

Advancing Knowledge: A Partner for the Public Good
Inaugural Address
Robert H. Bruininks, President
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Thank you all for being here, and special thanks to our Governor, Tim Pawlenty, a University graduate with a longstanding interest in this institution. I am deeply humbled and honored by this appointment to serve as the 15th President of the University of Minnesota.

This opportunity to lead one of the nation's best public research and land grant university systems is a rare privilege and a great personal honor. As a first generation college graduate, I have a deep appreciation for the power of higher education to transform lives and for the contributions it makes to advancing knowledge, human understanding and our quality of life. This is an especially important personal honor, since this University and the state of Minnesota have given me so much over the past 35 years. I owe this incredible opportunity to family and mentors who nurtured and encouraged my study in higher education and my career in public service. Most importantly, I owe this honor to you, the University's Board of Regents, my colleagues, our students and our friends, and to former President Mark G. Yudof, whose friendship and confidence in me were instrumental to my work as the University's executive vice president and provost. And I am deeply appreciative of your support over these past few months—even after we all celebrated my pending departure from the University's central administration this past June!

It is traditional for newly appointed presidents to review the history of the University of Minnesota early in their tenure. In doing so, I have discovered some interesting facts. I have learned, for example, that my brief tenure, marked as it has been by many serious economic and academic challenges, has led to one of the shortest presidential "honeymoons" in academic history. I have also learned that presidents have been austere with their words in times of challenge. Toward the end of World War I, President Marion Burton assumed the presidency at the University's 50th anniversary with a four sentence inaugural address. While these times may suggest a similar commitment to brevity, I have rarely been accused of following this practice.

I would like to take a moment at this point to honor the life of Governor Orville Freeman, whose life and contributions to Minnesota are being celebrated during ceremonies last night and today. Former Governor Freeman was a University of Minnesota alumnus, not to mention a former quarterback under legendary Coach Bernie Bierman. After his graduation, Governor served with great distinction as governor of Minnesota and as secretary of agriculture of the United States. Unwavering advocates for education at all levels, Orville and Jane, his wife of 61 years, have been passionate supporters of the University of Minnesota. We are grateful for their lifelong dedication. Our thoughts and prayers are with the Freeman family.

This ceremony marks the end of Founder's Week, a celebration of the University's proud 152-year history of commitment, achievement and contribution.

In 1851, when this state was still a territory that encompassed parts of the Dakotas and Nebraska, when the total population was only 6,000, people of vision decided to found the University in its earliest form as a preparatory school with 20 students.

In 1867, John S. Pillsbury, the chair of the Board of Regents, endorsed the idea that the University of Minnesota should be the state's land-grant institution. After helping to reopen the University in the wake of a recession and the Civil War, he argued that one institution should carry the hopes and aspirations of the new state.

And, like public universities across the country in the post-World War II era, the University of Minnesota ratcheted up its commitment to the people of Minnesota by creating access for thousands more students. We were part of a great expansion of public colleges and universities. By 1950, the University was enrolling 22,000 students in 13 colleges in a state that counted 3 million residents.

In these postwar years, the University of Minnesota also saw the emergence of its coordinate campuses. Out of teachers' colleges and agricultural schools grew new branches of the University we now know in Crookston, Duluth and Morris. Each cultivated its own academic strengths, and each continues to serve its local community. In Rochester, too, the University has been meeting the very particular needs of the community. Clearly, the people of our coordinate campuses and branches are an integral part of this enterprise we call the University of Minnesota.

And this University is an integral part of our idea of Minnesota--a relatively small population of 5 million in a challenging climate who have built a high quality of life and nurtured an

uncompromising aspiration for innovation and leadership--expectations we have almost taken for granted.

That idea of Minnesota has always been premised on the importance of education, and the University has benefited at the same time it has served this state. Today, through the education of nearly 63,000 students we have enrolled, through the half billion dollars of external support for path-breaking research our scholars do each year--98 percent of such research done in this state--and through the many and varied ways we connect our work to the needs of the community, the University of Minnesota is even more relevant to the people of the state, the nation and the world.

Further, we are proud of the faith and confidence that so many alumni and friends of this University have placed in the University as part of Campaign Minnesota. To date, we've raised an amazing 1.56 billion dollars for endowment and ongoing support. They are an important leveraging of--but not a substitute for--the state's investment in the University of Minnesota.

With many strengths in place, the University of Minnesota also faces many challenges. Foremost among these is the matter of financing public higher education. Although forward-thinking leaders of this state have long acknowledged higher education's importance to our economic and civic well being, the portion of public support for higher education has decreased over the past 20 years; we are now increasingly "state assisted" rather than "state supported." Since 1980 there has been a 30 percent decline in the University's share of the state budget and a 40 percent decrease in tax effort for higher education overall.¹ Soon, revenues from tuition and external grants each may actually exceed the level of state support. From this matter of finance flow many other challenges, including maintaining student access in the face of increasing tuition; supporting important but expensive education programs in areas such as medicine, dentistry, biology, language and engineering; and recruiting and maintaining top-flight faculty in a competitive market. These are challenges this institution will continue to grapple with, but our response and our directions must be guided by our values.

Vision, Values and Community

The noted British author John Goldsworthy once remarked that "If you don't plan the future, you won't have one." Our future will doubtless be marked by many passages and challenges, but each will be embraced with the values that have preserved, sustained, and enriched the University of Minnesota throughout its history.

Excellence: During the past 152 years, the citizens of this state and this community have created an outstanding university. They have done so through nurturing an uncompromising aspiration for innovation and leadership. We have embraced excellence in every way. In the words of Aristotle: "We are what we repeatedly do; excellence is not an act, but a habit." The habit of supporting excellence has characterized the University of Minnesota since its founding, and it will be essential as we set priorities and seek institutional change and renewal in the future.

Diversity: There are few values more important today than our continued commitment to create an academic culture that values access and diversity. If education is the key to success and fulfillment in this society, as I believe it is, we cannot live up to our democratic ideals without ensuring that talented people from every income level, every neighborhood, and every kind of background can find a place at the University. As the population of this state and this country becomes increasingly diverse, we must hold onto the gains we've made in opening the doors to the benefits and community of higher education, and we must push to swing the doors wider.

But diversity is also about our embrace of the widest range of perspectives, and a culture that privileges both academic freedom and the common good. Diversity will continue to be a central goal for this university, and it will continue to infuse and shape this institution with energy and the power of broadened perspectives.

Academic Community: But out of diversity must also spring community. Much lamented in the current literature on higher education is the perceived erosion of the academic community. As one former university president has written, "[Today] many of the most distinguished research scholars owe their primary allegiance to the invisible academy of their discipline rather than to their university."² I believe we share together a responsibility to reconstruct a deeper sense of community—across disciplines, across employee groups, and across students and teachers. It falls to all of us to continue the work of President George E. Vincent, who is credited with combining "a loose federation of disparate colleges into a self-conscious, cooperating and purposeful institution."³

Service: Crucial, as well, to our sense of community is the deepening of a culture of service. That will make us more competitive in the shifting world of higher education, but it will also improve the cohesion of our university community.

In these times, tough choices lie ahead, but this administration is committed to fairness, to consultation and respect for individuals' views. A deepened sense of community must remain

one of our primary commitments as we advocate for the University together, and as we grapple with the possibility of reduced resources. Retaining the sense of "We are Minnesota"--all of us--as our athletics director, Joel Maturi, likes to say, will be essential to achieving the University's long-term excellence and vitality.

A Distinctive Research Mission

Throughout its history, the University of Minnesota has been committed to **advancing knowledge and partnering to improve the public good**. As we face future opportunities and uncertainties, it is important to recall this larger purpose.

The University of Minnesota today comprises a flagship research campus; excellent coordinate campuses, each with its own unique mission and strong signature and reputation; and a network of statewide research centers and University of Minnesota Extension Service offices. Through these resources, the University provides a unique contribution and a comparative national and international advantage to Minnesota's system of higher education.

According to one researcher, "The presence of a major research university is a basic infrastructure component of the Creative Economy--more important than the canals, railroads, and freeway systems of past epochs--and a huge potential source of competitive advantage."⁴

In a global knowledge-based economy, where learning and the growth of intellect are the new raw materials, the University's status as a top research university system provides Minnesota with a unique advantage. We must maintain this strength and improve the University's level of excellence. The challenge will be formidable, especially as we work--as I believe we should--to make new academic investments during a time of fiscal austerity. To my mind, our dedication to excellence requires careful attention to how we prioritize our investments and reallocate existing resources.

As the executive vice president and provost for the U these past five years, I was proud to oversee major investments in areas of basic biological sciences, the health sciences, biotechnology, computer and information sciences, and many related fields. While my purpose here today is not to create a detailed blueprint for future academic investments, I believe we must continue and deepen these pre-existing investments. They are important to the University's research profile, and they are important to the state of Minnesota.

It is also critical that the University continue to maintain the strength of academic fields that claim distinction today. These are areas and departments often built through decades of

leadership and painstaking investment, but their reputation can be lost very quickly. These fields, which are spread throughout the University in areas like the social sciences, the health sciences, the humanities, professional colleges, engineering and the arts, are largely responsible for upholding the reputation of the University.

As my friend John Adams, the head of our geography department, has noted, "The exciting programs [today] seem to lie at the boundaries and overlaps of traditional disciplines and professional fields." To give just one example, the study of human development relies more than ever on the synthesis of the behavioral sciences, biology, chemistry and neurology. We must ensure that the foundational academic areas that are the springboard for working across the disciplines continue to thrive.

A moment ago, I made the case for public investment based upon the economic return the state realizes from investment in the University. But the value of higher education transcends dollars and cents. Just look at the amazing work that has been done for 60 years at our Cedar Creek Natural History Area. Researchers there are looking at profoundly important issues related to biodiversity and to people's impact on the natural environment. These are matters that affect the future of our entire world. It would be hard to measure its impact on a balance sheet today, but this kind of work ultimately benefits the public good.

Thus, I believe that, as a university, we must champion the value of a balanced academic culture, one that looks at the broad forces--everything from environmental to political--shaping our society, one that embraces arts and humanities along with cutting-edge science, one that values education at the undergraduate, graduate and professional levels. A University colleague, friend, gifted artist and distinguished professor of Pediatrics, Robert O. Fisch, reminded me of this important responsibility in his holiday letter. He wrote that, "Art brings us into another dimension, where the force of biological rules is replaced by the realm of dreams, where justice and beauty prevail."⁵

Public Purposes

Throughout its history the University has embraced public values and pursued public purposes in serving society. Today, with the prospect of difficult financial times ahead, some may suggest that it is time to lessen our commitment to our public mission. I believe instead that we must strive to articulate a renewed commitment to our public mission, one that reflects the changing conditions of public higher education and the needs of our society. We have

established a serious conversation on our public responsibility through the Council on Public Engagement, through the restructuring and redirection of the University of Minnesota Extension Service, and through implementation of the Outstanding Community Service Award.

Perhaps the greatest challenge--and the greatest opportunity--is to strengthen the connection between our research and education missions and the needs of our society. You can see these deeply embedded connections in programs like the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree we offer in conjunction with the Guthrie Theatre, where undergraduates combine rigorous education in the theatre arts with a solid liberal arts curriculum; and in the work of Baby Space, a center where the University has brought its considerable expertise in child development and family support to the table in order to partner with the needs of the Little Earth community in the Phillips neighborhood of Minneapolis. And we see it in the progress we've made in commercializing University technology--that's one of the primary ways that the discoveries in our labs make their way to the public. That's as true today, with new magnetic resonance imaging technology, as it was with the pacemaker, and as it was with the development of apples, berries, corn, and even flowers that could thrive in our northern climate.

I believe these significant expressions of our public responsibilities must be intensified and deepened. This year, with the support of generous private contributors, I plan to introduce:

- Important public conversations on serious issues facing our society, the first of which will be the President's Initiative on Children, Youth and Families. Because the health of higher education and the nation will rely on the generation who are children today, we seek to convene and connect our considerable intellectual resources with the work being done with youth and families in the community.
- A second area is expanded applications of technology to improve the connections of research across all areas of the University to the community--what we call the "portal strategy." This strategy enables individuals and organizations to customize access to University resources from any location. I believe we must make such connections more pervasive, more responsive and more available.
- During our Sesquicentennial celebration, we held a number of highly successful interdisciplinary conferences that brought together many parts of the university with members of the broader community. I am interested in continuing these conversations through the inauguration of the President's 21st Century Interdisciplinary Conference

series, a series to connect our research to issues that are of high public interest and concern.

Learning

There is no greater obligation for us than delivering the best possible education to our students--at the undergraduate, graduate and professional levels. One of the more celebrated aphorisms regarding higher learning was contributed by President James A. Garfield, who said of his mentor, Williams College professor and President Mark Hopkins, that, "The ideal college is Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other." While I have some difficulty envisioning the deforestation of Minnesota to recreate this learning model, we owe our students undivided attention and commitment. I would challenge us to make the development, support and learning of our students a deeper institutional commitment.

Especially over the past decade, under the leadership of former Presidents Hasselmo and Yudof, the University of Minnesota has made great strides in improving the undergraduate experience. Some of those gains include the proliferation of freshman seminars, the creation of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers, and other faculty development and award programs. My aspiration is that we continue and strengthen this commitment to improve learning opportunities for students, and that we do so with significant learning outcomes in mind.

As a student of research in learning, I support expanding those interventions that most improve results and satisfaction for students. I have a number of priorities in this area, including enhanced advising and career services, learning communities and honors programs, and the unique mentorship opportunities our students have through research experience and service learning with faculty. I believe we must also consider aligning our curriculum to ensure that it reflects the best ideas of a liberal education and that it helps, rather than hinders, student progress. I am convinced that these strategies will lead to improved graduation rates, and higher and deeper levels of learning and satisfaction for our students. We must also allow our successes in undergraduate student experience to "trickle up" to upper division learners; our graduate and professional students are nearly 40 percent of the students we serve at the University, and our attention to the student experience must expand to include them.

Peter Drucker recently characterized the 21st century as the century of the learning sciences. The University's strategy to improve the quality of learning opportunities must be a highly systemic, intentional commitment. In my humble opinion, we must dedicate more of our

attention to the science of learning and apply it to our central obligation of education. It is my hope that the confluence of important advances in cognitive science, measurement of human performance and technology will make the educational ideal of Mark Hopkins an attainable vision for all students.

In closing, I want to assure you that the leadership of this great university is fully committed to achieving excellence in every aspect of our mission, in fulfilling the promises we have made to the University community and to the state of Minnesota. In the University's research, in the caliber of students we are attracting and the quality experience they get on our campuses, and in the connection of the knowledge we create to the public good, we cannot afford to slow down. Truly, to mark time is to lose ground in higher education today. And we have no intention of doing so.

This University has faced difficult times in the past. We have weathered them and strengthened this institution through many challenges and adversities. I think of the sacrifices we have made in times of war, and the hope we have provided in difficult economic periods. I think of the breakthroughs in human health that have provided life to so many, and the innovations in other areas that have made life better.

As we embark on the next 150 years, this is a time for renewal of our covenant with the people of Minnesota. In a global economy whose currency is knowledge, this is not a time to pause or retreat from the state's historic commitment to education. Our success and our quality of life in this new century will depend upon continued investment and public support of education and the University of Minnesota. Former Governor and University Regent Elmer L. Andersen once said, "It is difficult to think that an investment in our youth and our future could be better placed than in our university." And we--the people of this university, its thousands of alumni, and its friends--will continue to make that case.

The people of this state have been generous to the University, and they have seen us deliver on our promises. Through great striving and progress, the citizens of Minnesota have created one of the nation's finest public research universities and systems. They can rely on us to protect this uniquely Minnesota asset, and to be accountable for continuing to live up to our commitments and to our extraordinary heritage that reaches back even before the founding of this state.

I believe that, in the end, institutions with strong values endure and thrive. But organizations must have a vision for the future, and the people of those organizations--especially one as labor-

intensive as a university--must constantly work together to reinvent themselves around their values to achieve that vision.

As former U of M President Lotus Coffman once said: the University "breathes the spirit of the social order ... is constantly engaged in an attempt to understand the meaning of the age [and is] dominated by a philosophy of helpfulness."

Let us hold on to that helpfulness as we look to the future--as we sharpen our research mission, as we look to improve our students' learning outcomes, and as we seek to better align our partnership with the community to improve society with the University's research and education programs. This is an institution that has endured and thrived, and one that has benefited from the state's largesse at the same time that it has underpinned its economic progress and quality of life. Let us continue to advance knowledge. Let us continue to partner for the public good.

God bless you and God bless the University of Minnesota.

¹ Data from University of Minnesota Institutional Reporting and Research and *Postsecondary Education OPPORTUNITY*, Number 126 – December 2002.

² Kennedy, Donald, *Academic Duty*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 146.

³ President Guy Stanton Ford credited Vincent in Gray, James, *Gray History of the University 1851-1951*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1951) p. 148.

⁴ Florida, Richard, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, (New York: Basic Books, 2002), p. 291-2.

⁵ Fisch, Robert O., Holiday Letter 2002.

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