President Lazarus, Faculty and Staff, Class of 2008,

Let’s go back to freshman year for a moment. The first thing we learned as freshmen was how to decipher all the abbreviations that turn up in day to day life here, and there are many: Phil & Eth, Lit Trad, Am Civ, Euc & Non-Euc, etc. At UD we like to keep words short. It is worth noting too that professors with short names, preferably names of one to two syllables, tend to do well here and quickly get tenure: West, Atto, Sweet, Doe – we like it this way, short and simple.

But UD isn’t against all long words – we have plenty of long words here. “Mallapalooza,” for instance, defies simplification and last names like Lehrberger and Jodziewicz have evaded abbreviation for decades. So although some long words remain intact, lengthy words which we use often quickly get abbreviated. The most telling example of this is the word “Tradition.” At UD, we are serious about tradition and one tradition in particular: the “Western Tradition.”

In our first weeks as freshmen we promptly add the term “Western Tradition” to our vocabulary and then learn to derive a certain pleasure from bringing it up in the Capp bar, on the mall, and at parties. We found that the Western Tradition kept popping up in every class: be it English or Politics, History or Philosophy. In fact, this word “tradition” turns up so much that it too has to be abbreviated. Five of the classes we take in our first two years have the word “Tradition” in the title: Lit Trad 1, Lit Trad 2, Western Theo Trad, the list goes on. And here is the simple rule that we quickly learn as UD freshmen: “Tradition,” we’ve found, may be abbreviated - but it is not dispensed with.

The word tradition may also explain why so many UD alumni and families send their kids here. The family is the arena in which to pass on the best one has. And for many, the liberal arts education received at UD is a most precious family heirloom. Therefore, year after year, alumni send their sons and daughters to the University of Dallas, eager to pass on the very best they have.

Thanks to our core curriculum we have become diligent students of the Western Tradition. And where there is a student, there is a teacher. The professors at the University of Dallas have safeguarded this tradition and passed it on.

Thus, on behalf of the Class of 2008, I would like to thank wholeheartedly the Faculty and Staff of the University for their dedication to UD’s unique and noble mission: the conveyance of the Western Tradition. It is my hope that our attention in class, our thoughtful questions, and our smiling faces day-in and day-out have made manifest in some way our gratitude for your commitment to this great project. Looking around UD’s campus, it is clearly not brown brick and brown paint that alone make a school. It is rather the enduring presence of the faculty which has made this campus into a home, these buildings into a University. You, our professors, we will never forget.

Abraham Lincoln spoke of the American people as the “legal inheritors” of political prosperity thanks to the actions of our founding fathers. But for our part, as graduates of this devoted University, where tradition is passed on—as in a family—we are not mere “legal inheritors” but rather full-blooded sons and daughters of our Alma Mater. As such, we owe this University the
best that we have. Not everyone in the world can attend UD, but we can, and should, bring UD to
the world. The best of the Western Tradition, the virtues of free men, the harmony of faith and
reason, the friendships formed in pursuit of the good—these, these are the fruits of our UD
education. We have to want— we must want— to bring UD to our profession, our society, and our
world.

But how does a new graduate bring his UD education to bear in society? How does a graduate of
this great school spread the mission and continue the project of our University and our Faculty?

I am not proposing that we wear our UD sweatshirts all year round or that we paint our houses a
brown, monochromatic hue to match the architecture here. Neither do I suggest that you name
your children after the buildings on campus (yes, please do not name you child “Lynch”). No—
my prescription is thus: that we dedicate ourselves to our professional work, our society, and our
family life. It is chiefly our professional excellence—and not a UD T-shirt or keychain—that
will put this school on the map and advance the great project started here in 1956.

And as students of the Western Tradition we need not approach our profession and our society
with trepidation. Diligent study of the Western Tradition gives us a familiarity with human
nature and the springs of human action: be they courage, justice, or honor. You’ll be glad to have
written that essay in Lit Trad 1 on the anger of Achilles when confronted with irate clients in
your professional work. You’ll be glad to have grappled with theorems and axioms in Euclid
and Non-Euclidian when you confront difficult questions in science and medicine. And you’ll be glad to
have accompanied Socrates to the Piraeus when you seek to imbue your neighborhood and your
society with justice.

Aristotle cautioned that the young are not prepared for the study of ethics because they lack the
experience and the breadth of outlook needed for this pursuit. UD understands this dilemma and
our study of the Western Tradition and its exemplary characters augments our experience and
broadens our vision. The Western Tradition is thus a locus of truth in a world dominated by the
dictatorship of relativism. The Western Tradition is therefore a vast depository where we view
the great characters of history—fictional and non-fictional alike—and learn to emulate their
virtues, and aspire to their friendships.

Alexis de Tocqueville, a liberal arts student himself, praised liberally educated lawyers for their
ability to instruct mores, temper democracy, and direct society towards a good end. There is thus
no reason why liberally educated UD grads cannot do the same. It is the UD graduate in the
laboratory, in the board-room, and in the home that will advance UD’s mission and change the
world.

The best pre-professional program, as UD alumni will confirm, is a diligent commitment to the
liberal arts. Logos leads praxis—not the other way around. At UD we acquire that “general
culture of the mind” which Newman says is the best aid to our professional and our scientific
studies. With these habits of mind, UD graduates have been shown to thrive in all professions
and environments: therefore what society needs most of all is a UD grad in the art studio, a UD
grad at the editor’s desk, and a UD grad at the town-hall meeting of each and every American
town.
Our professional excellence, our personal virtues, and our capacity for friendship: these are the fruits of our UD education and these are what we owe our University. We have within these walls now a great tradition and the talents needed to renew our country and our society. May this great project start here at UD—but may it not end here. It makes good sense then, as the Pope said in his address to Catholic Educators last month, that not only the Catholic community alone, but “society in general” expects great things from a Catholic University. Class of 2008, let us not disappoint.