In her investiture speech on October 16, 2009, President Graves spelled out her vision for Girard College.

Twenty months into her tenure as president, Graves reflects on the progress that has been made in these areas.

Graves: In my investiture speech, I listed six goals that would be my focus. I am happy to report we are making progress toward each of those. I have taken this opportunity to provide some detail below for each area.

1. Become the premier institution for effective urban education.

We live in a time where access to a quality education is the civil rights issue of our nation. The statistics are staggering. Here in Philadelphia, which almost 80 percent of our students call home, the situation is particularly troubling. Just under half of Philadelphia's public high school graduates ever go to college. Overall, Philadelphia students lag behind other students in the nation in college attendance: 37 percent of Philadelphia-area graduates immediately enrolled in college, compared with 69 percent nationally. An additional 12 percent of city graduates eventually attend college.

Here at Girard, we are part of the solution. As we move swiftly to set Girard's financial house in order, we are also moving forward with some exciting programmatic enhancements that will allow our students to compete in an increasingly global environment. A few of the educational initiatives we are launching include:

• Step Up To STEM: This program builds Science, Technology, Engineering and Math ("STEM") skills beginning in the elementary grades. Step Up To STEM will increase students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills, boost college preparedness in science, technology, engineering, and math-related fields and prepare students to meet the demands of the high-tech, highly-skilled workforce that they will enter.

• Physics First: Physics First calls for a resequencing of high school courses so that students study physics before chemistry and biology. Physics First is recognized as best practice at leading private schools; it is strongly endorsed by the American Association of Physics Teachers; and it is central to advancing STEM education.

• Summer Reach Camp: As we press forward, we must provide opportunities for students who are at risk for academic dismissal. This summer remediation and activities camp will boost literacy, math and
2. Raise the profile of Stephen Girard in this city and this nation.

This is in process. Two concrete examples of efforts we have undertaken include commissioning a short film about Stephen Girard that is directed by Philadelphia-area filmmaker Sam Katz and will premier on Founder’s Day in May. Also, as we launch the new girardcollege.edu, we will have a section – accessible on the front page – dedicated to his legacy. Stay tuned for other ideas that we have for highlighting the incredible legacy Girard created with the founding of this school.

3. Explore some of Girard College’s past best practices, update them for a 21st-century education and implement them into our current program.

Many alumni have asked if we will reinstate the mechanical arts program. While the program will not look the way it did in the 1890s or 1990s, there are elements of our core program that teach 21st-century skills that are comparable to mechanical arts of an earlier era. Lower School students are learning robotics that teaches mechanical engineering skills. Older students are learning desktop and digital publishing, which is equivalent to the printing press of last century. By moving to Physics First in the ninth grade, students will have a hands-on science experience that exposes them to some of the skills needed in today’s workplace.

In our residential program, we have implemented some past practices as well. All students in grades 1-11 must participate in a structured after-school activity. Rather than “hang out” in the dorm after school, students now choose from a large variety of interest or activity clubs. These clubs are part of our Fit Campus programs and E², the Extended Educational Experience, described in the last edition of “Girard Today.” All RAs (residential assistants) supervise these activities, and some are offered in partnership with other organizations such as Mural Arts, The Philadelphia Foundation, Greener Partners and Philly Girls in Motion.

Additionally, evening study has returned to the high school building and library for students who need tutoring or a structured study environment.

Throughout the year, I am making it a priority to visit with local alumni and those who live farther away. I look forward to meeting more of you and hearing how Girard prepared you for a successful life.

4. Engage in an intense financial and facilities capital strategic plan.

The Development Office has spearheaded business-model planning, identified expert partners for facilities planning, collated a school-wide Needs List, and prepared a preliminary planning document for fundraising purposes. These initial steps led to a grant from one of the region’s leading foundations to help us with this process. In partnership with the Board of Directors of City Trusts and Board of Managers, we hope to release this plan in the fall of 2011.

Virtually all large, anchor institutions are faced with the need to make significant changes in this economic environment. We’re exploring how to alter Girard’s business model in response to economic realities. The first change is one I’ve already mentioned: re-establishing a Development Office and reaching out to the community for additional support. As we see other key changes that are necessary, we’ll share them with you and invite your input and your support.

We are making efforts to live within our means. This involves admitting fewer students, reducing staff, and reconfiguring some of our programs and use of our facilities.

5. Build a culture of philanthropy within our alumni base and design a robust fundraising program that will provide millions of dollars on an annual basis to supplement our endowment.

When I started at Girard, there was not a single person in the Development Office. We now have a small staff in place that is in line with what Girard has had over the last decade. A further addition we have made is to hire a veteran institutional-giving professional. When I arrived at Girard, there was little history of fundraising from foundations, corporations and government sources and certainly no evidence of a systematic approach. There were few records, and none of the standard tools and materials required for effective grant-writing were in place. New staff member Bruce Bekker has conducted prospect research, developed a full range of planning tools, and created all of the materials necessary for an effective institutional giving campaign. By mid-February, Bruce had submitted over $400,000 in funding requests.

We are pursuing several different revenue streams and looking at all angles. The Gala, which took place in March, has generated over $250,000 in gross revenue for Girard, which represents an all-time high. We are
exploring more opportunities with the Pennsylvania Tax Credit program. And we are thinking about how to make better use of our incredible campus facilities. We will leave no stone unturned as we look to create opportunities for investment in Girard.

People often ask what I would do if I received a large gift of unrestricted funds to the school. What would I address first? What is on my wish list? The reality is there is no shortage of wishes that I have, as do our students, faculty, and alumni. However, I firmly believe that the strength of any institution is a strong faculty. My first priority would be to make sure our faculty is compensated in a way that is competitive with other area private and charter schools.

Second, I would engage in a renovation that would allow us to educate and house Girard College students in a 21st-century manner.

I am often asked what parents and alumni can do to get involved. Our alumni have and always will play an integral role in the life of the College. From working in Founder’s Hall to coaching our badminton team, our alumni help each and every day. We are also looking for volunteers to teach an after-school club; creative projects and special hobbies are welcomed!

We started a Family Association this year. We know the task of educating our children is one that takes all of us (staff, parents, relatives, administration and other champions) to work together in a cooperative partnership. We need families who understand and share the vision of Girard College today, to communicate this throughout our community. We would like to offer workshops and/or trainings on topics such as “Parenting Skills,” “Raising a Fit Family” and “Dealing With Personal Finances.” We also have financial needs and we want your suggestions, participation and support!

Positive and productive communication with parents is a high priority for all of us at Girard. One concrete example of improved communication with parents is the reinstatement of re-enrollment contracts.

Sending home contracts in the spring is standard practice in independent schools and one that benefits all parties in three ways:

- Planning: Knowing in advance which students are not returning in the fall allows us to plan for the correct number of students and may allow us to offer a student’s place to another child.
- Updating Contact Information: Updating family’s records is absolutely essential to maintain the supportive school-family relationship from which we all benefit.
- Communication: For those students who are not living up to our academic or behavioral expectations, the mailing of re-enrollment contracts is an opportunity for productive communication. The families of these particular students will receive a letter restating the areas that need improvement and making it clear that the child’s place at Girard may be in jeopardy. In 2010, these letters had an overwhelmingly positive effect and allowed most students to improve their status and to successfully return to Girard in the fall.

We are holding a new event this spring called Girard Cares Day. Designed along the lines of the Philly Spring Clean-Up day, it will occur on Saturday, May 14 from 9:00 a.m. to noon; we are inviting students, their families, staff and friends to campus to help us “give back” to Girard by sprucing it up. There will be planned clean-up activities and improvement projects around our 43 acres of campus space, including garden pruning, planting seeds, painting an activity space, trash pick-up, building bat houses (to reduce the mosquito population) and washing the school vans. More information will be available in April.

6. Build a comprehensive alumni support program. This “Office of Alumni Support” will be a professionally staffed office whose sole purpose is to provide academic, financial, career and life skills guidance to our graduates in the first six years of living outside of these walls.

As I think about great moments of 2010, the reunion of the class of 1960 is one of the brightest. Their history-making contribution has enabled Girard to launch our Young Alumni Support program. At my investiture, I talked about the importance of Girard providing thoughtful, professional, and consistent support to our young graduates. I strongly believe that the first five to seven years after leaving The HUM is a crucial time in the lives of our young alumni.

I am so pleased that Karen Campbell joined Girard in December as our Director of Young Alumni Engagement. Karen is already making great connections with and for our alumni. Also, she is teaching a class called “The Next Chapter” to our seniors. As you hopefully read in the winter issue of “Girard Today,” Karen comes to us with a
wealth of experience in the area of college access.

Karen will be focusing on 304 graduates from the class of 2003 to the present, offering them support and developing a tightly knit community. In January, all of them were invited to an event in Girard's library to reconnect with their friends and learn about the Young Alumni Support Program and the services Girard can provide. 32 students attended. Given the time frame, we were quite pleased with the turnout. Many students were eager to share their stories about life at Girard as well as their plans for the future. According to a brief survey, the services/resources they are most interested in receiving are: 1.) electronic job listings; 2.) college financing workshops; and 3.) professional networking opportunities. They are most interested in 1.) staying connected to Girard by receiving e-mail updates about the school; 2.) mentoring current students; and 3.) volunteering for special projects or events.

As I look back on my time here and then to what lies ahead, the picture I see includes leadership and clear goals, partnering for achievement, and shared communication. I’m pleased to say that my commitment to leadership has been shared by many others. I’m delighted to see that, campus-wide, we are pulling together to make changes that matter and progress toward our goals. I’m happy to share here the excitement of what I’m seeing, and I’d like to invite each of you to bring your best ideas into the mix as we move forward.

Autumn Adkins Graves

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Watch for more information on Facebook “Friends of Girard College (FOGC)” and on our Web site: www.girardcollege.edu

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED