

**David C. Sweet, President
Youngstown State University
State of the University Address
August 21, 2006**

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to the start of a new academic year and to share with you my 2006 State of the University address. I would like to introduce our trustees who are joining us today and ask them to stand and please hold your recognition until all are introduced: Millicent Counts, Attorney John Pogue, our Board Chair, Scott Schulick, Student Trustees Louise Popio and Erianne Raib. Provost Bob Herbert and Pat Sweet.

The Vision And Three Priorities

As a result of the outstanding contributions from all corners of the university—the faculty, staff, student body leaders, administration and Board of Trustees, Youngstown State University continues to make significant progress as a strong and effective university. Each of you has been involved in some way in contributing to the progress achieved and programs and initiatives underway.

During the past year, over 2,100 students received their YSU diplomas and became alumni. This was the largest number of graduates in the past twenty years. Much has changed since the university first began awarding degrees, yet one constant has been the commitment of our faculty and staff to provide a quality education for our students.

In the last 6 years, change is easily seen in our physical plant—from the student apartments in Smoky Hollow to the Bliss Hall addition, from the Andrews Student Recreation and Wellness Center to the updated classrooms, from our new state of the art planetarium to the new bridges on the northern edge of campus.

Change is reflected in a larger student body.

Change is evident in the new degree offerings that reflect a changing world of work.

Change is present in the outstanding 40 new faculty we welcome to campus today.

Change is evident in the positioning of Youngstown State University and our partnerships with the community to advance the mission of the university and connect more directly to the city of which we are a part.

Change is underway as we implement our technology plan and transform our administrative systems.

Change is seen in increasing numbers of minority faculty, staff and students.

Change is the reasoning behind the labor/management council designed to improve the labor – management environment on campus.

Change is seen in our new staff who bring energy and new ideas.

Change is ongoing in our successful efforts to raise greater dollars to support scholarships, academic programs, and projects.

Change is evident in the increasing recognition of our faculty achievements, grant awards and successfully accredited programs.

As our centennial approaches, more change is coming. The challenge is to manage change in positive ways and overcome to the best of our ability the forces—both internal and external – that would prevent positive change for the betterment of the university, the community and our students.

Despite the challenges that confronted us last year, major progress was made in fulfilling our vision to *become a national model for a student centered comprehensive urban university transforming its students into successful professionals, scholars, citizens, and leaders.*

Next Monday we will welcome over 2000 new students to campus. Sixty-one of these students will enter as high school valedictorians, while others will be under-prepared for the rigors of university work. Our goal will be to help these students—all these students-- achieve their dream of a college degree. Their experience at YSU and their interaction with you, will shape the rest of their lives.

Today I will—briefly reaffirm the three priorities—enrollment; diversity; and partnerships--that were established when I assumed the presidency of YSU in July 2000. Next, I will describe a number of external forces that we will confront in the months ahead. And conclude with a look to the coming year, leading up to the YSU centennial celebration.

First enrollment. Our success in recruiting, retaining, and graduating students measures our accomplishment in raising the level of educational attainment in the Mahoning Valley that is so critical to its economic future. The events of the past summer surrounding General Motors and Delphi illustrate that we have an even greater role in providing opportunities for those who need to change careers. Our goal must be to increase the college going rates in the Valley. We also have to be pragmatic about why enrollment growth is important to YSU. The *bottom line*--is that enrollment is critical to our *bottom line*, especially in this prolonged period of declining state support for higher education.

Our enrollment growth is sustained by academic program development and affordability. Academic program development includes not only new programs that meet student needs but also delivering those programs at the times and places that maximize accessibility to the student population, especially to the vast largely untapped market of adults who have some college education but no degree. In Mahoning County alone, this represents nearly 50,000 individuals. To compete, we need to expand distance-learning, credit for life experience, transfer credits, and program articulation. We have to face the reality that cost is a factor to students in our region. However, we can proudly point to the fact that because of our excellent scholarship packages, the average student pays 46% of the stated tuition. Working with the YSU Foundation, we will need to continue to increase our scholarship support—especially need based aid--to fulfill our aspiration that no one will be denied the opportunity for higher education for financial reasons.

Youngstown State has the responsibility to lead the Mahoning Valley in achieving diversity in our student body and our workplace, both because YSU is one of the most important institutions and largest employers in the Mahoning Valley, and because we recognize that a critical part of students' education in

the modern world is the ability to interact with people of cultures and backgrounds different from their own. We can all take pride in the fact that total minority student headcount increased 52% over the past five years, from 1,280 in fall 2000 to 1,950 in fall 2005. At the same time we are committed to increasing faculty and staff diversity. As one example, between fall 2000 and fall 2005, there was a 34% increase in African American employees, from 69 to 104. I applaud the strategic hiring policy for faculty and staff developed by provost Herbert this year and approved by the board of trustees that will contribute to our strategic objectives. The Diversity Council will continue to be instrumental in our efforts.

Finally, partnerships. As an urban university, particularly in the economically challenged Mahoning Valley, we have a responsibility to form partnerships that advance the goals of the university and at the same time are beneficial to the community. Partnerships create opportunities for students and faculty to engage in service learning, through internships and class projects. Partnerships abound across campus including third frontier internships where engineering students work for area technology oriented businesses, the homework express program in fine and performing arts that has recently been nominated for an Emmy award, and the newly developed internships in non-profit agencies funded by the wean foundation.

The Youngstown Early College, a partnership between YSU and the Youngstown city schools, enrolled its third class this fall. It has garnered external support from the Knowledgeworks Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the state of Ohio. YSU has the distinction of being the first public university in Ohio to be part of this innovative national movement. There is a full entering class of 100 students and for the first time a waiting list. The early college--promotes educational attainment in an at-risk group of Youngstown students who have demonstrated potential and prepares them for college work. I want to thank the YSU students and faculty who are supporting the teachers and students at the early college and gaining valuable experience with pre-college students, while generating enrollment for YSU. The successful efforts taking place in Fedor Hall are reflected in the students' encouraging state test scores and their performance with university course work. During the last academic year, 114 early college students took 250 classes, for a total of 476 credit hours.

YSU faculty also have an outstanding track record of collaborating with Valley school districts to provide the continuing education that teachers need. The latest example is the nearly \$1 million in grants received by faculty in the colleges of arts and sciences and education to deliver in-service education in the sciences and mathematics to teachers from forty-seven school districts. Another set of partnerships revolves around the implementation of the campus master plan. The progress on our north, east, west and south gateways--- our front doors--- are great enhancements to the already first rate physical appearance of our core campus. Kudos to our facilities and grounds staff for their excellent work. With the assistance of Congressman Tim Ryan, we were able to obtain unprecedented federal funding for YSU for student and pedestrian safety enhancements on Wick, Fifth, and Rayen avenues, which will create safe and attractive walkways between our parking areas and the campus core. Also, our partnership with ODOT is transforming our north gateway and the bridges on the north edge of campus, making them safer walkways for our dorm students and creating a more attractive campus corridor.

The centerpiece of the development of the South Campus Gateway is the future new Williamson College of Business building. The project is a needed addition to the academic facilities of YSU that will create modern teaching and learning space for the college; provide greater opportunities for interaction between college faculty and students and the business community; and also free up space in the current building for general instructional uses and other potential academic department space. The overall plan is an exciting partnership among YSU, the city, and the Catholic Diocese. I want to thank Mayor Jay

Williams and Councilman Artis Gillam for their strong support of the project. I am pleased to report that we have commitments for the two largest gifts in university history as part of the Centennial Capital Campaign dedicated to the new Williamson College of Business building. Our development team, led by Paul McFadden, is doing an outstanding job.

YSU's partnership with Wick Neighbors on the eastern edge of campus has now moved to the predevelopment stage and I envision the start of the next phase of the rebirth of the Smoky Hollow neighborhood and the construction of homes by the time we celebrate our centennial.

A final partnership is between each of us and the needs of our community through our leading role in the united way campaign. The united way supports agencies and organizations that impact thousands of lives throughout the Valley. I encourage all of you to support this worthy cause. YSU continues as a pacesetter campaign. Our campaign starts today and will extend through early September. Many thanks to Pat Shively and the volunteers from across campus for coordinating this years campaign. Look for the auction at today's reception where contributors will have the opportunity for some great prizes.

The Ivory Tower And The External Forces Of The Real World

I would now like to turn our attention from change within the university to the external forces creating change that we must be aware of and prepared to respond to.

Two of these external forces are—state politics and competition.

First, state politics. This is a time of transition and uncertainty in state government. During the course of the year, we will have to adapt to many changes. There will be a new governor and a new general assembly with many new legislators, a new chancellor, and five new presidents will join the 14-member inter-university council, which will also be appointing new leadership to replace Jim McCollum. From these new and ongoing participants, a new biennial budget will be proposed, debated, and hopefully adopted before the start of FY 08. In other words, there will be an almost complete turnover in the major state players affecting higher education and YSU...change of an unprecedented level. We will need to spend time to be effective participants and advocates at the state level. We will also need to be attentive and actively engaged in the discussion in northeast Ohio, driven by several key business and political leaders, who believe that consolidation of public universities in the region would lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness.

The new biennial budget will be the first enacted under the tax expenditure limitation, or TEL, legislation recently passed by the general assembly. This new law places a 3.5% limitation on increases in aggregate state spending. The impact on higher education is uncertain. If the legislature continues to view public higher education as a residual for funding, after the increases for Medicaid, prisons, nursing homes, and K-12 education have been addressed, the next several years will see a repeat of the past three biennia of declining state support and increases in tuition. Hopefully, the new players will change this perspective and view higher education investments as key to the states economic revitalization.

There are also recommendations by the Ohio Board of Regents to change the state share of instruction distribution formula. It will be important for us to understand the potential implications for our state funding - and to advocate effectively on our own behalf. I greatly appreciate the willingness of the leaders of our campus unions to work together with the administration to address these challenges emanating from our state capital. Another challenge of the state political environment is the growing perception that the two-year sector of public higher education, consisting of the community and technical colleges, is more aligned to contribute to Ohio's economic development objectives than are the four-year public universities. *I will return to this topic later in my remarks*

The second external force is competition. Here at YSU, we are surrounded by competition that, if not addressed, could threaten our very future. Colleges that 10 or 15 years ago never dreamed of trying to market in the Mahoning Valley now have billboards on Market Street and on Route 224. We open up the *Vindicator* or the *Jambar* -- our own student newspaper -- and regularly see ads from competing universities and online degree programs. Businesses such as the university of phoenix are advertising aggressively and increasing their market share of students pursuing college degrees. People seeking a higher education simply have many, many choices today; and universities that do not realize this and do not react will suffer as a result.

The university has external forces to deal with. We cannot do that well and win, if we are battling internally. We must learn to keep our disagreements brief, respectful, and constructive. Modern universities, the really effective ones, are no longer divided within. They have learned that it is impossible

to survive, let alone thrive, if they fight among themselves. They unify on most issues, try very hard to accommodate the genuine interests of the major parties, and save the arguments for matters that are both rare and essential. The effective universities focus their collective energies on the primary reason the university exists: providing a quality education for their students. At YSU, we all need to walk together and we need to work together and focus our collective energies on providing a quality education for our students.

A Proud Past And A Promising Future

What we accomplish this year and how we both create change and address external changes from Columbus and elsewhere will influence our ability to achieve our fullest potential.

The work that will take place this year on the self-study for the higher learning commission accreditation is an opportunity to evaluate the changes made and our progress as a university since the last accreditation and to set the course for the future. Thank you to the provost's office and to Drs. Bege Bowers and Jan Elias for leading this critical effort.

We will continue to implement the technology master plan, building on the successes and hard work of many during the past year. Over 30,000 hours of employee training have supported the implementation of the banner administrative system. I want to thank Donna Esterly and her team in this massive transformation of our campus and to Eileen Greaf, Katrena Davidson and their teams for working diligently on getting the banner finance module implemented.

During the coming year, we will conclude the silent phase and launch the public phase of the Centennial Capital Campaign. I am pleased with the success to date in receiving commitments for major gifts. The decline in state support for higher education and our commitment to affordable tuition require us to seek alternative sources of revenue for scholarships, programs, and new facilities.

We will complete the campus master plan priorities and develop funding strategies to achieve them.

Key personnel searches will be conducted.

During the summer, the Labor Management Council—comprised of the four union presidents, the president of student government, and four administrators, including myself—met as a group and, with the two federal mediators, began to develop a process to improve labor relations. I want to thank the council members for their willingness to commit their time this summer for three meetings—including two full day sessions. I especially want to commend student government president Chad Miller for the positive, thoughtful and constructive role he has played in our discussions. I believe we have made progress and this effort remains a priority during the coming year. Last Friday the council—after a day long session with the mediators—issued a joint statement. The statement acknowledges that the overall improvement in labor management relations is a shared responsibility and recognizes that the future strength of the university and students' future success is directly related to how effectively we address labor-management issues. The council pledged to work together during the year to set an example for collaborative problem solving. And that we will expect professional conduct from all members of the university community.

With our goal of increasing the college-going rates in the Valley, one specific initiative that has emerged is the so-called community college initiative. Last march, the YSU board of trustees requested that the administration study the potential of establishing a community college to serve the Mahoning Valley. The Youngstown metropolitan area is the only metropolitan area in the state without a community college, and this void is reflected in the college going rates in the region.

For example, the Toledo metropolitan area has a population base comparable to that of the Youngstown-Warren metropolitan area but is served by Owens Community College in addition to the University of Toledo. The combined enrollment at both institutions is nearly 38,500 students. The

combined enrollment at YSU and the three Kent State branches in Trumbull and Columbiana counties is 17,500, or less than half that of the Toledo institutions. In other words, with this as just one example, the data are convincing: *the presence of a community college stimulates higher-education enrollment beyond universities and their branch campuses.*

At this point no decisions have been made. The small planning committee, chaired by Dr. Nate Ritchey, has been working this summer and will evolve this fall into a larger group broadly representative of the campus to make a recommendation on whether to proceed. That recommendation could range from simply doing what we already do but doing it better, to collaboration with area career and technical schools or regional higher-education institutions; to opening a true free standing community college. Based on the work of the planning committee to date and the lack of support in Columbus for new public higher education institutions-- the later option is probably the least likely.

I am fully aware of the concerns expressed about this initiative and am also aware that some on campus are eager to participate in the planning process. Let me directly address some of the concerns by stating what this proposed initiative is and what it is not. It is an attempt to explore ways of creating opportunities for higher education for a population that currently is not inclined to participate, but it is not an attempt to change the mission of YSU or turn YSU into a community college. It is an attempt to satisfy the growing demand for two-year degrees, but not at the expense of graduate education and research. Let me assure you that we will not compromise the excellence demonstrated in our student and faculty achievements. An important part of the process for determining the feasibility of the initiative is communication with campus constituencies and the community. The planning process is being finalized and it will involve numerous open forums with campus and community groups in order to explain the options and hear concerns and suggestions. *Hear me when I say again*, that no decisions have been made and that we are committed to listening to all of you as we consider various possibilities.

There are many other exciting initiatives that will be undertaken in the coming year such as professor Alan Hunter's work with cyber-technology and the engineering colleges materials engineering initiative—both of which have received federal funding with the help of Congressman Ryan. Our nursing department just obtained full re-accreditation as well as several \$100,000 gifts for new laboratory facilities. And I do not want to forget the success of our student athletes—with championships last year in softball, women's track and football and a bright year ahead for our penguin teams.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the recently unveiled logo for the YSU centennial states—a proud past and a promising future. Our proud past and our promising future encompass our heritage as a university that provides an opportunity to all who seek to improve their lives through higher education. Our proud past and promising future encompass a university that both nurtures the under-prepared and challenges the best. Our proud past and promising future suggests that as an institution we can change and are prepared to in order to fulfill our mission. Some of you have been a part of our proud past for decades. Others for less than a year. I invite all of you to walk together on the road to our centennial and beyond to our promising future.