

Convocation Address to Faculty and Staff
Minot State University
August 17, 2011; 9:30 a.m.
Missouri River Room Conference Center
Minot State University Student Center
David Fuller, President

Announcing our Place

WELCOME

Good morning. Welcome to all, and with it I extend a warm greeting to our new faculty and staff. We're very pleased to have you join our Minot State University family and community. I'm also pleased to say welcome to Dr. Koczon, our new vice president for academic affairs. And Patti, Vicki, and Max, I welcome you to your new posts as presidents of the respective faculty, staff, and student senates. We have a bright year ahead of us, one that will depend on all of us working together in the spirit of shared governance for the good of our students, our colleagues, and Minot State University.

Before I go much further, I want to remind everyone about our Fall Kickoff picnic tonight in front of Old Main, which has been planned and organized by our Staff Senate and supported by many others. This is truly an event to welcome the new year, to honor our colleagues and their families, to celebrate our good fortune, to give us the opportunity to meet and greet our colleagues. Welcome to all.

MY TALK TODAY

I've titled this presentation "Announcing our Place," which refers to a line in a poem that I will read at the conclusion of my talk this morning. But first, in the next few minutes, I would like to:

- Say a few words about last academic year
- Offer some thoughts about the flood and the special character of our place and people, and share with you actions we are taking in support of the community
- Discuss this coming year—our plans and challenges
- And, yes, read a couple of poems

A LOOK BACK AT THIS TIME LAST YEAR

Last year I titled this presentation "Sustaining our Good Fortune," and highlighted the achievements of a remarkable previous year in meeting our Vision 2013 indicators, enjoying six percent enrollment increases, fulfilling our compensation task force goals, gaining acceptance into NCAA Division II candidacy, increasing our first-year retention rate, completing new renovations and academic enhancements, finishing our first phase of our landscaping plan, initiating new admission criteria and a plan to help all students succeed, reinstating a new marching band, reintroducing a Greek house, establishing a new student success center, witnessing CETL's development and successes, appointing a new advising coordinator, experiencing wonderful successes in our academic programs, and much more.

This year we've witnessed new developments and achievements. Here are a few of many: The full implementation of Community Research and Service Center; a new Veterans' Office and director, a proposal for a nursing academy partnership with Trinity Health, new Herb Parker stadium and seating; Studies in the Community and Environment Program and arrival of its new director; full implementation of TRIO Power Office; Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning Initiatives and a completion of its second year; expansion of our International Office and a marked increase in international activities and number of international students; preparation for our new membership in the Northern Sun NCAA Division II conference; Noel Levitz strategic enrollment management plan; development of plans to renovate First Floor of Administration Building; enrollment management targets; renovation of the Beaver Creek Café; initiatives to address housing pressures; comprehensive advising system on campus; workload initiatives reviewed and endorsed by campus, and a host of legislative accomplishments. The North Dakota legislature restored the college affordability budget for all campuses; restored campus equity funding (to executive budget level); restored \$1.0 million in 09-11 base funding for STEM Teacher Ed (\$250,000 for Minot State); and awarded \$4.85 million and \$8.7 million in building authority for our geothermal project.

We have enjoyed a very good year, and we should be proud of your hard work to continue to serve our students well in the classroom, through high quality student services, high quality academics, and on a beautiful campus. Minot State University is doing very well, and this is due to the hard work and commitment of our faculty and staff. The flood emergency has taken up much of our attention in the last few months, but it is important this year that we keep in mind the many great things at our university and our plans and vision for the future.

CHARACTER OF OUR PLACE AND PEOPLE

With the flood and the notable devastation we see across our city and region, we can be assured and heartened by the special character of our place and people. A few people often dwell on the negatives, but we have as well many opportunities as a campus to dwell on the positives and to recognize the many people who worked exceptionally hard on our community's and our campus' behalf.

Let me take a minute to share a few examples of the people and actions that exemplify in a positive way our place and character:

- Vickie Michels from addiction studies serving food to displaced people in the Red Cross Emergency Center
- Anton Huether from ITC working to help install the pumps and pipe on the dike late one evening during the height of the emergency.
- Wes Matthews from human resources working into the night and on the weekends with the Red Cross and emergency services to coordinate places for people to stay in Swain, and later going out to help people sandbag.
- Roger Kluck from maintenance literally living on campus and devoting countless hours each day and weekends to handle myriad problems, including the resolve to construct the dike that

protected our campus. And he did all of that knowing that his own house had been lost to the flood.

- Terry Wald, who also lost his home, and other maintenance staff working throughout the day and night for seven days to monitor the pumps and handle other maintenance emergencies.
- Cathy Horvath and her staff from ITC working countless hours to monitor and protect our computer system.
- Brian Foisy working on weekends to help at our emergency centers as well as volunteering to “muck out” homes.
- Neil Nordquist from education working with his church to volunteer in the community.
- John Girard from business volunteering to man the table in Swain to check in emergency workers.
- Lynn Redden from our TRiO Power Center in early June and in late June helping to cover the phone and coordinate assignments for the volunteer teams.
- Leon Perzinski from our student center participating in volunteer teams, serving on our emergency team, and performing countless other jobs for the campus.
- The line of faculty and staff who showed up at 8:00 a.m. on June 2 in response to our call for assistance to help our campus people in need.
- Lisa Eriksmoen from residence life and her staff working seven days a week and countless hours to coordinate and manage the hundreds of emergency workers coming and going in our residence halls.
- Lori Willoughby from business coming in late one night to meet with the students from JCEMP who just found out that the campus was closing for a few days before July 4th.
- Rick Hedberg from athletics working into the early morning hours helping people sandbag, and recently forming teams of athletic staff to help people “muck out” homes.
- And the countless others of you who helped by volunteering, inviting displaced colleagues into your homes, and working to help the community at the Red Cross Center, the Souris Valley Animal Shelter, the Salvation Army, and elsewhere.

I could go on and on and cite examples of many others but the point should be obvious that the character of this place and its people is second to none. I’ve always heard from others that the people in Minot and North Dakota are known for being very nice. The expression “North Dakota nice,” is used to describe this sense of what this means. You’ve no doubt heard a version the story about the fellow at the grocery store who asks a stranger in the store if she needs help finding something. If that should happen to you, you will probably realize that you must be in North Dakota.

This outpouring of support from our own people makes that claim obvious and underscores something of which we should be proud and appreciative of the place in which we live. We’ve got great people around here willing to help others and to contribute, as our Vision 2013 document makes clear, to the welfare of the common good. We exemplify those values of this great place.

OUR CAMPUS ACTIONS IN SUPPORT OF OUR RECOVERY

When the waters finally started to recede, and Broadway reopened, and displaced homeowners were able to return to their homes to begin the hard work of addressing the damage, the community and its people seemed to let out a collective but cautious sigh. Perhaps the receding water, the return of travel, and the eventual removal of the dikes could be seen as an exhalation of relief, but what we know of these catastrophes elsewhere, the time of recovery is long. Our UND colleagues who experienced the flood in Grand Forks and who came to Minot to meet with us to advise and assist us in our own recovery, continued to emphasize that this is not a one-year event; it is multi-year challenge.

We need to keep in mind the recovery facing our community, our campus, and many who have been impacted directly by this disaster. We certainly know that things will not get back to normal soon if ever for those people on our campus who suffered direct damage from this flood. We also know that things will not get back to normal here on campus for a long while.

This realization serves to remind us that our greatest priority right now is our people—faculty, staff, and students. And this year, as our community is rebuilding and our own people are attempting to deal with their losses, we need to continue to offer our assistance and underscore our commitment to valuing our people and supporting our university.

SPECIAL STEPS

Minot State University has taken steps to support our people during this difficult time. These steps include:

- Our flood ombudsman, Mr. Rob Anderson, will be continuing to work to help impacted people address special problems, locate housing, and be available to listen to our faculty, staff, and students.
- We will be hiring additional staff to assist Nancy Mickelson with student counseling.
- The Village Assistance Center will be available to offer personal counseling to our own faculty and staff.
- This Friday we will host a number of special meetings for our campus dealing with flood issues. The first meeting from 8-9 in Anne Nicole this Friday will be an open forum to listen to people on campus and hear what the university can do to help. Rob Anderson and I will be leading that discussion.
- On Monday, August 22, from 9-10, we will host be a special workshop on the topic of financial planning. From 10-11, there will be a special workshop for all supervisors on how to identify signs of stress and needs for counseling.
- We have purchased Olympic-style housing units with a low-interest loan from the Bank of North Dakota to provide additional housing for our students.
- With the space we reserved in the new Beaver Ridge Plaza, the suspended first-year student housing requirement, the reconfiguration of our residence halls to increase the number of beds by 62, we have been able to secure additional housing for students. In our efforts to serve as a

liaison for students and faculty and staff needing housing, we are taking immediate steps to address the severe housing pressures.

- We also purchased eight efficiency housing units, which we are calling University Heights, which will be available for faculty and staff impacted directly by the flood. We have compiled a list of names and Rob has been working with realtors and others to match available houses/apartments with identified needs.
- And we will hold weekly open forums with the campus at 8:00 a.m. on Tuesdays to report on recovery activities, updates on operations, and to seek input from our campus. Those will be held in Aleshire Theater for any people wishing updates and wanting to share suggestions.

We are compiling lists of costs and expenditures we've incurred related to the flood and emergency accommodations on our campus. We will make reports to FEMA, the State Board of Higher Education, and requests from the legislature for assistance. Grand Forks requested funds to support recruitment and marketing after their flood emergency and received support in response.

We are looking at strengthening our recruiting office and marketing efforts to respond to the anticipated long-term decline in enrollment. Mr. Kevin Harmon, our dean of admissions, will assume a new role as the assistant vice president of enrollment management and will answer directly to me to provide a closer connection to members of President's Staff about this critical activity.

A REQUEST TO CONTINUE TO ASSIST OTHERS IN NEED

Finally, regarding this emergency and recovery, I'd ask everyone to continue to volunteer and reach out to help people who have been hurt by this flood. Our Vision 2013 commitment in strategy number 6 is our need to support civic engagement and to contribute to the welfare of others. Our campus and its people have demonstrated in spades our commitment to helping others during this time. Many of you invited displaced friends into your homes, volunteered many hours sandbagging, helping colleagues move, and now doing the dirty work of mucking out homes, and continue to reach out to help and assist. Your efforts show the true meaning of our university's commitment to contributing to the welfare of the common good. This is a very good way to model for our students the importance and the value and meaning of civic engagement, helping others, contributing to one's community, and making direct connections between what we know and teach and what the actual lives of people entail and require.

This recovery will last a few years, and this is the year for us to do everything we can to help our colleagues and to help our campus. I'm asking all of you to pitch in on both counts through this year and beyond. I ask for your patience, your suggestions, and your understanding. We will have intense pressures on parking and general campus operations with the increased number of students in our residence halls. Let's make a point to work together to address these problems constructively and together rather than complaining and trying to assign blame. In so many ways this year, we need your patience, your help, and your assistance during this long-term recovery period.

SO WHAT ABOUT THIS YEAR?

One thing for certain is that we cannot stop our work toward Vision 2013. This flood event helped us develop a resolve, confirm the importance of our mission and vision, and underscore the need to continue to focus on what we do: and that is engaging our students in the highest quality education.

The dilemma that many of us have faced is the need to balance and support our own mission and responsibility and at the same time work to support our people and campus impacted directly and indirectly by the flood. I suggest we do both, that we continue to work hard to reach our goals, to raise the bar on our programs and operations, while at the same time remaining true to our commitment to value our faculty, staff, and students and our university

SPECIAL CHALLENGES

We have many reasons to be thankful for our good fortune in protecting our campus from the flood waters, but we also have special challenges to address together this year. Sustaining our good fortune depends on our ability to meet our mission and vision and to keep our university financially strong and viable. We should at the same time remain cognizant of our special challenges this year. For all of us, this will require:

- Staying attentive to the needs of our people on campus and doing what we can do to help others address their special losses.
- Be especially vigilant to recognize signs of stress and emotional needs of our students and colleagues, and to do what we can to help.
- Show our willingness to listen and extend our hand to colleagues as friends.
- Take responsible steps to address the predicted drop of 7-10% in our enrollment and with it the significant drop in revenues.
- Here are a few steps we are prepared to take to address this imminent financial loss:
 - Initiate special energy reduction plans to save dollars and reduce utility costs;
 - curtail where possible long-term plans for major expenditures not already committed until we understand the full import of the flood on our enrollment;
 - reduce our expenditures as much as possible without jeopardizing our curriculum and quality offerings;
 - follow the guidelines established two years ago regarding low-enrolled courses and work to consolidate class offerings and sections where possible;
 - initiate a soft freeze on replacing open faculty and staff positions,
 - reducing equipment budgets,
 - asking our supervisors and all employees to do as much as possible to reduce expenditures.
 - And, put additional emphasis on recruitment and marketing.

I am asking all of you to help in this regard to address this temporary shortfall resulting from this drop in enrollment. The people from UND who visited us warned that a ten percent drop with corresponding drop in revenues is to be expected in the first year and the next two years. What we've learned from

other schools in communities that experienced natural disasters and flooding is that enrollments generally declined in a three-year period. This is not a financial emergency, but it is a challenge that we all should address directly and responsibly this year and next, and we need everyone's help to meet this challenge.

OUR CHARGE FOR THIS YEAR

Now is the time unlike other times for us to step up to support our faculty and staff and keep our focus squarely on our goal and strategies. This is not the time to stop our work but instead to move our campus forward to the Vision 2013 goals. This can be done in concert with an effort to support our faculty, staff, and students, and to focus on building back our enrollment lost during this year of the flood.

We've made remarkable progress on our vision indicators, and have raised many of them to and beyond the average of our aspiration peers. Our institution is strong, with outstanding faculty and staff, nationally recognized academic programs and scholars, second-to-none student services, from our Student Success Center, our Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning, our Power Center, Veterans Support Center, Native American Cultural Center, and two highly regarded centers of excellence programs in the Rural Crime and Justice Center and the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disability. Our new Center for Community Research and Service and our Studies in the Community and Environment are distinctive and responsive new programs focused on research and community and environmental welfare. We are practicing what we preach about our commitment to our place and engagement and to our people.

FINAL COMMENTS

You have received a brochure describing our Vision 2013 goals and objectives which you can handout to students and others to show them what Minot State University is doing. Your commitment to this vision over the past five years has helped us meet most of our goals and objectives for each of the strategies. We've highlighted five of them in the past five years as themes at our commencement to show proudly to our graduates and their families what we emphasize for their learning and success and who we are.

This year we will be highlighting Strategy Number 6, Civic Engagement. We thought it would be especially fitting this year with the strong outpouring of our campus to help others during this time of need and the many other engagement initiatives on our campus to invite George Kuh back as a keynote speaker and workshop leader to start off this year.

Thanks to CETL for their work to coordinate and arrange Dr. Kuh's visit. George was very well received during his visit three years ago. He defined and clarified the need for engagement, spoke about the National Survey of Student Engagement and its primary features, and charged us with making our campus a place of engagement and support. I am looking forward to Dr. Kuh's presentation in a few minutes.

I also am pleased to ask all of you to pay particular attention to this strategy, demonstrate its values and importance to our students, continue to incorporate field-based learning, engagement activities, and others in your classes and activities, and show them that the importance of their study and learning and experience at Minot State University must be connected directly to doing, making a difference in the lives of others, experiencing things first hand and concentrating on helping others and our communities. A good demonstration of what that means is to look at how well our campus stepped up to help others this summer. That's civic engagement, and that's what is particularly important to instill in our students right now when civic engagement is especially critical in this recovery.

A SPECIAL THANKS

Thanks to those of you who volunteered your time during the height of the flood to show up and work on behalf of your colleagues when called upon. Thanks to all of you who volunteer and show your support for our campus at campus clean up days, where people gathered to help clean up the campus and get it prepared to welcome our students. Thanks to all of you each year who volunteer to help our students and their parents move into the residence halls and to welcome them to Minot State. And a special and big thanks to all of you who worked many hours to help us during the flood emergency. That demonstrates our commitment to the values of Vision 2013.

A special thank-you, too, to Roger Kluck and his maintenance staff, Cathy Horvath and her staff, and all who volunteered to assist Minot State University and the people in our community.

All of you deserve applause for your special resolve and for your work to help others. Thank you.

See, that demonstrates our commitment and the special character of Minot State University and what it means to be a premier, regional university in the "great" Great Plains.

POEMS

And the time all of you have been waiting for. I'm sure if my daughter were here she would repeat one of her oft-repeated comments, "Get Real, Dad."

I'll share with you some explanation as to why I read poems at our convocation. I depend on poems to understand things that are difficult to say, that cannot be said in the literal sense of the term. Good poems do not require or deserve explication or interpretation. They are not something to figure out what the poet meant. A good poem normally stands for itself, and good listeners merely listen and wait for the imagery and associations. This summer the images and associations we've experienced are not easily understood or interpreted, but they stand for themselves as something meaningful and powerful. In many ways, that is what good poetry does.

The first of two poems, which came from Garrison Keillor's 2009 Collection of Good Poems, is a fine way to carry forward a sense of our appreciation and the meaning of thanks. This one was written by W.S. Merwin:

Just Now

In the morning as the storm begins to blow away
 the clear sky appears for a moment and it seems to me
 that there has been something simpler than I could ever
 believe
 simpler than I could have begun to find words for
 not patient not even waiting no more hidden
 than the air itself that became part of me for a while
 with every breath and remained with me unnoticed
 something that was here unnamed known in the days
 and the nights not separate from them
 not separate from them as they came and were gone
 it must have been here neither early not late then
 by what name can I address it now holding out my thanks.

The second poem is, yes, one about birds, but more important about our need to sense and announce our special place, as we have all come to understand ours this summer. This poem is by Mary Oliver.

Wild Geese

You do not have to be good.
 You do not have to walk on your knees
 For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
 You only have to let the soft animal of your body
 Love what it loves.
 Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
 Meanwhile the world goes on
 Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
 Are moving across the landscapes, over the prairies and the deep trees,
 The mountains and the rivers.
 Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air, are heading home again.
 Whoever you are, no matter how lonely, the world offers itself to your imagination,
 Calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
 Over and over announcing your place
 In the family of things.

I trust that these poems speak for themselves and speak to us right now at this time and in this place. I hope they help us appreciate, say thanks, and announce our special place proudly, like the calls of wild geese.

Thank you for your kind attention and for everything you do on behalf of our students, your colleagues, the people in our community, and for Minot State University.

Best wishes to all in this new academic year of 2011-12.