

## Inaugural Address

*Naropa University, October 31, 2009*

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*President Stuart C. Lord*

Rinpoche, members of the board, faculty, students, staff, trustees, alumni, distinguished guests, neighbors, family and friends — thank you for your gracious welcome both today and in the days since my arrival at Naropa. Your generosity and enthusiasm are contagious, and I look forward to seeing our excitement continue as we move Naropa University forward.

I want to thank the chair of the Naropa Board of Trustees, Marty Janowitz, for his faithful and dedicated service to the university. Marty's solid leadership has helped position Naropa at this critical time in its history, and I want to acknowledge his diligent labors on behalf of the institution.

It is a deep honor and privilege to accept the office of the fifth president of Naropa University.

I accept with humility, respect, and a great sense of responsibility, knowing fully that I follow in the footsteps of those who have provided Naropa with exceptional leadership. I am honored by their presence here today. They have left us with a legacy that is evident in the university's mission, a legacy that we not only cherish and protect, but also build upon as the foundation of our collective future.

Naropa University owes much to its former presidents. From founding president Trungpa Rinpoche, who had a vision of an enlightened society, to Barbara Dilley's passion for contemplative education, John Whitehouse Cobb's devotion to learning and Thomas Coburn's dedication to making Naropa a distinguished and truly excellent place, we are all blessed to have had their leadership.

I would like to say just a word about President Coburn. His kindness and warmth have been invaluable to me as I have stepped into this role. Without his leadership my presidency would not have been possible. So I want to thank you, Tom for your relentless efforts, thoughtful

presence, and brilliance of mind; our community is forever in your debt.

As I embarked upon this journey, I knew I was given a great gift. I am at the helm of an institution with an amazing past, a powerful mission and a promising future. I am humbled by the pillars of this community who embraced the vision of contemplative education and who enabled Naropa University to expand and grow, to seek new horizons, and to help educate students to become compassionate and skilled leaders.

As I stand here before you now, I can only say, we are not ... done... yet.

Our history is vibrant and rich. We are an institution forged from the deep purpose of providing a truly well rounded education, one that is anchored in personal depth, knowledge and the spirit of service. This purpose has led me here today to assume this great honor as the president of Naropa University. Since my first visit to campus I have said that Naropa University is too good not to be better.

Allow me to share my vision for Naropa with you. My vision seeks not to change Naropa, only to enhance it by building on its strengths.

In many ways I see a parallel between Naropa and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Carroll paints a picture of Alice encountering the Cheshire Cat in a tree. Not knowing how to proceed, Alice asked the Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" The Cheshire Cat replied, "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to." Alice answered, "I don't much care where –" The Cat profoundly stated, "Then it doesn't matter which way you go." Carroll summed it up by saying, "*If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.*"

Let me share with you where I believe Naropa needs to go.

First, I want to build on the philosophy that Trungpa Rinpoche set for higher education. The vision that the founder had in mind is that we would not only transform students, we would

transform the world by changing the way we delivered education. His vision led to an environment where a student's heart, soul and mind were all engaged, equally. He burned for a place where students could translate their passions into learned skills to better our world.

So to embrace his vision, we must ask this question: What does it mean to be true to ourselves and Naropa's mission? Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth were founded to train leaders. Naropa was founded not only to train leaders but to transform the way that students learn.

Our world is calling for holistic leaders: leaders with sound ethics, a compassionate and open heart and a curious mind. There are many examples of leaders who have been disconnected from their hearts: Bernie Madoff, Enron executives, Bear Stearns bankers, mortgage lenders. Our society demands more accountable and compassionate leaders. This is the kind of leader that Naropa University must shape and nurture.

Second, I want to build upon the precept that contemplative education is a distinctive and invaluable educational for our students. Society expects students to engage in the world with a strong sense of civic responsibility. This expectation means that those of us working in higher education should be asking the question: How are we preparing students to engage with the world's problems? The world's problems are our problems. The future of higher education *depends* on our graduates' ability to meet the world as it is, and change it for the better. We believe it is crucial to produce graduates who search and explore. Finding solutions to better the world. We aim to empower students to challenge the status quo.

Third, I believe that spirituality and service play a meaningful role in the education of the whole person. As Robert Bellah has said, developing habits of the heart are essential to our individual development as humans.

While at Dartmouth, I worked with the students to begin developing habits of the heart. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina I had the privilege of working with the College to develop a program called the Education and Service Trips, which took students to the Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. We gave them opportunities to serve people who were in need. We

prepared them to serve. They received training on everything from putting up dry wall to politics, to economics and poverty.

How might Ivy League students on a weeklong service trip be perceived? Were they there from a place of compassion? Were they there to make a difference? Were they there to be a witness? We challenged them to make their trip meaningful.

Upon their return, students reflected on their experience and described it as life changing. Many students felt that the trip helped them develop a sense of spirituality and purpose. It gave them a chance to develop habits of the heart.

We MUST develop students with habits of the heart. It is imperative to deepening our contemplative practices. For some it may mean meditating on cushion, going for a hike in the woods, having a deep conversation, or pondering at the bank of a river. Naropa students should and must engage socially, in the local, national, and international communities, in the spirit of service. Students need the opportunity to serve others so that their experiences can be colored by the people they share the world with.

I believe that to build on our foundation we need to construct the future of Naropa in three ways:

One, we need to construct a consistent curriculum.

This is not to say that we do not have a strong faculty or a quality educational experience. However, if we are going to have a significant impact in transforming higher education, we must develop rigorous academics that are unparalleled. We need an academic program that supports and encourages its faculty, that challenges its students, and fosters logic and reason in every aspect of life. We must commit ourselves to establishing the highest academic standards. We must commit ourselves to teaching excellence of language. We must commit ourselves to teaching excellence of the sciences so that our students may well comprehend the world in which they live and offer advanced solutions for the problems that confront us. We must commit ourselves to teaching excellence! The academic plan recently adopted by the board of trustees is

an excellent start. If we want Naropa students to be the best, then the educational experiences that we offer must be the best.

This involves enhancing Naropa's undergraduate college; re-instituting international study abroad programs, and internships; creating opportunities for languages and science studies; and, taking graduate programs to the next level.

Two, we must construct a cohesive community.

Since my arrival on campus in July, I have met with countless individuals representing a number of constituencies. I have met with staff, faculty, students, alumni, friends, donors, community members, parents and leaders in the community. I have learned much about Naropa's history and traditions and one truth stands out: Naropa's community is *passionate*. You care about your institution. The future of Naropa matters to you. You want Naropa to succeed; in fact, you crave that Naropa become a place of excellence.

And yet, I am not sure that everyone agrees just how to accomplish this. For some, raising our endowment and putting the university on sustainable financial footing is the key objective. For others, it is enhancing the Naropa name in the Boulder community. For some, it is reconnecting with our alumni base. For yet another group, it is the creation of a more rich and vibrant student experience, encompassing all aspects of student life. And yet, all of these issues are significant. Not one of them could exist without the others. Thus, for Naropa to move forward, we must be a cohesive community, one that is committed to a unified direction for the university. What affects one of us, affects us all.

I have started my presidency by listening deeply. I have established listening circles to hear what is on the minds of students, alumni, staff and faculty. I am asking for collective feedback on both the problems and possible solutions.

I believe that we must have a solid and sustainable financial plan that shows regard for its employees and models sound fiscal accountability. I believe we must provide a positive student

experience. Further we must stay connected to our alumni encouraging their involvement and support. I recognize these problems cannot be solved unilaterally. This is why I will listen to all those who wish to share, so that together we will build ONE Naropa that is dedicated to delivering distinction with excellence.

And three, we must continue to do what we do well-build character. As students move forth and assume their roles in society, they are often challenged to develop their character. We need leaders with character, leaders who understand that embracing diversity is more *than* a quota — it is a habit of heart.

In my own personal journey, I sought out those who could cultivate my rigor, heart and soul. Something that I learned as a child from my family and mentors was that I had a responsibility to use my education for the benefit of others. Because in the end, we are all connected. Last month, I fasted for Ramadan because I wanted to share in the experience that means so much to so many people throughout the world. This experience helped me build my own character — giving me more tools to be a peaceful warrior in the world.

President Tom Coburn once wrote, “[This] is what we are doing at Naropa University: helping students wage the war against hatred on the internal front, creating a new kind of human being. Heeding his words we must listen carefully to one another and speak our minds through our hearts.

We must be guided by the principles we hold dear as a human family by engaging in difficult decisions without prejudice or anger. We must stand together for tolerance, civil liberties and the right to dissent by holding firm to the core principles of justice, freedom and human dignity. This university will serve the global community well. By doing so we will ensure our collective future.

In summary, we will realize our ideals through a strong and holistic educational process, existing in the context of a unified university community, producing skillful and compassionate graduates who are prepared to confront the issues that await us.

I began with a quote by Lewis Carroll, and want to share another as I close. “Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end; then stop.” So here is the end, and then I will stop.

If Naropa is to become the model for transforming higher education, it cannot be without all members of this community working together. I believe our success requires that we build a curriculum that is second to none. That we create a community that is united in advancing the mission of Naropa. We must never forget that our students cannot make a lasting impression on the world through their intellectual obtainment — without the use of an equal amount of conscience and heart.

It is to this end that I seek to lead Naropa. I call upon the students, faculty, staff, board members, alumni, parents and the community to join me in ensuring that a Naropa education — reflecting the interplay of discipline and delight — prepares its graduates to meet the world as it is and change it for the better.

Thank you.