

2015 Spring Presidential Address

Wednesday, April 1, 2015

Good afternoon, and welcome. The Spring Presidential Address provides us with an opportunity to gather for a report on the progress of the University. Thank you for joining me for what I hope will be an informative and enlightening look into the opportunities and challenges facing UAlbany.

First, I would like to acknowledge the faculty, staff, and students here with us today, as well as board members from our University Council, University at Albany Foundation and Alumni Association. I would also like to recognize Provost Jim Stellar, members of my executive committee and our Council of Deans. These are the leaders that assist me in shaping a compelling vision for the future of this University and play an integral role in engaging all of you to help us carry out our mission.

I am proud to stand before you as the 19th President of this University. As you will recall, during my inaugural address, I identified four areas that will advance the University to the next level of excellence. These include expanding degree-granting programs, recruiting more out-of-state and international students, enhancing our community engagement culture, and growing our resources to fulfill our mission. Over the past year, we have focused on advancing these areas in a number of ways:

For example, we have continued to grow our research portfolio, including:

- The launch of a UAlbany-led advanced statewide weather observation system, or Mesonet;
- The pursuit of big data analytics as an opportunity to advance our academic profile and to help finance our mission; and
- The advancement of the immense potential of the RNA Institute as a strategy for discovering new solutions in human health.

We have not wavered in our commitment to public engagement. Our partnership as the host institution of The Albany Promise is a tangible example of this commitment. And just recently we launched a data collection system to help us capture and communicate our efforts to apply research-based solutions to complex societal issues;

We have witnessed a 55 percent increase in the number of international students in recent years and have implemented an aggressive plan to nearly double this enrollment over the next five years. At the same time, we have furthered our commitment to diversity and inclusion. Through U ACCESS, we are able to offer distinctive programming that draws our diverse campus together.

Also, I would be remiss if I did not cite Athletics as an example of our excellence. We have experienced an incredible year for our athletic program. The program garnered numerous NCAA tournament bids and accolades, coupled with

high graduation rates for student athletes. The athletic program's success is an institutional asset that:

- Contributes to our institutional reputation,
- Deepens alumni pride,
- Promotes philanthropy, and
- Attracts prospective students.

In addition, we have made great progress in growing and managing our fiscal resources:

For example, I am pleased with our progress in developing a strategic legislative agenda at both the State and Federal levels. This will secure funds to advance our academic vision and build a coalition of awareness and support in the political arena, which I believe is absolutely necessary in New York State. Just this week, our efforts secured \$250,000 in seed funding to establish the NYSTAR Center of Excellence in Atmospheric and Environmental Prediction and Innovation. This designation will help us to leverage federal funding sources.

As you know, we launched a new compact planning and budget process intended to improve the transparency and strategic nature of our financial decision making.

And in development, we are cultivating growth in giving across the board. We were extremely honored to receive a \$5.25 million gift -- the largest gift ever made to UAlbany -- from the Massry family to support the School of Business and University-wide initiatives.

While these examples indicate our University is forging a new path, we must also address some serious financial and reputational challenges.

We have come face-to-face with the cumulative effects of insufficient investments over the past decade -- investments in people, in discovery, in our physical plant, and in the high need academic programs. We need more competitive scholarship awards and support packages to attract the top students at all levels. We are also losing ground in competitive salaries and experiencing increased compression in our compensation structures.

And, we must continue to invest in a research infrastructure that will sustain discovery, scholarship and increased faculty productivity. As previously announced, initial efforts to address these issues include a Blue Ribbon Panel, which has been charged with developing a series of recommendations to enhance the professional experiences of our part-time and contingent faculty colleagues. I have also established a Presidential Initiatives Fund for Research and Scholarship aimed at providing seed funding for multidisciplinary research.

However, our most significant financial threat is declining enrollment. Over the past eight years, the total annual enrollment of this University has decreased by more than one thousand students. Continued failure to hit these

targets will have real financial consequences, particularly as Chancellor Zimpher calls for system-wide growth. We must strive to reverse this trend to ensure adequate funds to advance our mission.

We must also work to improve perceptions of our academic excellence. Despite our world class research and scholarship, successful alumni, and some of the most diverse and engaged students in the SUNY system, we need to do more to advance our institutional reputation. I expect our new Vice President for Communications and Marketing will spearhead the development of an institutional communications strategy, which will require all of us to embrace the institutional brand.

Though we have challenges, I am energized by the possibilities.

As much as I believe this is a great university, I know we all recognize it can -- and must -- achieve more.

At this point in our history, the University's identity and our reputation are heavily influenced by two things: the scope of our academic offerings and the quality of the academic experience we offer. Today, I invite everyone to reimagine the academic profile of the University. I believe there are three critical strategies that have the power to transform the University at Albany and advance its reputation as a truly great public research university. They are:

- Enhancing the student experience,
- Expanding the academic profile, and
- Developing a new vision for the East Campus.

The first strategy will be familiar to us all, yet transformational nonetheless. We must unite in advancing our efforts to improve the student experience, both by enhancing the undergraduate experience and strengthening graduate education.

Provost Stellar is working hard to counteract enrollment and retention issues with a renewed focus on improving the undergraduate experience. In order to improve undergraduate retention, Jim has assembled a Workgroup on Enhancing the Student Experience, which will work to:

- Identify additional strategies to improve educational outcomes,
- Improve first to second year retention,
- Reduce time to degree,
- Increase student satisfaction, and
- Support our graduates' successful transition from college to career.

To make material progress in improving the undergraduate experience, it is necessary for academic affairs and student affairs to work together seamlessly. The Provost's office and the Office of Student Success, have increased

both the number of Writing and Critical Inquiry instructors for freshmen and the number of the Living-Learning Communities. We are also working to implement technology-assisted advising tools, such as an early warning system to help identify individual students at risk for dropping out of UAlbany.

In addition, we continue significant efforts to improve recruitment and increase enrollment. Our undergraduate admissions team has instituted the use of a powerful system to automate communications with prospective undergraduate students. The department has also extended our reach to out-of-state audiences by adding five domestic regional recruiters and a part-time international recruiter.

I believe an initial focus on enhancing the undergraduate experience is a good start, but I also acknowledge we need to do more for all students, particularly our graduate students.

In order to achieve enrollment increases at the graduate level, we must become more competitive in recruiting the best and brightest. This will require us to increase and strengthen our program offerings at the Master's level and offer fair and competitive levels of graduate student support. To this end, I look forward to receiving recommendations from the Graduate Student Stipend Committee by the end of this semester. In addition, to ensure we are delivering a high quality graduate education, we also examine our organizational structure for administering graduate education.

As we endeavor to improve the student experience and increase the enrollment of students locally, nationally and abroad, we also must continue to invest in faculty excellence, from recruitment and retention, to faculty development and more competitive salaries. Let us not forget that it is the faculty who will ensure the academic excellence that will sustain and advance our institutional reputation.

The second strategy also relies on faculty excellence and engagement. Together we must expand the scope of the academic profile of this university in ways that will increase our capacity for innovation, productivity and excellence.

We have begun to expand the academic profile by providing a public option for engineering in the Capital Region. We are now embracing a vision for a College of Engineering and Applied Sciences, to be located in the Schuyler Building on the Downtown Campus.

An urban location allows us to be the distinctive driver for economic revitalization in the city. The vision includes a makers' space with public-private partnerships, such as those through the Start-Up New York program.

New programs, beginning with courses in computer engineering, will help us to better educate and retain more students to meet the demands of our local industries. The best opportunity to establish the University's engineering presence is to create niche programs that capitalize on our existing strengths. Of course, such an endeavor would not be possible without the solid foundation and building blocks developed by our College of Computing and Information.

Our next step is to use a portion of the \$4 million in capital funding to support a wider Downtown Revitalization Initiative. As part of the design and planning for the Schuyler renovation, we will conduct a corridor study that includes examination of the interface between the Downtown Campus and adjacent city neighborhoods.

We will create a College of Emergency Preparedness, Homeland Security and Cybersecurity. I thank Governor Cuomo for the confidence he places in us as the home to this very unique new college. In order to stand up the foundation of a collegiate unit by this fall, Provost Stellar has asked Dean David Rousseau to lead this effort and name a steering committee to help shape the academic vision and direction for the new college.

In this spirit, we will continue to work closely with our own faculty experts from the School of Public Health, the School of Business, Rockefeller College and the College of Computing and Information, and several state agencies.

The designation came with a \$15 million capital appropriation to construct a facility to house the new college, but we quickly noted synergies between the needs of the new college and our plans for our Emerging Technology and Entrepreneurship Complex, or E-TEC for short. Therefore, we have requested an amendment to change the site location of the E-TEC building to include the new College and to build it on a 12 acre track on the Harriman campus.

Chancellor Zimpher is supportive of our request to modify our campus 2020 plan and we now are awaiting final approval from the Governor's office. This will delay the opening of the E-TEC building by up to 18 months, but the long-term gains are worth it.

We will also expand our academic profile by deepening our institutional affiliation with Albany Law School. As you know, we have been engaging in discussions in this regard over the past 12 months.

Affiliation with Albany Law will provide a multitude of new opportunities for program renewal and innovative inquiry that would significantly benefit both institutions and the region.

Our faculties are already working to design new interdisciplinary degree programs that neither could offer alone. Together we can redefine how legal education will be delivered in the future.

Finally, we are advancing a strategy to develop a new vision for the East Campus. The East Campus is home to academic excellence in the School of Public Health and the Cancer Research Center, and corporate tenants, like Regeneron Pharmaceuticals.

Nonetheless, many of us share in the anticipation of a more vibrant, synergistic future for the East Campus. A strategic vision for this campus is emerging as the University at Albany's Health Sciences Research Campus.

This vision opens several pathways for expanding the scope of the University. We will explore the possibility of deeper academic and research affiliations with Downstate Medical Center, Albany Medical College and the New York State Department of Health, as well as with other public and private agencies and institutions.

Programs such as START-UP New York and the Governor's broadband expansion plan will be utilized to establish new collaborative partnerships that will spur additional academic innovation, specifically in the biotech and health science fields.

By summer, I will charge a working group to explore the opportunities inherent to this vision and produce a recommendation to be shared with the campus community.

Today I have shared with you our ambitious vision to expand the University at Albany into a much more comprehensive public research University than ever before.

If we want to advance and distinguish the University at Albany:

- We must grow our enrollment by broadening our academic offerings and cultivating new programs;
- We must deliver graduates who meet the demands of today's global economy and help them to cultivate the critical skills necessary to successfully reinvent themselves throughout their lives;
- We must continue to invest in our research infrastructure and embrace public engagement as an outreach vehicle for translating the knowledge and expertise of the campus to the community;
- We must position the University as an integral partner in economic development and community improvement.
- We must remember that the greatest comprehensive universities maintain a strong and vibrant core in the liberal arts and humanities that informs interdisciplinary inquiry and prepares its students to become global citizens;
- And finally, if we want to advance and distinguish the University at Albany, we must tell our story in a way that enhances our institutional reputation, and garners the additional students and resource investments needed for a vibrant future.

I know we have a lot of hard work ahead and there will be choices and tradeoffs. This is precisely why I invite you to join me in building our UAlbany of the future. Since our founding as a normal school, the University has fostered innovation through visionary endeavors such as our School of Public Health, the Rockefeller College, and the College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering, among others.

Once again, we are reimagining our University from the inside out. We are the generation of stewards who will expand the University's academic footprint and provide truly transformational learning experiences to our students.

I know I can count on you to be fully engaged in our efforts to help the University at Albany fulfill its destiny as a comprehensive university and elevate us to a higher level of excellence.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.