

Chancellor Brian Levin-Stankevich
State-of-the-University Address
Blugold Breakfast
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
August 25, 2009

Good morning and welcome to the fourth annual Blugold Breakfast.

For me, this breakfast marks the beginning of our academic year, even though we've already been working hard this summer to get curriculum, classrooms, technology and campus ready for the 10,700 students who will soon bring this place alive.

This morning is a highlight for me — and I hope for you too. It is a chance for us to catch up with colleagues we don't often see. It is a chance to welcome new members to our university community. It is really my only opportunity to address the entire campus in person and not just by e-mail. And it is a time to introduce our legislators and guests to what I know is the best faculty and staff in Wisconsin — all of you.

Allow me to begin with some introductions. First, our new faculty and staff for whom this is your first Blugold Breakfast. If you joined the University anytime during the past year, please stand so we can officially welcome you to our campus.

In particular, I'd like to introduce our new provost, Dr. Patricia Kleine, who arrived this summer from Eastern Connecticut State University and has already been out meeting many of you. Pat will be on stage later in the program to assist with the excellence awards, but let's give her a warm Blugold welcome now. Pat, please stand.

There have been other transitions this year. We are fortunate to be able to draw on the depth of talent at this campus. I look forward to working with the leadership team we have in place. Joining Provost Kleine and Vice Chancellor Beth Hellwig is David Gessner, beginning his first full year as assistant chancellor for budget and finance. I want to thank Marty Wood for his exceptional leadership this past year as interim provost, and I'm truly pleased that he will continue to help guide our academic vision as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Mike Wick will serve as associate vice chancellor of academic affairs and dean of graduate studies, and I welcome back our University Senate chair, Susan Harrison, and Vice Chair Linda Spaeth.

I want to thank the members of my staff, Mike Rindo, Teresa O'Halloran and MJ Brukardt, for the added responsibilities they continue to shoulder. And I'd like to introduce to you my new Cabinet.

Last spring I created a broad-based Cabinet that I will rely on to deliberate and advise on matters of policy and university direction. Would the members of the Cabinet please stand — the group includes academic deans and faculty, academic staff, university and Student Senate leadership, vice chancellors and associate vice chancellors, classified staff and my immediate staff. I encourage you to contact them if you have concerns, and I've asked them to help make our decision making as inclusive and transparent as possible.

We have some important guests who got up early to be with us this morning, and I'd like you to help me welcome them. First, someone who has been my co-host at countless university events and receptions, at every one of the past four Blugold Breakfasts, and, as of November 29, at 35 years of breakfasts: my wife, Debi.

Also joining us today are Michael Umhoefer, our Student Senate president, and Aaron Wingad, a UW-Eau Claire student and our first student regent. Welcome

We're honored to have several legislators and good friends with us today. As I read your name, please stand — and let's hold our applause until everyone has been introduced:

- Marjorie Bunce, assistant to Senator Herb Kohl
- Gregg Moore, chair of the Eau Claire County Board of Supervisors
- Tom McCarty, Eau Claire County administrator
- Bruce Barker, president of CTVC
- Ron Heilmann, superintendent of Eau Claire public schools
- Charlie Grossklaus, CEO, and Mark Willer, chief operating officer, RCU
- David Fish, executive vice president of St. Joseph's Hospital
- Bob McCoy, president, Eau Claire Area Chamber of Commerce
- Charlie Walker, president and CEO of the Chippewa County Economic Development Corporation
- Sam Stagliano, past president of the Alumni Association and partner of Bauman Associates, Ltd.

Paul Kohler, would you please join me at the podium?

This Breakfast would not be possible without the generous support of our sponsors who have underwritten the full cost of this wonderful hot breakfast this morning. Charter Bank has been a sponsor for the past three Blugold Breakfasts and has helped to make this event one of our most popular traditions.

Since 1990, Charter Bank has contributed nearly \$150,000 for internships, faculty/staff development, scholarships and the Hobbs Ice Arena — this January you'll see Charter Bank on the scoreboard and the Zamboni. We welcome back to the breakfast Paul Kohler, a 1989 UW-Eau Claire graduate and executive vice president of Charter Bank.

[Remarks from Paul]

Thank you, Paul. This year Sodexo joined Charter as a sponsor to help us make the breakfast truly special and to say thank you for continuing our partnership. In addition to the delicious breakfast, Sodexo staff help to make this a great event. I want to thank General Manager Christian Wise and his team for being part of our UW-Eau Claire family and for helping us begin our academic year so well.

It's now my pleasure to invite Charlie Grossklaus to the stage. A 1969 UW-Eau Claire graduate and Eau Claire native, Charlie started his career as a student working at the Uniroyal Credit Union. Today he is CEO of RCU and a leader in a wide range of community, state and national organizations.

Over the years RCU has provided nearly \$170,000 in funding for facilities, athletics, the Wisconsin Youth Sports Program and other projects for our university. In addition to his role as the vice president of the Foundation board, Charlie is a member of the Chancellor's Advisory Council. Charlie will bring greetings and we hope a "little" something else from the UW-Eau Claire Foundation.

[Presentation of Foundation check]

I want to thank those who support our university. They have made this past year the second-best fundraising year in our history and voted confidence in our direction with their investments. I want to especially commend the Foundation staff members who have achieved so much during a very challenging economic climate.

It is a Blugold tradition, indeed a highlight of our opening meeting each year, to recognize those individuals who exemplify our university's commitment to excellence.

Would the following people please come forward for the presentation of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire Excellence Awards. Pat Kleine and Beth Hellwig, please also join me on stage:

Michael Kolis
Doug Dunham
Matthew Waters
Jacqueline Bonneville
Nancy Hendricks
Scott Oates
Paul Thomas
Matt Germonprez

David Marquart , would you also join us?

Each Excellence Award recipient will receive the University Medallion and a check from the UW-Eau Claire Foundation in the amount of \$1,500. The UW System Excellence in Teaching Award is underwritten by the Arnie and Lois Domer Foundation of Eau Claire.

In 2002, the Markquart family, which sets high standards for excellence in its family of car dealerships in the Chippewa Valley, wanted to recognize that same quality in our faculty and staff. Today, the Markquarts' endowment funds the Excellence in Classified and Academic Staff awards and the Excellence in Teaching award. David Markquart, representing the Markquart family and their businesses, will help to present those awards.

[Awards presentation]

It is now my pleasure to introduce University Senate Chair Susan Harrison.

Our university is privileged to have a tradition of dedicated leadership in shared governance, exemplified by Susan, who has returned to serve the university during our transition and continues to work closely with me and with her executive team. Please join me in welcoming Susan Harrison to the podium for her remarks.

[Susan's remarks]

Thank you, Susan.

Over the past three years, literally hundreds of faculty, staff and students have helped to conduct a rigorous self-study to assess how well we fulfill our mission to serve our students and this state.

In just three weeks, eight peer evaluators from sister institutions across the Midwest will be on campus to talk with us about how we measure up against the criteria for accreditation. This is undoubtedly the most significant event on our calendar for the year.

As a peer reviewer myself, I can attest that the campus accreditation review can be an exhilarating experience. We want our reviewers to experience what UW-Eau Claire is all about —the good and the to-be-improved — and what makes us such an exceptional institution. That will take an awareness and effort by all of us.

I would like to ask Dr. Mickey Crothers, who is the lead writer of our self-study and a member of the campus HLC Steering Committee, to give us a quick primer on accreditation and what to expect on September 14-16. Mickey ...

[Mickey's remarks]

Thank you, Mickey. I want to personally thank Mickey for the truly extraordinary contribution she has made over the past three years to our university. She has written a masterful profile of our university and has been the driving force behind making sure it is balanced, accurate and truly reflective of UW-Eau Claire.

It was not uncommon for the Steering Committee to get e-mails from Mickey at 3 in the morning. We'll never know the hours you invested in our self-study, Mickey, but we appreciate every one and thank you for an extraordinary self-study.

I encourage all of you to read this executive summary closely [HOLD UP HANDOUT] and the self-study proper. It paints a picture of an active, creative, sometimes stubborn, ground-breaking, thoughtful and caring community of learners.

A second important event this fall will be our hosting of the Board of Regents meeting on October 15-16. This will be our turn to showcase our campus, our programs, and our students. Regents and their spouses will experience a sampler of UW-Eau Claire excellence from our performing and fine arts to a hands-on experience with our Campus Kitchens initiative.

Let me use this report to begin my State of the University address and to first talk about our accomplishments.

As you know, equity, diversity and inclusiveness have been a major focus for our efforts this past year. We have made some real progress even as we acknowledge there is continued work to do.

- the Equity Scorecard is nearly completed and findings from that work are already affecting our practices and decisions.
- Vice Chancellor Hellwig has generated excitement around creating a climate supportive of LGBTQ faculty, staff and students. One result is the Safe Space training available this Friday morning — all are welcome.
- UW System selected UW-Eau Claire as one of three campuses participating in a national program called COMPASS with Oregon and California to investigate how to bridge the achievement gap for minority students in university studies.
- A number of our Quick Wins also focused on EDI, including funding for development of new intercultural immersion experiences for students, the continuation of the Dismantling Racism project in Arts and Sciences, and expanding our minority student recruitment efforts.
- Quick Wins also funded the startup of Blugold Beginnings. Initiated by Jodi Thesing-Ritter with Stephanie Zigelboim, it involves our students tutoring and mentoring middle- and high-school students throughout the year and through summer on-campus programs. This initial investment has resulted in our receipt of a multi-year grant from the Great Lakes Foundation to support this program. My congratulations to all involved.

Our accomplishments over the past year do not stop there.

- gaining approval for the first applied doctoral degree in a comprehensive university in Wisconsin, the doctorate of nursing practice;
- our student, Aaron Wingad, named a regent by Gov. Doyle;
- approving the establishment of the Watershed Institute; and
- implementing elements of the Clean Commute Initiative.

We are also in the midst of rolling out the new Campus Solutions student administration system — Admissions has just gone live. This continues to be a gargantuan task, and I want to thank everyone who has worked so hard to implement this huge project — and will continue to dedicate countless hours as this transition unfolds this year.

If you've been involved in our conversion project, would you please stand and let us thank you for your long hours and hard work.

Planning has proceeded on our new student center, and you can see on the screen the architect's rendering of the building. We are now developing a new children's center that must be in place before we begin site preparation for our third project, the new academic building, with construction to begin in 2011 at the earliest. At the same time a new campus facilities master plan is being developed that will inform all our physical plant enhancements in the coming years.

Would the members of our three building committees and master planning committee please stand and be recognized.

These projects will affect every one of us, often in multiple ways over a number of years. We will need creativity, tolerance and patience — especially when dealing with parking and related construction issues. These buildings will all incorporate sustainable building and accessibility standards and energy efficiencies.

We have already begun to plan for a range of contingencies for parking, but our most important planning will be to effectively and permanently alter commute trip patterns. We will need to do this not only to accommodate construction but also to achieve our greenhouse gas emission targets in the long run. This is an opportunity for us to turn a deficit into an asset and to really become a green campus.

And have you ever seen our campus look this good? We've paid special attention this year to getting the campus ready for our HLC and regent visitors this fall. Let's all thank our hard-working grounds and maintenance staff for all the work they do to make this such a special place for us and for our students. Please stand so we can say thank you.

It's not often that the chancellor of a university uses the "F" word in the state of the university address. You know what "F" word I'm referring to: furloughs.

We begin this academic year with significant challenges ahead of us. We all know the difficult financial situation we face: the cancellation of an already-deferred pay plan and salary reductions by way of a furlough system with incredibly detailed, inconsistent, and confusing rules and regulations.

Operational reductions will be nearly \$8 million during the current biennium on top of losses just since 2000 that have resulted in our having \$53 million less to spend on our students' education over the past decade. I acknowledge the burden this places on all of us to continue to serve our students well.

In spite of this, you have modestly grown student enrollment, produced successful graduates, remained productive in your scholarship, and marked continued success in grant competitions.

But behind this veil of excellence is an infrastructure maintained increasingly by superhuman effort. A daunting teaching load has become even more demanding with larger classes, erosion of faculty positions, greater expectations for assessment activity and reductions in support services.

Not surprisingly, this is reflected in our faculty/ student ratio, in our class sizes, and in our four- and six-year graduation rates — three factors that have now begun to hurt us in at least one national ranking.

Staffing levels in most student and operational service areas have stagnated as vacancies become permanent. Yet workloads have continued to rise as we also must respond to escalating demands in technology, campus safety, health protection, and services unique to numerous populations of students.

It is tempting to want to strike back at something or someone — that is a natural reaction. I have heard many pleas to “make the public feel it.” I understand that emotion and the frustrations you are feeling. But we have to ask ourselves: What would that accomplish, especially when our colleagues in the private sector are experiencing cutbacks, layoffs, and financial uncertainty as well?

The reality is that our most recent budget circumstances are a direct result of the larger, national and global economic downturn and a continuing trend of reduced state funding for higher education.

Will “making the public feel it” result in a sudden rush of new state investment? Of course not. I do not believe we will see increased state funding in the foreseeable future.

I might well use the same words Chancellor Mash used in 1999: The university was able to maintain its quality, he said, “only because of difficult but timely reallocation decisions ... coupled with its students’ willingness to pay differential tuition and ... fees.” We are back to the same choices, and how we respond to them will determine whether we allow circumstances to dictate our future or whether we create the university envisioned in our Centennial Plan.

There are two strategies we can employ to realize our goals, and these are, as my mother would say, “doosies.” First, we must use the dollars we have on our highest priorities. Second, we must increase the resources we have available to serve our students. In a nutshell, these are the two things we must concentrate our energies on this coming year.

Let’s begin with how we use the dollars we have. One of our accomplishments this past year was, I believe, simply completing the PEEQ process (Program to Evaluate and Enhance Quality). For those new to UW-Eau Claire, this was a project to assess all campus units and activities at a point in time against mission centrality, quality, cost and opportunity.

And let’s be clear about what PEEQ is and is not. PEEQ is not a tool to make unilateral decisions about cuts to programs and services. It is designed to give individual units valuable information about how they can serve students more effectively. It also provides decision makers — vice chancellors, deans, directors and shared governance — with the information they need to make informed choices.

I want to thank the evaluation team members for their considerable work. Provost Kleine, Vice Chancellor Hellwig and I received their recommendations and assessments. I then shared their core findings with the Cabinet.

You will not be surprised at the recommendations the PEEQ team brought forward. They called for a renewed focus on teaching above all else at UW-Eau Claire. EDI needs to be a continued focus and become more institutionalized across the campus.

We need to become better at assessing what we do and how we are measuring up to the university liberal education learning goals we’ve set for ourselves. We need to analyze duplication of curriculum and services across campus to focus our resources more effectively. And we need to squarely address the hyper-compliant culture at this university that tangles us up in rules and regulations and takes time from our core work.

There are additional observations and recommendations that I have received from the PEEQ evaluation team. At this point, I agree with some of the recommendations and disagree with others, but their specificity requires that we explore them with the people involved, not to quash action but to better inform it. I will charge each division head with exploring these recommendations with the deans, departments and units involved, and reporting back to me on their findings and actions by the end of the fall semester.

Provost Kleine has only begun to explore her new environment and colleagues, and I want to give her the time needed to feel comfortable and competent in her judgments. Actions will have budget implications, and these decisions need to be made in time to be implemented in the budget beginning July 1, 2010. Moreover, many actions will require and we will seek out the timely participation of shared governance.

The PEEQ recommendations, along with the annual assessments and recommendations of the University Planning Committee, served as the basis for discussion by my Cabinet of Gold Arrow goals for the coming year. The result is the Gold Arrow chart you have before you, titled "Implementing the Plan, 2009-2010."

You'll recall that Gold Arrows are just another name for our university's annual priorities. Because we can't possibly do everything in our strategic plan at once — especially this year — our Gold Arrows help us focus on the handful of activities that we commit to working on this year.

In the interest of time, I want to draw your attention to the gold arrow that addresses how we will grow our resources — the second key challenge for us this year.

We cannot become the premier learning community in the upper Midwest without addressing our strategic goal to amplify our financial resources. To this end, we have been working for nearly two years on a proposal that would generate additional resources for the university while also fulfilling the curricular objectives of the Centennial Plan.

UW-Eau Claire was the first university in the UW System to implement differential tuition in 1998. We are proud that UW-Eau Claire's initial differential tuition plan both promised and delivered real educational value in return for the students' investment.

Building on this strong foundation, we are calling our new differential tuition proposal the Blugold Commitment. It is the product of many conversations. Late last year and into the summer, Interim Provost Marty Wood met with deans and department chairs to discuss how we might best use additional differential tuition funding. We have been working with our legislative delegation to be sure that they could answer questions that might arise, and their help in examining statutes has been invaluable. We have consulted with UW System administration staff, and I have met with most of the regents to discuss our thinking and make them aware that our proposal will be coming to them this fall.

But most importantly, we have been working with our student leadership. It is ultimately the students who will need to see sufficient benefit to their education and their preparation for careers and for life to support the Blugold Commitment. Without student support, the regents will not approve it. We will be continuing these conversations with all of you this fall to refine our ideas and take forward a proposal we all will enthusiastically support.

What exactly is the Blugold Commitment? Briefly, we are proposing that differential tuition be increased significantly, through gradual annual increases over a four-year period.

Our purposes are, first, to improve educational quality by implementing the goals of the strategic plan; second, to make a college degree more affordable for all students; and third, to produce more globally prepared graduates for Wisconsin by improved retention and graduation success.

Our proposal allocates the increased tuition funds largely to the hiring of faculty and additional staff while retaining allegiance to the principle that we established in 1998 that students should have a significant role in determining the use of differential tuition funds. We also incorporate institutional financial aid to assure that a UW-Eau Claire degree remains affordable for all students.

The Blugold Commitment requires us to focus not only on the quality of our degree but also on the timely graduation of more of our students. The public demands it. Our reputation requires it.

Consequently, it is time to get serious about our curriculum. That's why the first really big gold arrow for the coming year is focused on exactly that.

The Centennial Plan at its core defines a learning environment that is different than what serves as the status quo. It is now time to implement a liberating curriculum in place of a prescriptive curriculum. This includes completing our re-creation of a flexible yet rigorous general education program. We must incorporate what are called "high-impact" practices, including international and intercultural immersion, collaborative research, internships and service learning.

And all of this must be done without extending the time it takes our students to graduate.

Currently our curriculum takes too long to complete. In the face of increasing competition, we can no longer suffer a culture that almost seems to take pride in students taking five or more years to complete a degree. The slide shows our graduation rates compared to UW System institutions. Is a 26 percent four-year graduation rate really acceptable? Is that the mark of a premier learning community?

We must orient advising toward planning for a four-year degree. We must develop a purposeful approach to make those we currently call "undecided" into "explorers" and then "discoverers" of their academic interests and passions. We will examine the causes of low four-year graduation rates formally at the beginning of this year, and we will address them as budget and academic policy priorities for 2010-11 or sooner.

We'll be able to tackle our curriculum gold arrow thanks in part to the hard work of your colleagues, led by Dr. Jennie Shaddock, who successfully competed for a nearly one-and-three-quarter-million-dollar Title III grant to be used to develop curricular, experiential learning and advising improvements.

Addressing our four-year graduation rate has a direct impact on the affordability of a UW-Eau Claire degree and on how much our students pay for it. Compared to our Midwestern peer institutions, we are a bargain. But we know that the quality of our degree is unsustainable at current funding levels, and we know that we cannot achieve the learning environment we have projected for the future without additional resources. If implemented, the Blugold Commitment would add millions annually to our base funded operating capacity.

In addition, even with increased differential tuition, the total cost of a degree to a student would be less if they graduate in four years than if they graduate in five years with our current tuition. The cost of that degree to the state, and therefore to the university, would be less. More students could, over time, access a UW-Eau Claire degree. And estimated student indebtedness would decrease.

Our alumni routinely acknowledge that they have a degree equivalent to those of colleagues who paid thousands more each year in tuition. Their initial response to the Blugold Commitment has been enthusiastic. It will be our goal to focus our next capital campaign on need-based aid so that more of the differential tuition funds can directly support the learning environment while private funding addresses a greater part of the financial needs of students.

Our student leaders have expressed very much the same opinion while also approaching this proposal with understandable caution.

Can you imagine our world with the Gold Arrows for this year completed? We will have a more flexible and manageable curriculum that liberates our students' curiosities and passions through high-impact educational practices.

We will have created an environment that attracts and retains a diverse faculty, staff and student body. We will have planned sustainable buildings and ways to work around the disruptions of construction through “green” solutions.

We will have expanded student opportunities for meaningful immersion experiences abroad and in the U.S. We will have begun to build a “four-year” culture into our degree programs and our advising. We will have reallocated funds that now support low-impact practices and duplication.

And we will be working hard at recruiting and hiring new faculty and staff to support our four-year curriculum, to reduce our student- faculty ratio, and to create more time for core work.

The Blugold Commitment is the key to much of this happening. Our goal is to finalize the Blugold Commitment for presentation to the Board of Regents during their meeting here on campus in October and seek approval from the board by the end of this calendar year. I urge you to watch for more details and to engage each other and your students in imagining the learning environment we can create together.

We will get through these challenging times. We can determine whether we emerge as a community that has just managed to survive or as a community that defined its future and took a giant step in that direction.

Thank you for your attention, your commitment, your dedication, and your selfless hard work on behalf of our students and each other.

Have a great year!