

Inaugural Address  
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October 27, 2006

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### **If I Had a Hammer ...**

Good afternoon.

This is a truly inspirational and meaningful event for me. It is made even more so by the privilege of following President Reilly, Regent Salas, our university, legislative and community representatives, and my good friend Stephen Jordan.

I have been fortunate in my career to enjoy outstanding mentors who have given me examples and their time and energy to help me be my very best. I am very grateful that one of them, Dr. Stephen Jordan, president of Metropolitan State College of Denver, is able to be here with me today. For seven years, I enjoyed the privilege of working with him when he was the president of Eastern Washington University and having him open up the challenges and joys of a college presidency to me and my colleagues.

I welcome Don Mash, chancellor emeritus at UW-Eau Claire, who is now with UW System, and Regent Thomas Shields, who is here from Oshkosh, as well as my fellow chancellors. I also appreciate the support and attendance of several colleagues from Eastern Washington who are here today.

I am, of course, overjoyed by the presence of my family. My wife of 32 years, Debi. Our sons, Matthew and Stephen. Matthew looks great in his academic regalia as he is officially representing Buffalo State, where he is the student body president and student member of their College Council. My sister Karen Gale is here, and my nephew Colton; our almost-family member, Michael Yargosz; and my dad, Henry Stanky, and his wife, Joyce. Dad and Joyce live in Buffalo and have survived the recent snowstorm there. They were without electricity for seven days and are glad to be in the temperate climate of Wisconsin!

And, I would be remiss if I did not mention my mother, Gertrude, who died a number of years ago. She is here in spirit because she believed deeply in the importance of education and would be extremely proud of her son today.

This is an extraordinary university. There is a central focus here on students and their success — what is described in every recruitment piece for every university in the country as being student-centered. From my experience, however, it is unusual to find a university where the student is truly the center of everyone's attention.

That *is* happening here, and I am very proud to be a part of it.

This afternoon I am particularly appreciative of the time and talent given by our students and their faculty who are part of the Symphony, the Statesmen and the other performing groups with us today.

So, you are thinking, what's with the hammer?

Well, I'll tell you why I wanted to organize my presentation around this theme. It's not that I'm a really big fan of Trini Lopez, who popularized the song "If I Had a Hammer" written by Lee Hays and Pete Seeger in 1949,<sup>1</sup> even though it did become a standard in the musical repertoire of the civil rights movement.

And it's not because the area of the world I studied for my doctorate just happened to be represented for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by, yes, the hammer and the sickle.

It is due to some of the lessons my dad tried to teach me. Some I figured out early. Others took personal experience to verify. I'm not talking about academic lessons. I'm not talking about parenting lessons such as when asked a tough question by your child, always say, "It's OK with me if it's OK with your mother."

I'm talking about the lessons that a man who understood the pride and joy of his own handiwork might pass on to his son. While I was most interested in reading books, Dad occasionally tried to teach me some fundamentals, like the difference between a Phillips head and a flat head screwdriver. Lacking interest at that age, I didn't master such knowledge until I needed to work on houses and cars myself. But reading all those books

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<sup>1</sup> Lee Hays and Pete Seeger, "If I Had a Hammer," TRO-Ludlow Music Inc. (BMI), 1958, originally written in 1949.

had taught me to teach myself, so I was able to pick up quickly on the things I had a vague memory of Dad teaching me earlier in life.

I'm talking about lessons that are boiled down to a few simple words.

“If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well.” To Dad, this might have been applied to building the best hockey goal for our street hockey games, and not just slapping something together. Of course, now I see in this the core of just plain good work, as in program review or planning or fundraising or anything we undertake.

Because the corollary is, if you can't do it well, perhaps you shouldn't be doing it.

“You can't do a good job without the right tools.” A simple concept, but a powerful idea. What is it we do in education if not give our students the tools to make a living and to make a life? How can we expect ourselves to do a good job of it if we don't ourselves have the right tools — currency in our disciplines, scholarship of teaching and learning, technology, library support, laboratories, and all that comprises a learning environment conducive to excellence?

So I picked a tool, perhaps the oldest known to humankind — and first used in the shape of a club — the hammer.

I've called this talk "If I Had a Hammer," not "If *Only* I Had a Hammer." I did so because a variation of the latter would be, "If *I Only* Had a Hammer."

A couple of years ago, I opened the day planner I use, which has a quotation for each day. The quotation I read was this: "If the only tool you have is a hammer, then every problem is a nail."<sup>2</sup> We see around us the animation of this concept on a daily basis. If one is limited to a hammer, then the problem has to be reduced to a nail. In fact, problem definition becomes an almost binary concept — nail or not nail. Since a problem that is not a nail cannot be solved with a hammer, that proposition is rejected and every problem then stated as a nail.

We see it in the stifling and dangerous use of dualistic argument. If you do not support my view, you support my enemy's. If you do not support this proposal, all form of chaos will result. Or problems are portrayed in a dualistic either/or, good or evil, progressive or regressive, in other words — nail or not nail.

William Perry, an educational psychologist, studied college student development and identified nine stages of transition. Students progress through these stages as they move from complete acceptance of absolute beliefs toward understanding the contexts and relativity of information from which they then derive their beliefs and values. These new or reinforced beliefs and values are consequently based on critical thought and rational

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<sup>2</sup>Abraham Harold Maslow, *The Psychology of Science: A Reconnaissance*, Harper & Row, 1966.

decision making.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the very first, or lowest, stage of Perry's scheme is dualistic thinking and absolute values. In other words, either/or — nail or not nail.

Today, we are surrounded by dialogues at every level of our polity based not on critical thinking but stuck in Perry's most elementary stage of cognitive exercise. When we look at the recent controversies around free speech on college campuses, we find that one or another proponent of an absolute value, an extremely relative and one-dimensional world view, is determined to prevent the presentation of an opposite view or of the shades of gray that students and society need to understand.

So, if I (or we) only had a hammer, we would not add much to our society. In fact we'd be quite happy to dawdle on AM talk radio or political ads that most graphically exemplify the nail/not nail thinking. We would transform most problems, no matter how complex or nuanced, into a nail.

But wait, there is not only one kind of hammer! Luckily, our species has indeed developed the hammer into a family of tools capable of handling much more than a nail. Remember, too, that when using a traditional hammer for nailing, the penalty for not hitting the nail precisely on the head is at best a bent nail (a problem made even more difficult) or a sore and painful thumb.

Yes, happily, we have hammers that can address a number of problems.

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<sup>3</sup> Ernest T. Pascarella and Patrick T. Terenzini, *How College Affects Students*, Jossey-Bass, 1991, pp. 28-30.

We have the claw hammer, what we think of as the traditional hammer, dating from Roman times. A basic tool in any toolset.

The ball-peen hammer takes a problem in metalworking and allows us to strengthen welded joints or create greater flexibility in the material.

A stonemason's hammer (geologist's hammer) is used for setting masonry and finely chiseling rock or brickwork to precise size and shape.

On the other end of the subtlety range are the two-handed hammers. The sledge, for example, will work on all but the most stubbornly resistant objects.

Then there is an entire family of mallets:

- Percussion mallets are used to strike objects like a xylophone or a tympani and add to the wonder of music.
- Croquet mallets are used for recreation and leisure enjoyment.
- Rubber mallets are used to strike a blow but do so gently, without damaging the object so struck.
- Meat mallets help us tenderize our steaks.<sup>4</sup>

All are enjoyable and constructive pursuits.

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<sup>4</sup> R.A. Salaman, Dictionary of Tools Used in the Woodworking and Allied Trades, c. 1700-1970, Charles Scribner's Sons, N.Y., 1975, pp. 219-236.

As you can see, hammers can be used to build and construct, to make something new or to repair a troubled structure. Hammers can also be used to deconstruct and tear apart. They can even be used to nourish the body and to soothe the spirit.

Having at our disposal an entire family of hammers for all possible situations, we can choose the appropriate tool to address the challenge of building, repairing or tearing apart the piece on which we work.

And whether it be in the world of construction and remodeling or in the intellectual work of the mind, there is much work to do.

The contemporary university is the topic of much conversation. It is interesting to me that the most aggressive thinking about reshaping the public university tends to come from retired university presidents and chancellors. But, the value of those views remains significant. Perhaps I, too, can look forward to a period of clear thinking in retirement. I will certainly be accused of the opposite while still in the working world.

James Duderstadt, the president emeritus of the University of Michigan, sees a sea change coming to the higher education enterprise, and on a global scale. “It could happen from within,” he notes, “in an effort to respond to growing societal needs and limited resources. But it is more likely to be transformed by new markets, new technologies, and new competition.” The institutions most at risk, he continues, “will not

be of any particular type or size but rather those most constrained by tradition, culture or governance.”<sup>5</sup>

Alan Guskin, president emeritus of Antioch University, calls not for incremental adjustments to the educational enterprise but for fundamental transformation based on quality student learning outcomes, organizational restructuring, reducing costs per student, and educational delivery consistent with the institution’s vision.<sup>6</sup>

Both see the future world of higher education as increasingly competitive in every way, in the competition for faculty and students, for resources, for reputation.

Higher education has recognized the need to change. Like the private sector, we need to become more responsive and more accountable. Becoming more nimble is the phrase I hear often on campus. We need to contribute to society those graduates who will be personally successful, perform the complex tasks of citizenship well, take responsibility, act ethically, understand the necessity and importance of making decisions for the common good and who will build the future economy and society — preferably in Wisconsin.

That requires that we seriously address the outcomes of a baccalaureate degree, something we are in the process of doing here at UW-Eau Claire. It means

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<sup>5</sup> James J. Duderstadt, *A University for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2000, p. 297.

<sup>6</sup> Alan E. Guskin and Mary B. Marcy, *Dealing with the Future NOW*, *Change*, July 1, 2003, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 10-21.

- that we continue to link theory and practice and that we specifically enlarge the reach of collaborative student-faculty research, in which UW-Eau Claire has been a national leader;
- that we continue to expand on the international and cross-cultural experiences and competencies of our students;
- that we make sure that our extraordinary learning environment remains accessible and inviting to students from all backgrounds regardless of advantage or disadvantage;
- and to succeed in this, that we will take the time to develop a vibrant strategic plan and then take action to implement, adjust, sustain and evaluate our progress on the course we chart.

And we will do all of those things here at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, making the hard decisions when we must and using all of the right tools as we build and live our plan.

The university has a particularly critical role in building cross-cultural competence. We simply must enhance and improve our efforts at creating a diverse population of highly educated citizens. Creating cultural competence enriches lives and enhances our region.

The world in which we and our students live and work is a multicultural one, enriched by diverse people, perspectives and ideas. James Duderstadt and Farris Womack cite demographic studies that indicate that by the year 2030, “approximately 40% of all

Americans will be members of minority groups.”<sup>7</sup> In 2030, the student who is a freshman today will be 42. She will likely be a parent, a supervisor, a community member, and a colleague to many. If our students truly are to succeed, they must experience learning at UW-Eau Claire that mirrors that diverse and increasingly globalized world.

We must demonstrate a return on investment — to the individual, to the region and to the public, in order to restore and maintain the social contract between public higher education and our citizens. One of the ways we will do this is by nurturing on campus a proactive sense of responsibility to the region, the state and beyond. Because our problems and opportunities cross institutions and boundaries, students must learn a shared responsibility as community members. The decisions our students someday make as scientists, engineers, artists, and business and political leaders will affect all of us. Community-based learning and civic engagement are essential to educating the whole student and instilling a sense of personal and social responsibility. And, just as importantly, the citizenry we serve deserves the quality of life to which this university contributes.

We will do these things by identifying our strengths, building on them and developing core competencies that will achieve our goals while maintaining and improving upon the quality of our work and affirming our reputation in a national and international marketplace.

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<sup>7</sup> James J. Duderstadt and Farris W. Womack, *The Future of the Public University in America*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2003, pp. 44-45.

We will do these things, because, as Dad said, they are worth doing and worth doing well. But we will continue to remember: We need the right tools to do the job. This is not always simply financial resources. It can well be a reprieve from practices and policies that are contrary to any business model, public or private. It might mean the license to experiment, to invest and be held accountable for the outcomes, and to do what we know we can do best: be creative. I would note that these reprieves are not only within the jurisdictions of those who exercise public control over higher education (the regents, the governor and the legislature), but also in the jurisdiction of university constituencies who can *prevent innovation* as easily as *facilitate change*.

The educator Howard Gardner and others wrote about the relationships between professionals and their publics in a 2001 book entitled "Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet." They defined good work as “work of expert quality that benefits the broader society.”<sup>8</sup> There are some values so essential to our work — to our Good Work — that on them we cannot and will not compromise.

We cannot and will not provide that to which only the affluent have access. While the current financing of public higher education exhibits a growing privatization, the future of our society depends on educational excellence for all of our citizens.

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<sup>8</sup> Howard Gardner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and William Damon, *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet*, Basic Books, N.Y., 2001, p. ix.

We will extend the work of the university to the people of our region, the citizens of Wisconsin and to the benefit of the international community. That can be the only interpretation of the Wisconsin Idea in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We will continue to undergird our students' experience in liberal education. Not in educating liberals (lest some grab for their hammers, having spotted a nail), but in the fundamental learning that creates intellectual and practical skills, individual and social responsibility, knowledge of human cultures and the natural and physical world, and the capacity to adapt knowledge, skills and responsibilities to new settings and questions.<sup>9</sup>

We will assure that our graduates know how to use the whole family of hammers and the rest of the tool chest as well.

We will lead by example in creating civil, meaningful dialogue from which we can learn. To this end, I am sponsoring a fund for campus dialogue. We can see and listen to hammers pounding nails on television and radio constantly. A university community must offer more than the shouting matches with winners and losers. We must use the entire range of tools available to us to promote meaningful dialogue and not just partisan narrative.

We will jealously watch over the integrity of the baccalaureate. An undergraduate degree is not an arithmetical outcome. It is not simply the addition of credits to equal a total that

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<sup>9</sup> Association of American Colleges and Universities, Overview of the LEAP Campaign, [http://www.aacu.org/advocacy/pdfs/LEAP\\_VisionFlyer.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/advocacy/pdfs/LEAP_VisionFlyer.pdf).

is called a degree. It is a purposeful whole, each part built on the other and interdependent. We must articulate this and protect it.

As a chancellor, I am but one voice. As a member and designated leader of this university community, I and we do have a hammer, we have an entire tool chest that is comprised of all of us in this university community, our greater community, and the University of Wisconsin.

While we are meeting the many challenges to come our way and inventing our future with our students, we can also use those tools to make sure that our students are cognizant of that about which Trini Lopez sang:

About justice.

About freedom.

About love between our brothers and our sisters, all over this land.

Because that, as educators and Americans, is what we ought to do best.

Thank you.