

Wichita State University
General Faculty Meeting
December 6, 2007

Remarks by:

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I want to thank the faculty for this opportunity to address you this afternoon. It is always a great pleasure to have an opportunity to share a summary of our activities and challenges with you.

As the President indicated in his comments to you in the fall, we anticipated that this would be an interesting year in the Kansas Board of Regents system because of the large number (five) of new board members. His expectation has been fulfilled. It has been an interesting year so far, indeed.

For us at Wichita State University it has been a positive year, however. The members of the KBOR are receptive to our urban serving research mission; like the other Regents universities, we have been given a number of opportunities to express elements of that vision and those presentations have been very well received.

We continue to have success in our collaborative interactions with the other universities with respect to the development and approval of academic programs. One of the best examples of this was our collaboration with the KU Medical School to win approval from the board for two new Doctor of Nursing Practice programs in the state (one at KU and one at WSU). In another example around nursing, the board approved out of turn our accelerated nursing program so that we could move ahead with recruitment into that important program. So, I am optimistic that we will be able to work within this new KBOR environment.

My goal today is to quickly run through a list of the issues and initiatives that command most of the attention of the Provost's Office. Because of another engagement, I will be unable to attend the reception to follow this meeting. So, I want to leave as much time for questions as possible.

For convenience, I will divide these topics into two broad categories: (1) those having to do with the national discussion about higher education and the Board of Regents' strategic vision intersecting with that national discussion and (2) those topics having to do primarily with campus initiatives or activities. I will briefly summarize each of these topics with the hope of leaving a significant amount of time for a discussion with you following my comments.

Broader issues:

KBOR strategic vision

Both the President and I have spoken often since late last summer about the five elements of the strategic vision of the Kansas Board of Regents: (1) alignment of higher education with K-12; (2) increasing the rate of participation of Kansas students in higher education; (3) increasing the persistence of those students in the higher education system in Kansas; (4) aligning university research with the Kansas economy and meeting Kansas workforce needs and (5) measuring learner outcomes. This past summer,

we were asked to develop concepts about how the university will respond to these strategic elements. That report can be found on the Provost's web page.

In the development of the unified budget proposal for presentation to the legislature early next year, the Board asked each university to prepare a presentation describing how the university would invest new state appropriations to advance the strategic vision of the Board. The constraints for the development of this very short (10 minutes, including questions) presentation were restrictive and the timeline short. The vision that the President presented to the Board at its November meeting leveraged our historic strengths in professional training and work-based learning in a program that will (1) provide work-based learning opportunities to every student at WSU who desires such an opportunity and (2) to significantly increase the number and quality of accountants, engineers, health professionals and teachers graduating from our professional schools. Both of the elements of this plan were adopted (with enthusiasm) by the Board in a special budget meeting held at the end of November.

Given the state budget picture, it is unlikely that higher education will receive any investment funding in the coming legislative session. However, the need to think about the implications of our urban serving research mission within the KBOR strategic vision has given us much to consider in the coming year. As I indicated to the Faculty Senate at their last meeting, I think that it is very important that we nurture a discussion about how the new focus of the Board and our reaction to it affects all the elements of the university, in particular the liberal arts and sciences. In the coming weeks, I will present you with some reflections on why it is essential that we reaffirm as well as reframe our approach to the liberal arts education in order to become a higher education leader in Kansas and the nation.

Campus diversity

In my memo of exactly one year ago, I affirmed my strong belief that it is central to our urban serving research mission to work in support of a more diverse faculty and student body. That memo dealt primarily with the imperative to fully deploy the faculty search process to ensure that we vigorously looked for people of color to fill open faculty lines. Our assumption is that by increasing the diversity in our search pools, we will increase the diversity in the faculty. Part of this is the willingness to adjust starting salaries in some cases to match the market value for highly competitive candidates. Because we have to address this issue one faculty search at a time, progress seems slow. But, we did have some success last year. We were able to attract minority candidates for nearly all open positions and we succeeded in hiring a minority candidate in several cases. In some areas where historically the faculty has been male – engineering—we have succeeded in generating movement toward some gender balance.

The issue of diversity, however, is not just about faculty hiring. It is also about student recruitment, retention, programming, university philosophy, community outreach and simple determination to change. Most of us will agree that we have a way to go on some of these, but I have to say that I am pleased with the progress that we are making on some fronts at least. This past fall, many of you participated in the annual Tilford Conference on Diversity sponsored and supported by the KBOR Council of Chief Academic Officers. This year, under the leadership of Dr. Susan Kovar, that conference was organized in such a way that campus groups had time to reflect on the activities on their individual campuses regarding diversity and to plan for future activities. One of the most encouraging outcomes of that conference from my perspective was the strong but very positive feedback that my office got from the relatively large group from WSU that participated in the workshop. In response to that feedback, earlier this week I convened the group to ask them to work under the leadership of Dr. Kovar through the spring semester and into next year to continue to study the issue of diversity at WSU and to develop recommendations about how we may improve. I have extended funding to that group to aid in their work, which will be

complementary to the great work of the Office of Multicultural Affairs and the Transition to Respect project.

Globalization

In February of last year, I appointed a globalization task force and charged it to develop a strategic vision for how we might integrate programs and processes to develop a global focus at all levels of our academic programs. Under the leadership of Marty Shawver and Ravi Pendse, that group has worked with great creativity and energy since last winter. While that group is not yet ready to report out their recommendations, some of their work bears mentioning. In what is probably a first, the group took advantage of the annual fall meeting of the National Advisory Council of the WSU Foundation to mine the experience of the very successful people who serve on that important group, many of whom run businesses around the world. The task force has engaged one local aviation manufacturer in what we hope will be a new project to inject globalization into customized professional training. They have begun to look at the organizational structure of international student offices and are working toward some recommendations in that regard. I am optimistic that this group will give us the narrative that we will require to develop a cohesive academic strategic plan for globalization.

Student learning and accountability

Last week, each of you received a copy of an essay that I prepared regarding the issue of accountability in student learning. To most of us, it is second nature to hold ourselves accountable for student learning. Very rarely have I encountered higher education professionals who were not concerned with student learning. But, as I pointed out in the essay, we are in a position to have to react to strong forces both in the state (KBOR) and nationally about this issue. Indeed, the forces are so strong that in order to forestall the enactment of federal mandates regarding how we will measure student learning, most major higher education trade organizations, including ours (NASULGC and AASCU), have rapidly developed and are in the process of deploying organized programs of response. The Voluntary System of Accountability is one of those, and we will be talking about it more in the spring.

Let me now turn to a consideration of some of the things that attract our attention locally.

Local issues:

Enrollment

In our current environment, the development of strategic research programs, delivering the highest quality programs of undergraduate and graduate learning, maintaining our technology, and investing in exciting new ideas depends on moving the university into a position of increased revenue growth. Enrollment is the key to revenue stability and growth, and this fall I have begun to work with the deans to deploy strategies in each of their colleges to increase enrollment. Each of them has identified ways to do this and we will work with them in the coming year to develop these programs.

It is important to appreciate that enrollment is not only an issue of admissions. It is an issue of *enrollment management*, which involves recruitment, admissions, *and* retention. Academic Affairs has a role in all of these but most especially in retention. Currently, my office is taking a long hard look at all of the functions and processes in the Academic division that affect retention, and we have opened discussions with the appropriate faculty groups on this issue. Vice President Kopita and I set up an enrollment work group composed of individuals from our two divisions to undertake a continuous study of our enrollment practices and bring recommendations forward to us. One of the areas under review by that group is the

university strategy with respect to minority enrollment. I look forward to learning more about those recommendations in the coming months and to working with Dr. Kopita to deploy those new strategies.

Research and Graduate Education

I have emphasized since coming to Wichita State that in our environment and with our urban serving mission, our future lies not only with our programs of study but also with our programs of research. We are the only urban serving research university in the state of Kansas. The potential for research partnerships in Wichita far exceed those available in either Lawrence or Manhattan. The background support for research partnerships in the business community is intense. The economy of the Wichita area is healthier than most similarly sized cities in the country. In my estimation, we are in a better position to grow strategic research areas than any university in the state. To seize this moment, we will have to identify what is important to us in research, resource it and hold ourselves accountable for productivity in that area. We are spending a lot of time in my office and with the Research Council on this imperative, and that activity will intensify in the coming weeks.

We have had some significant successes. We have submitted what we believe will be a very competitive proposal to the Kansas Bioscience Authority to begin planning for a Kansas Center for Innovation in biomaterials and composites. This is a partnership with Via Christi Hospital of great promise. We have reorganized the Office of Research Administration and moved to take care of some rather serious deficiencies in the way in which we interact with federal funders. We have put into place a more structured and thoughtful way in which we approach the Kansas Congressional Delegation about our needs – this is an activity that is organized and managed by Eric Sexton. We have worked with great vigor to streamline and bring up to date our internal grant handling processes and we continue to work in that area. We have brought the office of environmental safety into the ORA and we believe that that will put us in a better position with respect to compliance. Dave McDonald and the Research Council have begun to develop a long term strategic plan for our research programs, and we expect those discussions to accelerate in the coming year.

Under the leadership on Susan Kovar, we are effecting the integration of the Graduate School with the research operation in order to strengthen both of these. Thanks to Dr. Kovar's work early last year shortly after I arrived, we fixed two of the three major problems with the way we fund graduate students. Those problems are: (1) the structural deficit, which we eliminated; (2) increasing costs of graduate student health care, which we now include in our annual planning; (3) low graduate student stipends, which remain a challenge. We have also begun to look carefully at our enrollment management of the graduate program.

I have taken a very active role – some have said too active – in encouraging certain departments and coalitions of departments to come forward with new master's and doctoral level graduate programs that fit our strategic mission and have a chance to grow rapidly in our current environment. I will continue to push on this because there are significant opportunities, some of which are fleeting, that I believe we must take advantage of.

Research and graduate education will continue to be a high priority for me.

South Campus

As all of you know, we will open a south campus in Derby in January. While we have based our optimism about this campus on our very positive experience with the West Campus, we do not

necessarily see the mission of the two as being the same. Indeed, Keith Pickus and his group continue to very actively refine the mission of that facility. We do know that the new accelerated nursing program will be housed there and we are exploring a wide range of options related to both credit-bearing and non-credit-bearing courses at that facility.

E-learning

Most of you will recall that as part of the HLC accreditation process last year, we requested a status change to allow us to offer distance learning courses in specific areas. The visiting team approved the change but wanted us to take closer look at our e-learning philosophy and resourcing. We have spent this past semester studying the enterprise of e-learning in some detail in order to determine the extent to which we want to extend our academic programs in this area. As most have found around the country, it is clear that e-learning strategies are more useful to us in our local environment than as a way to extend our programs great distances – though that also has great potential for some of our programs, particularly in the professional schools. A robust e-learning system that includes the appropriate support for course development, etc. could give us much more flexibility in course scheduling and more options for flexibility of faculty work time.

Other internal issues and challenges

--The search for a new dean of the Barton School of Business is underway under the leadership of Dean Peter Cohen.

--We continue to work to revise our crisis management structure in light of the Virginia Tech tragedy.

--We continue to work to develop a more secure computer infrastructure and to realize the full potential of the Banner ERP system.

--We have commissioned a review of the university honors program and we will be working with faculty in the coming semester to determine the correct form for that program.

Thank you for your attention.