

2011

## Convocation Address

UNO Office of the Chancellor  
*University of Nebraska at Omaha*

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**UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA  
2011 CONVOCATION ADDRESS  
CHANCELLOR JOHN E. CHRISTENSEN**

Good morning and welcome to the 2011 convocation. Thank you for attending as always, and special thanks to our guests who have made time to join us today. This is a great time in history to be a Maverick!

Two years ago, I shared my enormous pride in the strides we'd made in realizing our mission as "stewards of place" and attaining our strategic goals of being student-centered, building and sustaining academic excellence, and engaging the community through our teaching, research, and service. That progress continues today, has gained considerable momentum, and remains the foundation for achieving our vision.

Over several years, numerous campus conversations and annual strategic planning events, involving campus and community, have helped us set forth an ambitious, yet challenging vision – to be one of the nation's leading metropolitan universities. We examined our role and mission in a new and perhaps, broader, light. We began to think big and envision a new horizon for our institution. In the words of Bob Dylan, "the time's, they are a-changin'", and we were willing to seize the moment and embrace the future.

Achieving leadership among metropolitan universities will require the support of the entire campus family acting as one, close collaboration with our community, and the ability to think, plan, and do, strategically. At the same time, we must remain nimble and adaptable to meet continuing and emerging needs of the community and campus. Simply, accepting the challenges inherent in realizing our vision is not an option, but rather, an obligation to those we serve now and in the future.

My special thanks to the faculty, staff, and students for their support and participation in this rather constant state of change. Dwight D. Eisenhower characterized change in this way, "neither a wise man nor a brave man lies down on the tracks of history to wait for the train of the future to run over him". We are a campus of wise women and men who refuse to rest or lie down until we achieve our vision of being a premiere metropolitan university, a leader among our peers. When people think of exemplary metropolitan universities, UNO should immediately come to mind.

Today, I want to spend our time together considering capacity and priorities, accomplishments, and our goals for 2020.

Since becoming Chancellor, I've directed much of our effort toward building capacity to provide places and spaces to enhance academic quality, more effectively focus on our students and community, and to sustain this growth for the future. Some of you may recall 1993, when 17,000 students populated UNO, and try as we might, we could not serve them well. One of the critical factors was inadequate infrastructure to serve a

student body of that size, and I suspect we all agree that growth without quality is untenable.

By no measure, are the efforts to add space to the enterprise complete, but we have realized considerable progress. To date, we have added 832,000 additional square feet of new space (23%), and renovated or repurposed 758,000 square feet (21%). This does not happen without the generosity of our community as much was privately funded. Moreover, it requires that stakeholders believe in us and understand the critical role public universities play in their respective communities.

Today, we have a beautifully renovated home for the College of Public Affairs and Community Service, we've completed a multiphase renovation and addition to the Library, and we've added Maverick Village and Scott Court to our on campus housing options. The Student Center has completed a multiphase renovation, and we've remodeled the historic Hayden House as a Welcome center, and student services, admissions, registrar, and security, has altered spaces to better serve students.

Campus life has been enriched with major renovations to the HPER building, the south of Center Dome and related facilities. The College of Business Administration has a new world class teaching and research facility, Mammel Hall, which allowed us to transform and expand Roskens Hall into a state of the art home for the College of Education.

Kayser Hall, education's former home, will soon house our highly successful learning communities, an expanded testing center, general purpose classroom and laboratory space, and much-needed space for Facilities Management and Planning.

The Elkhorn River Research Station has been completed and is supporting student and faculty water quality studies. And soon, major renovation of the Peter Kiewit Institute will enhance teaching and learning space and add additional research space, supporting its priority of increasing extramural funding through research clusters and partnerships in emerging areas such as virtualization and informatics.

Please join me in thanking Bill Conley, John Amend, and George Killian and the Facilities Management staff, who managed these projects with expertise and timing, which minimized the disruption to campus operations. Also, I would like to thank Carl Mammel for helping us contemplate a new development strategy for front loading capital projects with program enhancements as part of the construction or renovation process. Special thanks, also to George Haddix who embraced this concept and provided capital support for Roskens Hall and by endowing two chairs in math education for the Colleges of Education and Arts and Sciences. All major projects going forward at UNO will incorporate this a priori development strategy of more closely aligning facility and program funding.

Our next capacity priority is to finalize the funding for the Community Engagement Center which will serve as a living laboratory for effective community engagement. The CEC will link civic initiatives, nonprofit and business organizations, high schools, and faculty/staff/students, maximizing opportunities to partner, create synergies, and share costs and expertise. The center will provide a home for a public service resource center, the Service Learning Academy, a new public service student leadership program, and a staging area for community engagement initiatives.

As a part of the Athletic department's new strategic plan, a study of athletic facilities has been conducted by a leading national consulting firm through private funding. Their report, available this fall, will assess the current state of athletic facilities as well as future development needs and opportunities.

Parking must be a significant factor in our long range planning process so that we are able to move faculty, staff, students and visitors on and off campus in a timely fashion. Beyond the addition of the West garage and the Crossroads contract extension, we have been able to provide additional curb and surface parking on the Pacific campus and are completing a comprehensive parking study. In a related matter, the campus Wayfinding study has been completed and implementation of a new signage and information access strategy is pending final approval.

Additional projects on our agenda and the Capital Campaign menu at this time include: a new child care facility, a biomechanics laboratory, completion of the original Strauss Performing Arts footprint, and addition to Weber Fine Arts to bring together Radio/TV with related academic programs in CFAM.

I don't recall ever feeling the energy and excitement that is apparent on the campus today. The visible changes to the campus are clearly part of the anticipation for what tomorrow may hold for UNO. The support and success we celebrate in building core capacity now affords us an unprecedented opportunity to grow the campus for the future. We will need to be thoughtful in our approach, leading me to the second point of discussion.

If we are going to maximize opportunities for growth, then we will need to be strategic and priority driven across the entire campus. The fiscal realities now and into the future for public institutions will require that new and reallocated resources directly support campus priorities. As has been said so often, we cannot be all things to all people, particularly if we strive to be among the best of our peers.

To that end, I requested that Academic and Student Affairs, Business and Finance, and Athletics identify highest priorities in their respective units. I've also asked that an additional 4-6 priorities be established for the entire campus. Considerable preparation work on our priorities was completed last year and the timeline for the identification of

highest priorities at all levels will be done by late Spring 2012, if not sooner. All priorities will be reviewed systematically and adjusted as warranted.

The highest priority for the Chancellor's office will be the development and implementation of a comprehensive Enrollment Management plan. For much of our history, UNO's approach to enrollment management might best be described as "underfunded and unfocused". This is not intended as a criticism, it is simply a realistic observation that a strategic, and well-coordinated management plan has not existed, nor has it risen to the level of an institutional priority. The competition for students is fierce and our commitment to excellence is unwavering; therefore, enrollment management must be a priority.

Accordingly, Associate Vice Chancellor Thomas Wallace is leading a campus team to create a comprehensive enrollment management plan for 2020 which will address access issues, target populations for enrollment growth, goals for retention and graduation rates, and faculty and staff increases necessary to support a cultural of excellence.

The base plan will be in place by Spring 2012 and will be reviewed and adjusted according to progress, shifts in the market place, and in the higher education landscape. The current University tuition sharing formula will be a primary source of funding, and I will work with Academic and Student Affairs and Business and Finance to develop a plan for earmarking resources to support needs corresponding with growth and identified priorities.

The Enrollment Management plan will work in concert with the Strategic Communications plan for marketing and branding and will include consistent messaging in radio, television, and print media buys, and other initiatives, such as the virtual campus tour project that is nearing completion. We'll identify target markets such as Western Iowa, and individuals with college credit but without degrees, which will supplement traditional recruitment efforts in the metropolitan area, greater Nebraska, and internationally. We will also take advantage of hockey's regional and national exposure with television spots beginning this fall.

As an institution, we have moved into the fast lane. But, in doing so, it is easy to get so caught up in "doing" that we forget to reflect on the many achievements made by the campus community. As has been the case each year, the list of activities and accomplishment is extensive, and that is the good news. The bad news is: time will permit mentioning only a few:

- The University Capital Campaign continues to provide a margin of excellence across each of the NU campuses. This campaign may be the most successful in the country at this time, and UNO has been the beneficiary of this success thanks to the efforts of our foundation partners. (Ask them to stand and be recognized) Currently, UNO has received approximately 29 million dollars for academic program and faculty support, \$22.5 million in direct student support,

and \$67 million dollars in capital and equipment. This support adds significant value to our campus, and once again special thanks to our community for their support.

- As a campus community, we celebrated receiving three university wide awards in one year, which is a first. Information Systems and Quantitative Analysis received the Departmental Teaching Award, Jonna Holland from the marketing department received the outstanding teaching and instructional creativity award, and GJ de Vreede from Collaboration Science received the outstanding research and creative activity award.
- Thanks to our highly talented faculty UNO offers a full complement of quality academic programs, and many are nationally recognized. Professional accreditation is a highly regarded measure of quality and last year the undergraduate and MBA programs in Business Administration and College of Information Science and Technology's computer science and MIS undergraduate programs all received national academic reaccreditation. Additionally, the Nebraska Business Development Center housed in the College of Business was one of only seven state centers to receive specialized accreditation from the National Association for Business Development.
- As we continue to be responsive to market place needs, we've added new undergraduate degrees in Public Health and Athletic Training and minors in Management and Mass Communications along with concentrations in International Studies, Political Science, Computer Science, Sociology, Investment Science, Risk Management, Collaboration Science, and General Studies. A new doctoral program in Exercise Science is in the final stages of approval and should be available next fall.
- The Criss Library served about 600,000 walk-in visitors during the past year which is a sharp uptick as people discover what an incredible resource this facility has become. Countless others access library services around the clock, via mobile phone and interact with staff on Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, and Foursquare. Among the addition of many new electronic resources, the Web of Science research database covers over 10,000 journals and 110,000 conference proceedings in the sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities.
- UNO's stewardship was recognized nationally along with five other institutions with The President's Award for its leadership in general community engagement. Service learning continues to thrive on our campus and during the past year, 118 service learning courses provided over 1.4 million dollars in valued added service to the metropolitan area, while a cohort of Latino/Latin American Studies students participated in an international service learning project in Lima, Peru. The UNO Service Learning Academy was honored with the state's First Lady's Award as the Outstanding Service Learning Program.
- The campus' deep commitment to P-16 initiatives is exemplified by our work with the schools through The Metropolitan Omaha Education Consortium housed in the College of Education, leading Bright Futures initiatives in truancy and service learning, as well as the City of Omaha and Kiewit Foundations Summer Works

program. UNO continues offering the Summer Scholars program and a variety of campus based academic and athletic immersion camps, and is partnering with Avenue Scholars and Metropolitan Community College to prepare at risk students for higher education opportunities and success.

- Educator preparation and continuing education has been greatly enhanced through UNO's leadership in STEM education initiatives and partnerships, providing a home to the national Oxbow Writing Project, Metropolitan English Teacher Link, and the Culture Walks and Urban Immersion initiatives. The popularity of UNO's Dual Enrollment Program continues to grow as this past year it served 3500 area high school students in 45 different courses involving 24 UNO departments. Over 1600 students have matriculated at UNO and are experiencing considerable success.
- At risk, first generation, and underserved students on our campus continue to receive extraordinary support through learning communities like the Thompson Scholars, Goodrich Program, Avenue Scholars and the new the Jim and Shirley Young Scholars. Opportunities for success are enriched through the first year experience program, Project Achieve and Multicultural Affairs services.
- The entire campus community has benefited and from the Math Lab and the Writing and Speech Centers which served approximately 10,000 students and faculty last year. The newly redesigned Math Lab now incorporates the Course Redesign system better utilizing technology to reduce costs, increase learning success, and serve greater numbers of students. The Speech Center is part of the UNO Public Speaking Fundamentals program, which was recognized as the top oral communication general education program in the nation.
- Sustainability has become an important part of the campus agenda. In addition to LEED gold certification for Mammel Hall, Information Services has virtualized servers for thousands of computers resulting in tremendous cost and energy savings, eco friendly packaging has been instituted in the food court, we have recycled 500 tons of material to date, and energy efficient windows and lighting projects are increasing efficiencies, just to mention a few.
- In Athletics, Trev Alberts, his leadership team, and the department embraced the critical need to resolve the long standing fiscal challenges. Based on a detailed study of Athletic's financial history and condition, it was determined that stability required reorganization and reclassification to Division I status within the Summit League. This change would help achieve a better size and mission fit for UNO as well as financial stability in the context of capped revenue support from state sources. I'm pleased to report that early fiscal indicators for the current year appear to be on pace with the cost benchmarks approved by the Board of Regents.
- Other department accomplishments include charter membership in the new National Collegiate Hockey Conference in 2013, ensuring UNO's place in the upper echelon of collegiate hockey. Competing with name hockey powers in this new conference, will improve attendance as well as increase national exposure through regional and national television agreements. Additionally, the

department signed a Letter of Intent to play Men's basketball at the new Ralston Arena beginning with the 2012/13 season, allowing us to capture additional new revenue, all contributing to the financial well-being of the department.

- Finally, I'm pleased to report that, as the quality of our incoming students steadily improves, our efforts to be student centered and academically excellent seem to be striking a cord with current and prospective students. Institutional Research indicates that student satisfaction remains very high with 95% saying they would recommend UNO to other college seeking students. Personal recommendations of this sort are one of our most powerful recruitment tools and should be a great source of campus pride. Yes, it is a great time to be a Maverick.

Two years ago as we entered a new decade, I shared a vision of what UNO could look like in 2020. I would like to close today by revisiting six specific areas of consideration.

- Given the remarkable advances in building capacity I believe we should aim to be a campus of 20,000 students in 2020. Interim Vice Chancellor Reed said in the media recently, that this is a stretch goal, but doable. I agree on both counts. I'm convinced that the Enrollment Management plan mentioned earlier will provide the blueprint to guide this growth while sustaining quality.
- As the campus grows we'll need to provide additional on-campus housing. Resident housing for 20% of our student population would better align us with other metropolitan peers, translating into an additional 1,900 beds for the 20,000 student target. Student housing remains a significant aspect of our long range facilities planning going forward.
- Distance education provides a relatively new opportunity to serve on-campus, resident, nonresident, and international students. This delivery mode provides scheduling flexibility for on-campus students, accommodating work schedules or simply providing options to more quickly reach graduation. Resident, nonresident and international students could take advantage of UNO's quality programs without coming to campus or relocating. It should be noted that the Information Services Academic Partnership for Instruction has provided extraordinary support through training and technology, which will need to expand as the distance opportunities increase. A doubling or even tripling of credit hours utilizing this delivery mode appears to be a reasonable 2020 target, as exemplified by the success of the Colleges of Public Affairs and Community Service and Information Science and Technology in this regard.
- I suggested that we would want to achieve classification as a Doctoral Granting Research institution by 2020. This has recently occurred and will require nurturing of our current doctoral programs and consideration of new programs that fit our mission.
- Concurrently, research and creative activity is directly linked to the reclassification as a Doctoral Granting Research Institution. I proposed a 2S

million dollar target in extramural funding to support scholarly activity by 2020. Currently, even with the loss of 4 million dollars in earmark funding, we are at 17 million. We are on a reasonable trajectory to realize this target given the quality of faculty proposals and the leadership in the Offices of Research and Creative Activity and Sponsored Programs. Newly established programs and funding for student and faculty research, called FUSE and FIRE, are a great start, and additional infrastructure needs, such as a professional grant writers should receive careful consideration.

- In addition to the implementation of a new general education core and reducing the required hours for graduation to 120, we must enhance student support services. This continues to be a work in progress, up to and beyond 2020. Currently, advising is an Academic Quality Improvement project and advisor training and new technologies supporting on-line scheduling and file sharing are now in the mix of advisor tools. Student health services has been expanded, student orientation and first year experience have been redesigned, and we've initiated a freshman convocation. Our challenge for 2020 will be to prioritize future services to be enhanced and to establish metrics assessing our efforts.

I realize these very fluid targets are nine years away and my thoughts today are certainly not intended to be a comprehensive vision for tomorrow. Hopefully, however, each of us are encouraged to reach higher, push harder, and imagine what was previously deemed impossible.

UNO's transformation from its humble beginnings as a private college at 24th and Pratt to today's campus that extends from Dodge to Spring Streets is nothing short of an amazing journey. Our progress in realizing UNO's vision as a leading metropolitan university is not only inspiring, it also reflects an institution whose legacy is one of envisioning the future, and then, with ingenuity, hard work and good old Maverick spirit, getting it done. It is indeed a great time in UN O's history to be a Maverick. I thank all of you for sharing your talents, your spirit, and your commitment to serve our students and community at the highest possible level. Trust me when I say we have the "right stuff" to make the next leg of the UNO journey unforgettable.