

Celebrate!

Chancellor's Address to the Campus Community

Tuesday, August 22, 2017

Not only is this the first gathering of our new academic year, this is also the first gathering of our new century — our second hundred years. We had a great centennial celebration last year — how many of you got to at least one of our special events?

Did you see the pictures in the slide show when you arrived?

- That wonderful Gala with original music by faculty and alumni;
- Eating cake outside Schofield as we marked Old Main Day in the fall and then hamburgers with our students in the Quad on a perfect spring day;
- And the wonderful visit by Jeanette Parizino, our 100-year old alumna who came back to celebrate with us at our May Commencement.

It was a great year ... but there is even better to come.

I am looking forward to a new state budget that includes re-investment in higher education AND a pay plan. Now that's a powerful AND!

I'm also celebrating the fundraising support we have received from alumni and friends — a successful \$73.4 million campaign, with more than 39,000 donors. Just think: 39,000 people want to invest in YOU and what you are doing here at UW-Eau Claire. That's a huge vote of confidence and you should feel very good about that.

Speaking of confidence, this summer we joined with Mayo Clinic Health System to announce a game-changing partnership that will mean new research opportunities for our faculty and our students. This partnership is the first of its kind in the Midwest, and we are thrilled to be able to collaborate in new ways to strengthen the health of this region.

Dr. Rick Helmers, regional vice president for Mayo Clinic Health System, told me that UW-Eau Claire's reputation is what attracted a world-class organization like Mayo to this transformative partnership.

I wasn't surprised. Transformation is what we do — it's what we're good at. What a way to kick off our new century!

Speaking of transformations, look no further than our campus, with Garfield Avenue under construction (you can see the drone's-eye view on the screen). We have a new Davies Center, a new Centennial Hall, and the Confluence Arts Center rapidly taking shape downtown. We will be moving forward with a new Visitor's Center on Roosevelt Avenue, and we're clearing the Sonnentag Event and Recreation Complex site, where we'll have an events center, a community health center, the Big River Education Center and new student housing. You'll be hearing more about these projects later this morning. This is what a university looks like when we create our future.

Those are big changes, but the little ones make a difference, too. Many of you have participated in Fast Fix: identifying small changes that we can make quickly — like repairing a broken water fountain or enhancing our recycling. I want to thank everyone who helped identify and fix these little challenges and helped this university run just a bit smoother. Watch the weekly email “Blugold FYI” this year — there will be a link to Fast Fix there at least monthly, and lots of employee-related campus news every week.

If you’ve been watching the news this summer, you’ll know that we are no longer Wisconsin’s best kept secret. Newspapers around the country — in California, Florida, Washington, Kansas and North Carolina — all featured stories about the Eau Claire renaissance and the amazing culture we have here.

Every one of the articles — whether they talk about our “booming hipster scene” or how we are a “magnet for artsy millennials” — mentions the pivotal role UW-Eau Claire plays in this region. Eau Claire is on the map because of the contributions YOU have made to this community — the art you create, the walking trails you’ve help build, the students you’ve mentored who stay here — and increasingly are coming back.

I said earlier that transformation is what we do. We’ve been doing it for 101 years — starting as a teachers college, transforming ourselves into a university with a national reputation. Leading the way in international study and undergraduate research, *way* before the rest of higher education jumped on board. In fact, we were named as the national leader last year by the Council on Undergraduate Research.

We know how to create partnerships that produce learning experiences our students can’t find anywhere else, like our research and clinical partnerships with Mayo Clinic Health System and Marshfield Clinic; student internships and recruiting with employers like Hormel, Cargill and Humana; geology scholarships with companies like Unimin and Fairmount Santrol — and the list goes on.

But don’t limit transformation to our students. We’re pretty good at transforming ourselves, too. Two years ago we faced one of the biggest challenges in our history: state funding reductions that radically impacted our university. I do not minimize that challenge, but today I want to celebrate all that you have preserved and accomplished despite the challenge.

You created new centers that have not only changed how we organize our services, but have helped us enhance the support we give our students and colleagues:

- This year the Advising, Retention and Career Center surveyed students and found a 228 percent increase in the number of freshmen who told us they are “extremely satisfied” in their advising experience.
- ASK Center staff have tackled perhaps the biggest challenge of all: making travel easier, and — amazing! — we are cutting red tape and freeing up faculty and staff time.
- Blugold Central is now handling almost 75,000 student transactions and has even simplified our parking process for our students.
- And the consolidation of our Facilities functions has produced savings of \$1.2 million — while the campus has never looked more beautiful.

I know there has been a cost to our transformation: Anguish over colleagues who have left us. Hard work and long hours to figure out how to teach larger classes or streamline ways of working.

And some of our work remains incomplete. We know we have much yet to do to improve equity and diversity and to create a more inclusive community. We must move from the good ideas in our EDI plan to actual action on the ground, action that requires the energy and passion of all of us. We must get out of our comfort zones, personally address the institutional racism and homophobia that undermine our university, and join together to make this a true community.

Yes, there is work to do. But take a deep breath this morning. Look around. Your efforts *are* making a difference. In just two weeks we will welcome more than 10,700 Blugolds to campus, including 2,800 first-year and transfer students. What a privilege to do this!

Thanks to you, we can promise many more students that they will succeed here. This year we again improved our four-year graduation rate to an all-time high of 38.5 percent, up from 18 percent just 11 years ago — and *already* ahead of the 36 percent goal we set in our 2020 strategic plan. Our class profile remains strong, and we have seen another increase in applications this year. Students want to be Blugolds.

This doesn't happen solely because of a good marketing and communications team or amazing Admissions staff (although both those things help). It takes dedicated faculty and staff across the university who every day make our mission to serve our students their first priority.

Heather Kretz in Admissions shared some emails she's gotten from families, raving about the personal attention they received, especially from faculty who have gone out of their way to meet with them, call them to talk about scholarships or followed up with information. Thank you for taking that extra effort with our students.

I can stand here today and tell you how much I value all you have accomplished these past two years. I can tell you that every day I hear from parents or alumni about the impact that you are having in the lives of our students.

But don't just take my word for it. Listen directly to what our students and community members say about you. *[Video plays here.]*

I know that sometimes our work can seem thankless. Our mission can seem underappreciated. But our students see what we do — even when we don't think they are paying attention.

And so do people outside these walls. I've asked one of our guests here today to talk about the impact you have on this community and our state. I'd like to invite Representative Warren Petryk to say a few words about why he advocates for you in Madison.

[Representative Petryk speaks here.]

Thank you, Representative Petryk and all of our legislators, for your support of this University and of all our faculty and staff. We appreciate your efforts this year to reinvest in higher education and for your advocacy of our Towers Hall renovation, the new residence hall, the Confluence Arts Center in previous years — and with any luck — successful inclusion of our Governors Hall renovation in this year's budget (no pressure!).

Colleagues, I hope this morning that you have heard a message that I alone could never deliver. YOU are extraordinary. And you are appreciated.

It takes incredible people to keep alive a 101-year tradition of excellence. It takes faculty and staff — like you — who find purpose and passion in the calling we share. But don't take my word for it. Listen to why your colleagues are dedicated to UW-Eau Claire. *[Video plays here.]*

That is what inspires me every day. Every one of you. I'll bet that each of you could tell us what makes your work rewarding and why you believe in UW-Eau Claire. I know you all can name many colleagues who inspire you through the passion they bring to being a Blugold. I'd love to hear those stories — we'd all love to hear more of these stories. Send me an email if you'd like to share yours. Or tweet it, tagging @ChancellorJim, to share with many more.

Usually at the Blugold Breakfast I talk about strategic priorities and institutional goals. But not this morning.

You already know about our Guidepost Goals — and you're already working hard to reach them.

We have an EDI plan and we know what we need to do to become a more inclusive, non-racist campus. I know we're ready to really make a difference this year.

And, as I hope you've seen this morning, we have the talent and passion, as well as support from students and community, to make our second hundred years as strong as the first.

So this morning, I want only to say "thank you" for all you do. I want to celebrate everything you have accomplished, despite our challenges. And I want to join hands and begin another year with you, the amazing faculty and staff of Wisconsin's premiere university. Thank you!