

State of the University--2008

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Reaching Higher: Positioning YSU for Our Second Century

Welcome and Introductions

Good Morning--This year as we celebrate our University's Centennial -- reflecting on our proud past and promising future -- it is a pleasure for me to deliver my ninth State of the University address.

Introduction

Today, I want to focus my remarks--primarily on our promising future -- as we begin our second century as a University -- and specifically the exciting opportunities in the decade ahead. But before looking to the future, I would like to take some time to reflect on our proud past and celebrate our successes of this past year.

During the summer, I had the opportunity to catch up on some of my reading and recommend to you two texts that provide insights into our university's past and our future. The first was especially commissioned for our Centennial and is entitled, "YoCo to YSU--Youngstown State University at 100." This is a companion volume to the pictorial history of the University and both have been authored by Professors Donna DeBlasio and Martha Pallante of our Department of History. On behalf of all who have been a part of the history of this great University, I want to thank both Donna and Martha for their major contribution to our Centennial Celebration.

The second text is entitled, "The Strategic Plan for Higher Education—2008-2017" and is available online at the Ohio Board of Regent's website.

The primary author is Chancellor Eric Fingerhut; and in just over one hundred pages, the plan outlines the ambitious vision of Governor Strickland and Chancellor Fingerhut and the critical role our state's higher education system will play in the economic revitalization of Ohio. The plan specifically commits to a community college to serve the Mahoning Valley and provides an outline for the expectations of Youngstown State University in the decade ahead.

In reading "From YoCo to YSU," you get a glimpse of the evolution of an educational institution that was started by the YMCA in downtown Youngstown to meet the needs of the largely immigrant population attracted by the burgeoning growth of jobs, especially in the steel industry. As founding president, Dr. Howard Jones' skillful leadership guided the growth and development of this institution for thirty-six years, first, as Youngstown College and then beginning in 1955, Youngstown University. President Jones retired in 1966, the year before we became a state university.

During his tenure, President Jones hired the faculty and staff, raised money, artfully---and sometimes magically--managed the budget and developed the physical plan in 1961, for the campus that we have today. In one of his greatest legacies, he established the YSU Foundation, which this year will provide over \$3.8 million dollars in scholarships for 2800 YSU students. President Jones, literally and figuratively, put in place, the "foundation" upon which today's University has been built.

During the next 18 years, Presidents Pugsley and Coffelt guided the University into the state system. This was a period of dramatic growth in terms of new faculty, staff and facilities. In 1976, our student population reached 15,898, which remains a high point in our history. In 1972, an innovative medical college was established, NEOUCOM, a collaboration among YSU, the University of Akron, and Kent State University addressing the need for physicians in our region.

President Neil Humphrey served as president during the 1984-1992 period, and his background in budget and finance served the University well after the dramatic growth of the University.

My immediate predecessor assumed office during a period of dramatic decline in state funding support. President Les Cochran initiated the university scholars program that has provided full scholarships--by the YSU Foundation over the past 12 years--for over 500 outstanding students from the Valley and beyond. YSU expanded the development of student dormitories during this period with the construction of Lyden Hall and Cafaro House. And the 90's were also highlighted by our football Penguins winning four national championships under Coach Jim Tressel.

This brings me to the years since 2000 and the university's progress in this new century. I am most proud of our working together to build enrollment, increase our diversity and expand partnerships--the three themes of my presidency. In addition, we have developed new cutting edge academic programs, initiated our Centennial Master Plan including new buildings, improved campus corridors and gateways--including the pedestrian bridge that crosses Wick Avenue--and worked to beautify our campus.

Enrollment

Last fall our enrollment reached 13,497, a thirteen-year high. Enrollment has increased by 1,710 students or 15% since Fall 2000. The Higher Learning Commission site visit team was very impressed with our ability to reverse enrollment decline and "beat the demographics" of the region.

Diversity

We also received praise from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) for our success in enhancing diversity of our faculty, staff, and students that was a point of emphasis in the previous HLC review. Minority enrollment has continued to grow and reached over 2,300 students, which is an 82 percent increase since Fall 2000. Both the number and percentage of minority students attending YSU are at historic highs. We have increased our focus on recruiting international students and developing faculty and student exchange programs. New courses in Chinese and Arabic are attracting students and the Islamic and Judaic Centers provide unique opportunities for student and community learning experiences.

Partnerships

Our community partnerships focusing on the development of the neighborhoods surrounding the campus are making visible progress, and YSU must continue to play a catalytic and essential role in the revitalization of what we consider the campus neighborhood (the area within a one-half mile walking distance from our core campus).

I want to highlight one specific partnership that reached a major milestone this past May when we celebrated the first graduating class of the Youngstown Early College High School, a partnership with the Youngstown City School District. Forty students received diplomas, including four students who were awarded associate degrees. Thirteen students earned at least twenty-five college credits, the equivalent of nearly two semesters of work. Nearly thirty graduates of the Early College have chosen to continue their education at YSU, and we have offered last dollar scholarships to these Early College graduates.

The Past Year

As I reflect on the past year, I believe it will be ranked as one of the best in terms of individual and collective achievements. Last August, it was clear that YSU faced four major challenges.

Our first challenge was to achieve full ten-year accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Universities. We were formally notified of what was our greatest achievement of the Centennial Year on June 27. This important milestone came after more than two years of preparation by dozens upon dozens of campus and community stakeholders, led by Associate Provost Bege Bowers, Jan Elias, now Interim Dean of the Bitonte College of Health and Human Services, and Assessment Director Sharon Stringer. In addition, the Higher Learning Commission approved the expansion of our distance learning programs and our doctoral program in physical therapy. Yesterday at commencement, we celebrated the awarding of doctoral degrees in physical therapy to the first class of 16 students. We should also note that one area emphasized by the HLC was the need for expanded focus on assessment and student educational outcomes.

Our second challenge was to negotiate successor agreements with the faculty and classified staff bargaining units. That we reached new contracts well in advance of their expiration dates with both the faculty (YSU-OEA) and classified staff (YSU-ACE) unions was a direct result of the commitment of both the unions and the administration to improve campus labor relations. We will build on this progress--through the Labor Management Council and in negotiations with the APAS and FOP bargaining units during this year. In my view, the contracts are generous but fair; and in both agreements we were able to achieve important goals that we believe will serve the institution well.

Our third challenge was to meet the \$43 million goal of the Centennial Capital Campaign. This summer we surpassed our goal, a full year ahead of schedule, thanks to the work of our development staff, one of the smallest in the state, and the generosity of our many supporters. We began with a \$7 million dollar goal for new scholarships and have received \$13.2 million to date. The YSU Annual Fund reached its goal of \$1 million dollars in annual gifts nearly a year ahead of schedule. Even with all this success, the Capital Campaign is far from concluded. This year we will initiate a component focused on alumni, faculty and staff participation and a brick campaign to endow a campus beautification fund.

The fourth and final challenge one year ago was to engage in a significant celebration of our Centennial. During the year, we took time to pause, reflect, and celebrate the proud past of our University, including the opening of the University's Centennial Archives in Maag Library, the Centennial Spring Commencement, and the dedication of a commissioned sculpture honoring President Howard W. Jones funded by a generous contribution from the Lariccia family. A highlight occurred in July when more than 500 alumni from fourteen states returned to campus for the "All Alumni Reunion," held in conjunction with the YSU Summer Festival of the Arts.

The ceremonial mace that you see was crafted in commemoration of our Centennial and was first introduced at our spring commencement. The mace was designed by a team, led by Professor Greg Moring, that included YSU faculty, students, alumni, and area K-12 art educators. Professor Moring also spearheaded the Jones statue project. Academic Senate President Chet Cooper was the honorary mace-bearer and led the academic procession at yesterday's commencement.

Achieving any one of these accomplishments in a given year would be cause for congratulations. It is a tribute to the hard work and dedication of you, the faculty and staff of the most efficiently staffed public university in Ohio--as documented by the Ohio Board of Regents--that all four of these challenges were met and we exceeded our expectations in all of them.

This year, as in previous years, we will post the annual report of progress on the goals associated with the ten critical issues of the Centennial Strategic Plan on the YSU website. Please take a few minutes to observe, in detail, all that we have accomplished together.

The accomplishments of the past year provide an excellent platform for advancing the mission and future direction of Youngstown State University.

I want you to consider three concepts as we look ahead.

First, this is a time of unprecedented opportunity for Youngstown State University, not seen since 1967 when Youngstown University became a state university. Doors to new programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels are open as they have never been. The connection between our research capabilities and the creation of jobs in the Valley is now recognized beyond our campus, across the Mahoning Valley and in Columbus.

The Chancellor's Strategic Plan for Higher Education acknowledges the constraints of the past.

“Past practices in the state have discouraged the university...by restricting the growth of undergraduate and graduate programs that are an important component of a university's skill base.”

At the same time it provides guidance for our future.

“With the expansion of community college education in the region, Youngstown State will be better able to focus on its indispensable role in the economic rebirth of the Mahoning Valley. The state will encourage this role by authorizing and supporting graduate programs that focus on quality and have relevance to economic rebirth.”

Second, YSU must reposition itself geographically. We are a part of, or more specifically, at the edge of Northeast Ohio in the minds of state higher education policy makers and state and regional leaders. The reality is that forces in the Cleveland/Akron corridor dominate planning for this region. Too often, we are an afterthought when decisions are made and resources allocated.

It is time to change our view of where we are. We must think of ourselves at the center—the center of an emerging corridor with Cleveland at one end and Pittsburgh at the other. This emerging corridor is a region of 7.1 million people similar in population to the Charlotte/Raleigh and the Tampa/Orlando corridors.

Congressman Tim Ryan and his western Pennsylvania colleague, Jason Altemiere, have coined an optimistic and promising name for this corridor—the Tech Belt. On October 1, 2007, two weeks after our community commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of Black Monday and the death of our steel economy, the two congressmen co-convoked the first “Tech Belt Summit” bringing together on our campus some 100 business, educational, and philanthropic leaders. The participants were challenged to stop seeing the world as it existed thirty years ago and envision what it can become over the next thirty years. We need to think beyond state borders just as national and world leaders have been forced to think beyond national borders.

We took a tangible step in that direction last year by equalizing graduate tuition for in-state and out-of-state graduate students. The time is right to consider a similar reduction in the differential for in-state and out-of-state undergraduate students.

Our challenge and our future is to play a central role in the development of this Tech Belt just as we are playing a central role in the revitalization of the city of Youngstown through the 2010 plan and our Centennial Master Plan.

Third, we will not abandon our proud historic mission. We will remain an access university because our region is populated by many for whom YSU offers the only opportunity to obtain a university degree. We will remain affordable through financial aid programs that effectively reduce our already low tuition and will use distance learning technology and partnerships to bring education to people who are not able to travel to campus because of time, family and work commitments.

The top priority for the coming year is to develop the University's response to the Chancellor's "Strategic Plan for Higher Education." Our response will evolve along several paths.

First, we must make our core strengths even better. We can do so by:

- targeting and investing in selected areas of excellence, with special emphasis on those that have the potential to contribute to the economic development of the region.
- identifying and initiating the development of academic programs on a selective and strategic basis at all levels, including new doctoral degrees.
- supporting the growth of innovative efforts like the Rich Center for Autism and the Youngstown Early College High School.
- creating partnerships with organizations working to make a difference, be it with the P-16 council, the Youngstown Business Incubator, or the National Science Foundation.

Second, we must be creative in seeking the revenue to fund our important mission. An important part of the Strategic Plan for Higher Education is the creation of a new funding model for the University System of Ohio that will be recommended in the Chancellor's biennial budget proposal to the Governor in the Fall of 2008, and by the Governor to the General Assembly in early 2009.

We can take some optimism from the commitment to higher education demonstrated by Governor Ted Strickland and the Ohio legislature.

This year YSU received a 9.1 percent increase in state support and froze tuition at Fiscal Year 2007 levels for the second consecutive year, maintaining our position as the most affordable public comprehensive university in Ohio. The flat tuition and 9.1 percent increase in state support led to an overall increase in revenues for the University of 2.8 percent.

The new model, potentially shifts the basis of university funding away from enrollment to outcomes such as course completion and graduation rates. And it specifies funding for "quality" and "mission specific goals." The funding formula revisions have obvious measurement and political issues.

We must assure that the new funding model recognizes both our current role as an access university and the unique financial transition that will confront YSU with the implementation of the community college. The Chancellor has promised repeatedly to "do no harm" in the community college implementation process. I will be enlisting the support of our Board of Trustees, the campus leadership, community leaders, our alumni, and our legislative delegation to insure that his promise is kept.

We must also maximize the return from our own revenue sources. Enrollment growth must remain a priority, and we will develop a plan to revise the University's tuition and fee structure in view of changes in the state-funding model. We must continue to develop new revenue sources.

The support of Congressman Ryan bodes well for future federal research initiatives. Over the past five years, Congressman Ryan has secured nearly \$10 million in federal grants and appropriations on behalf of the University.

The third element of our response to the Strategic Plan for Higher Education is to assure that the community college implementation initiative succeeds so that it is designed to benefit the Valley and YSU. We need to remember that it was the vision, research, and initiative of YSU that led to the serious effort to create a long-needed community college in the Mahoning Valley, the only metropolitan area in Ohio without one. The absence of a community college is a barrier to economic development; and as leaders in education and regional development, we are breaking that barrier down and putting the interests of the community first.

I recognize that the community college is the cause for some anxiety on campus because of the fear that it will erode revenues through transfer of state support and loss of enrollment. In the long run, however, the community college will not only advance the region but also benefit YSU. This has been the experience in other metropolitan areas with both a rapidly growing community college and a comprehensive public university. The community college will get students in the college door at low tuition, offer programs currently not available in the region, and prepare students for higher-level studies at YSU and elsewhere. Earning a four-year degree at YSU will be the goal of many graduates of the community college.

As we begin our second century, we are also at another crossroads in our history—a crossroads of opportunity and risk. We must unite behind a common vision and a set of priorities. Only by standing together, will we be able to expand programs and services to our students and further develop our role in the economic revitalization of the Valley. I am confident that we will meet the challenges that we will face in the next year and in the decade ahead.

First, we are already making a start. A committee under the strong leadership of Provost Ikram Khawaja has taken a good first step by preparing draft revisions of the University’s mission, vision, and core values statements from the Centennial Strategic Plan. These drafts have started serious conversations about our future that will be broadened to engage the entire campus during the fall semester.

Second, part of our proud past has been meeting similar challenges. From the transition to a state university in the 1960s to coping with eroding state funding support, from successfully adapting the semester calendar eight years ago to reversing the trend of enrollment decline--we have met past challenges and emerged stronger as a result.

Third, we have shown the willingness to adapt to the changing needs of higher education. We created the Bitonte College of Health and Human Services in the 1990s, anticipating the growing importance of health care and human service related professions. This college has become YSU’s fastest growing and largest college.

The new colleges of STEM and CLASS emphasize both the importance of sciences and technology, but also the need of a well balanced “liberal” education. We will be proven correct in implementing the vision of our former Provost, the late Bob Herbert.

For centuries the human race has had a fascination with predicting the future. What lies ahead? What wonderful inventions and technological advances are to come? What will the world be like for our children, grandchildren, and their grandchildren?

Peter F. Drucker, the Austrian-born writer and self-described “social ecologist,” once said, **“The best way to predict the future is to create it.”**

Abraham Lincoln, whose actions created a future, that we as a nation still enjoy today, once said that **“the best thing about the future is that it only comes one day at a time.”**

Hour-by-hour, day-after-day, year-to-year, YSU has worked for the past 100 years to serve the educational needs of the Northeast Ohio region.

We are committed to continue working together hour-by-hour, day-by-day, and year-after-year to create a promising future for our students, the region and beyond.

Thank you for being here and have a great year!

Please join us for a reception in the Fountain Plaza.