

TRIBUTE TO DAVID PORTER AND RESOLUTION ON BEHALF OF THE FACULTY

Some scholars take their subjects lightly; others, like David Porter, take their subjects to heart. Although translations vary, here according to one is the poet Horace reflecting on life and his calling: "Mix a little foolishness with your prudence; it's good to be silly at times." Thus, at least once a month over eleven academic years, we have had to grin and bear the punishment of David's rhetoric. Fortunately, his romance with Horace goes deeper than that. A gifted musician as well as a classicist, an academic who not only reads Greek and Latin but who also plays the piano and harpsichord, David seems literally to have shaped his life after an exalted Roman prototype who, in Horace's words, is "accomplished . . . down to his fingertips."

And this is how, to say the least, we have come to think of our president. It was not long after David took office when the faculty took comfort in the certainty that in print or in person, and whatever the forum or occasion--in national journals or televised interviews, courting the good will of townspeople or exhorting state legislators--he would do the institution proud. Few if any of us, however, could have anticipated the extent of his astounding energy and the inspirational impact of his pluck and confidence on a team of fund raisers who, following his banner, would not be hindered in Skidmore's hankering for broader and deeper financial footing. Rather incredibly, culminating in the spectacular outcome of the Journey Campaign, Skidmore's endowment

has more than quadrupled during David's presidency. That's hardly all. Over the same period the number of student applications for admission to the college has soared. Eye-pleasing and practical transformations in campus architecture and landscape, a burgeoning number of endowed chairs for the faculty, ongoing support for student scholarships and projects in collaborative research--these enrichments are part and parcel of David's legacy too, and still others are not far to seek. But let it suffice here to remark only that Skidmore today is blessed with the wherewithal and momentum to build an educator's dreams on.

And yet, though we exult in our tangible gains, they do not in themselves a widely esteemed president make, let alone one who is widely held in affection. In any summary of the Porter years, his intangible legacy also deserves to be stressed. Despite the obligation to whiz abroad now and then, dart up and down and across the nation routinely, he has opened his office door to students on a weekly basis and somehow has found the means and time to touch the lives of colleagues across the college, and none more respectfully than the lives of the faculty. Indeed, David has made it abundantly clear that, first and last, he is one of us: a teacher to the core. What is more, he has been a model teacher, and not simply in his writings, lectures, and recitals. An educated imagination, interdisciplinary learning bridging traditional and contemporary thought, compassion for the downtrodden, wit and grace and an ingrained sense of civility--the very ideals we seek to

instill in our students and nurture in each other--David embodies in his presidential deportment. It is one thing--indeed the easy thing--to lead by edict, quite another to lead by example. And perhaps the most remarkable result of the latter, and nowhere more evident than in this assembly, is that by reason of his moral authority David has elevated--has in fact promoted the desire for--intellectual discourse uninhibited by political factionalism or fear of personal animus. During an era in which ideology and identity politics have splintered college and university faculties throughout the country, it is no small tribute to David's leadership that the Skidmore Faculty is not only intact, but has grown increasingly stronger and stands ready to confront the challenges of a new era.

THE SKIDMORE FACULTY THEREFORE INTRODUCES THE FOLLOWING RESOLUTION:

WHEREAS, Skidmore College has prospered gainfully under the extraordinary leadership of President David Hugh Porter, and today flourishes as never before in its history; and

WHEREAS, by virtue of exemplary teaching and scholarship, personal caring, stalwart defense of academic freedom, and pre-eminence as a passionate and articulate champion of diversity in higher education, President Porter has at once infused a spirit of collegiality into the community and reassured external onlookers

that Skidmore is a haven for mental travelers of various persuasions, teachers and learners alike; and

WHEREAS, today marks the last time the President shall sit with the Skidmore College Faculty in meeting assembled,

BE IT RESOLVED

that the Faculty acknowledges its profound indebtedness to its colleague and friend for his vision, guidance, and vigorous, unstinting dedication to the collective welfare of the College as a whole, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

that the Faculty expresses its fervent wishes for his well-being after the manner of ancient Athenians who, lest their sentiments well up in tears, invoked traditional blessings for a bountiful life when bidding their heroes farewell: "May all your oak trees grow tall, bear acorns at the top, and be filled in the middle with the honey of bees."

Ralph A. Ciancio  
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