

9/16/09

## **University Convocation**

### **Reflections, Directions and Action**

#### Introduction

Good morning everyone. One of the clear reflections or lessons that I have learned this year is that I need to find a way to NOT follow the President to the podium. He is an incredibly tough act to follow...it is like being the guy who can barely sing in the church choir who is asked to give a performance at a recital after Placido Domingo...you are dead meat!!

Like the President, it my pleasure to welcome all of you to our University Convocation and wish you all the best in Academic Year 2009-10. To my faculty colleagues, I hope that your summer break was enjoyable, relaxing and productive and that you have returned to campus rejuvenated and ready to take on the world. Please join me in thanking Dr. Annette Clark for assuming the position of Interim Dean of the Law School this year. I congratulate our Law School faculty colleagues, and Interim Dean Clark, on the successful launch of their semester and for getting the academic year at Seattle U. off to such a great start. What a delight it was for us to welcome former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor to campus this week.

I also wish to express our gratitude to our staff colleagues for their excellent service and support of the university throughout the year, and it is my hope that you were able to get a well-deserved and well-earned break over the summer, too!

### Reflections

What a year it has been for us at Seattle U. In many ways it feels like it was only a few weeks ago that you welcomed me into this university community, but in reality a year has passed. It feels good to no longer be the new guy...the new Provost...just Isiaah...your colleague...who happens to be the Provost. Again, thank you for welcoming me so warmly into the Seattle U family...it has been a wonderful experience to learn more about our university culture, ethos and history...it has begun to feel like home to be with you.

Over the past year, I have come to appreciate the difference between rain and showers; the distinction between a day that is partly cloudy versus one that is partly sunny; the Seattle version of mild weather that can encompass 20 degree temperatures and 10 inches of snow in December and three digit temperatures with significant humidity in July...which is not how you described mild Seattle weather during my interviews with all of you in 2007...and that on sunny and slightly smoggy evenings, there are few things more beautiful than a sunset over Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains.

My thoughts on the university from the past year are comparable to those expressed by the President. Academic Year 2008-09 was filled with many challenges - all of which this university community responded to with grace, grit and determination. I was most impressed by the ferocious commitment of our faculty and staff to our university mission and students. The process that we undertook to develop our Academic Strategic Action Plan and our concomitant course of self-study to prepare for our forthcoming reaccreditation site visit, allowed me to see, and be marveled by, the creative and dedicated faculty of scholar-educators that undergird this university. This faculty ... delivers rigorous academic programs that are very well received by our students... is respected by employers who hire our graduates... is esteemed by our peers in the academy... guides a number of our degree programs that are nationally ranked ... mentors students who become successful in gaining admission to top flight graduate and professional degree programs in the country... produces high-quality and influential research and scholarship and secures programmatic and research grants in excess of \$4 million.

Our students are hard-working and dedicated to their studies and are happy to be here. They take their education seriously...they want to be and are challenged intellectually, and they appreciate that they have a responsibility to use the education they receive to impact the world in important and meaningful ways.

We are a strong and well-positioned university and we can confidently step into the “Era of our Educational Commons” as the President outlined in his remarks.

### Directions

Our good work this past year to develop an Academic Strategic Action Plan, that was based on the collective strategic planning work of the university over the past several years, has as its primary goal the advancement of academic excellence and the promotion of the culture of learning at Seattle U that can help to usher in the Era of our Educational Commons. As you will recall, the six initiatives of the plan address:

- 1) A focus on Curricular Renewal within our graduate and undergraduate degree programs and a revision of the University Core Curriculum;
- 2) The infusion of resources and programs to promote faculty and academic staff professional development in the areas of teaching, research/scholarship and service;
- 3) Strategies to promote student success and effective enrollment management and planning to guide the university into the next decade;
- 4) Enhancement of our instructional spaces and campus facilities;

5) The establishment of university centers of excellence or institutes that are based on our collective strengths and core values that will promote interdisciplinarity and greater visibility to the university; and,

6) To focus our future strategic fund-raising and communication activities on the aforementioned to promote academic excellence at the university and communicate our achievements in the areas of teaching, research/scholarship and service effectively to the world.

It is my belief that through the implementation of the Academic Strategic Action Plan, the Era of our Educational Commons will be one in which we ensure that every Seattle University student receives an integrated Jesuit education for leadership; our mission can become fully realized; and, we will be in a position to re-fashion our vision statement from suggesting that we will become the premier independent university of the Northwest in academic quality, Jesuit Catholic inspiration and service to society...to one in which we make a declarative and non-qualified statement of our status as simply being one of the nation's premier institutions of higher education...one that is characterized by our high caliber and rigorous academic programs; exceptional teaching and co-curricular activities that promote deep learning; the production of high caliber research/scholarship and artistic expression in its many forms; high levels of student satisfaction; and high-

quality instructional labs, studios, classrooms, technology, and scientific equipment to support the university's learning goals for its students.

We are a good university...positioned to become great. I believe the Academic Strategic Action Plan is a tool that we can use to guide our march toward the realization of our potential...toward greatness. As we reach the end of our planning process with the Plan, I have already begun to meet with the faculty of each college and school to discuss the opportunities they see within the Plan to enhance their departments/colleges/schools, the university as a whole, and their own professional aspirations as well as the challenges that we will face to implement the Plan and achieve our goals. I have had the opportunity to have this conversation with the faculty of the College of Arts & Sciences and the College of Education over the past few days... and will do so with the other colleges/schools in the coming weeks...along with inviting members of the general university community to meet for informal conversations with me about the implementation of the Plan later this quarter.

This forthcoming year promises to be an exciting one for the university. We welcome a very strong and diverse class of first-year and transfer students to campus next week; we look to begin the implementation of the Academic Strategic Action Plan; complete our self-study document and prepare for our Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities site-visit in April 2010; complete

successful searches for our next Dean of the School of Law and our first Associate Provost for Global Engagement; celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the College of Education and the College of Nursing; enhance the infrastructure of the university to support the research/scholarship and artistic endeavors of our faculty (including holding a convocation that will focus on faculty and student research at the university); continue our development of a design-permit-build plan for a new Science and Health Science Teaching Lab Building; and explore ways in which we can promote student enrollment, services and successes; and, of course, prepare for the opening of our remolded Lemieux Library and our new McGoldrick Information Commons. I am confident that these new facilities will become the hub of intellectual life on campus and will clearly mark our entry into a new era for the university.

So, yes, we have a busy and exciting year ahead of us...and the goals that we are setting for the university are ambitious...but they should be because that is what great institutions do...they follow the wisdom of Daniel Burnham, the architectural mastermind behind the 1893 Columbian Exhibition in Chicago, who suggested to his colleagues at the time to “Make no small Plans.” To achieve greatness...we must believe we are worthy of it...and plan for it...and then go about achieving our goals with a singular focus. Greatness is within our reach and

I look forward to working with you to realize our full potential and to help us move confidently into the Era of our Educational Commons.

So, let me wrap up my time with you this morning by, again, welcoming you back to campus...thanking you for your excellent work this past year and the warm support (and guidance) you have shown and given to me...and I look forward to what we will accomplish together this year.

Thank you!!