

2007 Blugold Breakfast Speech
Chancellor's State-of-the-University Address
Aug. 21, 2007

"For the Public Good"

Earlier this month I was invited to attend a national meeting of new presidents and chancellors—kind of a presidents' "boot camp." As colleague after colleague shared the challenges faced at their institution—some of them monumental—I repeated what I've said so often since I arrived here just over a year ago:

Thank goodness I'm at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire! What a great university to serve.

I knew coming into this university that it was special, but the past year has proven to me over and over again just what makes this university a privilege to lead.

Every university claims its faculty and staff are both extraordinary and dedicated, and by and large they are. What we have here that is so precious, however, is an equally extraordinary commitment to our students and their success – it is unlike any but the most exclusive (and expensive) private liberal arts institutions in the country. And it is the foundation that supports the most important things we do – provide quality academic and co-curricular programs, and produce the very best university graduates in Wisconsin.

I could spend all morning telling stories about UW-Eau Claire achievements this past year—which is exactly what I do when I meet with past or prospective friends of the university or with state and federal legislators—I've had dozens of such meetings this year alone.

The same is true when I've met with hundreds of alumni and friends at events as far afield as San Diego, Denver, Phoenix and Albuquerque.

We can and should take pride in our individual and collective accomplishments, but today I'd like spend at least part of this time to make an accounting.

Last August I stood at this podium and set four priorities for my leadership: strategic planning, diversity, capital projects and our campaign. I have good news to report on all fronts.

I told you that my first priority would be to launch a strategic planning effort—to engage this university in inclusive, effective strategic planning. Why? Without a sure sense of our direction and priorities we will not continue our leadership as a premier institution.

Without strategic planning, we will not be able to avoid diluting the quality we've built.

I'm pleased to report today that our planning is well under way. Based on conversations with literally hundreds of you this past spring, five Work Groups of more than 60 faculty, staff and students, were formed to develop the strategic ideas that will map the next decade.

I want to thank this extraordinary group of individuals for their hard work all through the summer. Would all the members of the five Work Groups, as well as the Resource Team please stand so we can recognize your good work.

My second—and continuing—goal is to enhance the diversity and cultural competence of our campus.

To that end, I formed the Chancellor's Advisory Commission on Diversity, co-chaired by Assistant to the Chancellor for Affirmative Action Teresa O'Halloran and Associate Vice Chancellor of Student Development and Diversity, Kimberley Barrett. I also empowered the Commission on the Status of Women.

Let me be candid about my sense of our diversity. We are not there yet. While the number of minority students accepted to the university has increased, the number of students who accept and attend has not—our “yield rate” for students of color is almost half that of students overall. Our staff members are working to find out why. Likewise women and people of color continue to be under-represented among our faculty and staff. Addressing these challenges will continue to be a priority for my chancellorship.

My third goal was improvement of our capital infrastructure. On this item I have good news and some bad news.

The bad news is that our proposals to build a new education building and student center remain in question, awaiting resolution of the current Budget Conference Committee deliberations.

The good news is that these projects have received tremendous support. Fourteen past student presidents and vice presidents have petitioned the legislature in support of our Davies proposal.

These projects also have been supported in Madison by several of our elected representatives—Senators Pat Kreitlow and Kathleen Vinehout and Representative Jeff Smith.

They and Representative Terry Moulton have also been supportive of the NanoSTEM initiative, our joint effort with UW-Stout and CTVC. Thank you for your support.

Importantly, many of our region's most influential supporters of candidates in both parties have weighed in directly with their legislators to encourage support of our budget and facility projects.

The reality is that major capital improvements will take time and much relationship building.

My final goal was to successfully complete our first comprehensive campaign. Today I can announce that we have not only met, but exceeded our \$50 million goal.

Thanks to the great work of our Foundation and development staff led by Carole Halberg and now Kimera Way, we have raised \$51.8 million—and counting.

We have enjoyed many successes this year. We have converted our campus accounting system to the UW Shared Financial System, replacing a legacy system in use for more than 30 years. Amazingly this project was completed in less than a year, thanks to the hard work of Jackie Kriesel in Accounting and all who made the conversion possible.

What we learned during that conversion will help guide us this year as we move forward with our Oracle and PeopleSoft Campus Solutions project. These background infrastructure improvements will give us the tools we need to respond more flexibly to future challenges.

This conversion process is a major initiative—as it rolls out, it will involve every individual who deals directly with students, primarily in our University offices of Admissions, the Registrar, Financial Aid, Business and LTS, and eventually every faculty and department office.

Please be patient with your colleagues as this project unfolds.

Also upcoming will be our accreditation. Preparations for our 2009 site visit are already well underway, thanks to the Steering Committee and chair Andy Phillips' leadership.

The nine Higher Learning Commission subcommittees—involving more than 75 of our faculty and staff have undertaken a rigorous self-assessment of what we do well and what we need to improve. Thank you all for your work.

The sad events this year at Virginia Tech remind us of the importance of campus safety and crisis preparation. This fall we will conduct table top exercises to make sure that we are prepared for the unexpected.

The University of Wisconsin System, as well as the Governor's Task Force on Campus Safety, will soon complete their safety reports and we will use those recommendations to better inform our own practices.

Now, looking ahead into the coming year what we see, frankly, is a looming storm cloud: our state budget.

The biennial state budget is not just uncertain—no matter what package legislators finally adopt, and the Governor signs, it likely will be less than we need to meet the increased costs of continuing our existing operations.

This means that to do more or to function differently in the coming biennium will require internal budget re-allocations.

These budget challenges are not new, of course—they come on the heels of several biennia of fiscal cuts that have their roots in a growing, nation-wide mistrust of public institutions, and in increasing calls for accountability, tax cuts and smaller governmentⁱ. These trends are pervasive and are not going away.

We face these financial challenges amid an increasingly competitive academic world. While we continue to maintain our top-five regional ranking in *U.S. News & World Report*, other public institutions are gaining ground.

The innovations of undergraduate research, service learning and study abroad that set us apart in the 1990s are now the minimum entrance requirements for top-tier institutions. Our competitors are not only nipping at our heels, they are beginning to out-run us.

As Will Rogers once said, even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.

As your chancellor, it is not only my duty to comfort the afflicted, but also, as the saying goes, to afflict the comfortable. Colleagues, maintaining the status quo is no longer good enough. The “Eau Claire Way,” as we know it, cannot get us to the future. If we are to compete, we need to change.

We have been fortunate over the past decade to attract and accept the best students—this year we have 11 National Merit Scholars, a record.

But lest we pat ourselves on the back too quickly, a glance at the statistics reveals that our applications over the past 10 years have only mirrored demographic trends.

As the population goes up, our applications rise; as the demographics go down, so also do our applications.

This is fine for good times, when we're all going upward, but the reality is that by 2012 we are due for a big drop as the baby boomlet fades. We must find ways to attract and enroll more quality students—especially students of color and first-generation students—who will comprise a greater percentage of high school graduates over the coming years.

We must decouple ourselves from the demographic roller coaster if we are to have the capacity to shape our future as we want.

Budget, competition, enrollment—these challenges are not new and they are very serious.

They are the fundamental, baseline challenges we must address if we are to be in a position to even begin to accomplish our real work of quality learning and meeting the educational needs of the state of Wisconsin.

For this reason, strategic planning has never been more critical. Collaboratively developed priorities make it possible to target resource reallocation thoughtfully rather than implement damaging across-the-board policies. Clear goals will set us apart and help us lead, not follow.

The measure of a great institution is not how well it performs when all is well—but how it responds when the storm clouds gather.

So, what, even in the face of storms, is our work to be? What are we here for?

Are we here to enhance the prestige and stature of our university? Move up in the rankings? Achieve enrollment numbers? Yes, of course. I'm as competitive as anyone.

But these goals are not ends in themselves, they are the means to achieve our real purpose.

Several years ago a group of European and American university leaders convened a summit and produced a declaration on the purpose of higher education. I think it summarizes well our aspirations:

Universities, they wrote, must recognize their “unique responsibilities to, and opportunities in, their communities, regions, and the larger global society by affirming that teaching is a moral vocation,... scholarship is a public trust,... and public service is a major institutional obligation.”ⁱⁱ

Our calling—for all of us at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire—is to serve the public good. That is the account to which I want us held.

We do this through a spectrum of responsibilities to the UW-System and its growth agenda, to the citizens of Wisconsin, our students and their futures, and to ourselves and our campus community.

Our goal is nothing less than to create a leap in the value of what we offer to our students, to build a university that attracts and retains the most committed and talented employees, and to form a stronger bond with our community and the region we serve.

That is the challenge I laid out to the 60 members of the strategic planning Work Groups this past summer. I asked them to look past the storm clouds to how we can better serve the public good.

I asked them to build on our strengths that have already made us an envied institution and on the people that make our campus so special. I asked them to be realistic because our

ideals must be wed to the demanding economics of public higher education. And I asked them to think big.

They've done just that. Posted on our strategic planning website are proposals for our collective consideration. You can get there directly from the strategic planning button on our homepage.

At your tables is a flyer that provides information about a schedule of meetings—called charrettes—at which you'll have the opportunity to ask questions and add your ideas. I hope you will participate in one of these sessions. Also at your table are strategic planning post-it notes – use them to jot down ideas whenever inspiration strikes!

I see a lot of opportunities for us in the Work Group proposals. Let me give you some examples:

It's clear that we have a tradition and opportunity in international learning. We can elevate this strength to a leadership level nationally. While we will continue to welcome students from every culture to our campus, we should also expect every one of our students will experience an international learning opportunity.

To create global leaders, we must foster in our students a set of skills and attitudes that apply the learning of a liberal education to the resolution of real world problems. To that end, our curriculum must be streamlined, intentional and, in the words of Work Group 2's proposals, radically transformed.

Fostering student leaders requires collaboration between faculty and those staff who work with our students outside the classroom.

This summer I asked a study group of faculty, staff and a student to review the structure of Student Services—they submitted their recommendations to me earlier this month, and I thank them for their good work. I will organize the broad area of student services to better support collaboration, in service to the learning mission of our university.

This institution is very much linked to our place and there is a growing concern about our environment and our footprint on it. That message has been loud and clear in the work groups this summer. To that end, I have joined sister institutions in this state and around the country in signing the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment to set and attain sustainable energy and environmental goals for our campus.

I want to be very clear. The ideas I have just outlined came from you and your colleagues.

The UW Eau Claire strategic vision we are currently developing will not be merely my ideas for the university.

At the new presidents’ “boot camp” this summer, we were advised to create our signature agenda for our campuses. I objected to that concept and I told them so.

I objected because no new chancellor should come into an institution and impose a personal agenda. It may work for a while, but unless it is connected to the history and character of the university and engages the best hopes and dreams of everyone, it will not last.

What we will create this year, is OUR signature agenda—the public good that we envision together.

Serving the public good in times of turmoil is not easy. If we truly want to be the premier university I believe we are, things need to be different. And that will take courage:

Courage to strike out together and take risks—something we’re not in the habit of doing. And maybe even making some mistakes along the way. That’s okay.

It will take courage to make tough choices. Our planning, after all, starts with setting priorities, and then aligning our strengths and our resources. We will have to start saying “no” to some things so we can say “yes” to the things that truly matter.

It will take courage to trust one another with our future. We need to resist the urge to protect our own interests and instead work toward the common good.

If I have a chancellor’s agenda it is simply this: At the end of my tenure I want it said that I helped us find new ways to work together better.

These initial vision-building discussions have not yet included everyone. I know that. But it is clear to me that they have articulated some truly fundamental beliefs about university education, teaching, learning, and what helps or hinders those activities.

I look forward to this university community taking up these ideas. I look forward to lively discussion and accelerated learning about the primal concepts in our work. And I look forward to our again taking the lead in identifying and implementing a better way – a NEW Eau Claire Way!

The New Eau Claire Way is not to accept what is, ... but to question. Not to accept our facilities and buildings while others construct and renovate, but to ask — why not Eau Claire?

Not to focus on adhering to processes the origins of which we barely remember, but to create a system that serves us and our goals.

Not to accept our curriculum as cast in stone but to question the learning it creates and determine how we can do better.

Not to accept five years as the standard for graduation in many fields, but to ask how students can succeed in four.

Not to shrug our shoulders at our lack of diversity but to ask how we can become an inclusive and inviting community.

Not to make excuses for what we can't do, but to do what it takes.

In service to this NEW Eau Claire Way, I have set goals for myself and for us—expanding on the four from last year and adding a fifth.

First, we will finalize our strategic vision—the charrettes in September will yield our plan by the end of the semester. We will use that plan to set the priorities that will direct our decision-making, both in the short- and long-term.

More importantly, we will begin to implement our plan. Former UW-Madison Chancellor David Ward said that the most important leadership step he took was to take their plan off the shelf and actually implement it.

While the specifics of the strategic vision are still being refined—awaiting your comments—the current work group proposals have begun to sketch an outline of some critical components that I believe we must begin to work on—sooner, rather than later.

First, we must focus on our academic mission and the adoption of clear baccalaureate goals. To that end, I have asked the Provost and University Senate President to complete the process begun last year and to finalize the revision of the Goals of the Baccalaureate by the end of this semester. This is critical, because our academic purpose must set the direction for the university.

We must revise our budget process and review our administrative policies so they link to our strategic plan. I am partnering with the University Senate and have identified funding to support a redesign of our processes and our Handbook. We will begin this semester.

Transformative education necessitates well-prepared, intentional educators and so we will expand efforts in support of faculty development.

And we must empower leaders at all levels to make change possible. Next week we will convene our department chairs, directors and governance leaders to support them as they assist in developing and implementing our new vision.

My second, and long-term priority is to continue our focus on equity and diversity.

My leadership group, which includes administrators, faculty and staff governance and student leaders, has made equity and diversity its priority this year. I have asked them to form an additional planning work group—Group 6—so that they can present their ideas to you along with our strategic planning proposals at the September charrettes.

This year, UW-Eau Claire will also participate in the UW System's Equity Scorecard project.

This national initiative is a proven, research-based tool to help our university set and meet specific and achievable goals that will help us assure that all students succeed.

My third priority will be to continue building the relationships and opportunities to enhance our facilities.

Our campus already extends into our community for sporting events: When I watch soccer, I'm on Stein and Macarthur; football and softball at Carson Park and hockey at Hobbs. We have had successful and ongoing collaboration with the city of Eau Claire on developing these shared facilities that benefit us all.

I am eager to look for ways in which we can broaden this in support of our academic mission while also enhancing the quality of life for our region—especially in the arts and in our physical connection to downtown revitalization.

This year we will also request permission from the Regents to develop a comprehensive master facilities plan so that our use of space also supports our strategic direction and so that we can integrate our commitment to more sustainable practices.

Even as we look to new and renovated facilities, we must live and work in the spaces we have. And many of them need an upgrade, now.

We will create a process to identify and prioritize the most urgent needs. As a start, I have begun a fund that will be used to underwrite the replacement of aging furnishings and minor equipment.

The fund is not large—but we can begin to take steps to replace some of the items that are probably older than I am!

Fourth, I will continue to assist in expanding our revenues, through donor gifts and grants.

Even as we complete our first campaign, we have already begun to position ourselves for the next, anticipated to culminate during our centennial year in 2016. It will be here before we know it.

Finally, I am adding a fifth goal for the coming year: to broaden the borders of our university by strengthening and expanding our community partnerships.

UW-Eau Claire is already engaged in our community in so many ways—through Continuing Education, faculty applied research, economic development, student internships and service... the list goes on. But if our vision is truly regional leadership for public good, I believe we have more to do.

This fall members of Work Group 3 and the Higher Learning Commission will convene focus groups of individuals from across the community—healthcare, education, business, the arts. We will be listening to them to better learn how we can be a strong—and accessible—partner.

This summer I joined Chancellors Betz and Sorensen from River Falls and Stout, and President Ihlenfeldt from CVTC, to form a higher education alliance, working with Chippewa Valley civic leaders to re-energize and expand economic development efforts in the region.

Higher education will be an important driver for our region. Why? It is clear that collaboration expands our opportunities and gains support.

Although we already have more effective collaboration across higher education and with business in western Wisconsin than many other areas, we do not get the attention that lesser efforts receive (and the resources that result) because we are not yet effectively organized and speaking with a common voice.

In addition, Eau Claire's City Council recently identified its strategic priorities for the year, one of which was a community visioning process. We will be an active participant in that effort.

Those are my five goals for the coming year. While they require my dedication and leadership, they will be impossible to accomplish without all of you. I need your help.

We have among us new faculty and staff who are eager to ... no, who must make their mark on their disciplines and this institution.

We have more experienced and energetic faculty and staff who know that the ways our university operates are not flexible and effective enough to move us to the next plateau—the level they want to achieve.

They refuse to accept the notion that the way we work and teach is the best way just because that's how it's been done in the past.

We have senior faculty and staff who have paid their dues, earned our respect and who have the knowledge and wisdom to guide our steps, help us succeed and leave an indelible legacy for others to follow.

Our job is to recognize the strengths each of us brings to this university

... To get out of our own way, as Marty said, so we can contribute to the change that lies ahead.

... To explore new ways of working.

... To encourage and support all of us in making UW-Eau Claire the epitome of a model comprehensive university for the 21st century.

... In short, to create a New Eau Claire Way!

That's my job this year.

That's your job too.

Have a great year!

Now, let's get to work!

ⁱ Tierney, W.G. (2006). *Governance and the Public Good*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

ⁱⁱ The Glion Declaration, The University at the Millennium, 1998. Cited in Duderstadt, J.J., (2000). *A University for the 21st Century*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press. P. 147