

## President's Welcome 2013-14

- September 20, 2013
- Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.

### Launching a new year

Good morning and thank you very much for coming to this “President’s Welcome” in order that we might all be together at the start of the academic year. What we are doing this morning is in response to your request that we return to having more of a convocation, a gathering of all, in order to be one community of colleagues as we launch the year. I am glad that we have taken some time to introduce and welcome new members among us as we strive as best we can to be a responsible, unified, and personally caring community, even though a very large and complex one. That we come together in this way, see one another, say hello, update ourselves about one another, and be mutually welcoming of one another probably does as much in itself as what you will hear from me and discuss. So as your president, let me say “Welcome one and all!”

### Toward our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary

We gather at the start of the 122<sup>nd</sup> year of Seattle University. I emphasize that because I want us all to be aware that we are moving ahead toward our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In fact, the freshmen who move into our residence halls tomorrow will be seniors in our celebratory 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year, 2016-17. As that milestone approaches I hope it is both a cause of great gratitude for the people of our history—ourselves among them—who have built our university and a cause for hope and confidence in what we can become.

To put this in perspective, if you divide our history in three parts of about 40 years, I estimate that in the first 40 years we graduated 100 students, in the next 40 years from 1931-1971 we had 10,000 graduates, and in the last 40 years we graduated about 75,000 students. I point this out because I believe we are, in fact, still a young university in our development and energy and because we have now clearly moved into an era in which our compelling purpose of having an impact for a more just and humane world is more fully being realized and recognized. Let’s move forward gratefully and hopefully in this new academic year as we reach toward our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a university which so meaningfully impacts and inspires our students and serves the common good of our society and world.

### Celebrations

Please join me now in celebrating with your applause three remarkable recent achievements.

- The US News and World Report came out recently with their rankings of universities. All 28 Jesuit universities in the country were ranked in the top tier. Here in the West, out of 121 master’s comprehensive universities, we moved up from 10<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup>. This means that we are in the top 5% of master’s universities. This ranking reflects the academic

quality we have worked so hard to realize is now better recognized, which is truly something to celebrate.

- I recently learned that our faculty, across our five undergraduate colleges and schools developed 356 new courses to support the new Core Curriculum which now moves into full operation this fall. Our thanks to Jeff Philpott and his team, our faculty colleagues, the Registrar, and others who have brought this about. The new Core Curriculum engages our students more quickly, deeply, and interestingly; it emphasizes more clearly our religious commitment and our global engagement; doubles the science requirement; makes us far more intentional and accountable for student learning; strengthens interdisciplinary learning and educating students to solve complex problems; and makes room for their fuller engagement in their major and career choices. This program of study is a great new Core and we are proud both of its quality and how we developed it.
- A third cause for celebration is the outcome of how we are seen by our peers at the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities in their recent third-year accreditation review of the university. They commend us for a universal and extraordinary commitment to mission, an excellent new Core Curriculum, a unique fostering of community engagement, and a clear commitment and practice of investing in the quality of our faculty and staff. I'll take that together with their recommendations that we strengthen our structures for shared governance, clarify our policy on intellectual property, and bring greater cohesion into the multiple dimensions of university planning. Special thanks to Bob Dullea and Heather Geiger in the Office of University Planning, our accreditation gurus, and their teams across the university, at all levels, whom they facilitated in the accreditation self-study. We don't often applaud accreditation results but we should applaud these judgments of our quality by our peers as well as their indications of how we can improve.

### Ready for the year

As we move into this year together —although I know our School of Law is already well underway—I think we should ask ourselves how we are and are we ready. Our campus and facilities have been improved over the summer through dozens of projects and are ready; our enrollments are strong in some areas and improving in others so our students will be here and ready with special thanks to Marilyn Crone and her team in Admissions and Enrollment Services; our technology is growing more robust and we are better equipped in this critical area of university infrastructure; we have new exceptional deans in the School of Law (Annette Clarke) and the College of Education (Deanna Sands) and we are grateful for Janiece DeSocio holding the reins in Nursing and Michele Murray in Student Development; our finances are sound and are actively overseen by Connie Kanter and her division; we've purchased the largest piece of property—between 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, Columbia and Marion—within the footprint within which we can develop, so we are looking toward the future development of the university; we've bolstered our Public Safety significantly through the recruitment of a new and talented safety officer to oversee this important area of operation at the university (Tim Marron), increased the number of campus safety officers and made notable investments to promote the safety of the members of our university community.

Everything we needed to attend to in order to be prepared for a great year has been done, but are we, those of us gathered here today, ready? What would make us more ready personally for the year? Two things come to mind for me: gratitude for the people of our educational community and cohesion in how we move forward in all we are about.

### Gratitude

First I am very grateful for the people of our university community. I was given some extra time off this summer as I enter my 17<sup>th</sup> year as president and especially as I take on the leadership of a large, new, multi-year capital campaign. The heart of my time off was spent as a chaplain at a monastery in rural England and in a silent retreat in Northern Wales. I needed to have some distance from Seattle U. and some peace and prayer. What emerged for me was an overwhelming feeling of gratitude for the people of this university, for the students we serve of course, but especially the faculty, staff, advisory boards and alumni of Seattle U who are colleagues and friends. Where else are there people like these: competent people, caring people, committed people, open and inclusive people, creative people, spiritual people, people united by mission, good people.

I confess that I, and I'm sure you too, can miss it in the hurly burly of the business of the day, but step back, find your center, take a good look at what's most real and most important in your life and work, and see it's the people who are our colleagues who form our community, and the people of our families and our friends. I am overwhelmed by this feeling of blessing which surges up in gratitude for the people I get to know and with whom I get to work for a compelling purpose.

I find this overflowing gratitude for the relationships among us does more than anything else to make me ready and give me energy for the year. I wonder how you are in that regard. What chance have you had, or need to have, in order to allow gratitude for each other to emerge. I will ask you in a moment—to the extent you are willing—to talk about that with one another. Maybe what we most need today, as we begin the year together is to enjoy some gratitude for one another so that it will smooth out the bumps ahead of us and those bumps inside of us.

### Cohesion

The other thing I think we most need is a strong and abiding sense of cohesion in all that we are doing as we move forward toward that 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary. What gives us cohesion as we continue to advance our academic quality; to provide the resources of technology, space, and personnel for what we seek to accomplish; to create a more transformative and integrated student experience; to face more forthrightly the issues for students of the affordability of a college education and a clear path to a career? What gives us cohesion as we undertake together a great campaign for resources to take us into the next era; as we build on our developing strengths in science, technology, engineering, and math, so that the very best new facilities will make us the leader in undergraduate education in these most important areas; as we confirm the essential role and value of the liberal arts in our education; as we foster faculty research, scholarship, and artistic endeavor as critical to our academic quality; as we find the needed and appropriate means

of shared governance with faculty and a voice for all in our decision-making; as we take our Seattle University Youth Initiative to its next level of impact; as we develop new and creative, graduate programs amid greater competition; as we enter boldly in keeping with our mission and way of education, into online or hybrid course instruction? What gives us cohesion as we exploit the unique opportunities we have in our nursing programs and in our location and partnerships to develop new programs in health sciences; as we assure and deepen our Catholic and Jesuit animating character; as we ensure the financial oversight, accountability, resource development, and allocation to make all of this possible?

### Our strategic plan

Way back there at the start of that very long question were the words “what gives cohesion” to all of this? We have an answer to this question. Our answer to what gives cohesion to all we are about is that we have an approved clear, simple, coherent strategic plan to guide us, keep us on track, remove the confusion, and give us cohesion. Because we so badly need to have coherence or our bearings, we all can be helped by refreshing our understanding of that strategic plan. It was developed intentionally and deliberately in the bustle of last year, endorsed by the Board of Trustees, and rolled out in the spring, but we may have missed its true impact and its clarity of purpose for our endeavors.

The strategic plan is on our website and I want all of you to have copies of it and I’ll assure you do. I’ve gone back to it recently in order to get my bearings for the year. Let me tell you how I summarize it. Our strategic plan for the coming five years has four points to it. I see them as the compass points which allow us to know where we are going and, if we get lost, where we are at any time.

### True north

The first point is like our “true north”. It is what we are most centrally about. I call it, if I use words beginning with “c”, our “capacity”, or if I use words beginning with “f” our “foundations”. It is headlined by stating: “We will strengthen our capacity to provide high-quality and transformational education rooted in the Jesuit tradition.” This first strategic goal is realized through hiring and supporting faculty for teaching and scholarship, through deeper student engagement with the world as in the Youth Initiative and global education, and through advancing our Jesuit Catholic character and interreligious dialogue. This first, fundamental or foundational goal pulls together what we’re essentially about; it corrals our capacity: high-quality, transformational education in the Jesuit tradition. This is indeed our “true north”; all else pivots around it.

### Careers

The second goal and compass point of our strategic plan—maybe “West” as in “Go west young man or woman!”—is all about in “c”s, “careers”; in “f”s “futures”: “We will prepare our graduates to lead meaningful and successful professional lives.” It is a new day for all

universities in terms of how well they prepare students for careers, connect their major with careers, and provide professional pathways for students of all levels of study. Our second strategic goal seeks to integrate academic and career advising, build partnerships especially for internships, and prepare students by undergraduate research to go on to graduate study if they so choose. In effect we will be much more serious and practical about the futures of our students.

### Broadening the education

Our third strategic goal is to broaden our educational offerings and our means of delivering them. I call this the goal about “challenges” or about “flexibility”. The goal says succinctly: “We will meet the challenges and opportunities of the changing educational and economic environment.” Here is where we base a major development of education in science, technology, engineering, math, and health sciences. In meeting the challenges of today we will develop continuing education graduate and adult degree completion programs, and utilize technology for hybrid and online academic courses and programs in keeping with our Jesuit way of education. To meet the economic challenges of today, we must address more forthrightly the affordability issue for our students. This strategic goal, probably more than others, faces the rapidly changing higher education environment. We must be prudent, loyal to the legacy of the past, but we also must be bold.

### Infrastructure

The final strategic goal with its set of initiatives, which brings cohesion to our efforts, speaks to our campus and our facilities. It asserts: “We will realize an infrastructure that supports excellence and innovation in all facets of our education.” Perhaps this goal touches each of us daily because it addresses our needs for space, for physical infrastructures, and for state-of-the-art technology necessary to do our work and to meet student expectations. It makes clear our decision that we will move forward boldly this decade’s campus-transforming project of building a new facility to promote and expand science education and innovation, while at the same time creating more space for classrooms and offices. It is both the project of the decade and the cornerstone of the campaign.

### One plan

There is simplicity and clarity in our strategic plan which gives cohesion to all we do. Our plan focuses on: foundations, futures, flexibility, and facilities. It brings cohesion by giving us our compass points of capacity, careers, challenges, and campus. It is admirable in its succinctness and its selectivity of initiatives. We can’t do everything; we have to choose. What we do needs to have a cohesion about it or else we will feel scattered, overwhelmed and unsure of where we are going. It is not about doing more; it is about doing better or differently. Of course, we have other plans but all of them are based on the strategic plan and support its implementation. Our technology plan, our campaign plan, our academic plans, our financial plan, our human resources plan, our enrollment plans, our campus master plan, our diversity plan, do not compete with the strategic plan but derive from it, implement it, and make it real. I am asking you this morning as

we go into the year together, how great a sense of cohesion of purpose and effort do you experience through this strategic plan? Maybe more simply it's asking, "Are we changing in a responsible way to meet the challenges and opportunities in higher education?"

So far in this inauguration of the year leading up toward our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary I have spoken about particular achievements to applaud, the role of gratitude for one another as colleagues, and how our strategic plan gives us a much-needed cohesion.

### The importance of naming

There is a further thing I want to do. It comes from my experience of leadership of complex organizations for more than 25 years. I have learned that organizations such as ours often cannot move forward unless they frankly name where they are. As with our own individual, human growth or development, we can only open up a way forward if we can name where we are now. If we can't, we are often stymied and we don't know why. So let me try to name as frankly as I can some aspects of how I see where we are as a university.

- We have grown into a very large, complex, and rapidly changing university in a changing and highly competitive higher education landscape. This has required a strategic and deliberate increase in administrators of specific professional capabilities. Some think we've grown too much in this way; I know we have needed to in order to meet the new demands.
- We carried out a faculty and staff satisfaction survey last spring as we do every three years. While we continue to be strong in a number of key areas, some of the results did not match what I thought had been our progress in governance, transparency, leadership, compensation and resources over three years before. I, and the cabinet, take this seriously. We are bringing the results to you by schools, colleges, and divisions so that all can see the results and working with your leadership can suggest what we can do to improve.
- The other day when I gave a talk to about 200 members of our various boards—you can find that talk about my thinking online—someone caught me off guard with the question, "Father, if someone unexpectedly gave you five million dollars, what would you do with it?" I surprised myself by saying without skipping a beat, "I would invest all five million dollars in technology." We are making huge investments in this area, but I want to name the reality that we are only part way along on what we will need to do in this very expensive area.
- I want to name a student reality. What is it that the students are pressing us on? Here is what many of them want us to join with them in addressing: a disabilities-friendly campus, transgender recognition and needs, a deeper and truer diversity, a tobacco-free campus, and divestment in fossil fuels. They choose their issues; we don't. We need to know and to name their issues and to work with them on what counts for them.

- I want to name and acknowledge that we did not have the level of campus safety policies, training, preparedness, and practices which we needed. We are getting about this under great leadership but we still have more to do and it will require the investment and the cooperative engagement of all of us.
- While we are sound financially, I need to name that we are more resource-needy or starved than usual because of the changing environment. It's the reason behind the campaign and why I will be giving 50% of my time to it. I need your support as we seek these new resources. I also need to name the fact that our finances for the next and subsequent budgets will necessarily be tight because of the demands.
- Finally, I want to name what has become more clear to me recently. We are far too modest both among ourselves and in telling our story to others than we should be in light of what any objective perspective on our university makes evident about our academic quality, student experience, service, and impact. I don't know if it is "Seattle nice" or "Jesuit nice", or "First Hill humility". We must change from a false modesty to a deserved pride and be unafraid to brand and to market—yes, I used those words—Seattle U. in an ongoing and comprehensive communications strategy. We are all brand ambassadors and the new strategy to be unveiled in the coming weeks will help each of us tell the Seattle University story with greater clarity and impact.

I was wondering, as I wrote this part of my speech, how many presidents are willing in a public forum with all university colleagues to name frankly these realities, especially while generating enthusiasm for a new year. I do so because I think naming is freeing, not negative, that frankness fortifies rather than weakens. I want to ask you what else you think needs to be named in a frank manner so that we can be more freed up to go forward.

### Turning 70

I also am able to be more frank because I am now a long-termer as your president and have nothing to prove. I also have arrived at a certain age which makes for a reality check. I turned 70 this summer. I know you don't believe that! I'm out to prove my theory that each decade is better than the previous one in the fullness and depth and joy of life. Remember when you were 20 and did not want to turn 30? And remember when you were in your 30s and were so glad you got beyond your 20s! Well, it keeps happening like that. However, I'm not so sure my Mom would have said she enjoyed her 90s more than her 80s, so maybe there is a turning point when my theory falls apart.

I had a most unusual 70<sup>th</sup> birthday party. I was rather hoping to avoid any attention given to it altogether. I found myself in the days surrounding August 3<sup>rd</sup> at an enclosed Carmelite Monastery in rural England. This means the nuns do not go out. But I, as their chaplain for nine days, was on the outside of the monastery. I decided to tell Sister Lesley Lockwood—some of you remember her as my Executive Secretary 10 years ago—that I was going to turn 70 while there, so that they would not learn later and feel bad. Sister Lesley was excited. They threw a party for me. I was directed to come at ten to seven one evening to the large visitors' parlor. It's about the size of a classroom, with a low shelf from wall to wall dividing the parlor in two. I

entered from the outside door and 18 nuns in full habit entered from the monastery door on the other half of the divided room. There I sat in an armchair alone on my side of the room, cut a ginger cake with pecan frosting, as we all drank a glass of an alcoholic punch, and they sang and got more giddy by the minute. I happen to think I am funny; but apparently I have never been as funny as seemed evident with those 18 nuns. Forty minutes of frivolity and they trundled back to their silence and their prayer, and I was off into my new better-than-the-last-for-sure decade! Beat that for a birthday party!

So these are the things I have wanted to say in this President's Welcome: moving forward toward our 125<sup>th</sup>, applauding special achievements, gathering ourselves by gratitude, gathering our efforts by a cohesive plan, and naming some of our shared realities so that we can be freed for the future. I would now ask you, at your places, to take a bit of time for discussion and ask yourselves what do you applaud, what are you grateful for, how can we be more cohesive in all we do, and what would be helpful to name to free up the future? Talk about any of that among yourselves, and then we'll open it up for your comments or questions.