

Paul Miller

Margy, Adam, Matthew, Sandra, Nina, Madam President, distinguished friends of Martin and Margy:

I want to talk to you about Martin's presidency of Penn, and what he did to lift us from a status of also-ran to a university of international distinction.

I do so from the viewpoint of an alumnus who started as a freshman in 1946, as a trustee and trustee emeritus for 41 years, as a person who was privileged to serve on the committee that selected him, and who served as Chair of the Trustees during part of his presidency, as a native Philadelphian, and as a good personal friend

I can clearly hear Martin now, in the first interview with the committee, shocking us with his candor by saying that while he thought we had the makings of a first-rank, international class university, our shortcomings were many and we were still a long way from getting there.

He saw a university that was rather desperately in need of strong intellectual prodding. He discerned that we suffered from academic complacency, provincialism, and a lack of spirited ambition. And he told us so.

Formulating a strategy was not easy. When Martin became president, the University was operating at a financial deficit that was accentuated by skyrocketing energy costs. The United States was involved in an extremely difficult, costly and unpopular war. College campuses were reeling from the cultural changes of the 1960's. It was not a friendly environment for a new university president.

In 1974, his fourth year in office, having painfully accomplished a tenuously balanced budget, he summarized for the trustees and faculty the three choices we faced: First, was to become a so-called proprietary university, doing only those things that were financially profitable. Second, was to become a state-owned or state-related university, subject to the political winds. Third, was to establish a set of academic priorities, get off our rear-ends, find vastly increased funding, and set ourselves a course toward distinction. You know, of course, which route we chose, but it was by no means predetermined. Strong leadership was required, and Martin Meyerson provided it.

Selective Excellence, he called it, funded by the then largest fund raising effort in our history.

This room is full of people who appreciate how difficult it is to establish real academic priorities in a university? You must know how a faculty reacts to statements like this one, made by Martin on his enunciated goal of Selective Excellence to a special meeting of the Faculty Senate: (I quote)

“We can provide equivalence to all parts of the University, and I would venture to say that would be a path of intellectual doom for us.

“The last time around, [here he was talking about the American Council of Education’s review of graduate programs] there were only three fields in which our peers regarded us as being in the top five in the country. We ought to have a dozen or fifteen as do Harvard, Yale, Princeton and [six other universities].

“.....twelve or fifteen truly superlative departments would have halo effect on all the others.other highly rated institutions have done this. We need to do the same.”

As we know, we did, in fact do it, over a period of three decades, and we are still doing it.

That specially called meeting, at which faculty fired pointed questions at Martin, was, as you might have guessed, recorded in *The Almanac* as having grown “short of time”.

It takes courage on the part of any university leader to talk about preferential allocations of scarce resources to certain departments that are deemed to have the best chance of achieving eminence. Martin had that kind of courage. He wasn’t able to accomplish all that he wanted. But he made a very healthy start of it. Several major programs were eliminated altogether. The School of Allied Medical Professions was closed. Graduate Hospital was sold. Loud outcries were heard and huge pressures brought to bear on him. You should have heard the screams when he decided to eliminate ice hockey and close the skating rink. He not only stood his ground, but he also introduced initiatives that are solidly part of the university we know today.

A unified Faculty of Arts and Sciences, freshman seminars, thematic studies, dual degrees, submatriculation programs, the University Scholars Program, the creation of University Professorships for distinguished faculty, the installation of the college house model, responsibility center budgeting, the revolution of nursing education, the expansion and beautification of the campus, and many programs that stimulated our internationalization,all amazingly achieved in a period of austerity, and while making long strides toward a more diverse faculty, administrative staff and student body.

I would even venture to say that more changes for the better were made in that decade than in any other during my 60 years of association with the University. I say with complete conviction that Martin laid the foundation for what we have today. We went on under his leadership to the highly successful *Campaign for the Eighties* under the slogan of *One University*. It was a huge effort for its time and context.

Imagination, vision, courage, leadership, yes, all of those, but Martin was also a person of good humor. One of my less attractive hobbies is the collection of ribald jokes. I was slow to use any of them with Martin until he told me a couple of good ones. While it may seem uncharacteristic to some of you who may not have known him well, he was not beyond a knee slapping round of good solid laughter.

He had a couple of academic jokes he was particularly fond of, but occasionally something would come out of him that was spontaneous and really hearty laugh material. One day, for instance, we were coming back to his office after a trying meeting on some problems at HUP and the Medical School. He said, "Paul, I'll probably go to hell when I die. And hell will be my being the president of a university with two medical schools!"

During the years following his presidency, my wife, Warren, and I enjoyed many dinners with Martin and Margy,just the four of us. They were intellectual adventures for Warren and me. We would leave those dinners remarking upon the wonderful relationship that Martin and Margy shared, and how we always learned something from their knowledge and wisdom.

Once in a while I would talk with someone downtown about Martin, and he or she would refer to him as "Marty ". I would recoil. I wanted to say, "Please don't call him Marty. Marty is not the person I know". For some inexplicable reason, Marty just did not fit this intellectual giant. He was and always will be my friend, Martin, who raised our aspirations. He is missed terribly by all of us, and by this great University to which he gave so much of himself.