

Inaugural Remarks to the Faculty of Wichita State University

September 5, 2006

**Gary L. Miller
Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research**

Thank you President Beggs.

I appreciate those very kind and warm introductory remarks.

Georgia and I are so appreciative of the great kindness that you and Shirley have shown us as we pulled up roots in California and made our way to the heartland of America to begin our work at Wichita State University and in the Wichita community. Your assistance and advice and support have not only made the transition efficient but a great joy as well.

I want to thank Dr. Brigitte Roussel, President of the Faculty Senate, for her enthusiasm for arranging this time to address the faculty. I look forward to working with the Faculty Senate on the important issues that face us – some of which I will touch on today. I very much appreciate the time that the Senate has arranged here today as we begin to get to know one another.

I know that some of the Vice Presidents are here today. I want to thank them for their support, friendship and counsel in this transition.

The members of my administrative team – the Associate Vice Presidents and Directors that report directly to me and those people who support us in our work – are here today. I believe that most of you know the extraordinary work that these professionals do each day on behalf of Wichita State University. Thank you.

I hope that you will understand that I will not have time today to individually thank each of the many dozens of you who have so freely assisted Georgia and me. Please know that the depth of my appreciation is vast.

I do want to single out one additional person. My wife Georgia Nix is here today to listen to this speech for the 20th time. It is important for me to say to her publicly how much I admire her professional achievements and her community leadership and how much I appreciate her as a partner in what we have chosen to do. I am confident that all of you will come to know Georgia as a great asset for Wichita State University and for the Wichita area. Thank you sweetie.

This past summer the deans and their college leadership – department chairs, directors, and faculty leaders – spent an enormous amount of time – some of it vacation time – preparing

day-long immersion events. This activity essentially involved developing an elaborate workshop for a single participant – me. I am deeply grateful to the deans and their faculty leaders for their work. Anyone sitting through those immersion days would come away knowing that this is a special university with very special people.

Please join me in thanking them for this work.

[Pause for applause]

It is impossible for me to list for you today everything that I learned from those immersions. It is even more difficult to explain to you the sense of excitement that I felt during this exercise of discovery. Most of us would agree that if we are successful in instilling the sheer joy of learning in our students, then we have a chance to nurture a scholar. It was that joy of learning that I so appreciated this summer as I immersed myself into the programs and initiatives of the faculty at Wichita State University.

I learned so much.

- In my very long day with the Fairmount School of Liberal Arts and Sciences I learned how the LAS faculty are blending the fundamental ideals of the liberal education with the imperative to extend their academic programs into the community through programs of excellence in the basic arts and sciences and innovative outreach and learning initiatives of the many schools and centers of the College.
- I learned how the College of Engineering, with a committed faculty and under new and enlightened leadership, is positioning itself strategically to leverage its relationship with the vast local engineering community and the university research centers; how it is becoming a model for how to educate young engineers for the global engineering challenges of the next 20 years; and how it is developing relationships with the P12 and community college systems to encourage young women to enter the field of engineering and science.
- I learned how the Barton School of Business through the creativity and productivity of its faculty and the initiatives of its various centers for economic development, entrepreneurship, management development and international business continues to refine how it will meet its obligation to the legacy of Frank Barton to honor his commitment that the Business School be internationally recognized for its innovations in educating students to successfully compete in the global entrepreneurial marketplace.
- I learned how the faculty of the College of Fine Arts, working with the full conviction that human artistic expression is a principle avenue of learning and understanding, has embraced the opportunity to extend music and the visual and performing arts thoroughly into the Wichita community and coupling that with

their commitment to continued personal growth as artists and musicians have built a College of great distinction.

- I learned how the faculty of the College of Health Professions have come to so completely understand the imperatives of health care in America and working hand in hand with local health professionals and health providers have developed and deployed academic and community outreach programs that directly address health educational and service needs in Wichita and the State of Kansas.
- I learned how the College of Education is working with great diligence to train the teachers of tomorrow, to understand human development and to explore the relationship between mechanics and physiology of the human body and the relationship of those to health and aging.
- I learned how the graduate faculty at Wichita State University have crafted basic and applied graduate programs in areas central to our mission and that provide us with the potential to expand strategically to meet our research mission.
- I learned how the library faculty are using technology and contemporary approaches to information management to meet the needs of our growing academic programs.

I also learned about the exciting work going on at the interfaces of the Colleges.

There is a deep interdisciplinary spirit at Wichita State that is supporting innovation on a myriad of fronts that cross college boundaries including:

- P12 education where our reach extends well beyond teacher training.
- The use of technology in teaching and research.
- Research and graduate studies that focus at the intersection of the disciplines and that target specific and important areas social and scientific need.
- And in programs that address social needs and economic development based in the principles of discovery, learning and application.

What I learned this summer is that Wichita State University is a vibrant institution with an exceptional faculty, a beautiful campus, and a forward looking perspective.

There is no doubt that at Wichita State we are indeed *Thinkers, Doers, Movers, and Shockers*.

I congratulate you on your commitment to this institution, which is demonstrated so clearly in the programs that you nurture.

I would ask you to take a moment to give yourselves a loud round of applause in celebration of this great work.

[pause for applause]

But, how do we build on this legacy of achievement going forward?

One of the questions I asked you last spring when I interviewed here was *What do you want the new Vice President to do?*

What came back was a set of questions to me: *Can we better focus our academic programs within the broad mission of the institution? How will you provide that focus?*

I believe that there is a framework within which we can and should build on the vast wealth of achievement of Wichita State in order to position our academic programs as leaders in the American academy.

An important dimension of this framework is embedded in my leadership philosophy. In the essay that I submitted to the search committee with my application for this position, I accepted as the essential obligation of the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Research to lead and manage not only inside the institution by, importantly, also within the broad space of the social and academic environment of this country and the world.

I wrote:

The goal of contemporary campus leaders is to very intentionally connect the institutional mission with the broad challenges in higher education and society. That is, to demonstrate...how innovations in teaching and learning, in community involvement, in citizenship development and all of the other dimensions of institutional action not only advance the goals of the institution but, importantly, inform efforts to meet the larger challenges of the entire enterprise of higher education and society.

In short, I believe that the extent to which we meet our obligation to serve the state of Kansas will depend on the extent to which our academic programs are models of learning, research and outreach in the American academy.

From a practical point of view what I believe this obligates us to introduce into our thinking what my friend Stan Gryskiewicz calls *positive turbulence*¹-- a climate of constructive change that builds on creativity, innovation, and renewal.

We will do this by building on strong, innovative programs developed and supported by a committed faculty. And, after a summer of investigation, I have no doubt that we have met this condition.

¹ Gryskiewicz, S. S. 1999. *Positive Turbulence: Developing Climates for Creativity, Innovation, and Renewal*. Center for Creative Leadership.

We must then clarify what makes this institution distinctive and, from there, we must let these distinctive features guide us as we move forward toward our goals.

In short, when we say “We are Wichita State,” we must know what that means in terms of our academic programs and we must apply that meaning to the challenges and opportunities that we face.

What is it that makes us distinctive?

I suggest to you that we are first and foremost an Urban Serving University²

- We are located on an urban campus of a large city that faces all the issues attendant with the transition from the city center, to the suburbs to the surrounding dozen or so metropolitan areas of various sizes, to the out lying rural areas.
- We are served by an urban school district that experiences all of the problems related to variation in background, capabilities and success of students that every other city in America faces.
- Unlike large universities in traditional college towns, we are not the major economic driver in the community. Rather we are among a dozen or more other large enterprises that employ large numbers of people and provide services.
- We are obligated to meet the higher educational needs of a population having a vast array of ages, backgrounds, career motivations, and economic resources that represent the great character of our city and the immediate region.
- We are not the sole supplier of entertainment, health care training, business knowledge, basic or applied research, or recreation in the area. Rather, we share those activities with a large number of business and not-for-profit enterprises in the City.
- And, importantly, we are situated in an environment characterized by a complex array of alternative higher educational opportunities from technical education, to community colleges to other four year institutions.

These characteristics not only make us unique in Kansas, these features of Wichita State University and its environment also put us in the center of a growing movement in American higher education.³

² National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC). CUA: Commission on the Urban Agenda. URL: http://www.nasulgc.org/comm_urban.htm. (last accessed 9/1/06).

³NASULGC; URL: http://www.nasulgc.org/comm_urban.htm. (last accessed 9/1/06).

This movement is focused on how urban institutions of higher education will partner to build human capital, nurture and sustain communities in the urban environment, and develop a more constructive approach to human health – all major elements of our current mission⁴.

Why is this so important and why does it serve as a framework for our academic programs?

Consider the following:

- The vast majority of all expenditures nation wide in higher education go to universities like Wichita State in urban environments.
- The majority of all students in higher education in America attend universities that are in urban environments.
- The majority of all jobs created in the United States are in urban environments.

We are among those institutions in this country, whose obligation it is to develop the strategies that will drive how higher education contributes to the vitality of our major population centers and, with it, higher education's response to the needs of society in general.

It is by focusing on this opportunity and this obligation that we can shape the academic programs of Wichita state to become national models:

- For workforce development
- For urban education at all levels.
- For community, industry and higher education interaction for change.
- For urban renewal and revitalization. And
- For the application of the power of town-gown partnerships in leveraging music and the arts toward a broader understanding of the human condition.

I hope that you see that our situation as an urban serving university not only offers us many advantages – metropolitan advantages if you will – but it also presents us with an important set of obligations and these obligations can and should guide the development and growth of our academic programs.

What are the broad obligations that should frame our perspective as an Urban Serving University?

- We have an obligation to develop a global focus at all levels of our academic programs. To extend the intellectual and practical global reach of our students

⁴ NASULGC; URL: http://www.nasulgc.org/comm_urban.htm. (last accessed 9/1/06).

serves both our urban mission and our obligation to prepare Kansas residents for productive lives in a fully connected world.

- We have an obligation to nurture a passion for diversity. Not only do we need to become as diverse as possible, but we must learn from that diversity as it grows and let it inform our courses, our programs and our approaches to the community.
- As an urban serving university, we must commit to the development a culture of collaboration rather than competition within the complex local higher education sector. In the end, I do not believe that our success lies as a competitor of the community colleges and other four-year institutions. Rather, we will prosper by nurturing partnerships that build on the distinctive nature of our mission and our value as the only research institution in the region.
- We must continue to embrace the concept that practical solutions are a legitimate outcome of learning. And, along with this, we must hold fast to the sacred obligation to be the principle place in this community where the full embrace of learning for the sake of learning is preserved and lifted up as a central value of the human experience. These are complementary, mutually reinforcing, and fundamental goals of learning.
- We have an obligation to accept our fair share of the responsibility for public health, public education, and economic security in the City of Wichita.

These broad obligations are, in fact, calls to the kind of actions that I hope will characterize our academic programs.

In the coming year and beyond, we will face many specific challenges and opportunities. I think that our success in meeting these challenges and taking advantage of these opportunities will depend on how successful we are at shaping our academic programs within the urban mission.

I want to end today by highlighting for you some of the most important and immediate of the challenges and opportunities facing us.

1. HLC accreditation

In the spring, we will host the visiting team from the Higher Learning Commission and stand for reaccreditation. Nancy McCarthy-Snyder and the NCA steering committee have been hard at work in preparation for this visit for over a year now. In the coming weeks, you will see the fruits of their labor as we begin a campus-wide discussion about the self-study document that they are preparing and about the issues that are most important to us. Our discussion through the year will be an excellent opportunity to reflect on what Wichita State is and how we might affirm our mission as an Urban Serving Institution. Your participation in this is absolutely essential.

I would like to ask Nancy and the members of the steering committee to stand at this time to be recognized for their work, which is the most important university-wide effort at this time.

2. Research

Wichita State is a research institution. To a great extent, the success we enjoy in the coming years will turn on how well we are able to focus and grow our research capacity. We have seen growth in this capacity in recent years but we face certain important infrastructure challenges to continuing this growth including how we will support research faculty and how we will support graduate students.

One of the most immediate challenges in the area of research is how we will define our part in the state-wide bioscience initiative. This initiative, lead by Associate Vice President Dave McDonald, will require us not only to clearly define our niche within the regents institutions but also to leverage that niche in creative partnerships with industry and government as we move aggressively to become a part of this important state-wide and nation-wide initiative. David and I believe that our urban orientation will be a great asset in this effort.

WSU is fortunate to be the home of one of the premier research institutions in the country – the National Institute for Aviation Research (NIAR) – and a number of other fine research centers and institutes. To sustain and nurture NIAR and the other research centers will remain a top research priority.

There are many areas of research, particularly in the social sciences, the basic physical and biological sciences, in selected areas of the humanities, in the health professions and in business for which we must find support in the coming years.

3. Diversity

I have mentioned diversity as an important part of the framework of the urban serving university. We must renew our commitment to the nurturing of diversity in all of its forms.

One area of great importance is in how we interact with international students from the time they contact us to the time they graduate. Related to this are the opportunities that we afford domestic students to experience other cultures and languages whether in study abroad or through innovative programs of cultural competency on campus.

4. Economic development

We must continue to position our academic programs to be central players in local economic renewal and development initiatives. Like all American cities, Wichita changes in cycles driven by the global economy and these dynamics operate on a

more rapid scale than the rate of change in the academy. A central challenge of urban institutions is to match our response and our input to time frames relevant to social and economic change. The application of our legacy in entrepreneurship to the contemporary problems of the urban environment is, in my view, the best approach to this.

5. Education

I have already mentioned my view that we should be a collaborator in the higher education environment in this region. We must also be a collaborator in the P-12 educational system. The issues that higher education faces regarding access, student success, the challenge of the changing American student, and the imperatives of developing a diverse learning environment are directly related to the way in which we interact with the public school system. Our obligation here goes beyond training teachers. One of the biggest challenges that we will face in the coming years is arranging programs at all levels and in all colleges to fully engage with the local urban school district.

6. Enrollment

We will continue to face the issue of stabilizing overall enrollment while encouraging growth in strategic areas. In the end, enrollment at Wichita State University is the responsibility of all divisions. The Academic division can not be simply a consumer of enrollment services. We must be an active partner in developing and deploying an enrollment strategy. In the coming years, I will be working closely with the deans to align our activities in this area more closely with those of the division of campus life.

7. University priorities and funding

It will come as no surprise to you that we live in a resource limited environment. In order to move ahead in this environment, we must prioritize new programs and continually evaluate the efficacy of current programs. We must balance college-level priorities with university-wide academic priorities. And we must be willing to move resources both within and between colleges to support the goals that are deemed most important to the mission of the institution. This is perhaps the biggest challenge facing academic administration and the faculty leadership. It is a challenge that we must meet.

8. Faculty

The engine of learning and innovation in the university is the faculty. The support of research, teaching and service must remain one of the highest priorities of the academic division.

9. Student engagement

Finally, we know from preliminary NSSE data and other sources that we must improve the level of engagement of our students with their academic programs. This is much more of a challenge for urban serving universities, which must accommodate a wider variety of student needs and motivations. But, there is great opportunity in addressing this challenge with vigor and many ways to proceed.

I suggest that one way to address this issue is to tackle the third rail of American higher education and rethink the way we deliver general education. We should not only use the general education program to support basic skills development and to transcend the gulf between lower and upper division learning, but we should also use it as an opportunity to say something important to our students about the world in which they live and their role in that world.

I believe that if we can suspend our admiration for traditional discipline territories and mine the interdisciplinary spirit of this institution, we can lend to our general education program a transfer-friendly, urban-focused, and globally enriched experience of engagement for every student regardless of background or major. I challenge you to meet this goal.

Throughout his inaugural address in May 1999, President Beggs talked about honoring the history of this great university by holding ourselves accountable, by knowing who we serve and by valuing excellence at all levels as we work each day to create an environment of learning.

When I think of our stewardship of this great legacy, I think of our long history as an urban serving university and I am energized and humbled by the challenge of building on this great history of distinction as we work to become a model of higher education in the urban environment.

Thank you for this opportunity to address you. I look forward to greeting all of you at the reception. I look forward to working with you in the coming years.