

2006 CONVOCATION:

ACCESS, EXCELLENCE, LEADERSHIP

September 12, 2006

Thank you for joining us today. Without wanting to get side-tracked too much, I want to start with a quick update: Last year at this time, I spoke about a pile of dirt on the north edge of campus... it is now the Wyoming Technology Business Center – our business incubator. We'll cut the ribbon later this month, and it's already full of clients. The ongoing piles of dirt on campus are the soon to be completed Classroom and Anthropology buildings. The brand-new piles of dirt on the eastern edge of campus are the Hotel/Convention Center and the new Athletics practice facility. The upcoming piles of dirt will be the Library expansion and the Information Technology Building. The hoped for pile of dirt is the new College of Business remodel and addition, and the aimed for pile of dirt is the new Fine Arts building. And most of you walked through Simpson Plaza on your way here—it warms the cockles of any aging rock-climber's heart to have a little piece of Vedauwoo right here on campus! I invite you all to join us for the ribbon cutting this Friday at 11:30.

Now back to business. Here we are once again, celebrating the accomplishments of our faculty and staff who work every day to support the educational pursuits of our students. Today, we honor the fine faculty who have been promoted and who have been tenured, and no matter where you are in academe, you know the importance of these mileposts. We have lots of really big events here at UW... they focus on the achievements of our students in and outside of the classroom; they focus on players on the field, on the money we raise from generous donors, and on how many hotdogs a returning sophomore can eat out on Prexy's Pasture. Today, we focus on the academic enterprise—the heart of the University of Wyoming.

I'm going to speak today about the future of our university: about access, about excellence, and about leadership. The faculty we recognize today and their colleagues all over campus are the cornerstones of my vision for UW, and they, along with a world class staff, are the reasons why we will be successful.

A short while ago, I developed a vision document for discussion with the Board of Trustees. It was based on what I would like UW to look like in 2025. A university is a complicated organization, and it's hard to capture all the important facets in one sitting. Here are just a few snapshots:

By 2025, UW will be the foundation upon which Wyoming will have built the finest system of public education in the nation, kindergarten through graduate school. The endowed faculty we are just now beginning to hire will result in a state school system populated by

the best-educated teachers in the country. Our commitment to education will be widely recognized, and Wyoming will have become a virtual laboratory for how to "do" public education right!

Our baccalaureate education will be widely recognized for the outstanding foundation it provides in core subjects: writing, quantitative reasoning, oral communication, and a keen understanding of science, arts, and society.

UW's School of Energy Resources will weave together faculty from a wide array of disciplines, and they will be important players on the world stage in dealing with the broad spectrum of energy and related environmental challenges. We will have advanced the responsible development, management, and stewardship of Wyoming's mineral and energy resources, working hand-in-hand with private industry, state officials, and UW's outstanding Haub School of Environment and Natural Resources.

UW will be a leader in the region in rural health care. Our programs in Pharmacy and Nursing will play pivotal roles in meeting workforce needs in the state and in the region. Our Family Practice Centers will attract outstanding medical students to Wyoming, not only to complete their residencies but to establish practices in small towns throughout Wyoming.

UW will be the regional hub for culture and the arts. Our arts programs will enrich the lives of all UW students and, in turn, the cultural landscapes of communities throughout the state and region. The American Heritage Center will stand at the forefront of archival technologies, and the UW Art Museum will be home not only to a significant collection of contemporary art but also to vibrant connections with other facets of our academic mission.

UW's College of Business will be renowned for its internship programs and will enjoy a healthy reciprocal relationship with small and large businesses throughout the state and region. Its clusters of endowed professorships will provide the hub for international recognition in entrepreneurship and environmental and energy economics. Business statewide will be enhanced by the college's outreach programs.

UW will be a center for innovation in technology transfer and information-based business development. The "incubator" will have successfully nurtured more than a hundred new small businesses, now successfully settled and operating in Wyoming towns and communities. We will have anchored ourselves as the leading

innovator and provider of information technology and information services, not only for our students, but for all of Wyoming (we are closer to that now than you may know).

UW will continue to receive national recognition for both the scope and the quality of outreach services and distributed education. Continuing education and certificate programs linked broadly to workforce needs will serve Wyoming's businesses, and a balanced array of undergraduate and graduate degree programs continue to reach non-traditional and place-bound students in every corner of the State.

In keeping with UW's land grant tradition, the College of Agriculture will have emerged as a world leader in wildlife and livestock disease research. Research conducted at the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Extension Center will continue to provide agriculture and livestock producers with state-of-the-art techniques for managing their products and taking care of the land. Members of the Agriculture faculty will be key players in the study of renewable energy.

UW will have a billion-dollar endowment, fueled by private and corporate support that reflects the close ties the university will maintain with its constituents and the industries that continue to provide the state with its great wealth.

And finally, the UW Cowboys and Cowgirls will be competitive in every sport in the Mountain West Conference, and UW will enjoy national acclaim for its principled approach to athletics and for the academic success of our student athletes.

My little trip into the future is not just a dream. In some cases, we're almost there. In others, we have a ways to go, but the dream is within reach. To get there, we must build a future based on careful planning and thoughtful decisions. In short, we must exercise will. I believe that we have the will to move UW to the next level. It is time for us to engage in that "New Thinking" that we are so quick to advertise.

So, how to get there? What are the things we must do to move this grand old university up a notch or two?

ACCESS

This is a common buzzword these days in higher education. We have a fundamental responsibility to ensure that our doors are open, not just for the college ready high school graduate, but also for the working single parent living

in Cheyenne, or the manager from Gillette who needs to go back to school to qualify for a career advancement, or for the insurance agent in Sheridan who wants to work on an on-line MBA program.

And access isn't limited to our responsibility to hold open the door of opportunity. It also refers to our responsibility to guide our students through the system and to hold ourselves accountable for how much they learn. It also means we have to care about their success. As I speak, only a little more than 50 percent of our Wyoming high school graduates go on to some form of post secondary education. And less than 60 percent of those that attend UW leave after six years with a diploma in hand. We must do better.

In a state recognized by the world as rich in resources, energetic young people represent our most precious asset. The remarkable Hathaway Scholarship Program is now Wyoming's primary vehicle for cultivating this asset. Preliminary results are encouraging. This year's class of entering freshman from Wyoming is up 16 percent. Our financial aid programs and student services are responding well to the challenge. The numbers of entering freshman have substantially increased, our classes are full, and our dorm rooms are occupied. As good as this news is for the state, we need to continue reaching out to students for whom opportunity may not come so easily: students of color, students of limited economic means, students who have never even dreamed of going to college.

EXCELLENCE

This is a straightforward concept. Once they're here, we have a fundamental responsibility to all of our students to deliver first-rate educational opportunities — in our lecture halls and in our laboratories and in our studios. Make no mistake, the university's most important role, now and in the future, is to serve as the state's leader in producing world-class intellectual, scientific, and cultural assets. Teaching and learning constitute the core of this role.

As tempting as it may be to imagine ourselves tucked away in a quiet corner of the Rockies, we need to recognize that we are playing in the big leagues — that a degree from UW is among the very best in the U.S., and that the rest of the higher education community has its eyes on Wyoming. Enhanced funding from the state, in both endowments and our block grant, will allow us to continue our pursuit of excellence.

Wyoming is fortunate to have a nationally recognized research university, with vigorous student involvement in scholarly work; a productive faculty; and a healthy stream of external funding. In the last ten years, we have exceeded a half billion dollars in funded research. Historically, here and across academia, basic research has attracted most of the attention and funding support. Less widely appreciated has been the need to translate new ideas and technologies into successful applications.

Arguably more critical in Wyoming than in other states is the need to align a significant portion of the university's research with the economic needs of the state. Technology transfer, outreach, and research application are critical for public universities to be relevant and connected in today's social and economic environment.

Wyoming has tremendous natural resources, a spectacular physical setting, a highly motivated workforce, a deep respect for entrepreneurship, a small-community social fabric, a state government that recognizes the importance of education at all levels, and a population size that is conducive to integration across these levels. To translate these assets into stable prosperity, we must capitalize on all of them, not just the first two.

But Wyoming is geographically isolated and located in one of the country's most ethnically homogenous regions. UW faces perennial challenges in diversity and internationalization. Too few of our students speak a second language and too few study abroad. Too few work with professors of color. Too few engage directly with the kind of world they will encounter after commencement.

To attract the best faculty and to provide the widest opportunities for students, UW must find more effective ways to cultivate the diverse and heterogeneous environment that our graduates will find as they enter the global marketplace. International education in all its forms and fashions needs to be a more significant part of a UW education.

For years, we have defined our role in terms of three responsibilities: teaching, research, and service. It is time for UW to recast these responsibilities.

Teaching and Learning. Teaching is a means to an end. Learning is the point of the exercise. Learning includes the discovery of new knowledge as well as the acquisition and dissemination of old. There is a natural cascade of learning from original research and creative activity to the sharing of ideas in the classroom. This cascade encompasses the mission of the research university. We must embed it in the day-to-day lives of students, staff, and faculty members.

Research and Creativity. Instead of placing singular focus on research as the discovery of new fundamental knowledge, we must also commit to the creative activity required to translate new ideas into tangible assets. This process constitutes a second cascade, from fundamental discovery to applications. This cascade meshes perfectly with UW's status as a land-grant institution, dedicated to both pure and applied branches of human knowledge.

Service and Leadership. In addition to service, we must step up to a larger focus: statewide leadership. Wyoming needs its university more than ever before. It needs UW to be responsive, to be engaged, and most of all to help create the future—a future that is permanently linked to the life and success of our state and nation. And this is the third cascade, from anticipating the future to building it. And it provides a perfect segue to my third and final topic.

LEADERSHIP

No state enjoys a stronger sense of attachment than Wyoming, and few states look so consistently to their flagship institution for leadership. UW is arguably Wyoming's most logical anchor for the strategic and civic efforts required to build a magnet environment — what Wallace Stegner referred to as a "society to match the scenery."

Colleges and universities are among the most important catalysts for cultivating place-based assets, building an educated citizenry, developing research consortia, and offering unique environmental and cultural amenities. Magnet environments tend to be places with strong universities, in which education is highly valued and where arts and creativity flourish, cultural and recreational opportunities are plentiful, and entrepreneurship is respected and nurtured. Our nation's young talent pool converges on regions where "work is smart, the culture is cool, and the environment is clean."

The health of the University of Wyoming is inextricably linked to the health of our state. The key challenge for Wyoming and for its university is to build a workforce and an economy that will sustain thriving, culturally vibrant communities. I want to challenge UW to be the catalyst, to have the vision, and to accept the fundamental leadership responsibility we have for our future.

As we move into our next (can it be our third?) round of academic and support services planning, we must keep our eyes on these prizes. We must build on the vision and momentum established in our previous plans. We must sharpen our focus, hold fast to our intellectual standards, and be deliberate and decisive. We must remind ourselves and our constituents that we *do* have the capacity, the good judgment, and the will to make significant decisions about UW's future — and that these decisions are pivotal to the future of the state and the nation. It's not just about us; it's about the society that we serve.

Thanks for coming today. I look forward to working with you as we forge ahead during these extraordinary times.