

DEAN'S LETTER

Dear Alumni and Friends of Oxford:

Freshmen and sophomores are different from juniors and seniors. Those of us who have taught at all levels in the undergraduate curriculum know this from experience. Freshmen and sophomores are most interested in “the big questions. They are good intellectual risk takers. They are open to learning in ways that upperclassmen are less interested in and more inclined to engage faculty and their classmates in challenging ways.

Developmental psychologists explain this as an expected result of the transition from adolescence to adulthood, beginning when students leave home for college. The curriculum for the first two years supports exploration



and the development of broad understandings and fundamental intellectual skills. At the end of the sophomore year students take adult-like responsibility for their futures when they declare a major, and from that point onward they are more narrowly focused as they prepare for a specific career.

All of Oxford's students are in this developmental transition phase—the point at which a liberal education has its greatest impact and its most transformative effect. This is why Oxford is about great teaching; it is key to delivering the essence of a liberal arts education.

Oxford supports effective teaching in numerous ways. Most of the improvements to Oxford's buildings and grounds over the past several years have been made to enhance the teaching and learning environment. We are very excited about the latest in that line: the new Oxford science building, which is optimally designed for the collaborative learning style of freshmen and sophomores.

Please join me in celebrating our new science building and all the ways that Oxford offers an extraordinary experience in teaching and learning. And thank you for your support of Oxford College.



LEARNING TO THRIVE

Most of us experience recurring themes in our lives. For **Kenneth “Ken” J. Lander 87OX 89C**, this involved thinking beyond the boundaries of his life and taking action, even when it meant starting over. That sort of pluck emboldened him to leave a successful law career, move his family to Costa Rica, and take up coffee farming. It provided the tenacity he needed to overcome financial loss. These traits took root at Oxford College. “Oxford taught me to think on my own two feet and gave me an ability to evaluate where I am in life,” he said.

ENDURING INFLUENCES

Reflecting on the person he was when he arrived at Oxford, Lander is candid. “I was a dreamer with some raw talent for reading and writing. At Oxford, I began to have a passion to learn.” Professors William Shapiro and Michael McQuaide were influential in his academic development. “Bill Shapiro took a personal interest in me, a country boy from Monroe, Georgia. The seminal thing he taught me was the ability to read and think critically. That allowed me to become a lawyer.” Remembering a pivotal conversation with Professor McQuaide, Lander remarked, “He taught me that to be successful, you have to work with people. You have to listen to them and understand them. That was a huge lesson in my life.”

One of his most meaningful Oxford friendships had an ordinary beginning. Needing to fulfill a science requirement and intrigued by the class trip to Big Bend National Park, Lander enrolled in Professor Stephen Henderson's Desert Biology class. Lander didn't know it at the time, but

Finding a Place to Thrive

KEN LANDER'S
COFFEE ODYSSEY

Professor Henderson would remain a guiding, stable force in his life. An only child, Lander was seven when his father died. “I can count on one hand the men who have shaped my life. Steve Henderson, Michael McQuaide, and Bill Shapiro are among them.” The Lander and Henderson families have also become friends. Lander's stepdaughter, **Lindsey Mason Reynolds 06OX 07C**, attended Oxford due to Professor Henderson's encouragement.

CHANGING COURSE AND COUNTRIES

At the height of Lander's fourteen-year law career, he left Georgia for Costa Rica. Having added three adopted children to their large family, Lander and his first wife wanted to slow down and let the children adjust. Lander bought a coffee farm, planning to supplement the income with his real estate investments. In 2008, he lost everything but the farm. He soon realized coffee farmers “didn't make enough to cover grocery bills.” Professor McQuaide's mentoring served him well as he collaborated with others to survive.

What started as survival initiated a new paradigm in coffee commerce. Partnering with coffee farmer Alejandro Garcia and entrepreneur-investor Michael Jones, Lander founded Thrive Farmers Coffee. Thrive supplies farmer-direct coffee to retailers, wholesalers, and consumers. Their revenue-sharing model allows coffee farmers to participate in and benefit from the market value of their coffee as it flows through the supply chain. “Thrive is in the right place at the right time,” Lander said. His statement echoes another “right place, right time” scenario—the Oxford years, when he acquired the knowledge that helped guide his life.—*Nancy Moreland*