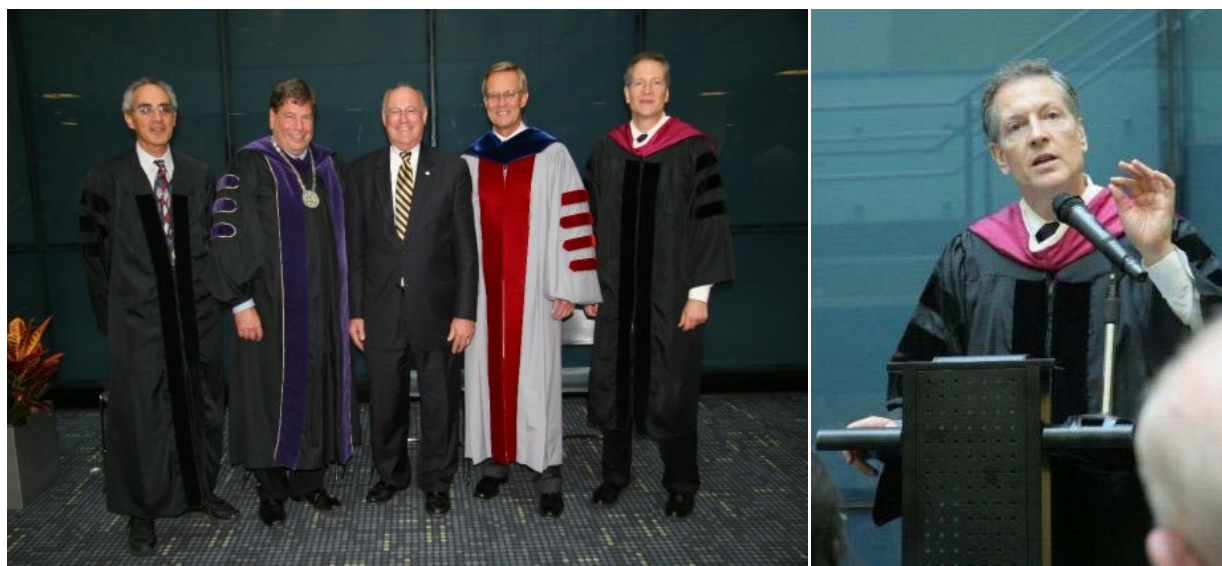


2008 FALL CONVOCATION

Shimer College officially welcomed our President-Designate Thomas Lindsay and the entering class of 2012 during Convocation held on Saturday, September 20th. IIT President John Anderson and Chris Nelson, Chair of the Board of Trustees both spoke followed by a keynote address from Thomas Lindsay (see text of the speech below). The event was attended by Shimer staff, students, faculty, alumni and members of the Board of Trustees.

Chris Nelson presented a gift of thanks to Shimer Interim President (2007-08) Ron Champagne for his dedication and commitment to Shimer and his assistance in helping us make valuable connections in Chicago. David Shimer, Academic Dean of the College and Provost, concluded the event by recognizing student achievements. A special mention was made of Robert Trigg III and Nathaniel Levebre who were recognized as having completed all requirements for graduation during the summer.



L-R, David Shiner, Chris Nelson, Ron Champagne, John Anderson, and Thomas Lindsay

SPEECH BY THOMAS LINDSAY, PRESIDENT-DESIGNATE OF SHIMER COLLEGE

The drama and content of the *Symposium* teach us that human beings most reveal their souls when they talk about what they love. For it is love, for Plato, that fuels the soul's journey to self-knowledge. In this spirit, I can think of nothing more revealing than to talk about the love of liberal learning that has guided me to the teaching life, the life that I share with all of you in this room.

As a teacher committed to liberal education, the goal always before my eyes—albeit always imperfectly met—is to provide my students the means to as well as an illustration of intellectual freedom. This freedom I take to consist in self-understanding, or rational self-consciousness. Students come to the university with their own "accidental baggage": race, class, sex, etc. The purpose of liberal education is to liberate the mind from unconscious bondage to these accidents of birth through careful study and debate of the greatest, alternative visions of human excellence presented throughout history. Let me be clear here: by my lights, liberal education is animated by the vision of a perfected, flourishing, and

therewith beautiful soul, whose contours become more visible to us through the various contributions of the greatest works of literature, philosophy, art, music, and the like. This vision of human excellence inspires us to see new possibilities and to have the courage to press forward with their implementation.

In this light, it's not surprising to find that the "liberal" in liberal education has the same root as the word "liberty." Because, as prized as economic and political liberty are, the liberty of the mind is more sublime; it is in fact the source of our other liberties. Intellectual liberty obliges us to step outside of and come to grips with the presuppositions that underpin our, and every, culture. Every people views itself and its world in light of unexamined, collective assumptions. Perceiving the power that culture exercises over our souls—over our view of who we are, what we can know, and for what we might hope—is the indispensable first step toward freeing ourselves from the potentially deforming influences of convention and prejudice.

In assisting our students in this enterprise, we teachers, especially we Shimer teachers, enjoy a rare privilege: our lives know less of the often necessary but nonetheless unfortunate disjunction between working and "living." In exploring with our students the insights of the greatest thinkers and artists, we at Shimer come to understand better the strengths and weaknesses of our own efforts to gain critical distance from the presuppositions that have been so formative in shaping us. Understanding what is necessary to our students' intellectual freedom bolsters our own liberation. In the classroom, then, and perhaps only in the classroom, the distinction between what is mine and thine—that age-old source of conflict—virtually disappears. While individual wealth and honor shrink when shared, knowledge multiplies through distribution. Accordingly, although my field--political philosophy--teaches the inevitable imperfections of all attempts at justice in the political community, the very act of liberal learning simultaneously discloses the reality of the one community—the community of lovers of learning—where doing justice to others perfectly harmonizes with doing good to oneself.

Thus, the love of learning, coeval with the quest for freedom in the highest, founds the community of would-be knowers, that is, it establishes what a university is intended to be. The vision of the beautiful for which we at Shimer strive is not to be found simply in books; it is to be found in community. Learning takes place most effectively in interaction with others -- and this requires that these would-be knowers have at their disposal the basis for a common conversation. A core curriculum makes this common conversation possible. As the Russian critic Bakhtin has written, "ideas exist only in dialogue, in the exchange between persons."

Guided by this notion of liberal learning, I have always, since my graduate school days, regarded Shimer as something of a Mecca. I came to Shimer because I found here an institution devoted to liberal learning. I came here because I found here a core curriculum coherently organized around this vision of liberal learning. I came here because I believed that something unique and noble was going on at this campus.

We are witnessing today a situation paradoxical on its face: the rise of information technology is producing a renaissance in classical liberal education. With today's computer technology, a wealth of facts on nearly any subject is available—literally—at our fingertips, but this means that accumulating information is no longer sufficient to constitute learning or scholarship. Because anyone with a PC can produce vast quantities of mere information, what matters today in both the classroom and the corporation is what one *does* with this wealth of information; that is, how one *thinks*. This is why, contrary to expectations, today's explosion in high technology makes more relevant than ever subjects like history, literature, art, music, philosophy, politics, and the like. These subjects teach students how to think critically, how to interpret the non-stop flow of information on the computer screen and, thus, how to envision new paths of discovery and new roads of innovation.