

## **President's 2015 Convocation Address**

### **An Intentional Path Forward**

Welcome to our annual fall convocation and another electrifying year at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Well, maybe "electrifying" is too strong a word, but I do think "exhilarating and stimulating" fits the pulse of our institution. It is always refreshing and energizing to return to the campus in August as we wind down from our summer vacations and welcome our new and returning students, faculty and staff.

I hope you looked around campus to notice how beautiful the grounds are, a tribute to our grounds crew and facilities staff. I understand the facilities folks completed 10 fairly major projects this past summer. In addition to these projects, if you have driven through campus you will see under construction our new state of the art \$29.0 million-dollar Clinical Sciences building and a new \$30.0 million-dollar Residential Dining Hall. Also, in partnership with the City of Mankato, a \$40.0 million-dollar Civic Center renovation and new Auditorium is underway that will provide a home through a downtown partnership for our men's and women's hockey programs.

There has been lots of activity on campus this summer. The Vikings just departed campus a few days ago after celebrating our 50th Training Camp anniversary, but not before signing another 3-year contract. You may notice new students are starting to appear at our doorstep eager to begin their college careers, along with new faculty members joining the faculty ranks for the first time. This is a vibrant campus, even in the summer.

In the audience today, we once again have some very special guests.

I am pleased to introduce them at this time.

First, a warm welcome to President Emerita Margaret Preska.

I would like to introduce our new Equal Opportunity and Title IX Director,

Ms. Cyrenthia Jordan, who comes to us from the Minneapolis Public Schools.

We are all looking forward to Cyrenthia joining our team in a couple of weeks.

And, lest I forget, I extend a very special thank you to Dr. Mary Dowd who willingly stepped in as the interim Affirmative Action Director and performed an exceptional job in this role.

Mary is looking forward to beginning her sabbatical in a couple of weeks.

Thank you, Mary, for your dedication and service.

Earlier this week, I looked back at the various themes of our previous convocations over the past decade and was amazed at the continuity and focus we have had as an institution. There has been a continuous goal over the years to enhance our reputation and quality, increase academic excellence and student support, strive for improvements in enrollment management and student success, implement our campus master plan, create meaningful partnerships, promote diversity and always operate within the culture of shared governance; because we know our form of shared governance is the "secret sauce"

that makes this university work so well! We also know that pride in our university does not simply occur because the president says we need to be proud.

Although personally I am very proud of this university and the work we all do together here. As our institution continues to grow in popularity and prestige, we fully understand it is related to the fine teaching, research, and service we perform here at MSU. We astutely realize it is our external market image and institutional peer rankings, reviews by accreditation bodies, individual and departmental awards, national recognitions, student successes after graduation, as well as achievement of academic and research milestones and market indicators that account for our excellent reputation as a doctoral granting university on the rise. And we readily acknowledge areas where our institution needs to work even harder at building the best flagship state university in Minnesota. Yes, we have come a long way in the last 10 years and even more so over the last 150 years as we approach our sesquicentennial celebration in 2017.

Last week, more than 100 faculty, staff, students and administrators met for our annual retreat held at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter.

I wish to thank everyone who dedicated a day to participate in the retreat.

It is the input and ideas that stem from these gatherings that help set the stage for the academic year ahead.

We were honored to have Michael Vekich, Chair of the Board of Trustees for MnSCU present at this important event.

Ms. Ellen Steck, President of the MSU Foundation, and Representative Clark Johnson also joined us.

It was an amazing event as we "jump started" the day with a rousing presentation by Jonathan Zierdt, President and CEO of Greater Mankato Growth.

I would like to cite some of the key awards and accolades shared by Jonathan regarding the Greater Mankato region that helped frame the day. You might be surprised to learn about some of those rankings, as I was:

- Forbes ranked Mankato as #3 in the nation in 2014 as Best Small Places for Business and Careers
- Mankato is the most affordable college town in Minnesota and ranked #36 nationally
- Mankato ranks #5 as the best small city in America
- Mankato ranks #19 in the nation for top college towns with under 250,000 residents
- Mankato ranks 3rd in the nation for affordable healthcare
- Mankato ranks #5 as the safest community in Minnesota
- Mankato is ranked #2 as the best place in Minnesota for young families
- Minnesota State is the second largest employer in Mankato.

Jonathan also talked about the outdoor sports and recreation opportunities, 5 colleges and universities, an exceptional health care system with Mayo Clinic and the Mankato Clinic, several rivers and a beautiful clean environment that stand out as inseparable factors leading to our region's success. Our university and the colleges help to create an enviable environment to attract new business and industry to the region. More than 90% of students find jobs upon graduation and 25% of our graduates find jobs in Mankato.

In addition to Jonathan's presentation, we were afforded the special privilege of hearing from Board Chair Michael Vekich. Mike talked about the history of MnSCU and the big challenges facing us today and pointed out our biggest hurdle involves finding the resources to continue supporting the excellent work of our colleges and universities. Perhaps one of the most telling aspects of his speech was his recognition of the role our educators play in motivating and influencing our students. Mike's own personal experiences growing up poor on the Iron Range and later becoming a successful business leader and state problem-solver were influenced by a single faculty mentor who encouraged Mike to fulfill his dreams.

Chair Vekich fielded questions regarding graduate education and research, CtF and financial models.

He thanked faculty for the impact they have on students and pointed out that we should not underestimate the importance of their guidance.

All of you, personally make a difference in the lives of students.

During the retreat, Dr. Barry Ries, AVP for research and graduate Dean noted that (20%) of our degrees awarded are graduate degrees.

Dr. Ries cited a source noting that "during the next decade, master's degrees are projected to grow far faster than any other degree, accounting for a third of all degrees awarded!" This is a statistic that does not receive much national attention.

Just as an aside, you cannot help noticing that what is getting attention in the media today is the need to expand our national workforce, which tends to be narrowly defined and linked to our vocational technical and community college programs.

While our nation's workforce is clearly dependent on graduates from our 2-year colleges, our national leaders also need to recognize the importance of growing our workforce in the upper echelons of education. This includes supplying the nation's professional workforce needed in all sectors of our economy and that means providing adequate levels of funding support for our undergraduate and professional degree areas. We need a workforce that is prepared with a strong liberal education and equipped with analytical and communication skills, as well as a global perspective in all areas of their educational preparation.

These will be our future leaders.

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

This is an opportune time of the year to share some of our accomplishments and highlights from the past year.

While I regret that I cannot list them all, I want to point out that in today's Free Press we have a full-page ad acknowledging many of our faculty and staff achievements (please feel free to pick up a copy as you leave the ballrooms today).

- We are celebrating later today the publication of our Academic Master Plan. The Academic Master Plan is the culmination of the University's first-ever integrated academic planning effort, empowering the University to prepare for and shape the future - to develop an intentional path forward.
- Last year, overall applications for admission to the University for graduate and undergraduate students reached an all-time new high with 15,876 applications. This produced an overall enrollment of 15,376 students, representing the 10th largest enrollment in our 147-year history. Of note, our Students of Color enrollment has grown to 13.1% of the student population.
- Through the outstanding work of Global Education, our University hosted 13 international delegations from 8 nations, sent 322 students abroad, and according to the annual Open Doors Report, we are now ranked 31st in the nation among master's institutions serving a record number of international students.
- Athletics finished fifth nationally in the NACDA Directors' Cup, second in the NSIC all-sport trophy standings, and earned six conference regular season and two postseason championships. We won the WCHA men's hockey Final Five playoff championship for the second year in a row and the Football team advanced to the NCAA Division II national championship game for first time in school history. In total, four different teams achieved No. 1 national rankings: football, women's soccer, men's hockey, and men's track and field.
- The Maverick Machine marching band under Michael Thursby will likely set an all-time school record this fall. Previously, under Dr. Clayton Tiede the marching band had a record 110 members. Already for this fall, the membership is at 117 students and continuing to grow.
- Library Services fully implemented Cornerstone, showcasing the intellectual output of university faculty, staff, and students by preserving their works digitally. The Collection features over 424 electronic theses and dissertations.
- The Council on Undergraduate Research recognized our University among 57 institutions as a national leader in undergraduate research.
- The College of Business and the Taylor Corporation Innovation Center received the 2014 Greater Mankato Growth Brian Fazio Business Education Partnership Award.
- Within Theatre, Minnesota State Mankato advanced more students to the semifinal and final rounds of the Irene Ryan Acting Scholarship competition than any other school in the region.
- University Advancement raised over \$9 million dollars in gifts last year and nearly 30% of our faculty and staff gave to the Campus Drive.
- In November 2014, the College of Education received a Gift commitment of \$1 million dollars from an anonymous donor.

- Finally, the Presidential Award for Diversity recognizing excellence in the recruitment of people of diversity, academic mentoring of diverse students, advocacy of underserved populations, and community leadership in areas of diversity will be awarded and presented for the first time at the Fall Diversity Dinner.

Unlike previous years, you may be surprised to learn that I am offering up no "new" initiatives and goals at this time with the exception of announcing we are now formally in the planning stages for the Sesquicentennial celebration. Paul Hustoles and Kent Clark are co-chairing the initial planning committee, but you will be hearing more about that in the fall.

You will not be surprised by some of the continuing goals.

As a reminder, here are the goals we are working on:

- Immerse our institution in embracing and implementing CtF to fit with our campus direction and culture.
- Further define and complete the budget reduction process that we have been discussing for the past year for FY 2015 through FY 2017.
- Implement our new Extended Education and Continuing Education initiatives.
- Prepare for the HLC accreditation visit scheduled for March 28-29, 2016.
- Move forward with the Academic Master Plan for 2015-18.
- Step up our efforts in all areas of enrollment management.
- Update our public relations and marketing plan.
- Continue our development of global education initiatives and international affairs.

As you can see, we have plenty of challenges and we need to take care of current business and relevant goals before we proceed with any new initiatives.

I mentioned earlier in my address that Chair Vekich considered our biggest challenge in Minnesota and MnSCU to be finding a solution to funding higher education in the years ahead. It seems evident that student tuition will have to climb some if we are to maintain the quality of our programs. Personally, I think we will need to address the challenge in a variety of ways. We need to continue diversifying our enrollment, improve graduation rates and push for radical changes in the existing allocation model.

So many institutions are recognizing the demographic trends as reported in a recent American Council on Education journal.

The population of 18-24-year-olds is projected to drop by 4 percent and high school graduates will decline by 2 percent overall." Institutions are recruiting middle class populations from China and India, as well as other parts of the world. "We will see increased numbers of non-traditional students, older students and veterans returning to the classroom."

More than a decade ago we initiated enrollment management planning for a more diversified student body. Today, we welcome more than 1,000 international students from 90 countries to our campus.

We continue to recruit students from all over the state and bordering states. In regard to transfer student enrollments we have seen generally flat enrollments from year to year.

Therefore, we have taken steps to increase our partnerships with community colleges, which should help to improve our transfer student enrollment.

We need to do even more to address the overall anticipated student decline that most universities are facing across the country.

I believe there are rich opportunities to balance our student enrollment through extended education. Through our extended education and continuing education offerings it is possible to address the higher education needs of an underserved and non-traditional population. We need to embrace the goals of access and opportunity without lowering our academic standards.

In addition, I have emphasized year after year the importance of continuing to improve our retention and graduation rates.

I know this is starting to sound like a broken record, but if we were more successful in these areas alone the enrollment impact would be significant.

In fact, if we increased our freshman year retention by 10% followed by a 10% increase at the end of the sophomore year, we would be able to maintain a steady enrollment and plan for a balanced budget. Enrollment management is everyone's responsibility at our university. Minnesota State is an exemplary university and will attract great students. I am confident we will be successful; however, we all need to work as a team to keep those students on our campus until graduation.

In conclusion, I observe everyone working so hard to serve our students every day as we continue to do exemplary work here at Minnesota State Mankato.

I praise you for making our university stand out as the flagship state university, the other great university in Minnesota.

Thank you, all of you, for caring about our students and helping to prepare them for the journey ahead.

Every member of our campus community has a role to play in helping our students to be successful. Thank you for making a difference in the lives of our students.

And thank you for all your contributions, no matter your role, in making Minnesota State the star it has become. We proudly forge ahead as Mavericks approaching our sesquicentennial celebration realizing that we are known for our Big Ideas and Real World Thinking and for going beyond anyone's expectations. Thank you.