

EXETER'S IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES

January 2012

Since I became principal, and especially over the past year, I have devoted a great deal of thought to the global promise and potential of our student body, and to Exeter's potential place in the world. My leadership objective has been to create a road map for how we can ensure that Exeter students are well equipped for the rapidly shifting world they will confront.

Our world needs Exeter and Exonians. The scope of possibilities and dilemmas we face as human beings in the 21st century is certainly beyond what John Phillips ever could have imagined. Knowledge is accelerating with almost unimaginable speed and complexity. We know our children will grapple with national and international issues related to energy, environmental sustainability, finance, economic development, healthcare, and human rights.

Thus, Exeter's mission to unite knowledge with goodness is as relevant and evocative as ever. Our world needs leaders and citizens who are creative and supple in their thinking, who possess the courage and the intellectual capacity to pursue the next good or great idea, who also value and seek goodness itself. These skills and qualities are developed extraordinarily well around the Harkness table. At this critical moment, Exeter must continue to hold to its highest standards and prepare students to tackle the immense global and moral challenges that lie ahead.

To accomplish this, I believe we must launch a period of ambitious innovation at Exeter. We have already begun to do this work on several fronts, and I believe we need to commit ourselves further, with the same kind of coordinated focus and creativity that it took to establish the Harkness model 80 years ago.

After more than 20 years of living and working at Exeter, I am a firm believer in the value of Harkness teaching and learning. If, however, we are going to contend with the massive changes in our world, we will need to launch other strategies. Our collective efforts will ensure that Exeter graduates leave our campus each year equal to any test or opposition, ready to be profoundly useful in a different kind of world.

To accomplish this, we must exert both individual resourcefulness and cooperative ambition. In what follows, I outline three fundamental imperatives that will guide us over the next several years: *Intellectual Ambition, Global Exploration* and *Goodness*. I also include some of the specific initiatives we must undertake.

As I lead our school into the future I believe these three qualities must be our absolute goals: *Intellectual Ambition, Global Exploration* and *Goodness*.

Imperative: Intellectual Ambition

Thanks to the breadth and rigor of our curriculum, Exeter is synonymous with the highest standards of academic performance. This atmosphere of inspired intellectual ambition attracts the most promising students and exceptional faculty and staff to Exeter. Yet at the Academy we are also keenly aware that great institutions can't be assured of greatness forever. Our continual drive to improve has enabled the Academy to provide a life-altering education to each succeeding generation.

Our steadfast adherence to our mission is manifest in the value we have traditionally placed on meritocracy, on our commitment that no student be denied a place at the Harkness table due to financial circumstances, and on finding and enrolling the “best and brightest” students. In that context, we must also offer our students an educational experience that is second to none. I will be asking our faculty to direct their attention toward ensuring and enhancing Exeter’s rigorous standards through the following initiatives.

- Ensure the depth and the breadth of academic inquiry.

Our world needs individuals who can forge radical new ideas across the disciplines of art, humanities and science. There is no question that today Exeter provides students with an extraordinarily broad curriculum. We must make certain, however, that all departments are equipped to provide equal depth of opportunity.

A decade ago, Exeter responded to this kind of curricular challenge with a major investment in the sciences. Today we recognize that our performing arts programs require similar attention, and we are developing a prudent plan to enhance the facilities for the arts while also taking into consideration impending needs in other areas like athletics and academic technology.

- Explore and implement new teaching tools in our classrooms

We must consider how our teaching could evolve, especially in light of the technological tools available to us today and in the future. How can technology enhance our Harkness classrooms without compromising our face-to-face discussions with students? Where do interdisciplinary synergies exist between individual teachers and academic departments? How can we leverage our resources and our Harkness expertise to create new models that will improve our teaching and the field of education at large?

- Develop a new and improved student advising system

Now more than ever Exeter students need strong connections with advisers who know them on many different levels, who can help them navigate and reflect on complex issues. We must balance the needs of students, parents and faculty within a system that is compassionate, responsive, equitable, realistic and technologically efficient.

- Examine and potentially re-define the composition of the Academy

Since 1993 we have not stepped back to consider the full picture of geographic representation, diversity, financial aid, or class sizes, nor what aptitudes, ambitions and personal qualities we seek in our ideal Exonians. Now is the time for a comprehensive review.

We have known for years that the diversity of our student body is not matched by similar diversity among Exeter adults. We must resolve to implement outreach and retention efforts that will draw a wider variety of faculty and staff to the Academy. At the same time as we embark on these initiatives, we will not stray from our central directive to attract students and adults who demonstrate the greatest potential for achievement as well as a desire for positive impact on the world.

Imperative: Global Exploration

For more than 231 years, Exeter has done an exceptional job of educating “youth from every quarter.” Our students live in a world where borders become more blurred every day. We can no longer simply educate students “from” every quarter; we must also prepare them “for” every quarter.

Our response must include the following initiatives:

- Create even more opportunities for students to engage with peers and experiences outside of Exeter

The Academy already offers a broad range of international programs, along with an increasing number of community service trips; however, we must continue to build opportunities for global engagement throughout our students' courses of study at the Academy. To achieve success, this initiative must be a grassroots endeavor in which all departments and instructors commit to creating applications that are appropriate to each discipline.

- Call upon faculty and staff to pursue professional excellence beyond the borders of Exeter

Over the past several years, we have significantly increased the occasions for faculty and staff to study or do community service in our region and in other states and countries. While this is a great beginning, we need to launch a much more ambitious scope of national and global engagement within our adult community.

We must enable more faculty to pursue advanced study or research beyond Exeter that will bring new perspectives and curricular enhancements back to our classrooms.

- Encourage faculty and staff to provide leadership on a national and international scale

At moments in Exeter's past, individuals such as History Instructor Henry Bragdon and Mathematics Instructor Dick Brown provided not only exemplary instruction to Exonians but also universal texts to students throughout the country. In the next decade I hope to launch a much broader phase of leadership, in which numerous Exeter faculty members are writing textbooks, developing curricular websites, inventing new methods and materials, and, most importantly, guiding the field of education in critical ways.

Imperative: Goodness

The very foundation of what we are and what we do here at Exeter is formed by our collective community values. Even when unspoken, our values serve as a powerful example to the students on our campus today and to those we hope to attract in the future. Our students live in an often uncivil world and will inherit serious moral responsibilities. Exeter must be an early touchstone that reminds them throughout their lives to value goodness just as much as knowledge.

To deepen our commitment to goodness, we must undertake the following:

- Embrace our differences

As Exeter becomes more diverse, we must strive to make the Academy a place where we truly welcome difference, knowing it will make our community stronger and more dynamic. If we want our learning around the Harkness table and across campus to remain relevant and incisive, we need to ensure that all people and perspectives can thrive here at Exeter.

- Foster connections by enabling people to learn and serve together

We are a community that encourages learning, whether in the Harkness classroom, the dormitory, on playing fields, or in faculty or staff meetings. By providing more opportunities for students, faculty and staff to learn new skills or serve the community together, we will foster a greater sense of connection that will help support civility, compassion and respect within the Academy family.

In my role as Exeter's leader I know that I am raising complex issues, and we will be breaking some new ground as we address these challenges. Yet Exeter is a community with a 231-year history of excellence. Every day I am inspired by the pure talent that our community brings to its work with students and the loyalty, commitment and support our alumni/ae bring to our entire enterprise. Exeter is never satisfied with anything less than the best strategy and the highest performance.

I am therefore confident that going forward we will fully scrutinize how the world has changed, and how Exeter must respond. I am honored to help forge the Academy's future with advice and encouragement from the entire Academy community.