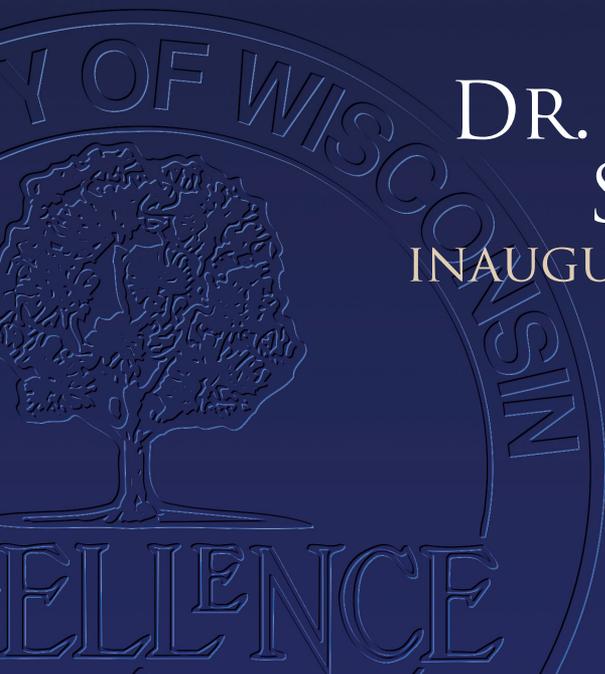


*Our
Audacious
Future*

DR. JAMES C.
SCHMIDT
INAUGURAL ADDRESS

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Mission of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

We foster in one another creativity, critical insight, empathy and intellectual courage — the hallmarks of a transformative liberal education and the foundation for active citizenship and lifelong inquiry.

Our Audacious Future

Regents Behling, Manydeeds and Farrow; President Reilly; President Krueger; former Chancellors Schnack and Levin-Stankevich, esteemed members of the platform party; colleague chancellors, deans and UW System representatives; university and college delegates; faculty, staff, students, emeriti and alumni of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire; board members of the UW-Eau Claire Foundation and Alumni Association; Chancellor's Advisory Council; members of UW-Eau Claire's Circle of Excellence, Wisconsin legislators, community leaders, friends and family — including my father, brother and sister; and especially my wife, Kim, and sons Ben, Andrew and Hunter. I am blessed to have two grandmothers who are part of my life. Although my Grandma Bette Schmidt, who just celebrated her 95th birthday a couple of weeks ago, couldn't be here today, my Grandmother Phoebe Bambenek is here, for which I'm very grateful.

“What history has led to this day and in what big footsteps I follow.”

Thank you all for joining me today to celebrate this milestone in the life of this very special institution. My thanks especially to President Krueger, for your remarks. You have been a longtime mentor and friend in whose leadership steps I follow.

Thanks also to those who have come from near and far to be here, and to the many individuals who have helped to prepare me professionally and personally, and whose presence makes this day so special.

This inaugural celebration makes history, for several reasons. Yes, this is the official inauguration of the eighth chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, an honor and responsibility I hold dear. But it is also the first inaugural ceremony to be held here in the Davies Center, appropriately, in a student-built complex that has helped to transform our university. What a reflection on the unique and substantive relationship we have with our students. It is a relationship I treasure and will uphold.

What history has led to this day and in what big footsteps I follow. Our first chancellor, Harvey Schofield, was also our youngest leader, at age 39, and our longest serving, at 24 years. I have an affinity for Harvey Schofield, not

only because he liked to put down roots and make a difference, but also because he loved athletics, as I do, and he was passionate about education. I come from a family of educators and value the vital role it plays in our lives.

Our second leader, W.R. Davies, was a passionate advocate for excellence and for the liberal arts, a mission we continue to serve. Leonard Haas led a building expansion effort, extending the campus across the river and up the hill. He named us “Wisconsin’s most beautiful campus” and also described UW-Eau Claire as a community of people interested in one another and dedicated to the pursuit of learning. I like that description.

There was Emily Hannah, our first female chancellor, and Donald Mash, who successfully led our first major fundraising campaign and forged new connections with our community.

I also recognize the legacy of those chancellors here with us today: Larry Schnack —who made a practice of dropping into departments just to talk and in so doing created a campus culture that is still marked by collegiality and collaboration; and Brian Levin-Stankevich — who partnered with our students on the Blugold Commitment and expanded our international relationships.

All have steered this institution through periods of growth and times of challenge, but always with the banner of excellence in front of us.

The history and heritage of this institution are worthy of a great institution. But as we stand today at a milepost of changing leadership, it is imperative that we look forward as well as back.

On July 2, 1862, Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act, establishing land-grant universities across the nation, including UW-Madison. As he signed the act that had such an impact on this nation, he observed that the times were “piled high with difficulty and we must rise to the occasion. As our case is new, so must we think anew.”

I think those words apply equally well today, in 2013, at UW-Eau Claire. As never before, the role of the public regional university is questioned. Our funding model has been inverted so that our students now supply the largest portion of our budget. Technology is revolutionizing how higher education is being delivered — we now have flipped classrooms, cell-phone quizzes and our very own UW-Eau Claire app. Our student body is changing as learners from across the lifespan seek the value of a Blugold degree.

We must find a new vocabulary to describe our future in what Stephen Covey calls a “whitewater world” of upheaval and change. Today I would like to offer four words that I hope will guide our conversations and discussions as we define the future of UW-Eau Claire together. They aren’t academic words. They’re not corporate slogans. They are, I hope, catalysts that will prompt wide-ranging discussion, debate and, more important, action in service to our mission.

My first two words used to be self-evident descriptors of higher education, but no longer. We in education used to take for granted that these two words, *public good*, were understood, accepted and supported by the citizens of this state. Our purpose was — and I maintain still is — to enhance the public good through the graduates we produce, and through the scholarship, research and service our faculty and staff provide to our communities.

D.S. Burt, a 19th-century Midwestern educator, wrote about the importance of public investment in higher education: “The benefits of such culture, like the fragrance of flowers and the pleasure of music, are diffusive and accrue to the society in general. The skill of the engineer who plans our bridges, of the pilot who guides the steamer into port, of the chemist who assays our ores, or the linguist who translates foreign literature into our language, is more valuable to the public than profitable to himself, and it amply compensates the state for supporting the schools in which it was acquired.”

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The wisdom from 1879 seems lost on our generation.

Over the past several decades, public disinvestment has been justified because higher education is seen solely as “valuable to the individual,” not

for the public good. Thirty years ago I protested on the capitol steps in St. Paul, Minnesota, because of a proposal to decrease state support for higher education. The state reduced its commitment of covering 75 percent of the cost of education to 66 percent.

“Current and future generations of Blugolds are counting on us to lead a civil, reasoned and impassioned dialogue on the funding of higher education.”

Today, that level of support is unimaginable — in fact today state support has flipped, and our students now contribute approximately three-quarters of our academic funding. What is troubling to me is that this dramatic shift has come about largely without a public debate. With each economic downturn, no matter which political party is in power, higher education is asked to cut back and our faculty and staff are asked to do more with less.

Some people think the time for discussion about public investment has passed. I don't agree. Current and future

generations of Blugolds are counting on us to lead a civil, reasoned and impassioned dialogue on the funding of higher education — and to help Wisconsin citizens and policymakers connect their agendas to the work of the UW System and UW-Eau Claire.

I want to have those conversations— and I want you to help me — because I know the immensity of the public good this university provides. We know the research that shows that college graduates not only will earn more — and contribute more in taxes — but they will live longer, be healthier, and vote, volunteer and give blood more often than those without a degree.

We know, as Wendell Berry wrote 25 years ago, that universities help to make human beings “not just trained workers, or knowledgeable citizens, but responsible heirs and members of human culture.”

Over the past several months I've visited with CEOs and business leaders in the Chippewa Valley. I've asked every one of them, “What keeps you from growing your business?”

Each of them said that they need the right people, the right human capital. They explained that they need people who can think critically, speak and write clearly, work with people and problem solve — along with some good old-fashioned Midwestern work ethic.

Sound familiar? This is exactly what we do here at UW-Eau Claire.

As our mission statement says (and it's proudly printed in your program), we provide the “transformative liberal education” that is the foundation for “active citizenship and lifelong inquiry.” We know, better than anyone, that the liberal education we provide is the most fitting preparation our students can have for a world that demands skills and wisdom, entrepreneurship and integrity of spirit, a strong work ethic and wild creativity.

Our students find that here.
And we need to tell the world so.

I will be tireless in championing this message, but it is not mine alone to carry. As a campus we must find new ways to tell this story, and we must not be afraid to talk about the public good we do in terms that we've too often avoided.

We do prepare students for careers —
AND for life.
We do have an economic impact —
AND an academic one.

We need to be able to quantify impact
AND tell compelling stories. We're about the power of the “and” that we offer our students, our state and the world.

Which leads me to my next word:
audacity.

If we believe that our purpose is to provide public good, we must be passionately audacious in what that means. We must not think small.

I'm tired of hearing that we need to play the game the way others dictate it. We can and we must choose to create the future we want. We can work

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together to create new opportunities — through partnerships with our students, through the power of what our benefactors and friends can make possible, through new ways of working with our community and business partners, through new methods of teaching that continue to put liberal education at the center.

We control our destiny.

As the French author and Nobel Prize winner Anatole France once wrote, “To accomplish great things, we must not only act, but also dream; not only plan, but also believe.” Almost a hundred years ago, the leaders of Eau Claire came together to lobby for the creation of this institution. In so doing, they called upon the “Eau Claire Spirit”— a spirit of cooperation and a spirit that wasn’t afraid to dream big. These times require similar audacity in our thinking, in our reach, in our partnerships.

We’ve already made some wonderful beginnings.

Just six weeks ago I was able to join President Greendeer of the Ho-Chunk Nation in signing a letter of intent to partner on developing learning opportunities for more Native American students. I’m honored to have President Greendeer here with us today.

As President Reilly mentioned, this historic agreement is the first of its kind between a UW System university and a sovereign nation and represents months of collaboration by many of you. It also reflects my commitment to advancing diversity at UW-Eau Claire in ways that are real and authentic to us and that fulfill our mission to provide an inclusive, transformative education to all in our region.

As I said at the Blugold Breakfast, our interdependence with our alumni, community, regional businesses, students, the UW System and the state will make possible new ideas and new ways of tackling challenges. I am not interested in struggling alone — as your chancellor or as a university. I want to link arms and move forward with audacity.

What does audacity look like? It’s opening our doors to students who have given up hope that college is within reach. What if we told them we’ll help them get a degree, debt-free? What if we teamed up with business partners who would become partners and mentors in the success of motivated low-income students? They would offer premium part-time wages and the opportunity to grow into a career with that company after graduation. What if we asked students to commit to this relationship with a degree plan

that would get them out in less than five years? Let’s have that conversation with our students and business leaders.

What does audacity look like? It’s using our high-impact practices to turn our classrooms inside-out. What if we said at least a quarter of learning will happen outside the classroom — in the field, in clinicals, in internships, in community service or research, in living-learning communities, in leadership opportunities? What if we led the nation’s regional comprehensive universities in the number of our students who study abroad for a semester by taking cost out of the equation? Let’s have that conversation in our departments and with our donors.

What does audacity look like? It’s about daring to lead. What if we became the pioneering hub for health care careers in western Wisconsin, linking medical research, distance learning, pre-professional programs, clinical experiences? What if we asked our community and our donors to help grow our region’s economy by making our 20-year facilities plan a reality in 15 years ... or even 10? Let’s have those conversations and many others, together.

UW-Eau Claire, we have always been audacious in our call for excellence. Let’s not stop. Your audacious ideas will help us continue to thrive.

We must have these and other conversations. To accomplish great things, we must act, dream, plan and believe. We will do this together. We *will* do this *together*. Because we are smarter together than we are by ourselves.

In order to thrive we need to talk about my final and fourth word. It’s not a word that many people associate with higher education, but it will be critical to our future. That word is *joy*.

“What does audacity look like? It’s using our high-impact practices to turn our classrooms inside-out. What if we said at least a quarter of learning will happen outside the classroom?”

Think about those times in your worklife when you could honestly say you felt joy. It was probably a time when you and your students became immersed in a new challenge — and your classroom almost hummed with the excitement of it; when you shared that “ah-hah!” moment with a colleague after hours of research or study; when years of preparation culminated in a performance or athletic achievement that brought the audience to their feet; when you helped that shy freshman become a residence hall leader; when a risky project succeeded and you knew you and your colleagues made the difference; or when a simple act of caring helped a student head back to class with a smile on her face.

Joy doesn’t have much to do with just being happy at work. It’s about connecting to what really matters. It’s about having the opportunity to think — and do — big things. It’s about taking risks, confident that our colleagues have our back.

This summer we asked the campus what it means to be a Blugold. One of our alumni responded to the survey with an answer that blew me away. “Being a Blugold,” the alum wrote, “means demonstrating awesome-nicety at all times.” Joy happens when we realize that Blugolds practice “awesome-nicety.”

I sought out this chancellorship because I knew about UW-Eau Claire’s reputation for excellence. But now that I am here — now that I have explored every building; met literally thousands of you; cheered at football, soccer and volleyball games; celebrated at Homecoming; joined a Blugold Marching Band practice; picnicked with students; talked about hopes and challenges with faculty; golfed with alumni; and experienced the rich fabric of this community — I know there is no better word to describe this place than “awesome-nicety.”

So let’s make sure we have the kind of campus where we truly support one another. I want joy in our mission to be pervasive at UW-Eau Claire. In the coming months, I would like to have a conversation about joy on this campus: what it means to you and how we can talk about joy in the context of our mission to serve our students. We will define the kind of campus we want to have and how we will make it a reality.

Four words: *Public good. Audacity. Joy.* They all reflect my belief in the excellence of this institution and my confidence in you. Collectively, we have the power to create a future that will be extraordinary.

I’ve seen our future in the eager eyes of our students, athletes and performers. I’ve heard that future in the lively discussions I’ve had in departments across the campus. I’ve caught that Eau Claire spirit that has permeated this campus from Harvey Schofield’s earliest days. But I can’t take on our future alone. I need your help. I need your support. And I need your trust.

In return, I pledge to you that I will be the foremost champion of public reinvestment in the public good of higher education and for the value of a liberal education. I challenge you to join me in thinking and acting with audacity as we take on the very real challenges of redefining what excellence means for the students of this state, in this century. And I eagerly invite you to help me create a campus community that is defined by the joy of working together in a mission that will literally change the world.

Thank you.

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