

Fall Faculty Address

Interim President James R. Stellar

Performing Arts Center

Wednesday, November 9, 2016

2:00 p.m.

Good afternoon everyone. Thank you all for being here.

It is a privilege to have this opportunity to speak with you as your Interim President. Let me begin by thanking the University Senate for providing this forum. Shared governance is an important principle and that begins with our Senate. I also want to recognize the students in the audience who have their own senate and who, with our faculty and staff, complete the campus community.

Let us also recognize the alumni here today, because I know many of our colleagues were once UAlbany students.

Finally, let us appreciate the community around us. We are a public research university in the State of New York and in the city of Albany and we serve many constituencies.

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I know that many of us stayed up very late last night, and that today we are all taking in the outcome.

As an academic community, many of us will be occupied with studying and making sense of this election. In fact, Rockefeller College is putting together an event tomorrow with faculty experts to discuss the election and start a dialogue with the campus community. And I know we will continue to bring our tremendous expertise in this area to bear on the national discussion as well.

Unlike the candidates last night, I only prepared one speech. And that's the speech I'm going to give. Because my report to you on where we stand as a university remains the same.

Our purpose today is to talk about where we stand and where we are going, especially given the leadership transition. I am eager to hear from you, so I will keep my remarks fairly brief to leave more time for discussion. I have asked our leadership team to sit in the front so that they can help me answer your questions.

As some of you know, over the past seven weeks I have spent time on something of a listening tour. I have met faculty in small groups over lunches in the Patroon Room, and individually around campus, and over coffee in my

office. I've also met with staff and students, and alumni here in Albany and in other cities.

Naturally, I also spend a lot of my time with administrators, and I assure you that there is not a finer senior leadership team anywhere. I want to particularly single out interim provost Darrell Wheeler, with whom I am honored to serve.

Our primary job in senior administration is to support the front-line work of the university, where faculty deliver and staff support the daily mission, led by department chairs, unit heads, and of course Deans. Some of you have decades of service, and we rely on you.

And to our extraordinary faculty: I know why you are in this line of work, because I started the same way you did. We fell in love with our disciplines, and that passion is what makes for great scholarship, research, and creative endeavors. It also makes for high-level teaching of those subjects we love.

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If I have heard one thing across all of my conversations in this listening tour, it is that for us to move us forward, we must be a community. We must work together and turn our size and complexity into an advantage of strength and mutual support. We must reduce silos and look for common cause.

We need to join forces in our research like we did to win the recent \$10 million NIH grant for work on the elimination of minority health disparities.

We must scale our impact, the way our students do with 900,000 hours of community service annually.

I agree wholeheartedly with the sentiment that we need to act as a community. So how do we do it? Fortunately, we stand on a very solid foundation. We have the right vision and the right initiatives. As a result we have created momentum that is ours to use. Working together, we are on our way to UAlbany's largest academic expansion in 50 years.

- We are growing our enrollment to 20,000 students through improved admission and retention strategies. And there is good news here: freshman to sophomore retention is at a six-year high of 84 percent. Freshman applications are up 6.5 percent, and for the past two years we've had the largest-ever freshman classes. And we are just beginning to more effectively recruit transfer students.
- At the graduate level, we are expanding Master's enrollments through new programs and better management of existing ones. We deeply value our PhD students, some of whom will become the next generation of faculty scholar-teachers. But it is the tuition revenue from additional

undergraduate and master's students that will provide the resources we need for programmatic expansion.

- We are building two new colleges: Engineering and Applied Sciences and Emergency Preparedness, Homeland Security, and Cybersecurity.
- We have seen strong student interest in majors and minors in these new programs...including many from out of state and internationally. This is good, because these programs must carry their basic expenses with revenue from new students.
- We are paying special attention to expanding School of Business enrollments, which will enable us to hire additional high-quality faculty.
- This year we hired 73 excellent new faculty, about 25 percent of whom are in the new colleges. I'd like to pause here and recognize all of the new faculty members who have joined us over the past few years. You are the best investment in our future that we could possibly make.
- We also have new academic majors and masters programs—like Digital Forensics, a Master's in International Affairs, a new undergraduate major in Human Development, and an expanded online Master's in Public Health.
- I know many people were involved in making these new programs a reality, and I just want to thank everyone who worked on the proposals and helped move them through the approval process.
- We are forging a new affiliation with Albany Law School and building on existing relationships, like the 30-year partnership between Wadsworth Labs and our School of Public Health.
- We are doubling our international recruitment, and giving as many of our students as possible the opportunity to study abroad.
- We are enhancing our use of Applied Learning, particularly during the sophomore year, to connect students with internships, undergraduate research, service opportunities, study abroad, and so much more.
- We are building on our national leadership in criminal justice one exceptional faculty hire at a time, one national journal at a time.
- We are deploying Rockefeller College and the School of Social Welfare in many aspects of public engagement here at home and around the world.
- And let me single out the College of Arts and Sciences, our largest, which touches virtually all aspects of University life, and provides outstanding programs of study across 36 majors.
- By next year, we will have completed the campus center expansion and renovations. And we will break ground on the ETEC facility on 12 acres that we secured on the Harriman Campus.
- We continue our campaign to renovate the Schuyler Building as the home of the College of Engineering and Applied Sciences.
- We will renovate the structures on the podium one by one starting this summer, in a truly massive program that will take well over a decade, but which is absolutely necessary to secure the Uptown Campus for the next century.

- On that note, I want to thank our facilities staff who not only oversee our renovation work, but keep the campus looking beautiful every day. That beauty not only attracts students, faculty, and staff to join us, but it got us on a list of the 20 most attractive public campuses in America!
- Meanwhile, we are striving to meet the recommendations of our blue ribbon commissions on graduate stipends and on contingent faculty.
- We will work with our unions to forge common cause.
- We continue to celebrate our Educational Opportunity Program, which retained 197 of its 200 freshmen from last year, and grew this year to a record freshman class of 250.
- And here is to our coaches and student athletes who continue to be great leaders on campus, great champions in the sports arena, and Great Danes everywhere!

Enough examples for you? Well, it is not a complete list, but then I promised you a shorter speech. The result of all this work is that we are on the move. Or as we sometimes say to each other in my office, *our time is now*.

We are rising at UAlbany, and with a commitment to remain as affordable as possible, keeping our public mission at the center of all that we do.

I have been here before. I was once dean of arts and sciences at a university that went from a US News ranking of 165 to a current ranking of 39. My college doubled in size to 6,000 students even as the SAT scores rose 250 points. Because of that experience, I know what is possible and I feel it happening here.

To keep **our** momentum going, we need smart strategies and that is where Strategic Planning comes in. This work is already in motion, as many of you know, and the committee is co-chaired by Darrell Wheeler and Leanne Wirkkula.

We are starting where we are, but imagining a future that includes your new ideas, collected and shared this fall, to be considered in the coming months for feasibility and affordability. This planning process is truly going to set the course for all of our priorities and resource allocation for the next five years, so this is no time to sit on the sidelines.

I am grateful to those who are serving on the steering committee, and there are two ways I would I invite you all to get involved: First, read and comment on the 18 futuring papers on the Strategic Planning website. Second, join us on December 9th and 10th for what I hope will be a remarkable event, the Concert of Ideas, which will use music to build a community of creative thinkers.

As Ludwig von Beethoven once said "*Music is the electrical soil in which the spirit lives, thinks and invents.*"

There is a lot of evidence that the arts and humanities help us get to deeper and more creative thinking as a group, and I think this approach could extend past its use in strategic planning to our entire community.

I know the role of the arts and humanities in a public research university is a topic that many people feel very strongly about, as do I. Let me make something very clear: In this time of growth in the STEM and professional fields, a commitment to the arts and the humanities is not just about producing engineers or project managers who can write. It is also about attracting more students to major or minor in the arts and in the humanistic fields.

To do that, we need to help students and their families envision career paths to jobs or further schooling. We need to battle the perception that the opportunities after graduation are not as strong for artists and humanists.

The data simply refute that position. We know employers across the board want the skills that these graduates possess.

We got a good start in a dialogue about the role of the arts and humanities at the spring faculty address last April, but we have barely scratched the surface. As promised, we have scheduled a campus conversation on this topic, which will be held on February 27th.

Another ongoing conversation that will be a focus of the Strategic Plan is our commitment to diversity and inclusion.

From many discussions I am very much aware of the concern that despite our strong efforts, we are not moving fast enough or effectively enough. We must not only keep talking, we must act.

One priority area is recruiting and retaining more diverse faculty members, and we must have pipelines to develop those faculty members. We are blessed with a highly diverse student population and we need our faculty to more closely reflect that diversity. Let us continue to build a diverse community of excellence.

Universities can lead social change, and what better way to do that than educating our students to live and work in an increasingly diverse country? So another priority is to keep having broad campus conversations. After all, what do academics do better than talk? Let us use that strength to teach each other how diversity is excellence.

Another important aspect of our campus climate is the response to and prevention of sexual assault.

Under the Office of the Title IX Coordinator we have launched a very ambitious Empowered Bystander Training and Awareness Program that is already having an impact in a very short time.

We set out this year to train 25 percent of our students to respond to violent situations. Bystander Intervention is successful because it engages so many people from across our campus and the broader community. And there are some powerful practices here that we may want to replicate in our other initiatives—anywhere we need change agents to lead us to a cultural shift.

And it just so happens that tomorrow evening at 6:00, Channel 13 will be running a story that features our Bystander training and the wonderful work our students are doing, under the leadership of Title IX Coordinator Chantelle Cleary and Advocacy Center for Sexual Violence Director Carol Stenger.

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I think there are a few other things we must do.

We should stop focusing entirely on graduation as the endpoint of our responsibility and look to the impact on our students' lives after graduation—whether it is the job after college or graduate studies.

We have to commit to what SUNY calls Applied Learning, to complement the excellent work our faculty do in the classroom. Applied learning has many forms, including undergraduate research, study abroad, internships, service-learning, and entrepreneurship.

We should encourage internships with academic credit or digital badges, a potential new form of non-credit credentialing.

The Blackstone Launchpad is a powerful example of applied learning and a resource for all of our students—in this case, to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset and business development skills across all disciplines.

Meanwhile, we also need to better define and tell our story, and we are working toward a re-branding campaign to do just that. Telling our story in compelling ways is critical to improved student recruitment.

And telling a powerful story of UAlbany is also important as we seek support from the state legislature and Congress for public resources, and increased support from our alumni and friends.

I can assure you that we will be telling that story throughout our comprehensive fundraising campaign, which is currently in its quiet phase, but is already consuming, appropriately, much of my time. I see Deans, Center Directors, Chairs, and individual faculty and staff stepping up to work closely with the Development team as they make the case to donors.

Finally, as we work to secure the resources to meet our mission, we must also be disciplined in our budgeting, always examining our operations for improvements and efficiencies.

As we approach the end of a decade since the budget cuts of 2008 and 2009, which I also lived through at CUNY, we must focus on how we can steward our resources responsibly, without abandoning our principles.

Families do it all the time, changing expenditures to match changing resources, needs, and opportunities. Their goal is preserving the fundamental mission of a happy/healthy/productive family. We all need to be that family here: caring, conversant with each other, understanding, but disciplined.

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Early on in this transition, our leadership team came together in a series of meetings.

We decided we could not wait to push forward with major projects like strategic planning and the fundraising campaign. It was heartening to me that you agreed. We filled the strategic planning steering committee two days after issuing the invitations. And our donors stand in solidarity with us on our campaign.

I could not be more confident about our future, because as a university on the move, we are strong.

We keep moving forward with purpose and goals in mind.

We rise to meet our challenges.

We seize the momentum that we are creating as a community.

Because we truly believe our time is now.

Join me in that vision.

Thank you all very much.