Dear Alumni, Family, and Friends,

“Educating ... for what? Renewing the deep purposes of higher education”

This theme reverberated at Clark throughout the fall as part of the Higgins School of Humanities’ Difficult Dialogues symposium. How do we at Clark University answer the question “Educating for what?” and how does this vision for liberal education inform my leadership of the University today? In my remarks at the October symposium, I reaffirmed what I take to be the enduring purpose of liberal education — to fully prepare our graduates for productive lives, careers, and citizenship. As former Board Chair Alice Higgins was fond of saying, we are educating the whole person, empowering students to pursue fulfilling lives of meaning and purpose. We aspire for our graduates to discover their passions, to make lives and careers out of what they love, and to contribute to the world as effective leaders. With the support of the Higgins School, the humanities and the arts remain a powerful force in enabling Clark University students to think deeply about their values, their relationships with others, and their paths to career and life success.

Under Clark’s pioneering model, Liberal Education and Effective Practice (LEEP™), we are deliberately educating the whole person. Some of the public discussions on liberal education suggest that this focus is a luxury that our students and our country can no longer afford, demanding that education must shift to a singular emphasis on preparing students for work. I disagree. Engaging our students around issues of meaning and purpose is one of liberal education’s most precious gifts, and it serves our country and our world well. We are inspired by the accomplishments of so many of our alumni who provide thoughtful leadership in their lives, work, and citizenship. The successful graduates profiled in this issue of CLARK magazine affirm that we have much to be proud of regarding liberal education at Clark University.

Clearly, one central purpose of liberal education must be to prepare students for long-term success in the world of work. With LEEP, we are especially influenced by feedback from leading employers. Time and again, these employers cite skills and capacities such as critical thinking, strong communication skills, creative problem-solving, and the ability to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty as keys to recruitment and advancement in their organizations, whether a business, hospital, investment firm, city government, or nonprofit. As part of LEEP, we are partnering with alumni and a host of organizations to expand the opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate these capabilities while working to solve problems in challenging situations around the world. We are building a new model of liberal education that is responsive to the profound changes underway in the global economy and that renews our commitment to enable our graduates to successfully transition from college to career, whether that path leads them to graduate and professional school or to their first job.

The case for liberal education must be made in words and deeds. In response to challenges of affordability and the large investments that families are making in education, Clark must clearly articulate the value of the education our students receive, must work tirelessly to control costs, and must be accountable for results. Clark has created a new website (clarku.edu/never-stops/) that specifically addresses the lifelong “return on education” for our graduates. And we will do more. LEEP is a major step forward in providing students with world and workplace experiences that open the door to initial career opportunities. We are also exploring ways to further support early-career alumni as they navigate the first decade beyond Clark. For all of our efforts here, Clark alumni and friends are critical to our success, whether as mentors to recent graduates or as resources for new networking opportunities and career building.

Beyond life and career, we believe that a liberal education must serve the critical purpose of effective citizenship. How are we to prosper as a country and a world if universities and colleges do not commit to fostering effective participation in our democracy? The Association of American Colleges and Universities describes this time as a “crucible moment” for higher education, one in which we must urgently reverse a growing deficit in civic and democratic engagement in society. We will look to new generations of college graduates to demonstrate greater understanding and fluency of cultures, languages, and societies beyond our own. When national organizations search for examples of universities and colleges that have successfully taken on this challenge, they will see Clark University’s commitment to deep and transformative engagement in our neighborhood and beyond. Ours is a powerful success story about the ways in which students can connect their education to the world and acquire the skills and capacities needed for dynamic citizenship in their communities.

These three strands of liberal education — preparation for life, career, and citizenship — define our commitment to Clark graduates today. Our approach to strengthening educational opportunities for our students builds on Clark’s heritage while responding to the challenges that mark a rapidly changing economy and society. Thank you for the opportunities that your ongoing support affords new generations of Clark students.

David P. Angel
President