

Convocation address: "The Academic Plan"

September 27, 2005

LAST AUTUMN we celebrated the conclusion of the New Landscape for Learning program. Today, we near completion of another building initiative, one that rises above the foundation of our physical infrastructure to define the mark we will make as an academic community.

I refer to the Academic Plan.

Building and planning projects share many commonalities, in as much as they often are untidy, challenge deadlines, and by necessity, create occasional inconveniences.

But as we have seen from the New Landscape for Learning and its successor—the New Landscape for Living, such endeavors have transformative potential.

As many here today know, the process that has carried the Academic Plan to its current form is one of engagement, multiple opportunities for feedback, and numerous revisions.

I invite our newest colleagues to visit the Academic Plan Web site to learn more about this process, and how to become part of it.

This afternoon we will address the following topics:

- We will define the plan, and tell you how it was developed.
- We will describe the process used to create the Plan.
- We will discuss how the plan ties in with our other campus strategies and initiatives.
- And finally, we will talk about how we will proceed from this point.

The Academic Plan is a studied way for our entire community to agree upon what principles define our work and, from there, to establish priorities among our programs, operations and services.

The Plan is linked to the Balanced Scorecard, a methodology by which we establish institutional and unit goals and metrics that will provide assessment for purposes of improvement and accountability.

As such, these documents not only tell the story of our collective future, but also establish the benchmarks by which we will measure our progress on the course we have charted.

In a few moments we will see a video about how the Academic Plan evolved from the 1998 Master Plan.

During this presentation, bear in mind that several key questions guided our efforts. They are:

How can we best capitalize on the unique assets of The University of Akron to differentiate ourselves among higher education institutions?

- How can we honor our mission while confronting challenging fiscal times, demographic changes and the increasing need for quality postsecondary education?
- How can we best engage with a local, national and international community to enhance community well-being, enrich the culture, foster discovery and innovation and provide leadership for developing the economy?
- What are the most strategic priorities for our actions and investments?
- How can we assess our progress in a time of increased accountability?
- With those questions in mind, let us turn to the video presentation.

[The video can be viewed [here](#), using RealPlayer.]

As I said earlier, building and project developments share many commonalities. As we have just seen, one more comparison is important: both are communal activities, particularly if we reflect on the communal activities of previous generations—those who raised barns—and those of the current generation—those who come together to build homes for projects like Habitat for Humanity. It is this kind of building project that best reflects the intention and the design of the Academic Plan.

Our approach in constructing the Academic Plan has been true to what we think we are about as an institution and a community. We have sought – and continue to seek – as much input and feedback as you will give us. It is this data, generated by you, upon which the principles were based and then refined and defined.

Those design principles reflect what academic and administrative units expressed as their most fundamental values, orientations and beliefs. Thus, the design principles define at a more general level the profile we envision

for The University of Akron.

The priorities are the specific shape of the structure. While we can nimbly change to enable our community to react and capitalize on new opportunities, or to answer unexpected challenges, we also need to be clear about the priorities for the near term—to be consistent with our plan and to use our resources in the most strategic way.

It is easy to see how the Academic Plan follows from Charting the Course, the strategic vision for the University. The Plan's priorities link the four Clusters of Excellence designated in Charting the Course with the Plan's design principles.

But how does the Academic Plan tie in with the Balanced Scorecard, now known as the Academic Scorecard? As you will recall, the Academic Scorecard is a methodology by which we establish institutional and unit goals and metrics to provide assessment for purposes of improvement and accountability.

The Scorecard yields measurements and metrics that indicate our present status and suggest appropriate future actions, whereas the Academic Plan enables us to focus on priorities that ultimately will allow us to fulfill the broader strategies set forth by Charting the Course.

The University's vision statement provides the foundation for this Academic Plan. Together, this community raised the structure of the Plan through the long process of identifying, refining and finishing the design principles.

Now, together, we must set the priorities for this institution. And again, it is critical that the entire campus community participate in this last, vital stage of the plan's development.

The priorities we set will be used in program review, as well as in university-wide planning and budgeting processes. Clearly, each of us is a stakeholder in this portion of the process, and every one of us should participate.

In the coming weeks, a formal nomination process will commence. All are invited to recommend programs, services or operations that they believe correlate the design principles with the Clusters of Excellence identified in Charting the Course.

Nominations will be followed by a review process, which is still in development. The Academic Plan will then be completed through the creation of a list of priorities that best reflect both the design principles and the clusters.

Finally, this year's budget-planning process will take into consideration any budget implications resulting from implementing the plan.

The pace of this project has been purposefully, if frustratingly, slow – much like a remodeling project. The construction phase seems to go on forever, but we resist the temptation to cut corners because when it is done, we want it done right.

And we all know that one of surest ways to obtain the outcome you desire from a building project is to put some sweat equity into it.

So, if you want an Academic Plan that you can work with, can support, can feel good about . . . please participate when the call goes out for nominations. Talk to your colleagues and urge them to participate. Stay involved, and in that way you, too, will share in the pride of ownership when the job is complete.

Before we leave, I would like to ask everyone who has participated in the design of the Balanced Scorecard and the Academic Plan to be recognized.

By my count, that includes hundreds of individuals who met in two all campus forums, those who provided feedback by e-mail, another several hundred who attended unit-based sessions about the plan, and this past summer's workgroup members. Please stand if you have participated in one of these ways.

On behalf of our campus community, thank you for your hard work and dedication to advancing our institution and its mission.

[end of remarks]