“On the Making of a Great Fletcher Degree Vintage”

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Faculty Address

Thank you Dean Bosworth. Dear colleagues, incoming and returning students, alumni and alumnae, and distinguished guests, what an auspicious day indeed. I am delighted and honored to stand before you and to join my esteemed colleagues in welcoming you and welcoming you back to campus. Obviously, this day marks the beginning of another promising academic year filled with hope, new dreams and ambitions, marked by a great deal of anticipation and, let’s be frank, for many of you some significant level of anxiety as well. Here are a few things that you may have overheard in the hallways or read on the faces in the last couple of days: “Do I belong? My classmates are really well traveled and pretty smart. Was this the right choice for me? I was fine until today, when classes actually started. Will the Fletcher soccer team be competitive this year? Can the Ambassachords fill the ranks of graduated vocalists with the same type of talent as prior years? Can we top the fun of Fiesta Latina night from last year?” And yes: “to get ahead, I had planned and was all set to complete my thesis this past Summer, but I don’t know why, nothing got done on that front.”

Well, what can I tell you here that could help and that you don’t already know? I have been thinking about this since being asked to speak on behalf of the faculty at
this year’s convocation. I have to admit that, past the excitement and ego-boosting stage of this invitation, I started to worry about this and became anxious myself. Luckily, as I was asking a few questions about expectations and, most likely, did sound very worried, I was quickly reminded that at convocation everyone is really just looking forward to a glass of wine or beer at the reception and connecting or reconnecting with others in the community. I am not sure this is really true, but it was reassuring enough to me. It also reminded me of something I find myself repeating to our students every year with great conviction, something that could also be very à propos to many of you self-doubters and anxious souls in the audience: “You made the right choice by coming to Fletcher and are fortunate. Your Fletcher degree is like a good bottle of [French] wine, it only gets better with age. Unlike many competing institutions that will grant you instant gratification at graduation but whose importance will also fade away over time, a degree from the Fletcher School will serve you a lifetime. The Fletcher degree gives you the confidence, the recognition and credibility, and most likely the inspiration and impetus to reinvent yourself successfully in the course of your professional life, be it from the public to the private sector and vice-versa, from the world of NGOs or international agencies to the world of international trade and commerce, or from law, business to advocacy and social causes, even politics. The paths and journeys are diverse, intertwined and fulfilling, with the core values of your Fletcher degree serving as True North.”
So, Fletcher first and second year students, doctoral candidates, let me now ask you a most vital question: “If your Fletcher degree is like a good bottle of wine, what kind of wine do you want to be and how do you go about its production?” And that my friends is what my dear colleagues and distinguished economics professors at Fletcher call Comparative Advantage in a pure David Ricardo’s tradition, and what business and military colleagues call Competitive Advantage. So, for the next few minutes, let me impose on you and tell you about Wine Making Processes as they relate to the production of your Fletcher degree and the choices you are facing, since, after all, by birthplace I am supposed to enjoy such a comparative advantage in this area. Please, bear with me.

In terms of global fun facts, did you know that 1% of the active population lives from wine; that world production is enough to supply 8 bottles a year to every inhabitant of our planet; and that some 10 million hectares (1% of all cultivated land in the world) are planted with vines? Such intriguing information comes from my experience in developing in-depth case studies about and in collaboration with some large industry players, a pedagogical undertaking that is precious for classroom experience and a healthy complement to research activities. For illustrative purpose and given the celebratory spirit of this occasion, what follows draws more heavily on the one such case: the making of sparkling wine in general, Cava and Champagne in particular.
First, it is clear that The Fletcher estate is rich in tradition and innovation. We are committed to always improve our best known labels and to selectively introduce new promising ones (such as our new LLM and MIB degrees this year). So for you, the choice of label and competitive spaces is very much defined by now. Or is it? You still need to commit to a domain and define clear boundaries to start your activity. For instance, are you gravitating toward the public or private sector? Are you aiming at international security studies, Public International Law, Development Economics, or International Negotiation and Conflict Resolution? Do you want to become a China or Latin America expert? Some of you are unsure yet, others will surprise themselves in daring to venture into new domains, and many will successfully engage in transplanting and grafting across fields for a novel or more robust production. Here your academic advisor and select faculty can be of sound advice.

So, you have settled in your domain under the Fletcher estate. What matters next in the process is the Soil: Everything begins with the soil. For instance, clay and chalk are the most suitable soils for growing vines for sparkling wines. In a way, you are the soil. You all come with your own experience and talent, the raw material. Then, there is climate. For instance, the climate in the Penedès region of Catalonia in Spain has gentle temperatures, intense sunshine and moderate rainfall, helping the grape to mature properly for the production of cava. When it comes to academic climate, there is no better location than here in Boston, possibly the
world’s capital for knowledge creation. Then, experience the micro-climates of the Fletcher School and its local and international partners. You can count on a constant dose of intellectual stimulation inside and outside the classroom. In fact your main challenge may be one of coping with over-stimulation: so many competing choices, events, and remarkable people around you.

The Grapes. Out of more than 600 kinds of grapes, only a few grape varieties are suited to produce fine wine. The traditional grape varieties of the Penedès region, those used to develop the cava wines, are the Macabeo, Xarel·lo and Parellada varieties. First, Macabeo gives the wine a sweet, delicate, fruity aroma. Then the Xarel·lo contributes to the required strength and acidity. Lastly, the Parellada is recognized by its delicate, subtle tones and a distinctive, floral aroma. A cava depends on the blending of these three grapes for its balance and individuality. The Fletcher School offers close to 200 courses, all with their distinctive attributes. Picking courses and sequences of courses is a remarkable challenge. This week all the discussions in the hallway are about this. Again, second year students and academic advisors are in a position to help. Ultimately, does the mix and blend work given stated or unstated ambitions? Similar to an Appellation d’ Origine Controlée system in the wine industry, Fletcher offers some certificate programs (e.g., Certificate in International Development, and Certificate of Diplomatic Studies) that can facilitate the selection process and offer some guaranty of quality and consistency. Beyond a few guidelines and field study requirements, the
relevance of course selection rests largely on the vision and genius of students: many of you will be highly competitive and even win medals for your inspired blend. Still, some others will only satisfy personal, eclectic interests and lack appeal against better positioned competitors from other well known higher-education Châteaux. Engaging and consulting faculty early on, can be an important step in preventing such pitfalls.

**The Cultivation.** Cultivation is a constant, year-long process including ground ventilation, preparing the soil, pruning and treatment to ensure good, healthy vines. Remember: a healthy mind in a healthy body; have an exercise routine.

**The Harvest.** For cava, the harvest takes place during the months of September and October, according to the different degrees of maturity for each variety and each of the microclimates in a region. Companies oversee the selection of the grapes as well as their transportation to the presses so that grapes are not damaged during the trip, and do not start to ferment prematurely. This is often a dilemma for doctoral students: should they wait to be completely done with their research work before accepting a job or can they pursue professional offers early on at the risk to derail progress very significantly?

**The Pressing.** Today modern pressing technologies, including pneumatic and electrical machinery, have made their way. Grape juice can be extracted at
maximum speed in order to avoid oxidation and contact with the remains of the fruit. When it comes to “pressing” trust Faculty, just look at some of some courses’ reading lists or term papers requirements; then, multiply this by four courses a semester.

**The Fermentation.** After being filtered, the wines are put into stainless steel vats with a refrigeration system which maintains a steady low temperature to keep the wine from fermenting too quickly and erratically, thus losing the delicate and subtle bouquet due to heat. Back to the Thesis: long periods of silence can be troublesome for thesis advisors and students alike: immersion in a topic is one thing, no progress is something else. Gauge carefully the fermentation of your topic idea and research questions.

**The Cuvée.** During the whole process, the wines are tasted repeatedly by experts. This is how the proportions of each variety are decided upon, to add to the base wine for the finally chosen cava. Indeed, the uniformity and the characteristics of the brand depend upon the creation of the blend. Once blended, specially cultivated yeasts are added to feed on the sugar contained in the grapes, turning into alcohol and carbon dioxide. The choice of yeasts determines the individuality of a cava. Fletcher is special because it has a human scale, it allows for some degree of customization. Your professors will know you. In some instances, they will become mentors; they will always have your interests in mind.
Words of caution. In the process, at times, vapors and fumes could get to you or your friends. You will know it when you hear: ”by the way, are you sure we have to write a Master Thesis, I was told that we can petition the Committee on Student Academic Programs to waive it?” Don’t be tempted, don’t compromise. You should not cut your wine with water or sweeten it artificially. Play by the rules, respect the spirit and culture of the place.

The Bottling. Next comes bottling and temporary sealing. The bottles are put in underground cellars, in semi-darkness, at a constant temperature. The wine will ferment for a second time inside the bottle, forming its characteristic bubbles. Now, you can start to feel the energy and effervescence of your investment and hard labor, things are coming together and it is an exciting feeling; Faculty will keep the momentum going.

The Remuage. The bottles are moved daily while they rest, gradually tipping them towards the floor so that the yeast sediment begins to settle in the neck of the bottle (today, this is increasingly done with robots not by hand). Here too, trust Faculty. Case studies, simulations, surprise quiz and other experiential learning activities will keep you on your guard and keep your mind open to competing explanations and theories.
The Disgorgement. The next step involves disgorgement. By rapidly freezing the bottleneck, the underlying gas pressure forces out an ice plug when the cork is removed, leaving the rest of the wine completely clean and clear. Trust Faculty: misconceptions, outdated information, erroneous notions will be uncovered and expunged. That promises to be fun.

The Dosage. The lost liquid is replaced with the so-called "passing liquor," which is a part of the same vintage, plus a blend of wines of the year and, if appropriate, a measured quantity of sugar. Each producer keeps the formula for this blend a secret. Here is your chance to develop a distinct competitive advantage with your skills on the basis of uniqueness, scarcity, and inimitability.

The Labeling, Stocking, Promotion, and Distribution. At last, the final cork is put in, and the bottle goes to be labeled and dispatched. Here, don’t just rely on Faculty, by now you have become the expert, you own the product and are in the best position to represent your interests.

This was about the process. Now, for those of you still looking for a thesis topic, I hope that a byproduct of this short address may well be the consideration of a new range of research topics such as: “World trade negotiations: U.S. vs. E.U., the sobering case of the wine industry” or “Of wine and ancient wars: from Greece to Iran”, or “The globalization
of eco and biodynamic viticulture,” or possibly, think about it: after music diplomacy, sport diplomacy, ping-pong diplomacy, kitchen diplomacy: what about “wine diplomacy?”

This coming academic year, or next couple of years, is not just about obtaining your degree or setting and achieving your goals. It is also very much about the process I touched upon, the journey that gets you there. Let me remind you of the last words of John Maynard Keynes, the famous English Economist: “My only regret in life is that I did not drink more Champagne.” Don’t have any regret, welcome the challenge, rise to the occasion, enjoy the experience fully, help strengthen the Fletcher community, work hard and celebrate the milestones. The Fletcher Faculty stands by you and is hopeful that the Fletcher 2009 and 2010 Cuvées will be superb.

Thank you very much.