

Brad Creed asked me to talk about my 33-year career at Samford and to issue a challenge.

My coming to Samford was a fluke. My Baptist friend suggested I come with her to meet a recruiter for Baptist colleges. I was ABD when he interviewed me, and I was still saying I was a journalism and English major. My undergraduate journalism degree sounded more interesting to me than my stuffy-sounding English discipline.

Though I was planning to take a job at Southwest Missouri State University, when the call came from Samford, I decided to interview. So in the summer of 1973, I came to campus to meet Leslie Wright, Ruric Wheeler and Hugh Bailey, the president, v.p. for academic affairs, and dean of Arts and Sciences.

We met and accepted each other through major misunderstandings. Dressed in my sweet polyester dress with the Peter Pan collar, bearing a glowing letter from the minister of University Presbyterian Church, and turning down coffee, because I'd just had orange juice in the café, I must have seemed perfectly harmless. What they didn't know was that I had come from an integrated, anti-war church active in both the civil rights *and* the anti-Viet Nam war Peace movements. We had women elders and African American elders; one elder, a professor of business at Alabama, was both. Moreover, the women's movement and I had found each other, and there was no going back.

What I didn't know was that not all Baptists were like my friend, Ann, who shared the exhilarating early days of what was truly women's liberation, and who shared my politics. I also did not know that my journalism/English background was so valuable, because Samford had fired their journalism professor in part over a disagreement of the role of the *Samford Crimson*, had been censured by the Society of Professional Journalists, and had moved the journalism curriculum into the English Department, terminating the scholarships of several of the majors. One former student who worked for the *Birmingham Post Herald* managed to insert a negative story about Samford almost daily.

And finally, what I didn't know was that my Shakespeare studies had not prepared me fully for teaching advertising, photojournalism, or law and ethics of journalism. Even mass communication had changed completely from my last encounter with it in undergraduate journalism classes. The learning curve was steep. And it's a credit to the developing academic quality of Samford that I never would have been hired to teach journalism today.

With our fifteen-hour, five-class load, I taught three classes on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and two classes on Tuesday and Thursday. My journalism classes rotated on a two-year basis, and with the fast changes going on in the media world, I was always playing catch-up. Teaching two classes of freshman English and all of the journalism writing courses caused terminal burn-out. It's been a struggle throughout my subsequent career to maintain an interest in student prose.

So that is my version of the “Walking-to-school-through-ten-miles-of-snow” story. My coming to Samford seems like a fluke, but that’s the story of my life. Unlike my students, who are sure they can find “God’s plan for my life,” I’ve only discovered my leadings by looking backwards and discovering where I have been led.

*First some snapshots of a 33-year career; then some things about academics; then a challenge:*

1. On my first day at Samford in 1973, Austin Dobbins, chair of the English Department, showed me around campus. One thing he pointed out was that the Campus could be completely closed off in case of riots. Having come from a campus of civil-rights and anti-war rabble-rousers, after about six weeks of student apathy at Samford I longed for a riot. I still haven’t seen a good one.
2. While cleaning out my file cabinets as I changed offices last week, I did come across my file of underground newspapers composed in response to the censorship at Samford; *and* I found another letter from Dr. Cortis, who promised the editor during the two years I misadvised the *Crimson* not to censor the paper.
3. We dressed up a lot more in the 70’s. Faculty men had to rent dinner jackets and women had to wear long dresses at an opening reception for new faculty. Mrs. Wright, the President’s wife, took attendance and looked us over. I wore a long dress and shoes a size too large borrowed from my sister.

4. Faculty women wore church clothes to class and many women students wore high heels. Martha Brown, now retired from the English Department, told me the story of her wearing the first women's pantsuit seen on campus. Dr. Dobbins quoted a piece of scripture that forbids women from wearing men's clothing. She looked at her ruffled blouse and fitted-at-the-waist jacket, and said, "Now Austin, do you really think this was made for a man?" He responded "That's one way to look at it" and walked away.
5. Dr. Wright liked to call us "family" and we had formal family dinners in the Café at Christmas each year—all the boiled shrimp and squash croquettes we could eat. The good thing about that was the inclusion of the *whole* campus family. The cafeteria workers and the housekeepers had not been contracted out, and we did eat with and talk to the people who routinely served our food and cleaned our offices. The English Department considered Ruby Shepherd, who moved from one building to another with us, a core person on our staff. I haven't kept a plant alive since she was fired by the contractor because they kept changing her hours and she didn't have adequate transportation for every change.
6. The mindset of the past has been called Samford's "plantation mentality" and there was a lot of condescension, patronization, and arbitrariness toward everyone; I imagine it was especially hard on people of color at the very low end of the economic scale. But everyone did have a stake in the campus. All attended the sports events on campus with the idea they were rooting for *their* school and we knew everyone had health and retirement benefits.

7. The year I came as a person so naïve I even paid for my teaching textbooks, we went through our first SACS self-study and I had to justify the journalism curriculum. They all blend together, but we've had several more SACS reviews since then. I remember a marketing one and now we have the one centered on assessment. There may have been another review in there somewhere.
8. We've also had University-wide changes. The English Department spent months on our MCPVV. If you've never heard those letters stated together, talk to your older colleagues.

***On to the academic changes:***

1. Of course the major milestones are the progressive reductions in faculty teaching loads: from 5-5 to 5-4 to 4-4 to 3-3. That has been accompanied by an increase in committee assignments, expectations for publishing, and adaptation to continual curriculum revision, so the work load is not less, but it is more doable.
2. We have gone through two major curriculum changes at Samford. The first, brought on by the Sesquicentennial celebration, resulted in the Cornerstone Curriculum, a tiered set of core requirements that extended through students' junior year. Cornerstone was an alternative for students and tended to draw the most intellectual ones, so it was a joy to teach.
3. I participated in a course called "personal wholeness," which scared parents because of its "new age" sound. It was one of my favorite all time courses. Not only did it have intellectual depth, but it encouraged students to put themselves in the middle of their learning. Also, it pioneered service learning. Students had to experience the

lives of those very different from themselves. The course got flak from faculty on campus, who couldn't see the academic qualities and drew flak from students, who perceived it as too liberal. I enjoyed it, because students read stories by writers such as Faulkner and Hemingway to gain social and psychological insights *and* I got to work with psychologists, sociologists, philosophers and pastors who were part of our team.

4. A hallmark of Cornerstone was team teaching, which stretched faculty, who strove to agree across disciplinary lines, much as it stretches our students when we ask them to work together in groups.
5. Cornerstone proved too expensive to extend to the entire University enrollment, so out of Cornerstone we developed the current Co-Nexus curriculum. The number of requirements were drastically reduced in order to give faculty the current 3-3 load. Faculty were asked to bring even more disciplines together and to learn new material. We now include classics, some theology, world religions, history of ideas, political theory, a smattering of psychology, history, literature, and the history of science in two four-hour freshman courses called "Cultural Perspectives." Freshman composition was expanded to include some word-processing training, speech, and service learning in addition to writing. Students also choose from a growing smorgasbord of classes to complete their general education requirements.
6. I feel my best work at Samford was English 205, the second half of sophomore American literature, which was scrapped by Co-Nexus, but which allowed me to teach the best writers of many ethnic groups. The literature expanded students' horizons intellectually, socially and spiritually. I regret that students don't learn the major poets and

- story-tellers who have sustained me throughout my life. One of my favorite teaching memories is watching a 250-pound white football player gracefully executing a dance of his own creation to replicate the mood of a story by Alice Walker about an African American woman.
7. In addition to changing the curriculum, we have developed new teaching methods. I've mentioned team-teaching. Another is Problem Based Learning, which allowed some faculty to travel to Maastricht University in the Netherlands, and which continues to inform science and liberal arts courses. We attended workshops, developed teaching portfolios, and engaged students in problems which would encourage independent learning and thinking. It reminded me a lot of the feminist pedagogy I had studied at the Women's Theological Center in Boston. PBL increased our pedagogical resources through which we do try to develop life-long learning skills within our students.
  8. Samford does have a commitment to students, and Samford remains a teaching college. Every time I meet with faculty, I am truly amazed and humbled by the quality of teaching that goes on here. Being young, students don't often realize the energy, the skill, the time, and the compassion that supports them; I know of no University where students are more valued.

### ***Faculty governance***

1. I want to say only a few words about faculty governance. I was President of the Faculty Executive Council for two years as we developed the present faculty senate system, and I was chair of the senate for the last two years. We probably would not have had a

senate but for the support of then-provost Dr. William Hull, who had enough faith in faculty to realize we were entitled to a more efficient and stronger system of self-governance than was possible through administration-led whole faculty meetings. Year by year, the faculty have developed a much stronger united voice and have taken on more and more responsibility for making things work at Samford. Senate effectiveness has taken the efforts of many, many faculty members and the interest and trust of the administration. I expect even more beneficial collaboration among faculty and administrators and I hope for more exchange among trustees and faculty in the future.

***Where do we go from here? Diversity-challenge***

1. My real calling at Samford has been toward understanding what diversity means and how to make it happen. When I read a sonnet by Adrienne Rich in which she talks of a good girl praised for her penmanship growing into a woman who wants to change the laws of history, I felt the poem as a physical blow. She named my calling.
2. It has not always been easy being a leftist Quaker feminist on this campus, and while I've often felt like an outsider, I've never felt I didn't belong here. For one thing, I've had to learn to listen to those whose spirituality, theology, and politics are different from mine; I've had to respect them; and I've had to try to understand them. This has kept me as humble as I'm likely to get and from going to extremes in my own thinking and actions. The worst fate I can imagine is living around people who think and feel completely as I do. To see the dangers I need only look at certain celebrities, politicians, preachers, and other powerful people in the public eye who are surrounded only by the "yes" people of their choice.

3. That said, for years my most creative work went into projects off campus, helping found the family violence program in Birmingham, developing Birmingham Friends Meeting, and working with local, regional, national and international Friends groups. The implicit and sometimes explicit messages I received at Samford were that I should stay in my box; my ideas and contributions were scary; they were not good; they were not welcome. I had two parallel experiences: The off-campus one was “Great idea and I can show you how to develop it further.” The on-campus one was “We don’t quite trust you; you’re loud; you’re female; be quiet.” I had the odd experience for years of being encouraged to grow in my off-campus life and being stunted in my campus life.
4. I felt I was something of a wimp. I never asked for a raise and took whatever classes were given to me, so I was at times amused and befuddled when my first Department chair never came into my office without bringing a buddy along. When I gave a Phi Kappa Phi lecture on “Feminist Theology and the Color Purple,” he brought marshmallows to campus. If they burned me on central campus, he didn’t want to waste the fire. I’ve had good moments and bad moments being perceived as a strident female.
5. We still have a way to go in our curriculum, in student affairs, in the administration and elsewhere before we can say women have arrived, but I think we’re facing women’s concerns honestly. We will keep progressing, thanks largely to the strong voices of both men and women on campus. I’m not so sure about other minority groups.
6. I did have the chance to develop a course, which keeps changing, on Minority Literature and also, I’ve taught courses on women’s

- literature. I am grateful for the Christian Women's Leadership program, and wish we had more focus on minority studies across campus. And we certainly need more energy going to recruitment of minority students and faculty; we can't grow in any way by keeping ourselves away from those unlike *most* of us.
7. The University has developed an exciting relationship with persons in Perry County working with self-help groups and others to better the lives of those in the Black Belt and to increase awareness in our students of the needs of those living in poverty. Administrative and faculty skill and commitment have gone into the making of that program. My dean has been a prime mover. The program serves the people of Perry County and helps prepare students for lives of service to others.
  8. My concern is that we are good at helping relationships, but it's much harder for all of us to develop *peer* relationships with those who we see as or fear as significantly different from us. I heard a missionary quoted once who counseled never going into a mission field without being willing to be changed yourself. I wonder how much we on this campus are willing to give up our powerful "helping" relationships to be changed ourselves and how we can develop this willingness in our students.
  9. The theorist bell hooks (*sic*) points out in her memoir, *Ain't I a Woman*, that when she began going to integrated schools, they were not truly integrated. She was asked to assimilate and she lost her history, her literature, and big chunks of her culture. The whites expected her to be just like them. I tend to believe we do the same thing here.

10. Samford has given me two great sabbaticals; one was a term as Friend in Residence at a Quaker college in Birmingham, England. The other was a year at the Women's Theological Center in Boston, where 26 women from 10 different countries tried to form community. We failed because of cultural, class and race differences. I learned that giving up one's own power to truly listen, understand and assimilate to others is very, very difficult, but it's worth the struggle and has to be done to enable us to use the word "*diversity*" with authenticity. I wonder about our willingness to learn from our non-white students on campus and how often we've truly heard their experiences.
11. I would like to see us work with Miles College students and faculty, who can challenge us as peers. In much of the work we do most people are not in a position to challenge us, but merely to be grateful. Based on my experience in Boston, I expect it would be difficult, painful at times, unsafe emotionally and spiritually and, at times, scary for faculty and students, and I don't think we would or should be appreciated always for reaching out. I do think it's a moral imperative that we become learners as well as teachers and be willing to change and grow.
12. Finally, and this is something after much meditation and prayer, I *have* to say: We must find a way to make Samford a welcoming place for our gay and lesbian students. We must stop turning the Good News of the Gospel into Bad News for so many students. I know of three gay males, among our top students, who have left Samford in the past three years. One, an honors student, got a full scholarship to Rice; another honors student is now at the University of Kentucky,

and another is a pre-med student at Alabama. I know of two of these students because they were and continue to be among my daughter's closest friends. As a Bulgarian Rom or Gypsy, she was an outsider at Samford herself among her peers, though she had an amazing amount of faculty and administrative support. These students, intelligent, loving individuals, befriended her. Whatever our personal beliefs are, how do we turn off the judgmental mindset Jesus forbids, and welcome all to Samford's table? I once heard a Quaker elder say that according to the Gospels, all Jesus expects of us in relation to other people is that we love them, forgive them, and feed them. I hope we can begin by removing the hurtful language regarding homosexuality in the student handbook; form some ways of educating our students and ourselves; and let Samford become a place where none of God's children is excluded and where they are not merely tolerated but welcomed.

13. In looking back over my 33 years here, I've grown to love this place. I realize my calling is to learn acceptance of those unlike me and maybe in a small way to reach out to "the other." I'm still here, and I hope to keep growing in God's grace with my students and with my colleagues.

Thank you.

Nancy Whitt