

State of University Address

President David C. Sweet

August 20, 2007

Good morning.

Welcome to the start of our new academic year—the Centennial Year of Youngstown State University.

While we commence a significant new year in the history of Youngstown State University, we begin the year with sadness over the loss this past July of Bob Herbert, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs. During his all too brief two years on campus, Bob made a lasting contribution through his vision, integrity, and commitment to student success. His leadership in guiding the development of the Academic Strategic Plan, which was completed at the end of this past academic year and endorsed by the Board of Trustees at their June meeting, will serve as a major legacy as we implement the plan's components. The creation of the CLASS and STEM Colleges, along with the recruitment of Dean Furnish and Dean Abraham, is an academic transformation, led by Bob, that has gained recognition for YSU at the state level and more importantly, set the stage for the future development of innovative academic programs in these two colleges. During Bob's two-year tenure, 27 new minority faculty joined YSU, a dramatic and lasting contribution to diversity on our campus. Our commitment to what Bob started will be one of the themes for the coming year.

The month of July was difficult, as we dealt both with our grief over Bob's passing and also with the job of keeping the University and the Academic Division moving forward. It was gratifying that so many individuals stepped forward to assist the Herbert family, the Provost's Office, and myself.

My thanks to all of you. And especially Associate Provost Bege Bowers, who since Bob's death has been effectively maintaining operations in the Provost's office, preparing our North Central self-study, heading the search for a new Chief Human Resources Officer and confronting a family health crisis.

The Centennial Year

Milestone anniversaries, such as our centennial year, provide an opportunity to: reflect on our history, evaluate the present, and chart a future course. This opportunity has heightened significance because of a remarkable convergence of activities and events this year. The centennial celebration will provide numerous occasions to reflect upon and celebrate our history.

The theme for our Centennial is: "A Proud Past.... A Promising Future."

As we look back at our proud past, what are the themes consistent throughout our history, and how are they present today?

- The first is *access and opportunity*. From immigrants and their children to returning soldiers taking advantage of the G.I. bill, to non-traditional and minority students, to students who are the first in their families to attend college, to some of the brightest students that our Valley has to offer – Youngstown State University has remained true to its mission of providing access to higher

education to all who wish to take advantage of the opportunity. This was true as Youngstown State University evolved from an Association School of the YMCA, to its years as Youngstown College, then Youngstown University; and remains a cornerstone of our mission to this day.

In Northeast Ohio:

- We are the only public university that embraces open access as a part of our mission statement;
- We have the highest percentage of first generation college students;
- ...the highest percentage of students with family incomes below \$50,000;
- ...and the highest percentage of students receiving state grants.

To maintain access, we have kept our tuition low (the lowest in Ohio) and our administrative operations lean and efficient (the most efficient in Ohio).

The excellence of our developmental education and student support systems creates the best possible opportunity for success of under-prepared students. The results are borne out by our retention and graduation rates, which exceed those of state universities with comparable profiles.

However, I should point out that in my recent planning discussions with Chancellor Eric Fingerhut, he pointed to statistics such as the fact that YSU has the highest percentage of students completing less than the minimum core and the highest percentage of student FTE's devoted to remedial instruction. And he suggested that our goal should be to increase the number of students entering the university with the high school core completed and reduce the percentage of entering students who require remediation.

I believe we would all heartily agree with this objective. The major challenge will be...how? I will return to the question of *how* later in my remarks.

- The second theme is that YSU has evolved to meet the educational needs of our region.

Throughout our history, the faculty and staff of the university have engaged in developing and delivering academic programs that respond to the needs of our region.

In recent years, we have continued that tradition through new programs and degrees such as the doctorate in Educational Leadership, masters in Social Work and Computer and Information Systems, baccalaureate programs in Forensic Science and General Studies, and associate degrees in Electrical Utility and Power Plant Technology.

The creation of the STEM and CLASS Colleges is the latest evidence of transformation to meet changing needs. The departments in the STEM College graduate the highest percentage of undergraduates with degrees in these disciplines of any Northeast Ohio University. CLASS, with its excellent undergraduate and graduate programs, is poised to play an even greater role as the center for general education. One hallmark of our undergraduate program across all disciplines is our faculty involving students in research projects. We should set as our goal, expanding this exemplary record by engaging even more students across campus in innovative student research projects.

- The third theme is our role as both a center of civic life and a source of community identity and pride.

From its origins in downtown Youngstown to our move up the hill and the construction of the first campus building in 1931 at the corner of Wick and Lincoln Avenues, now Jones Hall, to the expansion of programs and the transformation of the campus in more recent years, we can be proud that the region looks to us for leadership through cultural, civic, and athletic events that engage, entertain, and inform.

The Penguin has in many ways become a symbol for Youngstown and the entire Mahoning Valley.

No other public university in Northeast Ohio has as great a social and economic impact on the downtown, the city, and the region in which it is located as Youngstown State University.

We are returning to our downtown roots through collaborative planning with the city's comprehensive plan – Youngstown 2010 – and our own Centennial Campus Master Plan. A major step in linking the university with the city will be taken with the construction of the new home for the Williamson College of Business Administration at the southern edge of our campus, serving both as a gateway to the campus and to downtown.

Also, our leadership in neighborhood planning efforts will have a demonstrable impact on the neighborhoods surrounding the campus and the City of Youngstown. A strong campus connected to a vibrant downtown and restored campus neighborhoods will have immeasurable benefits for the city and the region as well as the University.

These themes define, identify and unify us. I believe they serve as keys to our future as well. However, our future is as challenging as at any time in our 100-year history, and especially in the forty years since we became part of the state system.

The Challenges Ahead

I have been involved in state-level policy and practice related to public higher education for over forty years. One of the most dramatic periods for public higher education was between 1964 and 1972, with the creation of the Ohio Board of Regents as a planning and coordinating body. The first task assigned to the then new Board of Regents was to prepare a master plan for the future of higher education in Ohio.

The first Chancellor, John Millett, saw quote “planning as the preparation for action.” And action there was, as the number of public universities in Ohio expanded from five to fourteen, including YSU in 1967. The goal was a two-year campus within 30 miles of every person in the state and a four-year campus in all eight of Ohio's major urban areas.

It is highly possible that the coming years under the leadership of Governor Ted Strickland and Chancellor Eric Fingerhut may well have equal or greater impact on YSU and higher education in Ohio. Why is that?

- In a historic piece of legislation, H.B. 2, the Chancellor became a cabinet level appointee of the Governor.

- The Governor gave higher education unprecedented attention in his first State of the State address.
- The Governor and the General Assembly, with unheard of bipartisanship, passed a biennial budget that reversed years of declining state support for higher education while freezing tuition at public universities for those two years and calling for new levels of accountability.
- Recently, the Governor by executive order established the University System of Ohio with a stated goal: to provide incentives and expert guidance to help each institution reach its individual point of excellence and ensure that the system as a whole offers a high quality, flexible, and affordable education to all Ohioans.
- The Chancellor will prepare a strategic plan for higher education in Ohio due to the General Assembly in March 2008. In contrast to the plan forty years ago that focused on the growth in the number of state colleges and universities, this plan will focus on precise ways Ohio's system of higher education and its institutions can accelerate the growth of the State's economy and define clear benchmarks for quality and affordability.

In addition, late last year, the General Assembly created the Northeast Ohio Universities Study Commission on Collaboration and Innovation. The 19-member commission comprised of business and university leaders has been meeting since last winter with the goal of preparing recommendations by this December for increased collaborative or combined academic and administrative programs among the five Northeast Ohio public universities.

One of the first major issues being discussed by the Commission is the future of NEOUCOM. With the merger of the Medical College of Ohio with the University of Toledo, NEOUCOM is the only freestanding medical college in Ohio. While at this point, I cannot predict what recommendations the Commission will make on this or any of the other major academic or administrative issues that will be considered, the mood with the business members of the Commission, with the Chancellor, with the Legislature and the Governor is for change.

The Chancellor has challenged all leaders of public higher education to quote "think about more than their own institutions and to think, and act, on behalf of the common good."

How then do we meet the challenges ahead?

- First, we must recognize their reality and act accordingly. We cannot bury our head in the sand and pretend that the challenges will go away. They will not. We have been and will continue to be active and thoughtful participants in these discussions, strongly advocating for the interests of YSU, but at the same time understanding that there are opportunities for collaboration.
- Second, we need to communicate effectively with one another. The entire campus has a stake in these discussions and needs to be informed and actively engaged in campus conversations on these issues. I will ask Senate President Ahuja for the opportunity to brief the Senate as frequently as necessary, as was the practice last year. Also, President Ahuja and I have agreed to initiate a series of campus conversations early in Fall semester to discuss in greater depth these issues and others confronting our campus. The first of these will take place September 14 at 3:30 p.m. in the newly renovated Pete's Place.

- Third, we need to understand that we are involved in an externally driven process for the very nature of our future. We must be united as a campus community to meet these external challenges. Our ability to succeed as an institution, will be severely compromised if we weaken ourselves with internal conflicts and attacks. Those who engage in these activities will be compromising the university as a whole.

Negotiation of successor agreements with the faculty and classified staff unions will take place this year. I share the commitment of the outgoing President of the ACE bargaining unit to conclude negotiations by May 2008 and will do everything I can to make that happen.

A Promising Future

Despite the challenges ahead and their accompanying uncertainty, I am convinced of the reality of the second phrase of our Centennial theme....*a promising future*.

- First, we have a history of meeting challenges and engaging in collaborative planning. The Centennial Strategic Plan, the Technology Master Plan, the Centennial Campus Master Plan – all were developed through extensive campus collaborations, involving dozens of faculty, staff, and students from all sectors of the university. These plans have guided our work with tangible results.

As I noted earlier, the latest such effort is the Academic Strategic Plan. Specific goals of the plan, such as creation of a centralized student-support structure, promotion of diversity and internationalization and development of more student engagement and internship activities, should be priorities for the coming year.

- Second, YSU is well positioned to state a strong case regarding our unique contribution to higher education in Ohio. Youngstown State University dominates higher education enrollment in Mahoning, Trumbull, and Columbiana Counties, so much so that this is a distinct region within northeast Ohio. YSU must be the focal point and driving force for higher education in the Mahoning Valley.

Earlier I asked, how can we address the Chancellor's observation regarding the need to increase the number of high school students entering YSU having completed the core and reduce the number of students requiring remediation? My answer is that YSU should expand our leadership role and further serve as the focal point for *the educational pipeline* in the Mahoning Valley.

The *pipeline* illustrates the progression a student takes in moving from primary and secondary education onto post secondary education. Our goal should be to collaborate with area school districts to encourage more students to attend college and to strengthen the preparation of the students to improve their potential for success when they get to college. To achieve these goals, we should take the lead in the formation of a Mahoning Valley P-16 Council.

The Early College High School is in part, a demonstration project for improving the preparation of students for college. Also, we are in the process of developing educational programs through emerging partnerships with the region's career and technical centers that will focus on career pathways. With the

passage of the biennial budget, these centers are administratively a part of the Board of Regents and no longer under the Department of Education.

The major gap in the *pipeline* is the absence of community college education. The Chancellor has indicated agreement with the need. I believe that any plan for providing community college education in the Mahoning Valley should have YSU at its center.

- The third reason for my optimism is the support of the community. We have been privileged over our history to have unwavering and generous support from the community. Through this support we have been able to advance numerous projects to benefit our students, faculty, staff, and the community. Most recently, to give a few examples: the campaign for the Andrews Student Recreation and Wellness Center, the creation of endowed chairs in fields as diverse as Accounting and Islamic Studies, refurbishing our world class planetarium, and the successful launch of the Centennial Capital Campaign – with both the largest single gift in the history of YSU of \$5 million from the Williamson family and the largest individual gift of \$4 million from Tony and Mary Lariccia. Both gifts are designated for the new building for the Williamson College of Business Administration.

Our Centennial Campaign focuses on raising \$43 million for academic programs, student scholarships and facilities. I am pleased to report we have now reached \$32 million of our goal thanks to the leadership and hard work of our development staff, the Campaign Cabinet chaired by Tony Lariccia, and colleagues across campus and the community.

- The fourth reason for my optimism about our promising future is you—the faculty, staff, and students. Despite tight budgets, lean staffing, and numerous unforeseen circumstances, you have kept focus on our reason for being here—the success of our students. On Saturday, 430 students received their diplomas for a total of nearly 1600 graduates this past year.

Examples abound of the excellence of our students and the quality of a YSU education. For example, YSU is the only public university in northeast Ohio to have recipients of both the Phi Kappa Phi and Goldwater national scholarships for three consecutive years. Our math and engineering students continue to excel in national and regional competitions. Our students in education and health-related fields continue to shine in their national certification exams.

Through your hard work and dedication we achieved this past year:

- A 3.0% enrollment growth over the previous year and the attainment of our highest headcount enrollment since 1995.
- A 6.2% increase in minority student enrollment, leading to the highest minority enrollment in the history of YSU.
- Successful research grant activity that topped \$5 million last year. In addition, we have a commitment of \$2 million in congressional funding, thanks to the strong support of Congressman Tim Ryan, for establishing a national center of excellence in industrial metrology and 3-D imaging research; a multi-year grant of \$1.7 million to our Center for Human Services Development, a \$1 million renewal of our Upward Bound program, and the

Rich Center for the Study and Treatment of Autism continues to expand programs, the number of students served and its national reputation.

Also, the year was marked by continued progress on partnerships that have resulted in:

- renovations to campus bridges that have created safer pedestrian walkways and the enhancement of our campus gateways;
- the first stage in the development of Smoky Hollow into a vibrant mixed-use neighborhood; and
- a re-invigorated international program establishing and growing our student/faculty exchanges. Also, for the first time, this Fall semester Arabic and Mandarin Chinese are being taught;

Internally, of greatest importance to the University, the Higher Learning Commission accreditation process is on schedule with the self-study preparation being led by Professor Bege Bowers along with Professor Jan Elias and Sharon Stringer and contributors from all sectors of the university. The self-study will be submitted this semester in preparation for the February 2008 site visit.

Progress continues on implementation of the Technology Master Plan with the launch of the MyYSU portal, the Banner admissions module, and the Banner HR/Payroll system. The Banner project is scheduled for completion during FY 2008, thanks to the hard work of staff in virtually every unit on campus.

You are responsible for these and the many other successes of the past year. As you make your way in this centennial year, I invite you to:

- Read our award-worthy YSU Magazine. Congratulations to George McCloud, Ron Cole and Wendy Wolfgang for a job well done;
- Visit the beautiful Wick Pollock gardens that have been restored by our students;
- read and enjoy *Youngstown State University: Yo-Co to YSU* written by Professors Donna DeBlasio and Martha Pallante which captures a pictorial history of the university; peruse the new Centennial Archives housed in Maag Library that will be dedicated this Fall;
- Discover and walk across the old stone bridge next to Jones Hall that was the scene of campus celebrations in our early years, and;
- Next Spring plan to attend the dedication of the statue honoring Dr. Howard Jones, the university's first president, as well as participate in the many other centennial events throughout the course of the year.

In this unique time in the history of Youngstown State University, I ask each of you to reflect on your place here and your own accomplishments – as a builder of a strong and proud university.

Some of you, such as Carl Chuey, Bill Countryman, Howard Mettee, Dan O'Neill, and Christopher Sweeney, begin today over four decades of service – some of you a decade, more or less.

As builders, you have advanced all that has come before – creating new programs, beautifying the campus, advancing research, developing athletic prowess, initiating new teaching methods, making

beautiful music and memorable theatre, reaching out to the younger generation and serving the community.

Today we welcome 40 new faculty members, who this week begin their YSU careers and the 26 staff members that joined us during the past year.

May each of us, regardless of our length of service to this university, make our mark on Youngstown State University as it moves into its second century – by advancing our mission and keeping students at our center. By doing this, we will respect our proud past and ensure our promising future.

Thank you. See you for a lunch hosted by Sodexo.