

We Have Done Much and We Will Do Much More

State of the University Address
by
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The University of Akron
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Thank you, Chairman Pogue, for that kind introduction.

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for joining us for the 2012 State of the University Address.

Before I begin, let us please recognize a number of special guests who are with us today, many of who work with us every day, and who made time in their busy schedules to attend this event. Will you please stand when I call your names and will our audience please hold their applause until all have been recognized?

From The University of Akron's Board of Trustees:

- Chairman Richard W. Pogue;
- Vice Chair Ralph J. Palmisano
- Vice Chair Jonathan T. Pavloff;
- Trustees Roland H. Bauer,
- Olivia P. Demas,
- Chander Mohan, M.D.
- Warren L. Woolford, and
- Nicholas C. York
- Student Trustees Alan M. Bowdler, and
- Ryan J. Thompson
- Chair Emeritus Patricia Graves
- And Board Secretary Ted A. Mallo

We are deeply grateful for your commitment to this university, and for the leadership you provide.

Also:

- Ms. Ilene Shapiro, representing Summit County Council
- Mayor Don Robart from the City of Cuyahoga Falls
- Summit Country Executive Russ Pry
- From the Greater Akron Chamber, Mr. Gregg Cramer and Ms. Rebecca Guzy Woodford

Would the leadership of our student organizations please rise, along with our leadership team of vice presidents, deans, and department heads?

I also want to extend a special welcome to all of our faculty, staff, students and other friends of the University. I am deeply grateful for your attendance, especially on the heels of one of the most exhausting elections in the history of this battleground state.

By the way, it has been reported that the presidential campaigns spent nearly \$200 million in Ohio to capture our votes. Imagine if they had instead tried to persuade us by using those resources to create scholarships, reduce student debt and offset state cuts. Indeed, if that had been the case, I expect all of us would be in favor of elections every year!

While political candidates often are criticized for not putting forth a clear vision for the future, we have begun this academic year with Vision 2020: A New Gold Standard of University Performance –our own carefully crafted strategic plan.

Today, I will first highlight some of our progress and accomplishments, then outline the opportunities and significant challenges facing us, and conclude by celebrating the energy and resolve of our shared vision for the future.

Just as triumphant candidates from Tuesday’s election now face the burden of delivering on their promises, so, too, do we in higher education have the obligation of delivering on the promise of our Noble Charter in a manner suitable to the 21st Century. In this global, knowledge-based economy, universities like ours continue to offer the greatest promise for individual success, and for innovation-driven prosperity for communities and regions. Increasingly, however, critical eyes turn to see if we are fulfilling that promise; to see if we are delivering on that Vision for the future.

I believe this university has, and I know we will continue to do so.

In January, I will begin my 15th year as president of The University of Akron. There is much that we have done and our accomplishments are many, but there is much more for us to do.

It was not so long ago when we were perceived as a commuter school with cars and trucks that sped through streets that divided our campus into isolated quadrants. Yet, in little more than a decade, through our New Landscape for Learning initiative, we have transformed our campus and created a university community that our students and alumni now celebrate and even brag about as one of the most beautiful metropolitan-sited campuses in the nation. In 1999 this plan was considered visionary and many doubted our ability to achieve it. But the plan *has* become reality, irrefutable proof of the strength of our resolve and depth of our capabilities.

Just this year, we have opened our fifth new residence hall and a new engineering research facility, and we unveiled a new master guide plan that includes an academic main street, the Academic Way, that will better connect us to each other and our campus to our community.

Clearly, we have done much, but we are not done yet.....

Over the last decade, we grew student enrollment so dramatically and so quickly that we actually experienced growing pains – a good problem to have in light of financial constraints in our state. Year after year, this University has steadily performed its responsibility to this community, state and world by graduating thousands of students who have earned undergraduate, graduate or professional degrees. During my tenure alone, more than 50,000 degrees have been awarded, and I have had the pleasure of personally greeting most of these students on stage at our commencement exercises. And now we have set forth another ambitious goal—40,000 learners by 2020. They may come to us in non-traditional ways: in the evenings, at remote campus sites, or by the Internet, but they will come because we have so much to offer them.

Ten years ago, the kinds of partnerships required to move an entire community forward did not exist. Today, the University Park Alliance is a nationally recognized effort that is expanding the borders of the campus, revitalizing neighborhoods, and creating new retail and housing opportunities. Today, the Austen BioInnovation Institute in Akron is exploring new economic opportunities for our region through research and discovery. And today, the University of Akron Research Foundation can boast of 50 start-up companies launched as part of its relentless focus on entrepreneurship and the promise of invention. In ten short years, through these and other innovative partnerships, we have created what has become known nationally as The Akron Model of university engagement.

And we are doing so much more. Today a nationally acclaimed STEM middle school hums with activity at the edge of our campus, and a STEM high school opened its doors this fall at the Akron Public School's Central Hower High School, located squarely in the center of our campus. Our early college and summer programs provide strong bridges that link high school to college. And first-generation college students find here greater opportunities to experience the promise of a college education.

In these and so many other ways, all of you have enabled our University to act as a convener, developer and anchor for clusters of innovation – clusters that generate knowledge and creative capital, train human capital, build social capital, attract financial capital and preserve natural capital.

And we are investing further in those clusters of innovation. This year, we delivered on our pledge to fund interdisciplinary proposals through our Achieving Distinction program. We challenged our faculty to think truly out of the box, and to bring together their unique and remarkable talents in programs that can benefit our region and, in some cases, our world.

In September we announced the selection of the two inaugural winning proposals.

The Biomimicry Research and Innovation Center seeks to create new products inspired by nature. Think, for example, of the exciting opportunities if we can synthetically reproduce the adhesive qualities of gecko feet, or synthesize a polymer strand with the tensile strength of spider silk.

The second project, actually a synthesis of two outstanding submissions, will create a seamless framework for innovation and entrepreneurship throughout the University and across our region. Faculty from several departments, schools and colleges will be linked to our expertise in licensing and commercialization, and to our leadership in innovative, entrepreneurial and productive industrial partnerships. Together they will create a Regional Innovation Institute and a proof-of-concept framework that will bridge the so-called valley of death for entrepreneurs, thereby forging new economic and job growth opportunities across Northeast Ohio and beyond.

The very process of developing the Achieving Distinction proposals for funding was in itself an indication of the vitality and vision that pervades this campus. Nearly 30 proposals, involving 160 of our faculty and more than 80 external partners, were submitted.

The two funded projects involve the collective expertise and energy of 45 faculty members and 18 University partners, and will include the talents of new faculty members hired through this program.

I ask any participants in these excellent projects who are in attendance this afternoon to please rise and be recognized. Would the participants in the bio-mimicry and innovation proposals please rise and let us applaud you?

The synergies between these proposals should be clear to everyone and I trust they will serve as an inspiration and model for those already planning next year's submissions. We fully expect that the creative collaboration that produced these proposals will be replicated across our campus, that funding will be pursued from many sources, and that this kind of interdisciplinary work will keep us relevant, connected and productive—thereby expressing our guiding principles in Vision 2020.

Indeed, we have done much together....and we will do more.

Another unique model of collaboration can be found in the new Timken Engineered Surfaces Laboratory, located in the Engineering Research Center. The laboratory is a place where industry and academia share both risk and reward, a place where students, faculty and private sector researchers shorten the span between discovery and commercialization.

Our expertise in many areas of manufacturing also earned us a place this year in the first federally funded National Additive Manufacturing Innovation Institute, a \$70 million initiative. Located in Youngstown, the Institute brings together university and industry partners from a newly identified TechBelt that extends from Ohio into Pennsylvania. Together we will explore the promise of 3D printing, both for industrial and biomedical applications.

These collaborations are among the many reasons we are bullish on manufacturing and on our regional economy. We are bullish because we are building the future with each and every partnership. Just last month, we led a number of Northeast Ohio universities in joining with the Manufacturing Advocacy and Growth Network to advance an initiative that will help small and medium-size manufacturers with research and development, state-of-the-art technologies and funding opportunities for commercialization—all the resources that a manufacturing company needs to grow, flourish and create new jobs.

These are but a few examples of the many ways in which we are supporting economic vitality and creating new talent—the talent supply chain if you will—of engineers, scientists, teachers, executives, health care professionals, artists and all the countless others who represent the true working capital of an economy and the social and cultural backbone of our communities.

We have taken many other steps this year to collaborate across departments and colleges, to converge programs on this campus, and to coordinate our offerings at other university centers. We have ensured that all of these are linked to businesses, industries and other organizations in our region, so as to provide the needed connectivity that will increase the number of exciting opportunities for our students upon graduation. These and other advances are outlined in our just-published Report to the Community — copies of which will be available as you leave.

Indeed, throughout the past decade, our University has discovered, grown and celebrated excellence across all of its disciplines. We have earned national recognition in the arts, business, humanities, science and engineering, and in athletics as well as in our storied polymer science and polymer engineering program.

And because of all of your good work and dedication to our shared vision, this university has emerged as a leader in so many ways that are relevant and significant to our communities.

Yet, just as we are moving forward to achieve our vision, the ground that has traditionally supported higher education is shifting beneath our feet – shifting at the fault line intersections of new technologies and growing economic pressures. These produce the “seismic rumbles of change” that Chuck Vest, the former president of MIT, spoke about nearly 20 years ago, and which now have put us into unfamiliar territories.

No doubt you have followed some of these issues in the press and in higher education journals and periodicals. Just last month, at a meeting in New York City, U.S. Secretary

of Education Arne Duncan summed up what he calls the problems in higher education: “high prices, low completion rates and too little accountability.” And surely you noted that throughout the recent political campaigns, candidates often railed against the high cost of college, student debt, low graduation rates, and too few jobs for college graduates.

The reality is that escalating costs have placed college beyond the reach of too many Americans. And we know that simply opening the doors of college to everyone is not a solution. So one of the ways we are tackling these issues at The University of Akron is through a new enrollment strategy, *Pathways to Student Academic Success*. In this initiative, we are developing learning pathways for prospective students according to their level of preparedness for college.

Less well-prepared high school graduates are guided to community colleges where they can earn an associate’s degree, certificates or specialized training at a lower cost. For some of these students, their journey to success will lead them back to our university for further education and career development.

The Pathways to Students Academic Success initiative provides students with better foundations for successful academic careers, greater opportunities to succeed at lower cost per credit hour, and ideally, with faster pathways to graduation and greatly enhanced opportunities to improve their lives.

But we must do more . . . and do more differently!

We must do more because when many students can and do learn almost anything for free through the Internet, we cannot continue to justify the high cost of tuition. What is more, disruptive innovations are forcing our hand not only to do more, but to do things differently.

What are some of those disruptive innovations?

For example, this past Sunday, the NY Times Education Section called 2012 “The Year of the MOOC,” of “Massive open online courses” . . . “the educational happening of the moment.” And lending credence to this claim, just last week Antioch University in California announced a licensing agreement with Coursera by which it would begin awarding credit for some of those courses. The president of edX, a joint venture between Harvard and MIT, describes this as “the year of disruption,” with free on-line courses taught by prestigious universities from around the country to hundreds of thousands around the world. This radical disruption to the traditional college model is a fast-moving train on a track that is still being built . . . to a destination still uncertain. And therein lie countless opportunities – opportunities to create new value propositions and new business models for higher education – opportunities for us to earn our way to prosperity.

Over the past few months, I have repeatedly engaged our Faculty Senate and other campus groups on the dynamic changes facing higher education, noting that if we wait

much longer it will be too late. Indeed, we must seize the moment because others already are driving ahead.

As it is, many universities are intent on putting each and every one of their courses on line. Unfortunately, this approach carries a very high cost and produces a plethora of duplicative end products, some of arguably little value. So, consider instead what might happen if we imagine other scenarios:

- Imagine faculty across universities collaborating to develop a course or learning module, or a simple, effective simulation of complex phenomena;
- Imagine universities or their partners integrating all available learning resources through portals that make them widely available;
- Imagine universities or other entities, of whatever form, providing assessment and credentialing of learning, regardless of how or where that learning took place.

As it happens, we will raise and discuss precisely these kinds of scenarios this weekend at the annual meeting of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities in Denver. There, we will lead a discussion to explore new business models for higher education, including the Stanford Coursera initiative, MIT's and Harvard's edX initiative, the University of Wisconsin's Flex degree, and a model we have conceptualized and tentatively titled the Integrator/Assessor Model. If that name is too long, just think of its acronym, spoken as a student's adamant response to the question, "Who is going to succeed? **I AM!**"

Let me explain some of the ideas that underlie the concepts of integration and assessment in this model. By integration we mean linking many learning platforms and resources – including open courseware, social media, and other innovative technologies – to enable students to select or design their own learning pathways with timelines that meet their unique learning styles and circumstances.

Imagine digital learning in which students continuously test their comprehension or skills and receive immediate feedback. Imagine a learning environment where there is no failure, only encouragement to relearn and try again, much as happens in electronic games. Those games motivate players to repeatedly improve their skills...until they gain a sense of mastery and proceed to the next level. The digital learner can benefit from that same sense of cumulative mastery.

Of course, the other side of our Integrator/Assessor Model is assessment. So, how are we in higher education going to credential this mastery of knowledge and skills in this new environment?

We must develop new ways to assess, certify and credential knowledge, regardless of whether the student has ever taken a course or set foot on our campus. Skills assessment could become the criteria for awarding academic credentials, regardless of how knowledge and skills were attained.

This integrator/assessor approach can move universities from the traditional model of an all-inclusive provider of knowledge resources to a new role: the university as enabler and integrator of knowledge and resources, and the university as assessor of the knowledge acquired. The associated costs for those services will be significantly lower for both the learner and the university, thus providing access to higher education to a broader population and, in turn, benefitting the larger society.

Let me be clear on one particular point: However these new university models take shape, I am convinced that the student-faculty relationship will remain at the core of learning. Even the co-founder of Udacity has said “There is a magic that goes on inside a university campus.” I believe that magic is in the bond between professor and student, between researchers and teachers and learners. The stronger we can grow that bond, the more certain we can be of success, both for our students and for our institution. It may be a different relationship, but a stronger one, as we take advantage of technology that students know well and are adept at using. To paraphrase one of the founders of Coursera, herself a Stanford faculty, . . . by flipping the classroom, we enhance the opportunity for service to our students.

And is that not what higher education is supposed to be all about?!

Enhancing opportunities and creating a kind of magic that can only be found at a place like The University of Akron. And that is why we have focused a great deal of our collective efforts this year on creating a distinctive Akron Experience for our students.

As part of Vision 2020, we have defined The Akron Experience as a Journey to Success that puts each and every student on a pathway to a lifetime of achievement. The Akron Experience is about connectivity—connecting classroom insights with real-world problem solving; connecting students with community and with industry through service projects and co-ops that ensure personal and professional success. And The Akron Experience is distinctively Akron because each student’s experience is connected to some aspect of the region’s historical, economic, social or cultural assets.

But don’t just take my word for it. Listen to the students whose futures are being shaped because they are **here, now**, at the University of Akron:

[Video plays]

Usually, I would ask the students who are profiled to stand up and be recognized. But I won’t, because they’re not here – they are all in class or at work! I find that rather encouraging, don’t you? Let’s give them a round of applause anyway.

As we develop the Akron Experience to its fullest potential, it will strengthen our linkage to the community—and to our alumni – as never before. And the additional connections and links we form in the community to build the Akron Experience will lead to more opportunities for research, collaborative projects, gifts and grants, and the kind of public support that matters to policymakers in Columbus and Washington.

Most of all, a strong Akron Experience will benefit our students and build our collective pride.

In closing, we have done a great deal in the past decade to enhance opportunities for our students. We have created new programs, new partnerships and a magnificent new learning and living environment. We have earned significant recognition and earned the respect of many. Still, if we are to earn our keep, we also must further enhance our relevance, connectivity and productivity. And that means we must seize the moment and innovate our way to prosperity. We must gather our energies and put forth the effort required to achieve our Vision and maintain our momentum, for in the end, we – and we alone – are responsible for ensuring our own success.

We must and we will do much more.

Therefore, as we now go forward to invent a new future for the University of Akron, let us again take a lesson from our championship men's soccer team, which begins the MAC tournament this week ranked number 1 in the nation. Competition is never easy, but as Coach Caleb Porter says about his team: "*We believe in ourselves and we believe in what we are capable of doing.*"

So, what is the state of the University of Akron?

We have done much. And we are determined to do much more.

Thank you!