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As Head of School at the  
**Academy of Notre Dame de  
Namur, Dr. Laura Hotchkiss**  
inspires young female students  
who are finding their voice  
and building their confidence.

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# FOLLOWING HER LEAD

by **MATT COSENTINO**

***During her three-decade career as an educator,***

Dr. Laura Hotchkiss has always tried to inspire young women to become the best versions of themselves, to discover their passions and pursue them with vigor, and to reach for lofty goals, even when it seems scary to do so. The circumstances that led her to the Academy of Notre Dame de Namur show that she doesn't just preach that lesson, but she lives it, as well.

Hotchkiss could easily have remained at her alma mater, Marlborough School, in her home state of California, where she had served in various teaching and administrative roles for nearly 30 years. When the opportunity arose to accept her first head of school position, she bravely leapt at it—even though it was 2,700 miles away on the opposite coast.

"It was certainly a risky endeavor," she admits. "It's hard because our whole family lives on the West Coast, and the long distance does make it challenging. At the same time, it's been a real adventure, and I see it as an opportunity to learn a new place, to meet people, to understand a different culture, and to impact the young women on this campus by sharing with them and with the faculty what I've learned in my career."

"I'm also learning from them about what makes Notre Dame special and unique," Hotchkiss continues. "The experiences that each of these young girls has here are so important to their own growth and development; one day they too might move across the country and do something that's a little bit risky, knowing that they have the confidence to do it from their journey at Notre Dame."

A self-described "STEM girl," Hotchkiss was proficient in math and science growing up, and loved school in general. She would often help her classmates with their studies

As Head of School at the **Academy of Notre Dame de Namur**, **Dr. Laura Hotchkiss** inspires young female students who are finding their voice and building their confidence.



and was even hired on many occasions to tutor the younger children of her mother's friends.

Hotchkiss originally went to college for engineering but pivoted and ended up receiving both her Bachelor of Science in math and her Master of Education from UCLA. She then landed at Marlborough as a math teacher and later served as math department chair, middle school director, and upper school director.

Believing she could do even more, Hotchkiss went back to UCLA in 2016 to earn her Doctor of Education degree. She wrote her dissertation about educational leadership for women.

"I was very excited to think about how I might lead a school," she says. "I had a wonderful woman who was mentoring me, Priscilla Sands, who is actually from this area. We met on the West Coast where she was serving as the head of school at Marlborough. She really pushed me to look for a head of school job; she thought this would be a great area and a fantastic school for me, and she was right."

Established in 1856, Notre Dame is an all-girls, Catholic college-preparatory academy for middle and upper school students located on 39 acres in Villanova. Hotchkiss, who is finishing her third year there, appreciates the focus on developing the whole person and allowing students to pursue their passions.

"Academics in schools like these are top-notch, and this is certainly a place where we have invested in the academic curriculum and the faculty," she says. "Right alongside that, I think it's so important that our girls are able to participate actively in all aspects of school: athletics, the arts, service, while knowing how to manage their mental and physical health."

She is particularly proud of ND Cares, an initiative she created and implemented at the Academy in 2022. ND Cares focuses on nurturing the mental health and well-being of every Notre Dame student.

With Notre Dame's Catholic identity, the school is nurturing the spiritual growth of each student, as well. Hotchkiss adds, "We're helping these young women discover what inspires and excites them, find their purpose, and use their voice to make a difference, to help others, and be actively engaged, both inside the gates and beyond the gates here at Notre Dame." ■

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