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Strategic Planning Advance, November 14, 2003

UNO Office of Institutional Effectiveness

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**Strategic Planning Advance—MBSC Ballroom
November 14, 2003—8 a.m.**

Good morning, and thank you for attending UNO’s annual Fall Strategic Planning Advance. Over the past six years, the university community has worked hard to develop a dynamic and responsive strategic plan, which has as our vision for UNO to be a metropolitan university of high distinction.

This morning, I want to talk about what a metropolitan university does, and how we explain the concept to our stakeholders. We must articulate why what we do is so important to our community, region, the state and far beyond. For example our 26 international sibling institutions benefit from UNO’s metropolitan advantage, just as does Nebraska!

What is the “metropolitan advantage?” More than a place, it is acceptance of our responsibility and our focus on strength to bring about positive change.

Sociologist Margaret Mead wrote: “The city is a center where, any day in any year, there may be a fresh encounter with a new talent, a keen mind or gifted specialist...(but) to play this role in our lives, the city must have a soul, a university.”

There is no doubt that the heart of UNO has the new talent, keen minds and gifted specialists, as described by Mead. Seeking and developing knowledge at the highest levels, UNO’s faculty, staff and students are the driving force behind the significant progress we’ve made.

As shared at our annual fall convocation, we have good reason to be enormously proud of what has been accomplished in the face of significant budget challenges. But beyond pride, there is a sense of anticipation, excitement and energy, sparking this institution toward distinction.

UNO is an institution which is both the soul of its community, and a force for higher education. In short, UNO is among the vanguard of urban-based institutions maximizing its “metropolitan advantage.”

Charles Hathaway, prior chancellor at UACR, and one of the architects of the metropolitan university construct, said, “A metropolitan university is defined by its philosophy. And while metropolitan universities may share characteristics, such as a high percentage of commuter and minority students; these institutions are best recognized by their commitment to interaction with the metropolitan area that permeates the entire institution.”

The metropolitan advantage is about universities seizing opportunities to develop knowledge linkages and unique partnerships. It is about universities, which have the people and the capacity; to bring special expertise to bear on pressing social, economic, governmental, business and educational issues. And, it is about institutions in “the seed beds of innovation and risk taking” -- that is in metropolitan areas -- whose studies of urban challenges and high risk youth, can be applied to many communities elsewhere.

Quite simply, metropolitan communities are living, breathing teaching laboratories. Our research collaborators include government and business leaders, public educators, industrial magnates; and those on the front line of social service.

Just as agriculture, home economics and mechanical arts were the relevant issues leading to the creation of land-grant institutions; today’s issues of health care, P-12 education, crime, economic development and jobs are urban-related.

Land-grant universities continue to fill a significant role in conducting theoretical and basic research; and in transferring knowledge to what used to be rural areas and farms, through Cooperative Extension, Ag Experiment Stations and 4-H programs.

Metropolitan universities, on the other hand, develop their niche through a variety of unique research initiatives, collaborative ventures and integrated partnerships. Both land-grant and metropolitan universities have distinct and important roles to play, as we move into the 21st century.

As Andrew Young, former mayor of Atlanta said: “There’s a crying out in urban American, for people to do for urban American, what state universities did in the last century for rural America. A similar kind of relationship between universities and the cities is necessary.”

James Stukel, President of the University of Illinois, put it another way:

“Researchers from universities in small towns and rural areas can, and do, come into the cities to have a look around, conduct their studies, and then return to their campuses to sort out the information. But metropolitan universities can have extended interaction with urban communities. They can build lasting alliances; they maintain longstanding relationships with the neighborhood, governmental and civic groups.”

Today, as a result of our metropolitan interaction, we see dramatic forces propelling UNO forward. The College of Information Science and Technology, through the Peter Kiewit Institute; is creating free-flowing information linkages between the university and technology-based businesses. These relationships allow us to better understand the needs of technology industries; and, respond with appropriate curricula,

internships, and executive-in-residence programs to help our students become “career-ready.”

We see the metropolitan advantage in our ability to offer residential housing to students, who wish to pursue programs for which we have a statewide responsibility. These students ultimately can address similar issues in their home communities.

We see the metropolitan advantage in criminal justice research and family mentoring programs, the Neighborhood Center of Greater Omaha, the Hope Center, Nebraska Business Development Center; and a host of other programs which bring faculty expertise to bear on social issues using real life experiences.

It is this metropolitan advantage, which allows our young artists and performers to learn from, and work with, seasoned professionals in the community. They then give back to audiences everywhere, a profoundly moving performance.

And, we see the metropolitan advantage in the research of students and faculty scholars. They are encouraged and supported by many citizens in this community and around the globe -- even as far reaching as Bethsaida, Israel, to bring our collective pasts alive.

Looking across the breadth and depth of the programs I’ve cited, one might be tempted to think that the metropolitan advantage is an attempt to be all things to all people. No -- we cannot serve everyone. We must select and prioritize... which is what UNO’s strategic planning process helps us to do.

Our engagement in certain initiatives, clearly, is not by random choice. To achieve institutional excellence, metropolitan universities must identify appropriate niches; and then extend resources deliberately and strategically.

At UNOmaha, our broad and inclusive Strategic Planning process has sharpened our vision. The metropolitan advantage is reflected in UNO’s institutional goals and objectives which:

- place students at the center of the educational enterprise, and prepare them to live in a pluralistic society;**

- goals which focus on academic excellence, consistent with our vision and mission; and**

- goals which encourage us to engage in collaborative partnerships and programs -- among universities, colleges, and businesses (profit and non-profit, both on and off campus). Such engagement with our community is truly the cornerstone of a metropolitan university.**

Ernest Lynton and Sandar Elman wrote: “The existing, narrowly defined mold into which almost all universities have tried to cast themselves, is inadequate to meet the expanding needs of our contemporary, knowledge-based society.” A metropolitan university is an agent of change -- a transformer of the society in which it is a part, and that is itself transformed by the experience.

This is the process, which we are witnessing at the University of Nebraska at Omaha -- an exciting, complex, and vital metamorphosis. A university which is an agent of change, transforming and being transformed by the METROPOLITAN ADVANTAGE.