

## **Inauguration of Edward S. Inch**

**September 9, 2022**

### **A Time for Inspired Action**

Good afternoon, everyone. I cannot help but be awed and humbled by the gravity of this moment. From the bottom of my heart, thank you all for being here today to celebrate this extraordinary university—its history, present, and future.

And, as with every new academic year, the return of our students and all their hopes energizes our beautiful campus as they pursue their academic dreams. This moment is a special time in a very special place.

I am grateful for the opportunity to lead Minnesota State University, Mankato, and be a part of its future. And before I continue, I want to pause and recognize a few of the people who helped make this day possible:

- Chancellor Malhotra, thank you for the opportunity; I am genuinely grateful.
- Trustees and members of the Search Committee, thank you for believing in me and trusting me to care for and lead Minnesota State Mankato.
- Distinguished delegates, your presence here means a great deal to me. More importantly, it means a great deal to our university. Thank you for your continued friendship and partnership.
- To our speakers today, thank you for the kind words. I am humbled by your support of me and my leadership of this great university.
- To the Inauguration Committee and all those who participated in this incredible week of celebrations, thank you for creating a time that reflected who we are as a university and the values we share as a community. On Tuesday, the Staff and Faculty BBQ and the Pizza Party with Students honored our campus community, all the people who make up our university. The Day of Service on Wednesday focused on our regional community, our deep ties, and our commitments we have with one another. And the Scholar Walk yesterday recognized the importance of scholarship to our university. It highlighted some

of the excellent research and creative activity conducted by our faculty and graduate students.

- To all my personal and professional friends, you have my deepest gratitude for all you did to help me find my path here.
- To those who supported, guided, and mentored me, thank you for your never wavering encouragement and advice.
- To my family, I have no words. You have supported me at each step along my journey. You cannot know how grateful I am.
- And, Belen, thank you for your unwavering belief in me.

The university I have the honor to lead is a uniquely special place, built on a foundation of strong leadership and dedicated faculty and staff who have worked tirelessly to serve our students, our region, the state of Minnesota, and far beyond.

We may be a regional university, but our reach is global.

Twelve presidents preceded me; each brought talents and gifts that contributed to building and strengthening our university. And I am honored that my immediate predecessor, President Richard Davenport, is here today. Thank you for your leadership and work that helped position our university for an exciting and impactful future.

During the past year, I met with many groups of students, faculty, and staff on campus, as well as alumni and community stakeholders. I asked for everyone's Big Ideas and aspirations to help inform the development of a new strategic plan. I read a lot about our 154-year history and the many stories that contributed to the deep, complex, and inspiring culture we share.

What became apparent is that from our beginning, this university and its constituents embrace what it means to be a Maverick. Although we did not adopt the Maverick as our mascot until 1977 (it was a close call between being the Mavericks or the Fighting Muskies), since our very beginning, we have been an institution of independent thinkers with big ideas who are unwilling to settle. We are determined to build the world we dream of. We have optimism about our future,

we look beyond what is and toward what could be, and together we work to make our future happen. It's what makes us Maverick and it is what makes me proud to be a Maverick.

On this campus, we don't have investitures of presidents often. Our continuity and longevity are a testament to our commitment to one another to drive forward and build our future. But investitures are important because they represent our commitment to honor our history, culture, traditions, and people and to use our strengths and talents to move our university forward to meeting our goals and aspirations.

Our university was founded as the Mankato Normal School in 1868, and we began with a class of 27. At the time, Mankato's population was fewer than 3,500 people and in very meaningful ways our university and the Greater Mankato Region have grown, developed, and shaped one another throughout our histories.

In 1870 our first permanent building was constructed down the hill from where we are now. In 1872 Julia Sears became president—the first known female president of a public, coeducational institution of higher education in the United States.

Thirteen presidents and five institution names later (Mankato Normal School, Mankato State Teachers College, Mankato State College, Mankato State University, Minnesota State University, Mankato), we have grown to become a remarkable institution with more than 120K living alumni.

Throughout our history, we exemplified what it means to be a Steward of Place. We and our region are linked in so many ways that our many relationships nurture and strengthen one another. Our strong bonds and partnerships with greater Mankato and beyond help make south central Minnesota a destination for talent, education, and business opportunities.

Our tight bonds with our region make this an exceptional place to live, work, and learn. Our developing strategic plan titled "Destination 2030" focuses on the extraordinary characteristics

of our region to draw talent, learners, entrepreneurs, and opportunity here; that we become a destination and place of choice.

And, as a recognition, these connections resonate at many levels including the reception that follows this ceremony. My thanks to Amanda Frie in my office, and the university catering team Lee Hengescht, Jamie Waterbury, Carissa Huxford, and Chef John for sourcing the food from our Greater Mankato Region.

Business leaders talk with me about how well we prepare students and that they look to us to help develop their workforce. Alumni tell me how proud they are of their degrees and how well their education here prepared them to adapt, adjust, and thrive in their communities and professions. Conversations with our international students point to the important difference we make in their world. I am very proud to be here and continue the work.

For several years now, we have talked about this as a place of “Big ideas. Real world thinking,” and I thought I would take a few minutes to reflect on what this means as we move forward to write our next chapter.

Ours is a campus grounded in Big Ideas. Big Ideas are the inspirations that come from many places, including our research, collaborations, partnerships, and passion for making the world what we hope. Across our university—in classrooms, labs, in the field, on the courts, galleries, and stages—there are countless examples of how Mavericks imagine new and creative ways to interact with and change the world.

Just a few of many examples:

- Rebecca Bates, faculty chair of the integrated engineering department, was inducted as a fellow of the American Society for Engineering Education because of her work with the award-winning, project-based engineering programs Iron Range Engineering and Twin Cities Engineering.

- Dr. Jeffrey Buchanan in the Department of Psychology is researching the rehabilitation of persons with dementia.
- Dr. Gwen Westerman, a Professor of English and the poet Laureate for the State of Minnesota, works passionately to inspire young writers and thinkers to explore their world in new ways.

The Scholar Walk on Thursday showcased so many more examples of scholarship with demonstrations in: Food and nutrition science, Earth Systems Lab, Health Care, Audiology, Astronomy Lab, Social Work Public Policy, Wind Turbine investigations, and Jet Simulation Lab.

These, and many, many others, represent big ideas that animate our campus, inspire inquiry, inform our curriculum, and add to the world's knowledge and understanding.

Real World Thinking looks at how Big Ideas can be applied to help shape our world. We work to equip our students to think about their world, imagine ways of acting and focus their education on solving problems and seizing opportunities. And, there are many ways our students act from being inventors, to business leaders, to advocates, to civic leaders and everything in between.

We have many, many excellent examples:

- Our many campus centers support an array of communities and needs. Some examples include: our LGBTQIA+ center, which is the second oldest in the country. Our Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship takes the spark of an idea and works with students to find ways to create new products, services, and start-ups. The Kearney International Center supports the university's goals of internationalization and bringing communities and cultures together. The Chesley Center on Aging provides education and applied research in southern Minnesota and works with community partners in the region's aging network.
- We host Swim with the Mavs, Skate with the Mavs, Maverick Rec and Read, and sponsor medical and dental clinics to support our community and region.

- Professor Thad Shunkwiler, through his role as the Director of the Center for Rural Behavioral Health, is focused on finding solutions for the growing problem of shortages in behavioral health professionals.
- Dr. Lin Chase, Director of the Computer Science Program, started the first project-based computer science program in the nation in response to the need of our students and industry partners.
- Doctoral intern, Deb Klinnert from Educational Leadership, using her skills and expertise to design and serve as our first Student Wellness Navigator.
- And, alumnus Josh Tavel. Before coming here, I lived in California; a place where traffic congestion is common and heavy. As a measure to improve air quality and reduce jams, California allowed ultra-low emission cars to drive in the high occupancy lanes. So, I bought a Chevy Volt. It shaved a half hour off my commute each way each day. It wasn't until I moved here did I find out it was an alum, Josh Tavel, who used his skills and education to help lead auto manufacturing into a more sustainable future.

There are so many more examples including those highlighted during our Day of Service earlier in the week at My Space, the United Way, and the Blue Earth County Historical Society. It's clear, though, that our university is committed to and works to make ideas come to fruition and have a real-world impact.

This concept of big ideas and real-world thinking logically culminates into what I think of as Inspired Action. Our university has and will continue to create the conditions that allow students and faculty to take their ideas and plans from the drawing board to fully realized programs, services, advocacy, products, and businesses. Think of our alumnus Michael Jordan who took inspired action to found the sportswear brand UNRL in the basement of his mother's house and grew it into a successful company that supplies uniforms and jerseys for college and professional teams.

Or consider alum Glen Taylor, who took inspired action to become a civic leader, politician, and philanthropist. Look at alum Tim Walz, who took inspired action to serve as the Governor of Minnesota. Inspired Action occurs when we have worked to create the conditions that allow for taking big steps toward solving problems or taking advantage of opportunities. Inspired action comes from a place of resolve to improve our world. It is what makes us a high-impact university.

The world has changed vastly since Mankato Normal School opened its doors in 1868 and our students face new and different pressures than previous generations. They will be asked to grapple with extreme climate events, address social injustice, infuse political discourse with reasoned dialog and debate, and find approaches to lesson violence and threats of war. A lot will be required of them.

Our core mission to equip students the tools they need to fulfill their passion, to give them the opportunity for upward social mobility, to seek new solutions, and to change lives, has not changed in 154 years. This is why this University will continue to grow and thrive for decades to come.

Skilled, talented, and passionate people graduate from our programs, and their successes speak to the quality of Minnesota State University, Mankato. Their inspired actions create new ways of understanding our world, develop new industries, strengthen our families and communities, and enhance our state and region. They create new art, new partnerships, new synergies that drive all of us forward. And we will be known through the good works of our students.

This is possible as long as our university commits to taking inspired action with our curriculum, research, advocacy, and focus on meeting the needs of a rapidly changing world. And we commit to being the educational partner for all learners who come to us along their life and career arcs.

When I accepted the position of President I made a promise, and I affirm that promise today, to do all I can to lead this University with a focus on our students' success, partnering with our community, and cultivating a culture based on innovation, inclusivity, and inspiration. Our students will continue to graduate into a very complex world rife with challenges that will test

them. They will also have opportunities we can't even imagine yet. And Minnesota State University, Mankato will be ready to provide the springboard and support for them to accomplish their dreams. I am excited for what the future holds, and I am honored to say Go Mavs.