

2008 MID-YEAR CONVOCATION

January 14, 2008

Chancellor's Address on the State of Green Bay's University
Bruce Shepard, Chancellor

Welcome

Thank you, Professor Laatsch, and good morning, all. Cyndie joins me in offering a warm welcome. We hope you had an opportunity during the break to spend time with family and friends and to enjoy the season to the fullest.

When we announced that we would be holding a Winter Convocation for the first time, my office fielded numerous questions. One of the most frequently asked questions was: How long is the Chancellor going to speak? I told Cyndie she could have come directly to me with that question.

The idea of a convocation to open spring semester came from our governance groups. We were discussing with them how best to improve upon our past efforts to recognize those who have served UWGB — and served us all - for many years.

That recognition we will do this morning. I congratulate all of you who will receive service awards today. We greatly appreciate what you have done over the years in helping your University connect learning to life.

I like the idea of a Winter Convocation for another reason: ours is a shared enterprise. Nothing is achieved in isolation. By coming together at the start of the term, we are reaffirming and celebrating the fact that ours is a shared and interdependent calling.

And, we have much to celebrate. Let's look briefly back at some of the successes.

— We received an extraordinarily positive budget: genuinely full costs to continue for the first time in far too many years, tuition increases kept to modest levels, substantial increases in State financial aid programs, support for the Wisconsin Covenant, and tuition remissions for veterans. And, full funding for the Growth Agenda.

There were other notable events during the semester just passed:

— We joined our partners from UW-Oshkosh, UW-Fox Valley and Fox Valley Technical College in opening the University of Wisconsin Northeast Wisconsin Learning Center. This new learning center, located on the campus of Fox Valley Technical College in Appleton, is a model for regional collaboration and will help us better serve adult learners.

— The Phuture Phoenix program continued to thrive and draw attention from state and national audiences. Our commitment to institutionalize the program has been carried out. And, one state leader who recently visited the campus said that, as he made yet another statewide award to UWGB and Phuture Phoenix, he wished every campus in the state had a similar program.

— We were informed that we can expect to receive the maximum 10-year continuing accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission. The external review team was especially impressed with the quality of teaching and scholarship, with the student enthusiasm for

*What we have most
recently accomplished*



Continuing directions

their UW-Green Bay experience and with the support from the community for its university. I offer my sincere thanks to all of you who contributed to the accreditation self-study and who made such a favorable impression on the review team.

— As part of the self-study, you developed and we gained Board of Regents approval for a new mission statement. This statement affirmed a commitment to our core values that date to the University's founding while also stating concisely what makes UW-Green Bay distinctive in the 21st century.

— And, we opened the Kress Events Center to outstanding reviews from the campus and community. This magnificent facility will contribute significantly to our ability to attract and retain outstanding students, whatever their major.

When we met in late August for our Fall Convocation, you heard me express frustration with the budget process. The struggle to get to a positive result was tortuous. I thank you for your patience.

I must confess that, at times, my patience wore thin. Yet, with hindsight, I see positives in that tortuous process. The UW was the "poster child," the example always referred to, as, across the state, citizens, community leaders, newspaper editors insistently and relentlessly called for Madison to build rather than blockade brighter futures for Wisconsin. You and our shared enterprise is now more clearly and tangibly seen as part of the solution to our State's challenges. This I can personally testify to: led by large commitments of the time and the talent of our Council of Trustees, our many supporters around our region continually let Madison know that they would not accept anything less than full and real funding to grow their UWGB.

Indeed, during all the turmoil, I fielded a phone call from a friend of mine and of UWGB's, a regional legislative leader, who started the conversation by saying, "Bruce, I am calling to give you my mother's phone number." In response to my, "Huh?," he explained: "She is the only person in Green Bay who has not called to talk to me about your budget."

I, of course, apologized for the oversight

You kept the faith. Our community kept the faith. And, our elected officials came through.

From the start, the Growth Agenda has been a three-biennia initiative. We will continue to work with our Trustees and other community friends, area legislators, the UW System and the governor to put the rest of the pieces in place.

When I arrived here just over six years ago, I immediately began meeting with hundreds of University and community members to find out what they — what you — wanted for your University. I summarized my findings in a rather lengthy report called "Educating the Chancellor." One of the central findings - in fact, THE central finding - focused on the need for greater community engagement and the need for the university to be more responsive to our community and region.

I went on to report a vision, really your vision, for Green Bay's University. I believe it as relevant today as it was then. The vision is this: When anybody in our area has a need, they think first of contacting UWGB for help. In the arts, in local government, in business, in teacher education, in nursing, in eco-system management, in whatever. And they think to do so because they have found us to provide prompt and valuable responses.

When we have not been able to achieve this vision, the issue often has come down to size. We simply have not had the platform to truly be — in every case — Northeastern Wisconsin's University of Wisconsin. Now we have an opportunity to build a larger platform.



Expanding the Growth Agenda

PRINCIPLES THAT SHOULD GUIDE US



One pending initiative directly serves that continuing commitment: to take our efforts to be Northeastern Wisconsin's University of Wisconsin to a new level. You will be learning more about it over the semester ahead. For several years now, our faculty, Trustees, and regional leaders have been developing the concept of an interdisciplinary Management Resource Center. Integrating the strengths of this university - interdisciplinarity and community engagement — the Center would focus our efforts to more effectively help our region — public sector and private sector - meet their challenges in a rapidly changing environment.

While much work lies ahead on the political and legislative fronts, I would like us to raise the volume on the campuswide discussion of where we go from here. At the last two fall convocations, I have talked about building “the next UWGB.” This morning, with our resource picture solidified, I would like to offer a few suggestions on what should come next.

We will continue to build and strengthen bridges to the community and region. It makes political sense. And it is the right thing to do. But we must do more. In fact, we deny our region what it deserves if we do not also emphasize and attain continually improving excellence in our academic programs..

And, foremost, that is the challenge I want to place before us this morning. Let me try phrasing it this way. We have been focused, intensely, on a growth agenda. We have been thinking of growth in terms of “capacity”: our capacity to serve students; our capacity to serve the region. Today, I want to suggest that we tackle another kind of growth: growing the excellence of our academic programs. And, just as we did with the “growth in capacity” agenda, that we now make “growing academic excellence” a driving priority for the years immediately ahead.

Academic excellence has rested and will continue to rest in the hands — and minds and hearts — of our faculty. As documented as recently as through the recent HLC accreditation visit, that is a responsibility that has been superbly well fulfilled, even in an environment of declining state support.

I will share several additional thoughts, though, on how to build on that base.

First is the experience, over decades in higher education, that those institutions able to move ahead, institution-wide, do so by first concentrating upon a very select few areas of particular strength. As eminence was achieved in those areas, all parts of the institution flourished.

Yet, that strategy can fail, even fail disastrously, if, as I have also seen happen, the broader campus reaction to selected foci is to circle the wagons ... and shoot inward.

So, focus is important but will succeed only if complemented by full appreciation of and trust in our profound interdependencies.

Other principles should guide us. We must look for opportunities for quantum and not merely incremental improvement. This means more than thinking in bigger terms; it means thinking in different ways.

Next, and closely related, we must set the bar high. What should be our aspirations as we select an area or areas upon which to focus? This is my answer: whatever may be the area selected, it becomes recognized as the strongest available within the UW System. Better than available anywhere else in Wisconsin, Madison included.

Note, then, that by setting the bar at least that high, we are also addressing the means by which the next UWGB will be recognized and differentiated not only in Wisconsin but, since the UW is a world-class system, also, nationally and internationally.

As we seek a few areas upon which to focus, we need to look first to areas of existing strength. We must do so with clear and critical vision.

What are those areas of current strength upon which we should build? I would start with these:

— Most clearly, it is our recently reaffirmed commitment to interdisciplinarity. We have the commitment. So do other universities. Ours is the only university I am aware of, though, where form fits function: where our budgets, positions, and, most importantly, promotion and tenure decisions flow through interdisciplinary rather than disciplinary lines.

— Regional engagement is another important strength. It is, again, an aspiration shared with other universities: to be, in the AASCU phrase I love, “stewards of place.” At UWGB, though, we are demonstrably living that mission.

There are other important strengths but interdisciplinarity and being stewards of place must surely guide our choices.

We cannot stop, though, after looking at strengths. We must also look externally: where does the surrounding environment offer opportunities to take existing strengths and parlay them into areas of extraordinary excellence?

We must also look to areas of weakness and vulnerability. There are a number of key items that, were this a full inventory, would need to be mentioned. Here I note, again, that our clearest area of vulnerability is the current modest levels of diversity among our faculty, staff, and students; UWGB, “the next” or otherwise, will fail if, in the future, we are not significantly more diverse than we are today.

And a final thought on general principles. Whatever few foci we initially select, we should prefer those efforts to enhance academic excellence that most widely engage the campus. This might seem to follow from some sort of “fairness” concern - leave nobody out. But not really; indeed, that concern alone could lead us astray. There are other reasons: from the day I arrived here, I have been struck by the pervasive professionalism and existing excellence to be found throughout our campus; to the extent we can fully engage these strengths, we will be more certain of achieving our goals. And, there is the undeniable fact that, when we attack complex matters — would we waste our time on any other kind? — understandings and strategies, to be fruitful, must be holistic.

I guess all I am saying is that we not forget to apply our honored educational mantra to ourselves: we must engage in practical, community-engaged, hands on problem solving, from multiple perspectives.

So, can I take you from such general principles to more specific foci? Only with trepidation. But, several examples may more clearly communicate what I have in mind in calling for an expanded “excellence growth agenda.”

I have already suggested one possibility: an interdisciplinary management resource center bringing the expertise of our campus to focus upon the needs and challenges of our rapidly changing region. It fits the criteria I have outlined, importantly including that of community support for it would be funded through a combination of the revenues it generates and philanthropically provided academic chairs, professorships, and operating endowments.

One area of potential focus is obvious. We have a proud tradition of commitment to environmental awareness; have recently reaffirmed our commitments through a variety of local, state, and national initiatives; and have very strong academic programs in the areas of the environ-

FOCUSING ON
EXCELLENCE:
ILLUSTRATIONS



mental sciences and policy including internationally recognized faculty. We serve a region with environmental challenges but that has also proudly led and seeks to continue to lead in environmentally sound manufacturing processes.

We have a profoundly important legacy, here. How is that legacy to be handed off so that the outstanding younger faculty in the many related areas can take our programs, our university, our region and state to another level? And, of course, we have the good fortune to be asking such questions at precisely the same time as environmental issues are foremost on the agendas of major foundations and other funding sources.

Let me suggest another area of focus: to genuinely internationalize our campus, curriculum and student experiences. Our existing international programs have been strengthened, and I applaud our faculty and staff for seeking out new international opportunities. There are many academically valuable reasons for so doing but please also note that we are not adequately serving as Green Bay's University of Wisconsin if we are not effectively bringing Green Bay to the world and the world to Green Bay.

Imagine requiring some type of international experience for every student who attends UW-Green Bay. Universities do that. Or, let's get really radical. Here I illustrate what I mean by a principle that I offered earlier: that whatever we do, let's engage in thinking apart from the ways by which American higher education traditionally constrains itself. Imagine our faculty being so bold as to require (and the university committed to financial supporting) a significant international experience as a necessary condition for receiving tenure at UWGB.

The evidence is clear: the most effective way to internationalize a campus, its curricula, its student body, is to expand opportunities for faculty to have international experiences. Perhaps rationale enough right there. But, think also about what the mere commitment — is there another university in the country that has such? — would say to those we seek to attract and to keep on our faculty, as a part of our staff ... as members of our student body.

Lest I mislead you into concluding that academic excellence is relevant only to our faculty and our academic programs, let me offer a final illustration of a possible institution-wide "growing academic excellence" focus.

One way to establish some degree of eminence is to be more selective in admissions. And it is likely that success in other parts of the agenda I have suggested will attract better and better students. Yet, our university, I firmly believe, must continue its strong commitment to serving first-generation students from diverse socioeconomic and other backgrounds.

Can we attain excellence in doing precisely that? Today and by the traditional measures of students' academic success and after adjusting for the demography of our current student body, how well do we do? Middle of the pack. Nothing to brag about.

Suppose we commit to becoming "best of class" in terms of the academic accomplishments of our students. We do not do so just by becoming more selective: our excellence is grounded on the capacity we demonstrate to move our students further along than do other universities admitting similar students. That, of course, requires the continuing commitments and contributions of many across the campus importantly including those in academic and student support services.

Growing academic excellence? You will have better ideas. Already, we have seen the faculty and staff step forward with a Common Theme initiative that offers an interdisciplinary opportunity for students, faculty and staff, that engages the community in conversation on important topics, and that highlights the global connections between Green Bay and the world.



You'll be hearing more about this initiative in the weeks ahead.

Already, also, many of you have been involved in a series of meetings kicked off by nationally recognized consultant Michael Dolence. Michael, as any faithful advisor should, laid out our challenges and vulnerabilities directly and forcefully. I found great reassurance in your engaged and constructive responses. My comments this morning obviously seek to move forward the campus discussions initiated by inviting Mr Dolence to help us. Having seen the work you have already begun, I am optimistic about our ability to achieve success with an "academic excellence growth agenda."

My overarching point is this: with the base more secure, it is now time to really get about building that next UWGB, achieving areas of truly distinctive academic excellence as our next priority.

It can be scary. Yes, other universities are seeking to capture the same ground I have just suggested as offering opportunities for us to plant UWGB's banner. There are risks. And we could fail. But, the risks are even greater — and the collegial intellectual satisfactions much fewer — if we simply see our future as better managing the status quo. Let's ever more lead.

Conclusion

Earlier, I mentioned some of our most recent high-profile achievements. We have good reason to be proud of and to celebrate these accomplishments and their meaning for the university of today and tomorrow.

Today, we also celebrate those victories that, in and of themselves, may not get much attention across the campus or throughout the community. They are victories, though, that mean so much not only to our students and their families, but to the future of our community, region and state. They are achieved through the dedication and persistent professionalism of those we will now honor for their years of service.

As we look back in recognizing such exemplary service, I am struck by a connection to the forward-looking themes upon which I focused in my remarks. What wonderful models for us all. What substantial foundations upon which to launch the next UWGB.

Thank you.

