

Brian Levin-Stankevich

State-of-the-University Address

University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

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Welcome to the beginning of the 90th academic year for the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire!

This is a special beginning for all of us as we share the privilege of carrying on the Blugold tradition of excellence. This beginning is particularly exciting for my wife, Debi, and me as we start this year's journey with you for the first time.

Our journey really started about 120 days and 1,500 miles ago when we said "yes" to your invitation to join this exceptional campus community. As we packed our books and our bikes in Spokane, Washington, we wondered what our new future would bring ... how we would be received ... what our life would be like.

In the whirlwind of activity that has made up the past 80+ days, what we found were open arms. We want to thank you and this entire community for welcoming us, making us a part of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and introducing us across campus and across the community. We're enjoying the quality of life in this region and getting to know the campus and the university community.

I think that is why I feel so at home at UW-Eau Claire and why I would like to begin this address the way most speeches like this usually end. They usually end with a big challenge or "call to action." I'm not going to wait until the end of this speech for that. I'm going to ask you my big question up front because it will be the single most important challenge you will hear from me as your chancellor.

No matter what your job, what priorities we focus on from year to year or what big goals we set for ourselves, the single question each one of us must ask — each and every day — is, "What can *I* do to help University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire students succeed?"

In the weeks and months ahead we will refine our institutional vision, set new plans, work together on grand new initiatives that will set UW-Eau Claire apart, but at the core, our single driving motivation must be the success of our students. Students must be at the center of everything that we do. If we are united in that commitment — and, from all I've seen and everyone I've met, I believe that we are — we will continue to excel. \

With this in mind, I want to talk to you about

- what's been happening since June 1;
- where I believe we are; and
- what I believe we need to do in the near future to set a course for continuing excellence and success.

First, WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING SINCE JUNE 1: Since arriving in Eau Claire, I've had the privilege to attend:

- eleven meetings with UW System administrators and chancellors
- nine Alumni Association and Foundation meetings
- eight legislator meetings
- seven departmental meetings
- three meetings of the UW System Board of Regents
- lunch with the Governor
- two visits with the Friday afternoon Mona Lisa's crowd
- and one great commencement ceremony where our graduates became our newest alumni.

This list of activity is not about me. It is about the great number of people who eagerly interact with me to tell me of their role, to offer encouragement and suggestions. I welcome and encourage these interactions, as I cannot serve you well or be useful to you unless I understand this institution, its culture and your collective aspirations.

But this is not all that's happened since the end of the spring semester.

Among my first efforts has been moving to put our leadership team in place. It may seem like a small step, but in pursuit of this goal we have already changed the membership and schedule of some of our administrative meetings. When we find ourselves struggling to compile a meeting agenda, we must question why we are meeting.

In fact, I've noticed that we have many meetings and committees here at UW-Eau Claire. One committee that was brought to my attention actually had a roster of 31 members. I have asked the provost to look at this committee's purpose and who is needed to accomplish that purpose. Student success does not depend on large committees. It depends on each of us focusing on being effective and efficient. Let's look for efficiency while making sure to engage the right people for the task and to work through *effective* shared governance.

Today I am officially calling for the beginning of the search for a permanent provost and vice chancellor. Last Friday, the Board of Regents approved our search, setting in motion the next steps by several nominating committees here on campus. I will meet with the search committee as soon as it is formed to discuss the attributes I seek in a provost.

You can imagine the first question I will ask all candidates: "What will you do to make UW Eau Claire students successful?"

I anticipate a permanent provost/vice chancellor will be in place sometime during this academic year. I want to take a moment to express our gratitude for the continued service of Dr. Tallant, Dr. Phillips, Dr. Hale and others who serve or have served in interim positions during this transitional period. Having been there myself, I know that role is no easy task. All have earned my respect for the enthusiasm, energy and commitment they bring to their positions.

Initial screening of applications for the director of affirmative action began yesterday. The goal is to have a permanent director in place by mid-fall. In addition to affirmative action duties, we seek a candidate with a legal background. The director will act as the point person with the UW System legal department and provide counsel to me and others here at the university.

Earlier this year, UW System administration presented an agenda to the Board of Regents for enrollment growth across the state. The purpose of increasing enrollment is to graduate more students in Wisconsin who hold a baccalaureate degree.

UW-Eau Claire can and should be an important contributor to this goal, and earlier this summer we submitted our plan in support of this agenda. No doubt in the weeks ahead you will hear more in the news media about what the UW System calls the Growth Agenda. I want you to know now how we plan to be a player in this initiative. If funded adequately, we will meet our goal for 525 students in three ways. The first is through increased retention. Ninety-four percent of this year's incoming freshmen intend to complete a bachelor's degree with us. Wouldn't that be a challenging retention and graduation goal? Retention is making a commitment to the students we admit to this university that we will do everything we can to help them succeed, to help them make the mature decisions they need to make to be successful, and to meet our responsibilities to them as we expect them to meet their responsibilities as learners. I've told our incoming students the same thing I tell each student in any class I teach: that I want and expect to see each of them work hard and meet the challenges we put before them. A second path to our growth agenda is through targeting and serving more nontraditional students. A number of faculty have been working on a liberal studies degree. We will ask our whole faculty to help build a degree that meets the needs of adult students and students in the workforce while maintaining the rigor and high standards we set for all our degree programs. Finally, we can grow, if funded, by expanding selected graduate programs that can address the needs of the many UW-Eau Claire graduates in this region and through online and distance program delivery. I believe our goals are realistic and can be accomplished by 2012. Again, these goals can only be achieved with adequate funding so that we continue and improve the quality of the learning environment we offer our students.

Of course, growth must never be an end in itself. In tandem with the UW System's Growth Agenda, we here are also beginning conversations regarding the goals of our baccalaureate degree, hosted by the provost's office and others. They begin in earnest this week and next.

There is nothing more important than defining and refining the curricular objectives and the learning outcomes of our degree. They define student success and set us apart as an institution. They are the reason for our existence and should drive everything we do at this university. I strongly encourage you to participate in these upcoming discussions.

What can you do to help University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire students succeed?

Over the summer, a number of you have been engaged in preparing for and initiating our 10-year reaccreditation process. I am eager to begin this process not only because I am confident that we

will do well, but more importantly, because I know the process will help us better identify our strengths and ways we can improve. We will use the accreditation process to align our goals, inform our planning and strengthen our assessment of outcomes achieved.

WHERE WE ARE

Through these experiences this summer, I am beginning to learn more and more about where we are as a university. And what I am learning makes me even more certain that the opportunity to join this community was truly a privilege. So, where are we?

On one level, we're eating eggs in the arena. In preparing to come to Eau Claire, I was uncomfortable with the first week activities and the separation of our community into what I feel are artificial groupings. When I first brought up the idea of a breakfast for the entire university community, I was told it couldn't be done. But by challenging traditional thinking and suggesting some space configurations, we've made it work!

If we are to be equal to the task of helping our ambitious and deserving students succeed, we must continue to get better at thinking differently and working together. This breakfast is symbolic of the way we will need to work — creatively, with energy and, above all, together. Together, all of us help to educate the whole student, in and outside of the classroom. Some of us teach. Others help students match their cognitive growth with effective skills and development. Yet others play important roles by supporting and enhancing the environment in which this work occurs.

In all that we do, we will strive for excellence through civility. As we do our work, I anticipate we will have many deep discussions. Sometimes these are not easy, but civil discourse and mutual respect will help guide our efforts. I applaud the work of the Committee on Civility.

We have the wonderful privilege and responsibility of significantly affecting — indeed, transforming the lives of our students through their experiences with us.

What can you do to help our students succeed?

On another level, as I have had opportunities to listen to you, I listen to your words. But I also try to hear the values and subtexts behind your words. And all these conversations turn very quickly to our students. You are quick to tell me about engaging students in the classroom and about special student research and internship projects. You speak with great pride about your role in engaging our students outside of the classroom.

This central focus on students and their success is something that is described as student centered. It is described in every viewbook of every university in this country. From my experience, however, it is unusual to find a university where the student is truly the center of everyone's attention.

It is happening here.

I knew of UW-Eau Claire's reputation for academic excellence before I arrived here. Our Marks of Excellence distinguish this university from our peers. They are built on student engagement

through undergraduate research, community-based learning and international experiences.

I am pleased to be at a university that actually walks the walk and values students so highly. Having spent my career focusing on student success both in and outside the classroom, I feel very much at home in this environment.

To the outside world, our strength as a university was recognized once again last Friday by U.S. News & World Report's College Rankings. We are in the top 10 among Midwest regional public universities, as we have been since the rankings began — one of the few Midwest regional publics with such consistency. We are again noted for our specific marks of excellence. We were cited at last's week Board of Regents meeting for our role in preparing graduates who succeed in such visible ways as becoming Fulbright scholars — four just this past year and eight since 2000.

We contribute to the economic vitality of the Chippewa Valley as a major employer; by enhancing the talents of the region's population; by interacting with area business and industry as interns, advisers, analysts and leaders; and by preparing the future leaders of this region and the state. Continuing to expand this role is, for me, a given. We will look for the best opportunities to contribute to economic development in ways that also further the academic mission of this university.

Within the constellation of institutions of higher education in America, we are an institution that provides a liberal education across the curriculum in all programs. John Gardner, the guru of learning differences, criticizing the growing specialization in undergraduate education, described the ideal education. It is one that prepares students in fundamental principles and gives them confidence in their ability to apply that learning in a variety of contexts throughout their lives.¹ Because that is what we do here best, we heartily join our spring graduation speaker, Lt. Gov. Barbara Lawton, in her leadership of Wisconsin's pilot role in the AAC&U's program, Liberal Education and America's Promise. I urge you to incorporate the goals of this program into your thinking about the goals of the baccalaureate.

We are, I believe, in a very strong position. We have excellent programs, a history of achievement, and the talent to accomplish whatever we set our minds to do. Most importantly, we have a focus on the student. This summer, I once remarked to a group of department chairs who were telling me about their programs, "What makes this university unique is that you, the people who make up this community, haven't forgotten why you got into higher education in the first place."

This is a university of high quality and wonderful reputation, filled with people who have deep pride in it. Together you have built and continue to enjoy something that is truly special. Now we must engage together to keep it that way because, simply put, we cannot remain static and expect to remain distinctive.

We are about to welcome 10,500 students to the university. Many of you have worked diligently over the summer to prepare the campus for them. Classrooms in Hibbard and Schneider have been refurbished, the buildings are clean and the grounds look good. Advising has been going on all summer

long, and our precollegiate programs brought hundreds of young people to the university. Last week, we dedicated a refurbished portal to the campus just west of Zorn Arena. So many graduates pass through that portal for final photos after commencement. It will be fitting to have our new freshmen pass through that gateway when they attend our convocation next week — a symbolic start to their fascinating journey. Thanks to all of you for your great effort in preparing the campus to help students (indeed all of us) succeed.

Yes, we are at a beginning. In October, I will use my inaugural address to offer a more specific portrait of where I believe we need to act to assure an even more outstanding future for UW-Eau Claire. Today, however, I want to outline four goals I have set for myself as your chancellor. I believe these goals are important first steps. They were formulated through thoughtful conversations with many of you and from my own reading and discussions with colleagues across the country.

WHERE WE ARE GOING

First, we need to refine our vision and strategically manage our future.

On this, I plan to move quickly and to provide personal leadership. Perhaps one of the most important reasons this university has been able to lead our counterparts in the quality of our performance is because of our clear vision: “Excellence. Our Measure, Our Motto, Our Goal.” We know what is important and we are united in working toward it.

This vision has served us well. But it is time to look again at what we need to be in a world that is rapidly changing.

I am quite impressed by the approach laid out in the book "Blue Ocean Strategy" by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne. In that strategy, competition with other institutions becomes irrelevant. Rather, the focus is on creating a leap in the value of what we offer here to our students as well as in the working environment that will attract and retain committed employees.² There is a visual mapping process that will help us define where we are and, more importantly, where we want to be. I will implement this process here in the coming months. I believe it will guide us in enhancing our distinctiveness. An effective, vibrant, transparent strategic plan will dovetail with our accreditation preparation and help us to align our mission, our direction and our resources.

Earlier I mentioned our Marks of Excellence, particularly collaborative research, community-based learning and international experiences. Years ago we developed and implemented those marks and did a great job of it. But look around now and you'll see many universities that are a lot like us. They've modeled themselves on us, are catching up and doing many of the same things.

Think of the analogy of a house. When Debi and I came to Eau Claire, we looked at about 30 houses. The one we chose is unique, has some distinctive characteristics and is very special to us. We love it. That doesn't mean we won't change a thing (although some days that would be OK with me). We certainly will change things and as we do, we plan to add to its distinctiveness.

The purpose of our strategic thinking and action is to identify the distinctiveness that characterizes our university, our capacities, the way we work and our learning environment. It is to build a strategy that creates such an extraordinary level of excellence that others must continue to look to UW Eau Claire as the standard against which to compare themselves. Finding our "blue ocean" will require a rigorous, inclusive and collaborative planning process that engages all of us in asking big questions and finding new answers. It will require us to determine how to best manage our student-faculty ratio to achieve excellence, how to provide the most effective and efficient student services, and how to purposefully organize our environment to support our learning objectives for students. We will need to determine how best to not only attract our first-choice hires but also to retain and continuously develop the talent you all represent here already.

We will work through this together and lay out a plan of distinction for this university. We will define our priorities. We will do our best to obtain adequate state resources to support those priorities. However, budget follows planning, so our budget and our personnel decisions will support our strategic plan, including reallocation and realignment if necessary.

My most immediate goal is engaging this university in inclusive and effective strategic planning that results in a living strategy, meaningful assessment, and broad participation in the decisions that affect our future.

Second, we need a greater emphasis on cultural competence and we need to enhance and improve our efforts at creating a diverse environment.

Creating cultural competence enriches lives and enhances our region. Cross-cultural learning can occur in many ways. International experiences or participating in our National Student Exchange programs give all students the chance to live in different environments. Students learn from other students — from sharing residence halls and classrooms with those who differ from them. Students learn so much from surviving and thriving in environments different from their own.

Recently the Census Bureau confirmed what we already know: this state — and our nation — is becoming more diverse. Since 2000 Wisconsin has seen a 17 percent increase in the number of foreign-born immigrants – with a 27 percent increase in Hispanics.³ The world we and our students live and work in is a multicultural one, enriched by diverse perspectives and ideas. If our students truly are to succeed, they must experience learning at UW-Eau Claire that mirrors our increasingly diverse and global world. Serving our diverse populations opens doors for the people who obtain degrees. It also prepares majority students for the global society where they will live and work. We have an

extraordinary learning experience to offer here. We need to make that experience accessible to all eligible students of Wisconsin regardless of the advantages or disadvantages of their lives.

I recognize that much has been accomplished and many resources are already committed to these goals. But there remains significant room for improvement in the cultural, ethnic and socio-economic diversity of our students. It is easy to argue that our enrollment roughly mirrors the population distribution of the state. But a university of our caliber should be doing more to attract, retain and graduate an even larger percentage of underrepresented and low income students. This is attainable, but it will require setting lofty goals and a singular focus of not only the people most directly involved with our recruitment, admission and retention processes but of every one of us.

This challenge is not just a vague goal. It has already had financial implications for this university. UW-Eau Claire was recently eliminated from a large NSF grant program for one key reason: insufficient benefit to racial and ethnic minorities. This elimination may be a first for us but will by no means be the last if our performance remains static. Creating a more diverse environment is part of everyone's job here at UW-Eau Claire and in the larger community.

My second, and continuing goal is to provide leadership to distinguish UW-Eau Claire by the diversity, the cultural competence, and the global perspectives of our students, our faculty and staff, our curriculum and our learning environment.

Addressing my third continuing goal, you can learn a lot by walking around. And there is one need at UW-Eau Claire that it is pretty hard not to see. We need support for our capital projects.

Although there has been consistent investment in remodeling and lab modernization in the past, and our deans and chairs have been extremely creative in their efforts, we lag behind our sister institutions in major capital building projects.

Take UW-Whitewater, for example, which, over the next five years, will see \$100 million in capital investments. Our last new academic building opened in 1982. This disparity, for a university of our caliber, needs attention.

We will work, therefore, to ensure that a new academic building replacing the Campus School and Brewer Hall remains in the queue for state support. The process for state support is a lengthy one, I know — it will take several biennia before a new building opens. Nevertheless, that is what it will take to get what we need. Other institutions, now building new facilities, have all spent time in that same queue, so it is important that we are in the game and that we move forward.

We also continue to work with our student leadership regarding plans for changes for Davies Center. We need to have a proposal presented to the Board of Regents on our behalf by its December 2006 meeting. This project has been the focus of student leadership attention since 2000. It is time to make decisions and move forward with them.

At the same time, we must continue — and expand if we can — the departmental remodeling projects. These need to be addressed if we are to continue to service students well — and help them succeed — in our academic programs.

Every facility is a part of our learning environment. Academic buildings, student centers, athletic facilities, residence halls are purposefully incorporated into achieving the learning outcomes we expect of our graduates. They help facilitate our assurance of those outcomes. As such, each facility is an important component of the core work of this university community.

You have my pledge that my third and continuing goal as chancellor is to work to obtain support for our capital needs.

Finally, a fourth objective is one that we share with every state-assisted institution: our need to supplement state funding with private funds. In this regard we have set our sights high and met the challenge. Our comprehensive campaign, “Fulfilling the Promise of Excellence,” has, to date, received \$47.5 million dollars in cash and commitments. This is an extraordinary achievement for a regional public university. It is a tribute to our alumni and other university friends who have given generous gifts. It is a further tribute to each of you who provide the experiences in and outside of the classroom that inspire such investment. Alumni I have met tell me that their Eau Claire Experience made their decision to “give back” an easy one.

We will continue to work diligently to reach our \$50 million goal by Dec. 31, 2007. Raising significant private contributions is one of the very few ways we can access resources that lift us from good to great and influence our own destiny. State dollars open our doors — private dollars set us apart. We, all of us, need to set the example we ask others to follow.

Again I ask, what can we do to help make UW-Eau Claire students successful?

Our success with private fundraising is just beginning. And our reliance on private resources to achieve our goals makes the need to think strategically about our future even more imperative. I plan to be deeply involved in fundraising and all community outreach programs at UW-Eau Claire. You can be assured that my fourth goal is to provide enthusiastic leadership for our current comprehensive campaign, and to lead the charge for the next one.

So there you have it.

My personal goals for the immediate future are:

1. I will provide leadership in developing an inclusive, comprehensive and living strategic planning process.
2. I will provide leadership to distinguish UW-Eau Claire by the diversity, the cultural competence, and the global perspectives of our students, our faculty and staff, our curriculum and our learning environment.
3. I will work for support of our capital needs.

4. I will take the lead in completing this university's first ever comprehensive fundraising campaign.

All of you can take pride (and credit) for the successes of the past. But I also believe your achievements are only the beginning for UW-Eau Claire.

Anchored in our shared commitment to student success, the journey ahead will be a bold and exciting one. I'm anxious to begin.

And so I ask you: What can we do to help University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire students succeed?

Welcome to the beginning of our 90th year! THANK YOU.

ENDNOTES

¹John Gardner, *Excellence: Can We Be Equal and Excellent Too?* (Harper & Bros., New York, 1961).

²W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne, *Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make the Competition Irrelevant* (Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 2005), p. 12.

³The Census Bureau Report, "American Community Survey," released August 15, 2006, outlines patterns of immigration across the states. The report was summarized in an August 15, 2006, National Public Radio online article, "America's Growing Diversity" available at: <http://www.npr.org/news/specials/usdiverse/>. That URL also contains data on Wisconsin.