

*Kansas higher Education and Economic Development: The Future*

**Remarks to:**

**Wichita Metro Chamber of Commerce  
Board of Advisors**

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I appreciate the kind introduction Bryan. It is indeed a pleasure to have a chance to visit with you this morning about a topic that is obviously very important to you but, also, very important to Wichita State University and to American higher education in general.

It is also a great pleasure to join Keith Lawing from the Workforce Alliance of South Central Kansas. Although, we had not had the opportunity to meet until just a few minutes ago, I have known and admired his great work from a distance.

As I reviewed the letter that Bryan sent you on August 16 announcing the agenda for this meeting, I was struck by two things that he emphasized that are central to what we are about at Wichita State University. First, the need to develop the talent for the future and, second, the absolute necessity for us – the business community and education – to engage in a continuous, direct and constructive dialog about this need and about how a synergy between us would fuel economic development.

Higher education is all about developing talent. And, I am here this morning to begin a dialog with you and, as Bryan wrote, to solicit your input to ensure that we are tracking your needs properly.

I want to leave you with three things in the brief time that I have with you today:

- (1) I think that it is important for you to have an idea of the tensions that face American higher education today. Some of these tensions are generated by your concerns and those of people like you who address issues of workforce and economic development every day. Others come from other kinds of concerns in society about the direction and operation of higher education. Still others come from within the higher education industry as part of our own self-reflection about our role in the global economy.
- (2) I want to briefly paint a picture of the higher education landscape in Kansas and how Wichita State University is unique in the state in its potential to work in synergy with business for economic growth and to develop talent for the future.
- (3) I want to end with a brief description of what we at WSU see for the future in our work with you to build talent and foster economic growth in Wichita and in Kansas. And, this is where our dialog can begin.

Many of you may be aware that we are experiencing a robust critique of American higher education. This critique has called into question many of the traditional core values of the American academy. It has questioned whether we are able to deliver on our promises particularly regarding student learning. It questions the way in which we finance the enterprise.

And, most importantly for the purposes of this discussion, this modern critique of higher education questions whether higher education is too married to tradition and protocol – some would say because of the tenure system – to respond effectively and appropriately to global economic dynamics and modern commerce.

Perhaps the most obvious product of the current criticism of higher education is the report of Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings' Commission on the Future of Higher Education, which took American higher education to task in a very public way.

Let me assert before going forward that there remains very little doubt that a college education yields significant benefits to nearly everyone who gets one. College education citizens make more money, are more philanthropic, provide more community service and vote more regularly than those who do not obtain a college degree. College graduates are also less likely to be incarcerated or exact other extraordinary costs on society.

But, the question of whether higher education with its seeming penchant for slow change and traditional thinking can meet the demands of the modern world is legitimate it seems to me when you consider how rapidly things are changing, particularly in the area of technology, which is certainly related to the workforce challenge.

Here are a few examples that I mentioned in my annual fall address to the faculty:

- > 70% of US 4 year olds have used a computer.
- In 1984 there were approximately 1,000 internet devices worldwide. Today there are over 600 million.
- Last month there were 2.7 billion searches on Google. Where were these questions directed before?
- If MySpace were a country, it would be the 8<sup>th</sup> largest in the world.
- Today, 3000 books were published. By 2010, the amount of technical information is expected to double every 72 hours

And a few facts related to the emerging work force:

- Currently, 1 in 4 workers in the US have been with their employer < 1 year.
- 1 in 2 < 5 years.
- Estimated that today's learners will have between 10 and 14 jobs by their 38<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- The following college majors did not exist 10 years ago: nano-technology, e-business, national security, new media, organic agriculture, and many more.

How can higher education keep up, especially in a time of dramatic decreases in state support? Even prosperous businesses are struggling to keep pace with the changing global business environment.

American higher education has not turned a deaf ear to this criticism and as I look at the industry today and see the level of innovation taking place and the response to the needs of business and government, it would be easy for me to refute nearly all of the assertions of the Spelling Commission and other strong critics of higher education. But that is a topic for another presentation.

One of the salient characteristics of American higher education and the one feature of the enterprise that still makes it much better than emerging systems in India and Europe is that, better than any other system, American colleges and universities still produce graduates with more acute powers of innovation and analysis.

The reason for this, in my view, is our insistence – some would say stubborn insistence – on clinging to the seeming paradox that the best way to education some for the future is to also education them in the past. Even as we struggle to keep our programs current with this rapid change, we also hold fast to the precept that some basic traditional education in language, history, philosophy, sociology, etc. is a good thing. Thus, we have general education programs.

And, so, I am optimistic that, with the right kind of leadership, higher education can partner productively to solve workforce needs.

This does not mean that I believe we are doing that now. Indeed, as I will point out in a moment, WSU has a way to go in some critical areas in our programs, our approaches and our interactions.

Given that optimism, let me turn to higher education in Kansas, to Wichita State University and, then, to what I see the future to be in our interactions with you, with organizations like Keith's, with government and with other educational organizations, including pre-k through 12 education.

My own career in higher education demonstrates an important feature of the industry: the enormous variety of mission and approach.

In my career I got my degree and held my first job in a land grant institution similar to KSU. I took my first tenure-track appointment in an urban institution much like WSU. I spent the formative part of my academic career in a flagship institution like KU. And, my most recent position was as an administrator in a highly selective private institution. In Kansas, we have all of these types of higher education institutions plus technical colleges, for-profit colleges and community colleges. Let me review the situation in Kansas:

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All of these institutions are involved, in one way or another, in developing talent for the work force.

But, Wichita State University has a special place in this environment as the only urban serving research university in the state.

We know that in the coming decades, most of the students who obtain higher education in America will do so in a four year or two year university that is located in or around some urban center. We know that the majority of the jobs created in the coming decades will be located in urban centers like Wichita. And, we know that most people will live in or around an urban environment like Wichita.

These settings present the full array of challenges to colleges and university including: huge variations in economic means of potential students, widely varying family histories of higher education attendance; great racial and cultural diversity and, often, vast texture of different languages spoken; rich business and industry climate; stiff competition for higher education (in Wichita there are 21 different entities offering undergraduate courses).

So, urban serving research universities have special obligations. Among these are:

- Developing human capital for the rapidly changing economy.
- Revitalizing education at all levels now with an emerging emphasis on pre-K education as well as K-12 and beyond.
- Renewing and sustaining communities including the leveraging of music and the arts toward a broader understanding of the human condition.
- Sustaining public health.
- Understanding and reacting to global connections and changes particularly with respect to economics and global climate change.
- Nurturing diversity and leveraging the great potential that diversity implies.
- Understanding the fundamental importance of learning for personal enrichment as well as the relationship of learning to work.
- Understanding the nature of information and knowledge in the technological age.

WSU is a member of the Urban University Coalition, a group of some of the most well respected urban universities in America. Our goal is to meet these challenges and responsibilities head on and over the past year we have emphasized to the faculty and staff that these are the principles that will drive new program development, resource allocation, and growth in the coming years.

So, what do we plan to do?

A month or so ago, Don and I had an extraordinary opportunity to think about this. Everything that I have told you today is very well known by the Kansas Board of Regents. They have taken as their responsibility – appropriately – to examine Kansas higher education within the current global economic climate.

We received a letter asking us to prepare suggest how the university would meet challenges in three areas in the coming years:

- Increasing student participation, student learning and graduation rates.
- Addressing critical workforce needs.
- Investing in research to support economic development.

We were delighted to have a chance to address these questions because we believe that they are at the heart of our mission as an urban serving research university.

Our answers reflect what we think we do well and where we need to improve. Let me focus for a minute of the last two areas: addressing workforce needs and investing in research to support economic development.

- We think that it is essential that we develop and maintain a close, mutually beneficial working relationship with technical education. Currently, Wichita Area Technical College is operating under what we believe is the technical training model of the future. The idea is to marry the university research stream with a responsive and flexible technical training curriculum approach to train people for *emerging* technologies not just current ones. You will hear more about this because I believe that in this technologically dependent business and manufacturing environment, our collaboration will reap benefits.
- At my direction, we have begun an intensive review of how the university responds to the customized training needs of the highly skilled and highly educated members of the current workforce. I expect that this will lead to some reorganization in the academic and research division toward the goal of providing most of that training locally.
- We are putting into place plans to substantially increase the number of engineers, nurses, accountants and other key professionals in the coming years. Many of you in this room have discussed this with me recently as it relates to the leadership transition in the business school. I expect to see movement in the right direction in the coming years.
- We are moving aggressively in the area of composite research as it relates both to aviation and to biomedicine. This is one of our greatest successes in the coming years and I expect that you will see some exciting developments in this area in the near future.
- Since coming to WSU last year, I have made it clear that it is an absolute priority of this institution to support and partner with the pre-K through 12 education system in Wichita. I am extremely pleased with the direction we are going now and I expect significant levels of activity in that area in the coming years. Clearly, education at all levels is essential to creating and maintaining a vibrant workforce and higher education shares responsibility with pre K through 12 for public education.

- We will continue to emphasize work experience as part of higher education and significantly increase the level of global training that we give our graduates in the coming years.

It is important to appreciate that I believe all this can be done while maintaining our commitment to general education and to the traditional disciplines that give American higher education its edge.

I invite you to engage with us to meet the critical challenges of the coming decades

Thank you.