes “theories instead of values, concepts rather than human beings, abstraction rather than consciousness, answers instead of questions, ideology and efficiency rather than conscience.”

So I join everyone present here in celebrating 30 years of an Arts & Science community of learning and a culture that emphasizes values, self-awareness, questioning and conscience. I salute the spirit of idealism, altruism and compassion that has struck me over the years as so characteristic of Arts & Science students. We celebrate in a special way the visionaries, President Alvin Lee, Vice-President Les King, and the father of the Program, Herb Jenkins, who brought this Program into existence and nurtured it. And we look forward to the strengthening of the Artsci alumni network and the ongoing development and renewal of the Arts & Science Program in the years ahead under the leadership of its long-standing, award-winning instructor and current Director, Jean Wilson. As we celebrate the past, we look to the future.