

## **Remarks by University of Minnesota President Robert H. Bruininks**

*New Faculty Orientation – August 21, 2007*

Thank you – and thanks, Arlene, for your introduction. Hearing your career summarized makes you feel a bit like that great Johnny Cash hitchhiker song, “I’ve Been Everywhere.” In truth, I haven’t been everywhere – for nearly 40 years now I’ve been right here at the University of Minnesota. That’s more than a quarter of the U’s 155-year history! I hope that gives you the distinct impression that this is truly a wonderful place to make a living and a life for yourselves.

I have to admit I’m a little jealous – I’ve been president for 5 years now, but I’ve always said it is my hope to retire as a professor – the very best job at this fine university! So congratulations on your new appointments, and welcome to what we in Minnesota affectionately call “the U.”

### **University profile**

Alumnus Garrison Keillor, MN’s leading citizen from Lake Wobegon, has described the U as “one of the glories of the state” – and we tend to agree. The U consists of the Twin Cities campus here on the banks of the Mississippi, as well as four coordinate campuses in Crookston, Duluth, Morris, and Rochester, and more than 30 research and outreach centers, regional extension offices, and other critical locations statewide.

The Twin Cities campus is home to:

- more than 3,000 faculty
- approximately 13,000 staff
- more than 26,000 undergraduate students
- more than 17,000 graduate students

We are one of the largest universities in the country by enrollment, with 12,000 graduates system-wide each year. Applications and the academic profile of incoming students are

improving steadily across a variety of measures including class rank, test scores, leadership, and diversity.

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 groundbreaking research and the application of new knowledge to serve the greater good. The U of M is one more than 70 universities established by federal grants of land to the states beginning in 1862.

The original land-grant act (the Morrill Act) and subsequent laws created colleges that stressed practical education in order to broaden educational opportunity for average Americans. The act gave the resulting universities broad license regarding the range of research and educational opportunities that would advance the prosperity of the state and its citizens.

Chartered several years before Minnesota statehood, the University underscored its commitment to this three-fold mission of education, research, and public engagement in 1936 with the inscription on Northrop Auditorium:

*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*

Practical research, especially related to agriculture, has long been an important component of that mission. Today, we still provide significant agricultural expertise, innovation, and outreach. But we also drive the development of human capital, spur economic growth, and enhance quality of life in many other ways, as well. For example, we produce nearly half of the state's graduate in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine) fields, including roughly three-quarters of all first professional degrees and 90 percent of all doctoral degrees in these fields.

Obviously, this is an area of strength for the U, but we strive for excellence across the range of our academic responsibilities, including:

- Adopting student learning and development outcomes that identify what all U graduates should know and be able to do, regardless of field of study, to be engaged and productive global citizens.
- Providing talent, training, expertise, and creative space for a MN arts scene known the world over for excellence in theater, music, and the visual arts (e.g., the Guthrie partnership).
- Translating research into solutions to real-world problems – the 2007 Better World Project credits the U with 4 of the world’s 100 best academic discoveries with real-world application, addressing water purification in the developing world, HIV treatment, metabolic disorder in horses, and swine pandemics.

We are actively redefining our land-grant mission to more directly reflect our statewide mission, the urban location of our flagship campus, and the state’s increasingly diverse population.

As Minnesota’s only comprehensive research university, we receive 98% of research funding allocated to MN universities, with \$600M in sponsored funding projected for this year. Through our strategic positioning efforts and award-winning “Driven to Discover” campaign, we’re showing the public and elected officials that research yields new knowledge and ideas – not to mention creative and transformative leaders.

As further evidence of our impact, in a recent discussion with the VPs of research for 3 of the Twin Cities’ biggest corporate innovators, they indicated in no uncertain terms that they would not be here without the U. We are working to create better pathways for innovation across disciplines to move to application, e.g.:

- the new Academic and Corporate Relations Center

- the Office for Technology Commercialization
- the Office of Collaborative Research Services

We believe efforts like these will yield a responsive and service-oriented U that will be seen first and foremost as a resource – and as such, worthy of investment and preservation. In fact, this spring the legislature renewed the state’s tradition of strong support for higher education and committed \$150M to our strategic priorities over the next two years. After years of flat or declining support, this substantial investment in the U is a welcome sign that our priorities are aligned with the needs of the state and nation.

### **Transforming the U**

That’s a quick overview of where we’ve been – now to where we’re going. The stated goal of the U’s strategic positioning initiative is to become one of the top three public research universities in the world. This goal was greeted with some expected skepticism – people have asked whether “top three” is attainable or even desirable; what scale we should use to measure our progress; and whether an emphasis on research might hamper our teaching. I would argue that the two go hand-in-hand; as John Slaughter once said: “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.”

Setting aside the questions for a moment, the good news is that this goal is now well established:

- The U community knows it.
- Our supporters are drawn to it.
- Our peers are taking notice.

We’re investing substantial resources to reinforce what we call “the four pillars” – exceptional students, exceptional faculty and staff, exceptional organization, and exceptional innovation – and around the world, other universities know that the U of M is on the move.

Let me share a few examples. First, we're proud to be among the universities taking leadership to set the standard for more affordable access to higher education for talented students regardless of income. In Fall 2005, we launched the Founders Free Tuition Program, which guarantees grant and gift assistance equal to tuition and required fees for all Pell-eligible Minnesota students. When fully implemented in 2008-09, at least 4,200 students will receive more than \$20 million in support from University resources.

The U is also leading a consortium of 10 public and private research universities to determine how best to "institutionalize" interdisciplinary research – from incorporating such work into tenure considerations to funding interdisciplinary projects and building interdisciplinary workspaces. This spring, our academic leadership successfully strengthened and improved promotion and tenure policies, standards, and procedures to create a culture of rigorous peer review that recognizes the breadth and diversity of legitimate academic work at the University.

We're striving for excellence in the management of our resources, as well. For example: New construction management practices have enabled the U to deliver nearly every construction project in the past 3 years on time and within budget, without midstream redesigns or costly claims. We estimate that these performance increases have helped the University avoid \$60M to \$80M in costs.

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. These practices, too, mark us as leaders and innovators, and they are just a few examples of programs and initiatives underway to move us achieving our strategic aspirations. Many more appear in the strategic positioning presentation in your orientation materials and in a comprehensive report to the Board of Regents to be released next month.

## **Your role**

Without a doubt, “top three” is aspirational and audacious – but if we continue together to strive for excellence, it can be achieved. We aspire, not to ranking, but to stature, which requires a deep and abiding commitment to excellence in everything we do.

To achieve this – and to address the call of government and citizens for stewardship and accountability – we must foster a culture of personal responsibility, from the executive team to our exceptional faculty and staff to the newest U freshman. What does this culture of personal responsibility mean for each of you? It means that each of you is empowered and accountable for acting with integrity – in the classroom, in the laboratory, and in the community.

For the sake of this discussion, let’s define “integrity” as right action, regardless of personal cost. For example, in the face of serious budget cuts, over the past few years the University has made substantial investments (and significant policy changes) to ensure affordability, help promising students make the transition to college, improve academic advising, and raise graduation rates.

We have no shortage of students applying to the U; we could make our enrollment numbers without these initiatives and saved much-needed funding for other priorities. But our historic commitment is to “the instruction of youth and the welfare of the state” – we invest in providing access to success, because since 1851, it’s been the right thing to do.

Of course, right action implies to ability to act in the first place. As an exceptional organization, our faculty and staff are empowered and encouraged to make a difference – which brings to mind a question: *How many U dollars does it take to change a light bulb?*

Recently, three staff members got the notion that if the U 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 \$46K in one year; over the first 5 years, the campus-wide savings is projected at more than \$1.5M.

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.” In this case, three staff members with very different roles and responsibilities found a better way to change a light bulb and went the extra mile to see it tested and implemented. Today, group relamping is not only saves us time, effort and energy costs, but helps to beautify our campus, increases productivity and helps ensure public safety, while enabling us to spend our money in more mission-critical ways.

But even if each of us is empowered to act and does so with integrity, accountability cannot be taken for granted. We must demonstrate on a daily basis that we are acting in as responsible stewards. For example, in 2000, our Athletics department was cited by the NCAA for “significant, widespread and intentional” athletic code violations.

Today, our athletic compliance program serves as a model for peer institutions, due to extensive training and communication across University departments and units, and an unfailing commitment to documenting and sharing each and every athletic code violation, no matter how minor. As a result, we often show more “violations” than our Big Ten peers – but we also get the benefit of the doubt if something unexpected arises.

Our athletic compliance director, the late Frank Kara, said our habit of full disclosure was key to restoring the U’s reputation. “It’s good to be a thick-file school,” he said. “When we turn something in now, the NCAA knows it’s been investigated thoroughly.” In the end, accountability isn’t just about good intentions and best practices – it’s about transparency and trust: Can our stakeholders see what we are doing and understand what we hope to accomplish?

I hope each of you will feel personally empowered to make the University of Minnesota the best it can be:

- If your idea of top-three public research university is one that leads the world in innovative undergraduate teaching, be that teacher.
- If your idea of a world-class U is a space where creative minds do groundbreaking research that no one else dares to, by all means, dare! Be Driven to Discover!
- If you can't imagine a great research university that isn't engaged in meeting the needs of its neighbors and society, don't hesitate to push – we want to be that publicly engaged University, too!

And if you see a problem – or a potential solution – by all means, share it with us. Your fresh perspective is valued – as Einstein once said: “We cannot solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” Together we can make this university, a world-class institution whose people are known for new ideas, right action, and responsible stewardship in service to the greater good.

## **Conclusion**

It's an honor to welcome you this morning and share with you the culture of excellence we're creating here. For the future of our University, the seeds of greatness – and greatness itself – are represented here today. In the coming year and beyond, I hope you'll:

- take the opportunity to work across disciplinary boundaries
- strive for excellence in teaching and scholarship
- seek ways to connect to our community in the best traditions of the land-grant university

I'm confident that each of you will help us reach our goal, and that the U, in turn, will provide you with opportunities to grow and discover. Thank you – I would be happy to take a few questions.