

**Convocation Address to Faculty and Staff  
Minot State University  
August 20, 2008; 11:00 a.m.  
Conference Center; Student Union  
David Fuller, President**

## **“Our Distinctive Place and Vision”**

### **WELCOME**

Good morning and welcome. Thank you for coming this morning, and thank you for staying around to the final minutes of the morning. And, for all of those new to Minot State, thank you for joining our community. It’s great to have you with us. For those of you who are experienced Minot State University faculty and staff, I want to thank you, too, for giving your all to our students and our university. Minot State University is what it is based on what you do every day in so many ways.

### First a comment about being truly seen and heard

Our statement, “Be Seen, Be Heard,” expresses our commitment that students will be seen and heard as individuals at our university, not as a number, not as a generic face in a classroom, not a person who is left to fend for him/herself, but an individual. In many respects, that tagline exclaims our institutional pledge that we will be seen and heard as a distinctive university of place and engagement, one that elevates our responsibilities for outstanding teaching and learning, exceptional service, and for our pledge to contribute to the welfare of the community and common good.

You’ve probably been asked occasionally, like I have: What in the world does “Be Seen, Be Heard” mean? The other day I came across a story on the Internet that might help clarify what it at least doesn’t mean. Please be assured that this story doesn’t refer to Minot State University, one of our students, or one of our faculty members. The story goes this way:

It was the final examination for an introductory Biology course at the local [university](#). Like many such freshman courses, it was designed to weed out new [students](#), having over 500 students in the class!

The examination was two hours long, and exam booklets were provided. The professor was very strict and told the class that any exam that was not on his desk in exactly two hours would not be accepted and the student would fail. Half of an hour into the exam, a student came rushing in and asked the professor for an exam booklet.

"You're not going to have time to finish this," the professor stated as he handed the student a booklet.

"Yes, I will," replied the student. He then took a seat and began writing. After two hours, the professor called for the exams, and the students filed up and handed them in. All except the late student, who continued writing. An hour later, the last student came up to the professor who was sitting at his desk preparing for his next class. He attempted to put his exam on the stack of exam booklets already there.

"No, you don't, I'm not going to accept that. It's late."

The student looked incredulous and concerned.

"Do you know who I am?"

"No, as a matter of fact I don't," replied the professor with an air of sarcasm in his voice.

"Do you know who I am?" the student asked again in a louder voice.

"No, and I don't care." replied the professor with an air of superiority.

"Good," replied the student, who quickly lifted the stack of completed exams, stuffed his in the middle, and walked out of the room. ([http://www.short-funny-stories.com/funny\\_stories/s-funny-college-stories/funny-college-stories-017.html](http://www.short-funny-stories.com/funny_stories/s-funny-college-stories/funny-college-stories-017.html))

This story reminds me of an introductory psychology class I enrolled in as a first-year student. That class had about 500 students, met on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday mornings at 7:30 a.m. I remember the professor, during the first day standing far up in front of this lecture hall, who offered the class instruction about looking at the person on your left and right and then understanding that only one of you would be here next year. At first I didn't understand fully the point of it. Huh?, I thought to myself. I thought it was some sort of psychology exercise or trick that college professors are known to play on students, but then it dawned on me that my chances to survive the year were not great. Okay, I was only a freshman.

For a first-year student that's scary. I presume that the underlying intention was to send a message that each and every one of us should work hard and succeed. But now, in hindsight, I wonder if it was not just a way to tell us that we were lucky to be there and that they actually hoped to weed some of us out. Those were the days when our social security numbers figured prominently in our own identity. For those of you who remember, test scores were posted on faculty members' doors with your social security number and no name.

Of course, that would never happen at Minot State University, where we pride ourselves in helping our students succeed while at the same time expecting hard work and high-level performance. The student in the story would have been seen, heard, and recognized

at Minot State, and couldn't have pulled off the ruse with the faculty member. For those students, there are some risks who come to a university and want to remain anonymous but are seen and heard as individuals, with names, special interests, special needs, and dreams for future success. We know them because we want to help them succeed. Yes, "Be Seen, Be Heard."

## **THANK YOU**

### For Service to Students

Before I get to the topic of my remarks, I want to stop and say thank you. Giving that special attention to our students takes time and enormous effort. Knowing that and knowing what all of you do to support our special commitment to provide engaged learning and to focus on helping out students succeed and to realize those dreams, thank you. I mean that. Thank you. From the beginning of our campus in 1913 until today, we remain focused on serving our students and serving them well.

### Valuing Colleagues

It seems to me that we also need to be intentional and persistent in our efforts to respect each other and to thank our colleagues for the efforts they devote on behalf of our community. Here's a request to all of you. I'd ask you to do what you can to express your sincere appreciation to individuals in your department or elsewhere on our campus who deserve a special smile and thank you. None of us is too busy to recognize and value our colleagues and others. We have a number of institutional practices in place, such as Beaver Praise, recognitions from the University Cabinet, annual awards from Board of Regents awards for outstanding service, and special functions to show that we appreciate our colleagues' service and contributions. But even better than those institutional ways to appreciate others is for each of us to express our appreciation face-to-face.

We could not survive and thrive as an institution if we wouldn't value our faculty and staff, as our third strategy of Vision 2013 makes explicit.

### MSU at the Zoo

A great sign of this and one that deserves a strong note of appreciation is our Staff Senate and the wonderful job they did preparing for the MSU at the Zoo event last night. Thanks Staff Senate, thanks to Chartwells, and thanks to all others who made that possible. It was a great night. Could the members of Staff Senate and the MSU-Zoo contributors please stand? Thank you for a wonderful and fun evening.

Before going further in my remarks, let me start and mention a few other efforts from this past year—this very difficult and challenging last year-- that deserve our recognition and note of appreciation.

### 1. Higher Learning Commission Self Study

First, I'd like to start out thanking everyone for the exceptional efforts and hard work all of you have devoted to Minot State University. Under the sound leadership of Dr. Royer and our Self Study Committee, all of you worked exceptionally hard in our honest and dedicated three-year self study for the Higher Learning Commission. The study was honest, inclusive, and focused on identifying how we meet the HLC criteria and what we can do to improve ourselves. The visiting team, as you know, concluded that we meet the five criteria for accreditation and that we are doing exceptionally well. They drew attention correctly to our demographic challenges and needs for continued focus on enrollment management, which we are addressing proactively and seriously.

In justifying their recommendation that MSU is reaccredited and receive a full ten years until its next visit, the report concluded: "The team found evidence that the institution engages its community in refining, and communicating its mission; publicly articulates it to the campus, and embraces and lives its mission; and upholds and projects its integrity."

The report also concluded that: "*Actions of the board, administrators, faculty, students, and staff demonstrate that MSU values a life of learning. Moreover, acquisition of breadth of knowledge and skills, as well as the exercise of intellectual inquiry, are integral to MSU's educational mission. The new six-credit diversity requirement, broad definition of diversity, aspiration to institutionalize service learning, and efforts to extend opportunity for study abroad to more MSU students are consistent with the future-oriented Vision 2013 plan for an engaged MSU that knows and honors its unique place.*"

The team recognized that one of our greatest strengths was our faculty and staff, and the level of engagement in our campus. All of us recognize that as well.

I expect to receive soon the final word from the Commission. Last week we were notified that the review team supported the recommendations of the visiting team, and that we are to expect on August 20 the official word. I think all of you know that without our accreditation we could not operate, our doors would be shut.

A thank you is due to all of you, but would the Self-Study committee please stand and be recognized and thanked for an exceptional job on the most critical review that our institution undergoes.

## 2. Foundation of Excellence for First Year Students

Second, I want to thank everyone for the outstanding work on our Foundations of Excellence for First-Year Students self study completed at the end of the year. While completing our enormous job on accreditation, we tackled another major task and that was this self-study to focus on something that all of us know is essential for us, and that is to improve our support of our first-year students.

As a specially invited institution to participate in the Foundations of Excellence for First Year Students, led by John Gardner and other scholars of first-year methodology and practice, we completed the study and received a strong and positive response from one of the Foundation's primary associates and one of the principal scholars in first-year methodologies.

Her response to our self study is a strong commendation of our full campus effort, involving faculty, staff, and students, to develop a plan for addressing first-year student engagement and learning. She wrote: "What a marvelous document you have written. Your report is persuasive, well organized, and easy to understand. It will provide direction to your work on the first year for months and years to come."

Based on their review of our work, the Foundation made a number of specific recommendations, including beginning with the planning and piloting of a new first-year seminar; establishing a comprehensive advising system guided by NACADA models and best practices; a focus on remodeled and effective classrooms; and recruiting and hiring professors dedicated to first-year students.

The response to our report concluded this way: "You have done a truly phenomenal job here. In fact, with your permission, I would like to post your report on our FoEtec site so that other institutions could see what an exemplary final report looks like."

Thank you to all of you for the support of this study and your understanding of our priority to support in exceptional ways our first year students.

Would the FoE self study committee and others who contributed to this work please stand and be recognized for your phenomenal effort?

## 3. Vision 2013 Action Plans and Progress toward our Goal

And third, another huge effort has been the work on our vision and the action steps our campus identified to move us toward our goal and vision.

In regard to the vision and goal, the Higher Learning Commission team pointed out in the team report that "with the overarching Vision 2013, Minot State

University evidences maturity in environmental scanning, strategic planning, community inclusiveness, and communication effectiveness.” The report went on to say that “MSU is fiscally sound and committed to making the institutional resource allocation process transparent, though continued focus on the re-allocation process is needed to ensure future financial stability. The draft 2013 Priority Actions Work Plan for 2007-2008 is an excellent beginning, which ties specific Vision 2013 objectives to adequate resources, identifies responsible persons, and establishes concrete timelines. All members of the MSU community should be encouraged to frame their activities within the aspiration of the strategic plan.”

This morning I want to share with you the first annual reports of Vision 2013—both the institutional achievements and the unit and departmental achievements. You have received in your materials both reports. A full report for each is available on the MSU web site as well. These reports include an extraordinary selected listing of accomplishments for the institution and achievements provided by each unit and department. By the way, thanks to Deb Wentz and Sandy Nordstrum and her staff for preparing these materials to distribute this morning.

### Our Results

As you will see, these reports provide compelling evidence to show that we are making significant progress toward our Vision 2013. Each and every one of you has made these accomplishments possible. Here are a few examples, which could not have been accomplished without you.

- Completed comprehensive strategic planning process and program
- Campus committees identified specific objectives and action plans
- New Great Plains Exceptional Scholar Award program
- Completely remodeled Crane Hall into a new living and learning center
- Renovated Ballroom into new student activity center, the Beaver Dam, and renovated full Student Center
- Initiated new mentoring program for freshmen
- Hosted nationally known speakers, such as George Kuh, to address faculty and staff regarding engagement, critical thinking, and student competency.
- Established Compensation Task Force to develop a systematic plan for raising salaries to 100% of market; incidentally the campus reached a 94.6% compa-ratio in 2007 and that figure increased substantially again this year.
- New format for faculty and staff recognition luncheon for all campus members
- Conducted Diversity Campus Climate Survey and hosted a national consultant to hold open forums with the campus to talk about results and needs
- Partnership agreements and identified specific projects with three Native American colleges
- Hired new director for international programs

- Partnership agreements with five international universities that have already yielded considerable activity from visiting scholars, student cohorts, study abroad activities, and study abroad tours.
- Completed feasibility study for opening ESL center on campus (which incidentally is now in a stage of collaborating with an ESL company who will locate on our campus)
- Reorganized and expanded career services office
- Hosted Great Plains Service Learning Conference
- Joined prominent national organizations devoted to civic engagement and experiential learning
- Completed full campus master plan and embarked on a comprehensive landscaping plan
- Reorganized and moved recruiting services office; doubled the number of recruiters.
- Requested and received from the ND legislature \$6.3 million to renovate Swain Hall
- Created a new information center in Atrium
- Became a smoke-free campus
- Completed comprehensive self study and achieved reaccreditation from the Higher Learning Commission

That's only a small sampling of the accomplishments. There are literally hundreds of departmental and unit achievements included on the departmental list you were also provided.

Again, the reason we could accomplish all of this and more is because of the support and ideas coming from our faculty, staff, and students. You continue to make the difference in the way we are meeting our strategic goal to be a premier public regional university in the "great" Great Plains, a place of distinction, and an institution committed to engaged learning and student success. Thank you for your focus on our collective vision and initiatives.

## **BELIEF AND CONFIDENCE**

Now to the topic of my remarks. This morning I want to ask you to believe in Minot State and believe in the potential for us to become one of the premier, regional universities in the "great" Great Plains. We need to believe in our university and its future. It is only with your confidence and your support that we'll be able to reach our goal.

In your materials you received are some reminders and a synopsis of our mission, core values, core purpose, and our Vision 2013 goal and strategies. Thanks again to Sandy and her staff and Deb for planning and assembling these.

Note the outline of the Great Plains and the central location of Minot State University in that diagram. Please use these inserts as book marks, hang the summaries on your bulletin boards, and use them as reminders about our vision and strategies.

All of you who were here in the last two years have received a formal Vision 2013 document and a subsequent document providing the list of specific action steps and objectives developed by teams of faculty, staff, and students. If you would like to see the formal Vision 2013 plan or the full list of action plans handed out at the 2007 January Convocation, you can find them on our web site, along with the annual reports and other planning reports and initiatives. What we have now is a vision, responsive strategies and priorities, an ambitious list of action plans, and now annual reports showing that we are making significant progress.

The synopsis of the vision, which offers key statements and explanations, can serve as a reminder about the importance of the direction all of us has set for our university. When you review these statements about who we are and what we aspire to become, you'll notice essential terms related to the specific and wonderful place in which we live in North Dakota and the Great Plains, our commitment to engaged learning, and our historical and current responsibility to student success. This vision, these strategies, and this goal came from all of you through an inclusive and broad planning process and endorsed and supported by our senate and administrative governance processes. These are ours.

Now it is our job to believe in them, to incorporate them in our individual jobs and departmental goals, to refer to them in our syllabi, to set our own specific professional objectives to align with our institutional vision and goal, and to recruit and hire new faculty and staff who will serve as strong advocates of our vision, our high standards for teaching, and our commitment to place and engagement. I ask that you make our vision and goal to become a premier university in the Great Plains your vision and goal.

The distinctiveness will come from this vision: Minot State University's vision anticipates that students will gain extraordinary opportunities for active engagement, high-quality learning, and future success. The highest quality teaching and learning will be achieved through stimulating engagement and learning of cutting-edge theory in chosen subjects and through hands-on experience in the local place, community, and beyond.

Complementing the high quality learning on campus will be a range of engaging experiential learning activities, from field trips, study abroad, service learning, internships, and experiences with real issues and topics in the community. Students will gain an in-depth knowledge of their subjects and a confidence to succeed.

Please hold on to this synopsis, bookmark, and summary of our vision and goal.

## OUR VISION AND STUDENT SUCCESS

You might recall the AASCU study I mentioned a few years ago, in which (*Student Success in State Colleges and Universities*, AASCU, September 2005), 12 state colleges and universities, known for their favorable retention and graduation rates, were examined to determine why they enjoyed such a high level of student success. The study identified three characteristics in these colleges' cultures that are common and distinguishable: 1) there is a "pervasive attitude that all students can succeed, reinforced by a wider culture that is not content to rest on past success"; 2) there is "a sense of inclusiveness on the part of all members of the campus community frequently characterized as a 'family'"; and 3) "there is a strongly held sense of institutional mission that recognized the campus as 'distinctive' or 'special'" (9).

When I mentioned that study two years ago, I conducted a brief written survey, and asked each of you to identify on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest and most favorable, how we do on each of those characteristics. The survey came back with scattered responses to each question—some near the bottom, some near the top, and the vast majority of the responses about in the middle. How would you rank us now? Do you believe in our sincere commitment that all students can succeed, that there is indeed a campus sense of inclusiveness like a family, and is there a strong sense that our campus is distinctive and special? Whatever you conclude about how well we fit on the scale for the three characteristics, I can only tell you that it is very important that we eventually get up next to 10 on all three because it is essential that Minot State University, like the 12 schools studied, realize a high level of student success and be known for our high retention and graduation rates.

The reason for this is it seems that retention and graduation rates are primary determinants of successful institutions. Rod Hair, our institutional researcher, has compiled a complete list of all public, regional universities in the "great" Great Plains, from Texas north to Canada, from Minnesota on the east west to Montana. He found approximately 150 public, regional universities, and then he narrowed the list to approximately 45 institutions with higher performing features, and then he studied those and narrowed the list to 8. He concluded that those institutions with the highest retention and graduation rates generally realized higher performance benchmarks. Those institutions with the highest retention rates and graduation rates enjoyed other positive indicators. In view of what he found, he concluded that those eight to be what might call the premier, public regional universities of the Great Plains.

We are now studying those indicators, reviewing qualitative features of those schools, and arriving at a much better understanding of premier regional universities in the Great Plains. From that, we are going to set our goals based on the performance indicators we have identified in the eight schools. He is also doing the same thing with our sister universities in North Dakota, and we are comparing the performance indicators to see how we match up with our fellow North Dakota schools.

Our goal now is to identify those indicators and set those as our own institutional goals to reach by 2013. It is our intention to meet and achieve those indicators, so that we can indeed exclaim that we are indeed one of the premier, public regional universities in the “great” Great Plains. Retention rates, graduation rates, faculty-to-student ratios, national assessment data, NSSE scores, nationally-normed satisfaction surveys, salaries, and other data will be identified.

### **A VISION OF PLACE AND ENGAGEMENT**

Central to our vision and mission is the concept of place, a concept that for some is not clear. For you to understand it and believe in it, I think we should think about where it is, what it looks like, who and what resides there, when did things occur, and how is it special. A sense of place depends on a knowledge of it, an appreciation for it, and a commitment to serving it.

There was a story about the three ice fishermen I heard in a in a skit about 1995 on National Public Radio, performed by the group called Riders in the Sky. It goes something like this:

Three fishermen, with plaid shirts and down jackets, and woolen hats with ear flaps pulled down over their ears, walked out onto the ice carrying an ice auger, fishing poles, beer, chairs, and a lot of hope for a good day ice fishing.

They set their stuff down on the ice in preparation to start fishing. One of the fellows took the auger in his hands and pulled at the cord to start the engine. He pulled the cord but it did not start, and just then a loud a bellowing deep voice echoed from above and out across the ice, “There are no fish here!”

The three fishermen, startled by the voice, looked up and around to see the source of the voice. Shrugging it off after a few moments, the one fellow pulled at the cord of the auger again. It revved but didn’t start, and again but much louder the deep voice called out in its echoing and frightening tone from above, “THERE are NO FISH HERE.”

This time the three fellows stopped what they were doing, straightened up, their faces startled, their mouths agape in obvious fear, and they looked up and around but again didn’t see anyone. They waited a few moments, and this time hesitantly and cautiously, the fisherman again pulled on the cord of the auger. The motor revved and nearly started, but again died.

At that moment, the deep and echoing voice called out in a louder and powerful voice from above, the sound frightening the fishermen. “THERE are NO FISH HERE!” The voice echoed. The fishermen again stopped, looked more frightened than ever, and the one fisherman holding the auger, fearfully looked straight up in the direction of the deep voice and timidly asked, “Are you God?”

They paused, and then the deep and loud voice responded, “No, I’m the skating rink manager. There are no fish here,” the voice echoed from the loudspeakers.

Developing a sense of place, if this story can illustrate at all this message, depends on a knowledge of where one is and an appreciation of the special and distinctive place. Those fishermen didn’t know where they were, and one could say, didn’t have much if any of a sense of place.

The writer and naturalist, Wendell Berry, explains the importance of a sense of place this way: “If you don’t know where you are, you don’t know who you are. With a sense of place, your identity is defined—to a significant extent—by the natural features of the place where you live.”

A lot of what we aspire to accomplish with our vision of place and engagement is to help our students know the place—its history, its culture, its people, its flora and fauna, its wildlife, its economic strengths and challenges, and so on to develop appreciation for the place and their role in it. Using one’s local place as a place for study, we assume that learning is enhanced, character developed, and the chances of student success improved.

A few years ago I cited a book by Kathleen Norris, from her Dakota: A Spiritual Geography, where she recounts a comment of an acquaintance that the “size and gravitational pull” of the prairie actually holds people to the prairie and gives people their sense of the planet. If you recall, Norris suggests that this sense “allows Dakotans to feel as if they are in the middle of the world rather than, as others would have it, in the middle of nowhere”(128).

I suggest to you that our vision and purpose is to substantiate a view that we are indeed in the middle of the world and not in the middle of nowhere. Anyone who has an in-depth knowledge and appreciation of the beauty and richness of the plains knows deep down that we are in the middle of the world, not in the middle of nowhere.

Clay Jenkinson, the scholar and writer from Dickinson who portrays Thomas Jefferson on nationally syndicated Public Radio, explains what this special knowledge and sense is in his book, *Message on the Wind: A Spiritual Odyssey on the Northern Plains* (2002):

“I learned to see North Dakota through the eyes of its most alert consciousness. I learned to feel the soul of the plains as I lay on my back on river banks and buttes on spring days. I learned to understand our history, our failed potential as industrial agrarians, and the great potential we still might pursue. I learned to become a North Dakotan, a project quite different from simply being one. I felt the spirit of the place in the grasses and in the wind” (78)

## **ABOUT OUR DISTINCTIVE PLACE**

If you would pardon a slight but relevant diversion, I'll mention only briefly that you can be assured, though, that unlike the last two years, I won't be telling any bird stories, as I promised at the end of my remarks last year at this time, which incidentally incited loud applause and cheers.

HOWEVER, I do want to tell you about an incident when Nancy and I were sitting out on the deck of the cabin in Lake of the Woods a few weeks ago, we saw a dark object, the size of a large soft ball, moving slowly along in the water and through waves across the bay. It caught our eye because the floating object was moving, strangely enough, against the waves and wind. The object continued to move through the water, and when it got closer, with the waves pushing against it, I could see through my binoculars that it wasn't a swimming soft ball at all but the head of a beaver—yes, a beaver. There was no nonsense about this beaver; no diving and frolicking; it just kept plodding along across the bay until it got to a reed bed, which it skirted slowly along the edge of the reeds and across another channel and around the bend. It knew where it was going, that's for sure. It seemed to know the place and the destination.

But what in the world was a beaver doing out in deep water and swimming such a length? Maybe their swimming prowess and endurance we witnessed has caused others to chose the beaver as a likely candidate for an athletic mascot. Maybe that's why Minot State's mascot is the beaver, I asked myself. Maybe not. Instead, maybe they are known for something else.

I'd prefer to think, rather, that the reason was not so much their swimming prowess but their ability to think. Henry David Thoreau (sorry, but I've got to quote him), in his April 1859 journal, explains that “we have heard much of the intelligence of the beaver.” Like Thoreau, I've heard the same—smart, hardworking, industrious, determined, natural engineers par excellence, good parent, creature who mates for life, not dangerous, not a fighter, a “vegetarian,” with a taste for bark but with no bite to speak of.

Obviously good swimmers, beavers, however, don't strike me as great athletes. So why are they mascots for as many as 12 colleges and universities? Thanks to Mark Boren for his Google search to discover the 12 schools. Beavers are not swift, fierce, strong, powerful, courageous, or muscular looking creatures like a wolf, a coyote, an eagle, hawk, grizzly bear, or even wildcat. They are not known as fighting beavers. They are chubby, slow, apparently awkward and plodding, with two large goofy orange teeth, and a floppy large tail.

There are a few hearty souls on campus who are waging an effort to raise the prestige and prominence of the beaver, our mascot, not so much to emphasize its many athletic qualities but to highlight its undiscovered and seldom realized academic qualities.

All of this does make one wonder why the beaver was selected as Minot State University's mascot—no doubt because there were many beavers on the Plum Creek, as

the Native Americans referred to it before Europeans came to name the river Souris or the Mouse. This we know attracted many of the fur trappers in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and earlier who came and stayed right in this valley within a few hundred yards of where we are now sitting on our campus. The beavers, no doubt, were here long before that, swimming and damming the river for centuries. Beavers provided one of many incentives for coming and staying here.

Understanding the role the beaver played in our place, one can only appreciate the reason the beaver was identified as our mascot but also recognized as a symbol for our place. One source explained that the “American Indians called the beaver the "sacred center" of the land because this species creates rich habitats for other mammals, fish, turtles, frogs, birds and ducks.” (<http://www.beaversww.org/beaver.html>)

The beaver actually is a fitting animal for our study of place, for it represents very well our location and habitat in northwest North Dakota, in the Plum Creek valley. There are also countless events and stories of individuals who contribute to our sense of this place. I understand from our own Evelyn Klimpel in Student Health that she has a direct connection to our place with stories from her ancestors, with a keen and direct sense of this place. Her ancestors lived right here in the Plum Creek Valley before the coming of the Europeans. Evelyn told me that her grandfather and grandmother used to come here to pick berries on the Plum Creek, a place rich with berries and wildlife. Her family’s oral tradition includes many references to this place.

Trappers, buffalo hunters, and eventually European farmers arrived in this area. The trappers came for the beavers and other animals; the Homestead Act brought many Scandinavians and other Europeans who were intent on farming in this area, and the railroad brought thousands others to experience the boom and fortune.

This summer I read The Empire Builder, a book about James Hill and the railroad and Erik Ramstad, one of the first European settlers and farmers in this area in the 1880s. The history is fascinating, from Erik Ramstad’s role he played in the establishment of our town to the railroad boom and rapid growth of our town of Minot, which was named incidentally after Henry Davis Minot, a vice president from Boston of the St Paul, Milwaukee, and Manitoba Railroad, who never lived here and had very little sense of the place. What was particularly interesting was Erik Ramstad’s commitment to this place and his engagement in the life and welfare of the growing community. Talk about civic engagement in our vision, Erik Ramstad exemplified and offers a remarkable model to our own graduates 100 years after the founding of Minot State.

He worked tirelessly for the cultural and educational development of this community. One notable action of many by Ramstad was his effort to bring a college to Minot. The stories are fascinating about the challenges to establish the college, but the person who succeeded in establishing the college right here on the ground we now occupy was Erik Ramstad, who donated 60 acres of his farmland for the express purpose of locating a college here and building it on this very spot. His service to higher education, to the community, to city government, to his church, and to others in Minot was invaluable and

well established. And besides that, Erik Ramstad, his wife, mother and other relatives are buried right in the cemetery adjoining our campus, along with other prominent founders of our community and active participants in our growth as a college, such as Brynhild Hauglund, the renowned legislator, and Herb Parker, our long-time dean of students, coach, mentor, and devoted MSU supporter.

This is what we can introduce our students to. This will give us and our students a special sense and deep appreciation of our place—its history, culture, challenges, strengths, people, and beavers.

It is with little wonder that Minot State University should recognize and celebrate, as a part of our vision for 2013 and beyond, the notion of engagement and the idea of the sense of place in the Great Plains. We're right in the middle of it.

### **NEXT YEAR: THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE**

We have many plans for our future. We have them described in detail in our vision and action plans. I wanted to share with you a few plans for the future for Vision 2013 this year:

- *Setting and publishing performance benchmarks from our study of premier universities in the Great Plains*
- *Identifying grants possibilities and securing funds for direct support*
- *Continuing to look for efficiencies, duplication, and areas in which we can shift dollars to priority programs, as was noted as a need by the HLC team*
- *Moving one-time local funds into specific priorities this year, for:*
  - *Support for annual convocation speaker*
  - *Marketing of university and its distinctive vision/mission*
  - *Increase support for UDC initiatives*
  - *Work with Faculty Senate to review promotion criteria and add qualifications to acknowledge the role of experiential learning and service*
  - *Implement and support sustainability projects and commitments identified by our sustainability and recycling committee*
  - *Support international programs and a new ESL Institute*
  - *Improve advising program as defined by FOE*
  - *Support to pilot and establish first-year seminar*
  - *Develop Student Success Center*
  - *Develop specific plan and support faculty sabbaticals and faculty and staff mini sabbaticals and mini-awards focused on our vision of place and engagement*
  - *Increase resources and staffing in enrollment management, with two new recruiters (one for Canadian recruitment, and two-year national articulation agreements)*

- *Continuing to meet goals of CTF and expand to identify competitive compensation goals for premier universities of the Great Plains*
- *Supporting CASTLS and SCE program planning and start-up.*
- *Creating an annual fund to upgrade our classrooms*
- *Establishing a coordinator for experiential and engaged learning*
- *Join Campus Compact and American Humanics*
- *Support increases for field-based study/activities*
- *Pursuing membership in NCAA Div II conference; adding women's soccer and considering the addition of wrestling*
- *Initiating master plan and landscaping plan, with a new monument sign on Broadway and the opening of 11<sup>th</sup> Avenue.*
- *Continue planning for new Wellness Center*
- *Support planning for new academic programs, including energy, public history, Native American studies,*

## **CONCLUSION**

What we can continue to do is develop a sense of place, raise our academic standards and expectations, value our faculty and staff, become actively involved and engaged in our community and place, continue to believe that all of our students have the ability to succeed, and believe in and support our university. All of this depends on our knowledge and appreciation of our place and our confidence in our future.

I look forward to a good year. I guess what we're doing in many respects is just what our faculty panel is going to be talking about tomorrow: "Rethinking What It Means to Be a Beaver: Opening the Dam for the 21st Century Learner."

Thank you for your kind attention. I'm looking forward with each of you to an exciting and productive new year.

David Fuller  
 President  
 August 20, 2008