

President's 2016 Convocation Address

Rising to the Challenges

Introduction

Provost Wells, thank you for that very warm welcome and for introducing our university leadership team and union leaders. Some of you know that I spent this past weekend at the wedding of my wife's daughter. Mary and I got so much joy from watching her daughter, and new son-in-law, make that exciting, life-changing commitment. And it got me thinking, that for me, and for many of us in this room — that commitment is similar to what happens when we sign on to work for a university. It's a relationship. And, it's life-changing! Instead of a marriage license, we sign a contract, which gives us a voice in creating the future of the institution. At our university, we call that "shared governance." And it leads to consensus-building in our household, which leads to a happy and smooth existence — most of the time! I share that analogy with you this morning, because I want you to know I truly appreciate those of you for whom this is more than a job. So many of you have made sacrifices for your work here, in the interest of students, and the future of education, and the greater good. I respect that and I appreciate it. It's because of you, and the relationship you've built with this institution, that I have so much good news to share this morning as we head into another action-packed academic year.

Given all of our concerns about the state of affairs in higher education across the country, we are starting the year on a positive note with a balanced budget and no retrenchment plans, except for a single program involving one staff person. We are very pleased to showcase our new strategic diversity and inclusion plan that received complimentary remarks from the Chancellor. It feels good to start the year with such positive energy and many great things to look forward to. For instance, the new \$28.9 million dollar Clinical Sciences Building that is under construction with a planned opening in January 2017 for classes will be serving our Dental Hygiene, Communication Disorders, and Nursing programs, which, in turn, will serve thousands of clients through

practicum labs throughout the year. Unfortunately, we did not receive Phase II funding during this past legislative session to back-fill and renovate the space left behind by these programs. However, securing this funding will be a high priority for me this year. The new \$31.4 million dollar University Dining Center will also open at the same time and will serve meals to 3,000 students on meal plans, plus a large number of other students who elect to pay for individual meals. The new space employs “food-forward” design principles: customers can watch as their meal is prepared and finished to-order. Cindy Janney is moving our institution ahead of our peers with this state-of-the-art food center design that includes the latest sustainability advances, such as LED lighting, heat recovery technology, composting of organic waste, and much more.

Over the past 15 years Minnesota State Mankato has fared well in regard to receiving new bricks and mortar funding, as well as Repair and Replacement dollars totaling more than \$250 million dollars. In the future, the funding of new buildings, however, will be an increasingly difficult priority to achieve given the System’s recent stringent Board policies on new construction. We would argue, of course, that as the leading university with the highest enrollment of full-time students among the System universities, and the 2nd highest among all public universities in Minnesota, our additional space requests should be given higher priority than those institutions consistently losing enrollment. This means, of course, that we need to have a robust student body. Vice President David Jones shared with me recently that we have broken an all-time record in regard to the number of new student applications for this Fall; with close to 17,500 applications, representing a 10.7% increase over last year. Of course, not all of those students will enroll here, but we still need to matriculate a much higher percentage of them in the future. These facts represent a few positive indicators that our University is becoming more frequently “the university of choice” for Minnesota students. We must be successful in continuing to strengthen our enrollment in the years ahead. That translates to higher enrollment, higher retention and higher graduation rates.

We have much to be thankful for and I ask each of you to take time to enjoy our beautiful green, clean and colorful surroundings throughout campus. We have lots of

people to thank for this and realize it is just one of the many attributes that attracts students and others to our campus. Combine this with our outstanding student services, superb faculty and staff, our high quality of education, and it is not hard to understand why we excel as one of the top universities in the Midwest.

Accomplishments

It is always a favorite part of my opening address to recognize some of the accomplishments from the past academic year. Also, it is the most challenging part of my speech because I never have enough time to share all of the wonderful stories and accomplishments. Once again, we have a full-page ad in this morning's Mankato Free Press acknowledging many of our faculty and staff achievements (please pick up a copy as you leave the ballroom today).

To begin with the accomplishments:

- The University completed its 10-year Comprehensive Evaluation seeking institutional reaffirmation of accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission. The Institutional Actions Council of the Higher Learning Commission at its meeting in June acted to continue the accreditation of the University. Congratulations team...Provost Wells, Dean Roca, Assistant Vice President Lynn Akey, Dr. Andi Lassiter and so many others.
- Last year, we celebrated the publication of our Academic Master Plan, the culmination of the University's first-ever comprehensive integrated academic planning effort, empowering the University to shape its future and develop an intentional path forward. Thank you Provost Wells for leading this massive and first-ever initiative.
- Through the outstanding work of Global Education, and Dean Stephen Stoyhoff, the number of international students attending our University increased 7.5% to a record 1,124 students coming from 94 countries, improving the University's ranking from 31st to 29th among our national peer institutions. In addition, our University hosted 15 international delegations, sent delegations to 13 countries, and established cooperation agreements with 10 international partners. Further,

during the past year, Global Education generated more than \$700,000 dollars in external grants sponsored by the governments of Brazil and Mexico.

- The College of Allied Health and Nursing advanced the SCRUBS Camp in a partnership with many other agencies. SCRUBS Camp provides high school students hands-on learning sessions in health sciences careers such as dentistry, nursing, emergency medicine, and clinical laboratory science.
- Within the College of Arts and Humanities, four Department of Art faculty members earned Minnesota State Arts Board Artist Initiative grants, a highly competitive program that provides grants designed to nurture artistic creativity.
- The College of Social and Behavioral Sciences achieved more than \$900,000 dollars in grants and contracts. In addition to this achievement, the Organizational Effectiveness Research Group received a Minnesota Job Skills Partnership grant to create a customized business training initiative with Condux International Inc.
- The “Shark Tank” competition sponsored by the System office awarded grant dollars to two professors from the Department of Mechanical and Civil Engineering for their project, “Online Lessons to Help Engineering Students Transition.”
- The University’s Aviation Professional Flight Program was accredited for the first time, joining the Biochemistry Program, the School Psychology Doctoral Program, and the Urban and Regional Studies Program as newly accredited programs.
- Our Office of Institutional Diversity leads the System in the recruitment efforts of underrepresented students. Last year, Institutional Diversity exceeded goals and expectations. Students and staff made more than 4,000 phone calls and reached 2,000 prospective students. Overall, the acceptance of diverse student applications has increased 2.9% and enrollment confirmations for Fall 2016 for diverse students is up more than 5.8%.
- Athletics had 13 teams score points in NCAA postseason competition and completed the 2015-2016 season ranking 5th in the final Learfield Sports Directors’ Cup standings. We have finished in the top five nationally seven times

in the last ten years. In addition, Minnesota State Mankato claimed eight Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference championships last year. Plus, Minnesota State Mankato claimed its second consecutive MacNaughton Cup as men's hockey WCHA regular-season co-champions.

- The University foundation raised over \$12.5 million dollars this past year and continues operating in a “silent phase” in anticipation of announcing a new comprehensive campaign in the next couple of years.
- Our University was selected to participate in a major American Association of State Colleges and Universities initiative, the “Re-Imagining the First Year of College Project,” a sweeping initiative aimed at enhancing student success.
- Building on past successes, the Department of Theatre and Dance in January placed four students in the semifinal round of the Irene Ryan Acting Scholarship competition at the Region Five Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival. And, in March, the University's Dance Program received the North-Central Regional Conference of the American College Dance Association's highest honor by being selected for a Kennedy Center performance.

This is merely a brief overview of the hundreds of accomplishments from this past year!

Institutional Evaluation

Changing topics now, it is important that we measure our performances in a variety of ways to substantiate our successes and failures. I recently met with Chancellor Steven Rosenstone for both my annual review and institutional review, which includes our university goals and the corresponding metrics on which every university is evaluated and compared. I want to share with you those strengths and weaknesses.

Clear areas of strength for our university include:

- The number of Certificates and Degrees we award. Last year, we conferred over 3,400 awards surpassing the Institution's performance target of 3,218 awards.
- Our faculty and staff continue to become more diverse. We reached a nine-year high with 10.3% of our employees identifying as Employees of Color.

- In a similar fashion, our students continue to become more diverse with 13.6% of our students identifying as a Student of Color.

We also saw improvements this past year in several important institutional measures that still require additional attention:

- Our one-year student persistence and completion rate increased from 86.6% to 88.1%, with the institution's one-year retention rate increasing from 73.3% to 74.3%.
- The one-year persistence and completion rate for our Students of Color increased from 79.1% to 84.2%, cutting the one-year achievement gap observed between Students of Color and White students in half.
- Following difficult budget reductions, our Composite Financial Index increased from 1.21 to 1.31, and remains above the Minnesota State System Universities' average of 1.01.
- This past year, we doubled the number of individuals enrolled in customized training and continuing education from 864 to 1,764.

Weaknesses that must be addressed as we look to this coming year include:

- Our six-year completion rate for undergraduate students. 52.3% of our Fall 2009 entering undergraduate students completed within six-years. We have a target of increasing our six-year student completion rate to 60% within the next two years.
- Reducing the completion rate gap between Students of Color and White students. The opportunity gap observed between our Students of Color and White students has been persistent. We must identify ways to support timely degree completion for our students of color. A six-year completion rate of 40.2% for our Students of Color is simply not acceptable.
- Demonstrating high student achievement on licensure exams. The System Office only looks at licensure from 3 programs and fails to capture the full profile of all our student successes from other programs. Student performance and achievement on licensure exams provides a critical reflection on our University, and we must exhibit the high caliber academic programs we provide.

Retreat

Last week, we engaged in intense discussions at our annual Fall retreat held at Gustavus Adolphus College attended by more than 100 campus leaders. The group included administrators, bargaining unit leaders, student government and other faculty and staff. We have heard from many attendees that this retreat was the best ever. I give Provost Wells much credit for organizing the event along with other Cabinet members. The major thrust of the retreat involved discussing our multiple challenges for this coming academic year, such as implementing our Academic Master Plan, reviewing our Higher Learning Commission Report and recommendations, and outlining Charting the Future goals; I am happy to report that there are no “new Charting the Future goals;” just continued implementation work!

- We began the day with a presentation by Vice President Kent Stanley on the topic of Our Next Comprehensive Campaign, which resonated with our theme for the day, “Rising to the Challenges.”
- Dean Henry Morris and Cyrenthia Jordan facilitated a healthy discussion on how we must continue to build a campus commitment to move from civility to inclusion and understanding the difference between equality and equity.
- We had a variety of stimulating speakers, topics, and close to 20 round-table discussions, such as how do we maximize our capacity to ensure all students receive high quality advising throughout the entire first year and from their first year to graduation.
- Two themes emerged from many of the round table discussions: “We need to tell our story better and more often;” and there is a strong desire to change the way we do advising.
- Obviously, many other ideas surfaced as we set the stage for a very important planning and implementation year ahead. Many of the challenges are coming from “*Minnesota State*,” the new brand selected by the MNSCU Board of Trustees to promote the System statewide.

- At any rate, the retreat was highly successful this year in providing input on issues that help set the stage for important initiatives.

Message – Sesquicentennial Year

I am very happy to extend a special thank you to Dr. Paul Hustoles for stepping in to provide the leadership in our Advancement Division while continuing to successfully multi-task his several roles in directing theatrical plays, working on Charting the Future transfer pathways, Sesquicentennial planning, and many others. Some of you may be wondering about the planning for our 150th birthday. Paul recently shared with me:

- that more than 75 volunteers have been appointed to committees and subcommittees so far.
- A Sesquicentennial logo has been created and is already in use.
- Several projects are underway, including a history book by Professor Emeriti Bill Lass, along with many other ideas for events, publications and activities.
- We have begun compiling a master calendar relative to the timing of the Sesquicentennial and all events and activities.
- Paul tells me it is remarkable how many ideas have come forth and how much enthusiasm there is around campus for planning this historical event.

As we approach our Sesquicentennial year, it is fitting that I spend a few brief moments reminiscing about the evolution of our University starting with a timeline of higher education, which is a fascinating study by itself of which must have been written.

- Harvard University was founded in 1636 followed by the College of William and Mary in 1693, Yale in 1701, and Princeton in 1746 and several other institutions during this time period. However, there were only a handful of colleges and universities at that time.
- We boast today of having more than 4,700 degree-granting institutions in the United States.
- Our Nation's leaders had the insight more than 150 years ago to pass legislation that would lead to the development of colleges and universities. The Morrill Acts of 1862, 1890 and 1994 created the public universities that we have today

accounting for the normal schools, 76 land-grant universities and historically black and Native American institutions. Unlike several other states, Minnesota was only granted one land-grant institution, the University of Minnesota established in 1851. These universities have become our nation's public research institutions and are ranked among the very best in the world.

A little closer to home, the Normal School in Mankato opened its doors on October 7, 1868, however, it was legislation passed on March 1, 1866 that gave the permission to open, but only if money was raised locally.

- Local bonds were authorized on February 16, 1867. According to our records,
- the first Normal School west of the Mississippi was not in Mankato, but instead in Winona, Minnesota in 1867,
- followed by Mankato and then St. Cloud, Moorhead, and others.
- The State of Minnesota funded the schools and placed the curricular emphasis on what is equivalent to today's high school curriculum.
- These normal schools quickly emerged into teacher colleges and focused on the needs of rural Minnesota.
- And, of course, continued to evolve into comprehensive universities.
- The student enrollment reports back in the early days were predicated on attendance over the year, which usually amounted to 4 months of college. Mankato registered 136 students in 1868-1869.
- Over the next 35 years enrollment patterns at the Mankato School remained stable with 300-400 students annually with an occasional blip above this level.
- However, by the time our university reached its Centennial year, 1968, enrollment was reported to reach 16,770 students.
- Since the mid-60s enrollment has dipped and risen several times until this year our head count was equivalent to the 60s. In total, we have approximately 116,000 living alums scattered around the country.

A brief overview of the history of our University provides a frame of reference that is important as we enter with our next 150 years. Today, we must look at our institution in

the context of demographic changes, economic challenges, workforce needs, global issues, diversity, and a multitude of other forces impacting our world.

Goals

Looking at the bigger picture, this year we will engage in multiple planning initiatives including implementing:

- Charting the Future Goals
- Transfer Pathways
- A new Institutional Strategic Diversity and Inclusion plan
- the Academic Master Plan
- the Sesquicentennial Plan.

This does not include our System challenges with Financial Sustainability and legislative action. We cannot operate in a vacuum and isolate ourselves going forward. If we don't consider our sister institution's well-being, our own well-being will be threatened. We must step-up to the plate more than ever before to provide strong leadership for our MNSCU System, that recently changed the System brand to, "Minnesota State." We must demonstrate Enterprise Leadership for all. This is not a new concept for our University. We have been partnering with our 2 and 4-year institutions since the System was formed. The leadership comes from everyone. Our combined campus leadership is needed today more than any time in the history of MNSCU.

In addition to these goals' rests one of the most important goals as we plan for the future. I am talking about our next University Strategic Plan. This will be our 3rd University Strategic Plan in 15 years. This future University Strategic Plan needs to be centered on the mounting challenges facing our university and higher education. I anticipate that we will rely heavily on our well-developed university sub meets, and in particular the Planning Sub-Meet, to flush out the details of the plan this next year and to recommend task forces to further define the priorities for our university. Here is what I envision as key broad-based goals for our next strategic plan:

1. Enhancing Student Success and Completion.
2. Elevating Faculty Distinction and Academic Achievement.
3. Expanding Regional and Global Impact.
4. Leading Equity and Inclusive Excellence.
5. Advancing a Culture of Evidence and Innovative Organizational Designs; and
6. Leveraging the Power of Partnerships and Collaboration.

These represent six timely goals, intentionally broad in nature and consistent with the many challenges of higher education, such as demographic changes, competition, financial challenges, workforce needs, serious global issues, diversity and inclusiveness, research needs, as well as a multitude of other forces impacting the U.S., and Minnesota. They are intentionally designed as general goals that relate to the trends, issues and challenges impacting higher education today. I look forward this year to many campus discussions centered around these new strategic goals as we grapple with further defining our new university strategic plan through action steps and measurable outcomes for our future. Minnesota State Mankato must be strong and go forward as a flagship Minnesota public university. We are who we are because of you.

Summary

Just as we need to be willing to learn from history—and we'll have plenty of opportunities to do that as we plan for our sesquicentennial—we also need to be able to anticipate the challenges just over the horizon. We must be attentive to pressing constituent needs, changing markets, global changes, and technologies that will influence how we deliver a sound education for all students. We must continue to do what we have done for our almost 150-year history: provide an education that transforms lives and changes the world.

There is an intrinsic value in higher education, and each of us here at this University contributes to that. Each of us plays a role in the impact we have on our students and our world. I look forward to working with all of you as we embark on this unprecedented period in our evolution.

Thank you all for coming today. I invite you to come back in 30 minutes to hear Provost Wells' Address focused on intentionally propelling the University forward while rising to bold challenges and opportunities.