

2007 State of the University Address

President Robert H. Bruininks

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It's a great time to learn and work at the University of Minnesota. Today you'll find all the excitement you would expect from a university community headed into spring. In this period of transformative change, we also share the genuine commitment to excellence you'd expect from a community of critical thinkers and passionate advocates.

Enthusiasm and commitment are at the core of our character. Our University, like our state, is hopeful, measured, engaged and caring. While our concerns are Minnesota's concerns, they are not parochial. The great challenges of the 21st century are the same from Brainerd to Beijing: health and education; economic growth; the food supply; the environment and energy; the preservation of human dignity; and the fostering of free and creative expression. The people of Minnesota care deeply about these issues – and we are expected to provide the knowledge and leadership the state needs to address them.

Why the University of Minnesota? Because as the state's only land-grant university and its only comprehensive research university system, we are responsible, not just for the education of the state's people, but for ground-breaking research and the application of new knowledge to serve the greater good. Chartered years before statehood, the University underscored its commitment to this three-fold mission with the inscription on Northrop Auditorium. The idea for the Northrop inscription first surfaced in 1924, and a committee went to work on it in 1928. By October 1929, committee members were feeling the strain – one feared any inscription would seem laughable to future generations.¹ No further action was taken until 1935, when the inscription was revised at least

¹ "The Northrop Auditorium Inscription" (unpublished article), Engstrand, Gary, and Ramsay, John.

twice. It was set in stone in 1936. Perseverance yielded a final product that has framed the University's commitment to Minnesota ever since:

"The University of Minnesota

"Founded in the faith that men are ennobled by understanding

"Dedicated to the advancement of learning and the search for truth

"Devoted to the instruction of youth and the welfare of the state"

Perhaps it's no surprise that it took 10 years for the U community to write those 37 words. In the context of strategic positioning and my term as president, I'm pleased to say we've at least cut that time in half – and we've written considerably more!

The more important point is that, in the midst of the Great Depression, people recognized the beauty of human understanding – and they saw fit to have their devotion to the advancement of knowledge written on the very heart of the University. So while we can make light of the work that went into those four lines, the truth is that the things that last in this world take vision, take time, and take persistence.

Resetting the goal

Today, the state of the University is strong. We began the process of transformative change strong, and I believe we'll finish even stronger.

I know it hasn't been easy. For months, staff members in Extension and the three redesigned colleges spent their days working in their old configurations, their evenings mapping out the new configurations, and many sleepless nights wondering what would happen to their academic programs and jobs.

Lori Gilbertson from the College of Design puts it this way: "The past few years have shown me what is personally important – not the daily dramas ... [but]

acceptance of each other, the ability to stand in another's shoes, the importance of modeling what you want to see, and the importance of daily joy and laughter.”

Gilbertson and countless others paid a high price in terms of extra work and stress, but they rallied, not in support of slogans, or rankings, or Morrill Hall, but in support of students and an expanded academic vision. They rallied in support of excellence.

The stated goal of the U's strategic positioning initiative is to become one of the top three public research universities in the world while achieving an equivalent standard of excellence for our coordinate campuses. Like the Northrop inscription, this goal has been greeted with some expected skepticism, but its purpose is to urge our communities to live up to our proud heritage of achievement and public responsibility.

The good news is that this goal is now well established: All of you know it; our supporters are drawn to it; and our peers are taking notice. “Top three” is aspirational and audacious, but that's not to say it can't be achieved. We must continue to set aggressive goals in critical areas of responsibility, and to measure what we value, but we must not get caught up in rankings and begin “teaching to the test.” We aspire, not to ranking, but to *stature* – and achieving this aspiration requires a deep and abiding cultural commitment to excellence in everything we do, from the education of our students to the advancement of knowledge for the public good.

In this context, it's much easier to see “top three” as attainable, and to imagine what an “equivalent standard of excellence” looks like for our resources statewide. It's also clear that while the creation of three new colleges on the Twin Cities campus was a major undertaking, it's also just an initial step toward academic leadership on a global scale. The redesigned colleges, our support of new interdisciplinary institutes and inquiry, and more recently, the creation of the

new Department of Writing Studies, provide a framework for outstanding education and research opportunities. Our task now is to realize our full potential in these areas. If the recent Bush Foundation grant of nearly \$1 million in support of our innovative Writing Enriched Curriculum program is any indicator, the best is yet to come.

According to Aristotle, “We are what we repeatedly do; excellence is not an act, but a habit.”² For the University of Minnesota system, habits of excellence have everything to do with our mission of education, research and outreach. The four pillars of strategic positioning support the weight of this vision and mission, so that if any one pillar crumbles, the entire structure is diminished.

Nor can we strengthen any one pillar at the expense of the others. Our 35 task forces were not formed and charged in isolation; all of the parts work together to move the entire University system forward. For example, it’s true that the college reconfiguration helped the University realize operational efficiencies to the tune of roughly \$4 million this year. But it’s also true that we could have recognized that savings far more easily by requiring people to carry their trash to a central location and by cleaning public spaces every other day. Any organization can streamline; real transformation requires looking beyond the bottom line.

Transformation

Exceptional Students

After two years of planning, a better U is emerging. If students are why we’re here, then we have tens of thousands of great reasons to come to work each day.

The class of 2010 is the best-prepared in history. This strong student profile predicts more students like Twin Cities campus senior Katie Lee. Lee is an accomplished concert violinist who became a full-time University of Minnesota

² Politics, bl. 1, ch. 2, Aristotle.

student at age 15, double-majored in chemistry and biochemistry, and was named one of 32 U.S. Rhodes Scholars for 2007. Her achievements speak volumes about her, and the fact that she chose to spend her undergraduate years here is a testament to the University's commitment to provide a distinctive student experience.

We foster such experiences by investing in our own strengths, but also by partnering with other organizations. Last year, the Guthrie Theater selected University alumnus Santino Fontana to play Hamlet in the final production on its Vineland Place stage. Not only was Fontana the youngest Hamlet ever to grace that stage, but he is also a member of the first class to graduate from the University-Guthrie BFA Actor Training Program. The program enables U students like Fontana and cast-mates Leah Curney, Matthew Amendt and Jonas Goslow to study with top-notch professionals from both institutions.

The Guthrie partnership is just one of many ways we offer students an experience tailored to their strengths. The University of Minnesota Rochester is expanding its academic footprint to meet the education and research needs of southeast Minnesota. This expansion builds upon our long-standing partnership with Mayo Clinic, as well as our relationships with Rochester Community and Technical College and Winona State University.

The University of Minnesota Crookston recently received the maximum 10-year accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission. UMC continues to lead the system in online education, meeting the needs of traditional and non-traditional students statewide with countless technology-enhanced courses and three complete degree programs offered via the Internet.

Our regional comprehensive university on the North Shore, the University of Minnesota Duluth, continues its leadership in environmental research and many other fields of study. UMD's Sieur Du Luth Summer Arts Festival has become

internationally known for its opera program, with 120 international participants registered this year from Europe, Asia and Mexico – including 40 students from Turkey alone. Last year, theater professor Tom Isbell was commissioned to write a play for the opening of a new theater at the Kennedy Center. And this fall, Duluth will launch its first-ever doctoral degree in education and will welcome Distinguished McKnight University Professor Robert Hecky to its biology department and Large Lakes Observatory.

To the west, the University of Minnesota Morris provides a public alternative for students who seek a liberal-arts education in a closely-knit, diverse and engaged community, with a campus and research center devoted to leadership in renewable energy. Last fall, Morris's Center for Small Towns and the city of Morris won a national Carter Center Partnership Award for Campus-Community Collaboration, and more recently, Morris history and political science major Eagan Heath was named a 2007 Truman Scholar.

Morris also leads the University system with a freshman class that is 21 percent students of color. The campus enrolls 178 Native American students, each of whom attends college with free tuition as a result of an historic agreement with the federal government that predates the institution's founding. We have honored that promise for decades, making access to a college education a reality for students who may not otherwise have been able to afford it.

Across our system, nearly 16 percent of this year's freshmen are students of color, and on the Twin Cities campus, that number is more than 20 percent – up nearly two percent over Fall 2005 – underscoring our continued commitment to serving the diversity of our population.

Access and affordability are a top priority for parents and students across the state. Two years ago, I announced the Founders Free Tuition Program, providing free tuition for low-income students and emphasizing access and affordability as

primary concerns of the University. In October, our Promise for Tomorrow private scholarship drive reached its initial three-year goal of \$150 million in endowed scholarship and fellowship funds. This effort continues, achieving giving rates five to 10 times higher than pre-campaign levels. Student access will continue to be a major focus of our planning and fund-raising efforts in the foreseeable future – not only in terms of undergraduate scholarships, but financial support and fellowships for graduate and professional students as well. We still have much work to do.

We've also set our sights higher in terms of academic goals. Under the leadership of Provost Tom Sullivan, Senior Vice President Robert Jones, and our chancellors, we've set aggressive new four-year graduation rates for all campuses. These goals are supported by many strategies to ensure greater student success. Such strategies include new Welcome Week activities, summer bridge programs, stronger advisement and career support services to help students make the transition between high school and college, and new strategies to support transfers. We are also engaging the public to improve college preparation through the new Consortium for Post-Secondary Success.

In addition, we're pushing forward with specific learning and success outcomes for students – defining in clear terms what all U graduates should know and be able to do, regardless of major or profession. Recent reports suggest that in this global century, employers will be looking for 360-degree thinkers and breadth of knowledge will be as important as depth of expertise in a given field.³ Our proposed, outcomes-based approach is right for our students and the world.

Exceptional faculty and staff

Exceptional faculty and staff are essential to achieving our strategic goal. They are critical to fostering excellence; improving our stature; recruiting and retaining

³ "College Learning for the New Global Century," The National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise, 2007.

the best and brightest students; providing a distinctive educational experience; attracting research funding to the University; and garnering the attention of other world-class scholars. We've made great gains in our faculty recruitment and retention efforts in the past year, including a new Web site addressing, among other things, the quality of life that has made Minnesota a destination state for people from around the world.

But our emphasis cannot be limited to compensation and support for new faculty – the U's human capital resides at every level of the organization, and we are committed to professional development and support for everyone. We should all applaud the work of our faculty leaders in strengthening the University's promotion-tenure policies – especially our colleagues on the Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee and in the Faculty Senate. Today's vote on the adoption of tenure code revisions is an important step toward fostering faculty achievement and advancing our efforts to transform the University. We are also seeking funding to support merit-based compensation throughout the University, and actively implementing new programs to increase the U's appeal to current and prospective faculty and staff.

At the best universities, inspiration is alive in the classroom. Our faculty are teacher-scholars – researchers at the forefront of their fields who not only change the way we live through their discoveries, but actually change the way our students learn and each of us think. As a result, our goals of education, research and public engagement are not at odds, but strongly complementary. John Slaughter puts it this way: “Research is to teaching as sin is to confession. If you don't participate in the former, you have very little to say in the latter.”⁴

In short, research is education – and it takes the best to inspire the brightest. Unfortunately, all the recruiting materials in the world won't serve us without the ability to offer basic and competitive compensation to heavily recruited faculty. To

⁴ The Creation of the Future, Rhodes, Frank H.T., Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y., 2001.

that end, we've asked the legislature for \$28 million in market-based compensation to help us attract great minds to the U and keep them. This investment will pay for itself over time in terms of research funding, innovation and human capital.

Exceptional organization

I've long maintained that we must be as well known for our stewardship of public resources and the quality of our management as we are for education, research and public engagement. This requires an exceptional organization working to support our academic responsibilities – a culture that seeks the best answers to common internal questions, such as “Can we do more to improve services and productivity at the U?” as well as external questions like, “How are you spending our money?”

I continue to be impressed by the way Vice President Kathleen O'Brien has carried this message to thousands of employees in University Services. As a result, today many of our best ideas come from people in the trenches. Stop me if you've heard this one – it happens to be one my favorite stories illustrating the impact of a cultural commitment to excellence:

How many U dollars does it take to change a light bulb?

Ruth Ann Manlet in University Services and Dave Crane in the Office of Classroom Management got the notion that if the University quit changing individual light bulbs as they burned out, and instead changed them in batches on a regular cycle, the labor savings could be significant – and even more so if we switched to more energy-efficient bulbs. A pilot project in a few selected buildings saved \$46,000 in one year, and according to financial analysis done by their colleague Sean Schuller, over the first five years, the savings is projected at more than \$1.5 million. The program is currently being implemented across the Twin Cities campus.

John Gardner once said, “The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity, and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because philosophy is an exalted activity, will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water.” Our emphasis on organizational excellence has been deliberate – everything we do impacts everything else, such that group relamping not only saves time and energy, but helps to beautify our campus, increase productivity and ensure public safety, while enabling us to spend the savings in more mission-critical ways.

There are many such examples on all of our campuses, including strengthened construction management practices that have enabled the University to deliver almost every construction project in the past three years on time, within budget, and without spending valuable resources on midstream redesigns or incurring costly claims. We estimate that these performance increases have helped the University avoid \$60-80 million in costs – proof that we are maximizing our construction dollars to serve academic programs while fostering stronger relationships with contractors in the state. An AHC initiative used innovative design, shared space and open space to improve lab usage efficiency by 33 percent. Senior Vice President Frank Cerra has voiced his view of Transforming the U in no uncertain terms – “right goal; right time” – and his Research Corridors concept provides a clear vision of an agile organization committed to sharing information and breaking down barriers.

Each of these examples adds to the overall picture of University campuses on the verge of becoming talent magnets – destination schools for faculty, staff and students from all walks of life. Our efforts to foster diversity and inclusiveness system-wide are bolstered by the hard work and spirit of the U’s first Vice President for Equity and Diversity, Dr. Rusty Barcelo. Encouraging diversity of people and ideas on all of our campuses will better prepare our students and

members of our academic community to be productive and engaged global citizens.

Exceptional innovation

Our commitment to excellence is already at work in our corridors. The problems of the 21st century require an interdisciplinary approach to solve them – but the strength of that approach will be rooted in departments and disciplines of distinction.

Serious interdisciplinary work requires – and builds – strength in core academic fields. The University of Minnesota system is an established national leader in many disciplines – strengths that feed directly into our efforts to foster new interdisciplinary work through centers and institutes such as the Institute on the Environment, the Large Lakes Observatory in Duluth, the Institute for Translational Neuroscience, the Institute for the Advancement of Science and Technology, and the Institute for Advanced Study in the humanities and social sciences.

Interdisciplinary work in these areas and others should increase funding from government and industry sources. Under the leadership of Vice President for Research Tim Mulcahy, we are working hard to support faculty teams seeking funding for large-scale interdisciplinary grants, as well as to facilitate statewide industry partnerships through the corporate relations center and related efforts.

We believe that such institutes provide a flexible, responsive model for conducting research and attracting support in the future. The Institute on the Environment was recently awarded a \$300,000 contract from the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources to develop a comprehensive conservation and preservation plan for the state of Minnesota. An early success for the institute, this project is the result of coordinating our academic strengths across campuses, departments and fields. Legislators too often perceive the

University as having its hand out – our approach going forward must be to present the U first and foremost as a resource.

Challenges

The path forward is not without obstacles. All of our aspirations are contingent upon two resources: persistence and funding. I rank persistence first, most obviously because in this regard we control our own destiny. It is only fair that an institution committed to responsible stewardship would expect to be held accountable by the state and the public. We've identified important strategies that support our view of excellence, but we cannot expect continued investment without continuing reform.

Self-scrutiny is critical because the information needed to address most of our challenges already exists within the University. Let me share one case in point: When our athletic-academic advisory task force examined the record of achievement for student-athletes on the Twin Cities campus, they discovered that from 1999 to summer 2006, roughly 27 percent left the U without obtaining degrees. Many of them had accumulated 100 or more academic credit-hours – enough credit-hours to put graduation within reach. In other words, *they were succeeding academically* when they left. We are now implementing several strategies to foster greater success and timely graduation for our student-athletes.

In addition, we've now looked more closely at students from the general population who leave the Twin Cities campus without graduating, and found that approximately 7 percent of them leave with more than 100 credits but without completing a degree. These disappointing numbers suggest an urgent need to apply similar solutions in our overall retention efforts.

So we must do a better job of mining our own intelligence and sharing what we find there. For example, policy-makers who see our biennial budget request and

wonder, “What’s in it for my district?” need to know that the University of Minnesota system has talented, engaged alumni working across the state, including more than 7,000 who have founded roughly 10,000 companies employing half a million Minnesotans in every county in the state. Or that in the 2004 academic year, the University of Minnesota produced 46 percent of the state’s degrees in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, including nearly three-quarters of all first professional degrees and 90 percent of all doctoral degrees in these fields.

Not only are we an economic engine for the state and one of its chief sources of human capital, but we are also Driven to Discover. The research we do here changes lives – and the success of our marketing campaign in the past year underscores the fact that this message is beginning to resonate, on campus and off. We can use success stories like these to connect the fate of the U to the future of our great state. We can convince our partners that money invested in the University is money well spent.

Our legislators have shown great willingness to hear our story and our ideas for the future. But the U requires a stronger partnership with Minnesota. We’ve asked the governor and the legislature to make a serious and sustained investment in the University, because such an investment will create new resources and human capital needed for the future.

Make no mistake, over the past few years we’ve taken great steps to strategically allocate funds, seek new research dollars and garner private support. The University works hard to ensure the maximum return on the state’s investment – in fact, we rank sixth in the U.S. in terms of income from University-developed technologies. This year, we will attract more than \$600 million in grants, contracts, royalties and other forms of non-state funding to support research, discovery and the transfer of knowledge. In addition, the University of Minnesota Foundation reported \$181 million in total gifts for 2006 – a record for a non-

campaign year – but these funding sources can't carry the day. Our message going forward must be this: *The time to do more with less is past. In the future, we must do more with more.*

Conclusion

Two years ago, I said that Minnesota needs a great research university, and this University needs Minnesota. I also said that strategic positioning would provide the basis for change and a commitment to excellence worthy of our heritage and our future.⁵ The inscription on Northrop captures this beautifully: It expresses the spirit of a great University, its commitment to excellence, and its service to the greater good. It's a tremendous vision, and I'm humbled by your efforts to attain it – but we still have work to do.

The poet Emily Dickinson wrote: "We never know how high we are/Till we are called to rise/And then, if we are true to plan/Our statures touch the skies."⁶ If we continue together toward our common vision of excellence, we will truly transform this university for the benefit of our students, our state and the world.

And if, throughout this transformation, we keep that historic Northrop inscription in mind, we will remain all that we already are: The only university in the world that can call itself Minnesota.

⁵ 2005 State of the University address, Bruininks, Robert.

⁶ Poem, No. 1176, st. 1, 1870, Dickinson, Emily.