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Memorial Service for Greg Dees

Remembrance by President Richard H. Brodhead

February 11, 2014

Goodson Chapel

A university does not exist in the abstract: it needs people to activate its potential and breathe life into its mission. Today, as we honor the life of our colleague and friend Greg Dees, we remember a person who lived out the purpose of Duke University as a bold and creative thinker and scholar, a teacher and mentor who changed lives of his students, and a wise colleague who led and encouraged others in his field.

We live in a time that prizes entrepreneurship and the creative spark it brings to our society. We also live in a time where the challenges of the world are global and complex, requiring our best minds from far-flung disciplines. What if we were fortunate enough to have someone imagine that entrepreneurship might have its most valuable form if its energy could be harnessed as a force for good in the world? Greg Dees not only delineated the academic field of social entrepreneurship—he turned the idea into a powerful, and renewable, intellectual resource. Greg helped us understand that entrepreneurial energy switches people on: that the ability to locate a problem and develop a solution provides a boost to all other forms of intellectual endeavor, and that nurturing that ability can be, and should be, a part of what universities do to train the next generation of the world's leaders. At the same time, Greg knew that putting knowledge in service to society is a university's higher calling—and he taught us what an inspiring and animating force it could be at Duke.

Greg's gift to all of us was in his connections: connecting people, concepts, entire worlds. We celebrate his brilliance in connecting these two strands of thought to create a new field of inquiry. We also celebrate the way he re-imagined the university as an entrepreneurial incubator, throwing off sparks of ideas. In connecting his spheres of influence in teaching, research, and practice, he helped Duke to dream bigger dreams of the service we could render to the world. Duke University is profoundly grateful for his life and work.