

No Time to Be Timid

University of Wyoming 2009 Convocation

Tom Buchanan, President

September 10, 2009

Welcome! Before I begin my talk, I'd like you to join me in thanking an extraordinary group of volunteers for the University of Wyoming. Our institution demands incredible excellence and time commitments from them, and in return, they get only the satisfaction of helping to build the best possible university. Will our Board of Trustees please stand so that we can thank you?

Today's convocation is the fifth time I've talked with you about the state of the university. I usually start thinking about my comments during the summer months, when I reread my previous convocation speeches. That reminds me to keep it brief. I also solicit suggestions from the university's vice presidents. The vice presidents remind me of the complexity of the university and the extraordinary accomplishments that are always happening, but are so often overlooked. Finally, I've gotten into the habit of setting aside interesting newspaper clippings and internet articles that are pertinent to higher education and the environment in which we operate.

I have to tell you, reviewing those articles was difficult. Unemployment, budget shortfalls, bankruptcy, foreclosure, state deficits, layoffs, benefits reductions, salary cuts, furloughs, and ugly political fights. Unfortunately, this is the type of language we've become all too familiar with over the past year. There have been major cuts to higher education in California, Florida, Arizona, Wisconsin, and Colorado. Our colleagues around the country are feeling the pinch. No one is immune.

One thing I have noticed while reading these articles is that the University of Wyoming is far better off than most other public universities. Cranes are in the air on campus. The College of Business is taking shape. War Memorial Stadium is undergoing a facelift. The new wing of Coe Library is open, and the rest of the Coe Library facility is undergoing a major renovation. The new Information Technology facility is fully operational. Ground-breaking will take place this month for the Berry Center for Biodiversity and Conservation, and ground-breaking for a new Biosafety Level III Veterinary Lab occurred this summer. Finally, funding is in place for the School of Energy Resources Center and planning is underway.

Clearly, Wyoming and UW are not out of the woods. It has felt for many of us like falling down a flight of stairs. It hurts like hell, but you're anxious to get to the bottom. I hope that last year's budget cuts were the end of it, but I don't know that for sure. Despite some uncertainty, UW must remain focused on the goals we articulated in University Plan 3, its relevance to the state, and its process of effective shared governance.

Challenging times reveal the character and commitment of a university. Let me be clear, our commitment is to the educational enterprise. Faculty and students are UW's two most important assets—they are at the core of our mission. We tested this commitment last spring when it became clear that budget reductions would be a reality. We engaged in a university-wide process that produced 11 white papers from every major campus constituency. That process came upon us more suddenly than we would have liked, but thanks to our faculty, staff, and student leadership it was an example of shared governance of which we should all be proud. More than 90 percent of the budget reductions that we implemented were recommendations developed during this process.

UW's approach has had some critics. That's not a surprise. We could have relied on quiet, steady, unplanned attrition in our ability to teach university-level writing, oral communication, quantitative reasoning, scientific literacy, and the arts. Across the nation, history shows that this approach generates few if any headlines, no venomous letters to the editor, and few political liabilities. But, as safe as this strategy might be, it makes us weaker in the very areas where society at large rightfully wants us to be stronger. We didn't take the easy road; we took the road that was right for our students.

I know many of you in the audience, and I know how much you love this extraordinary institution. I challenge you to look for positive ways to work with colleagues and administrators, legislators and trustees, and students and alums to maintain and build upon UW's momentum as we chart our own course rather than simply roll on down this bumpy road. So let's get on with it. Let's look forward rather than back, and let's do it together.

In the bigger scheme of things, the economic downturn is a small blip on our institutional radar screen. Since the turn of the century, we have advanced our institution in every measurable category, and together, we will continue this impressive progress. Our instructional workforce—professors and lecturers—is stronger than it has ever been. The faculty losses of the 1980s and 1990s have been restored, and we've added distinguished faculty in recognized areas of distinction advanced by our strategic plans—a total of more than 100 in the last 10 years. Our capital expenditures have also grown tremendously. From 2000 through 2005, expenditures on capital projects averaged just over \$22 million per year. From 2006 through 2009, capital expenditures more than tripled to over \$70 million annually. Evidence of this enormous growth in capital investment can be seen all around us every day.

As distasteful as a budget cut is, UW *can* take this one step back and still maintain the great momentum we've enjoyed in this millennium. UW will be in a far better position to move forward than many other universities. We have a clear vision of what we're trying to do. Most institutions have strategic plans that are as much fun to read as the Fort Collins phone book; we have a strategic plan that is both literate and inspiring. Read it, and help make it come true. We know where we're going. We know how to get there. This is no time to be timid.

Universities are among society's most complex organizations, and I can't do justice to all facets of our future in a single speech that you'd sit still for. So let me mention briefly a few key directions outlined in University Plan 3.

First, let's talk about computing. There was a time, not too long ago, when computing was the private domain of mathematicians and computer scientists. What is now being described as the third branch of science has grown to encompass the cutting edge in engineering, biology, ecology, neuroscience, chemistry, physics, material science, and the geosciences, to name a few. Unnoticed by many, Provost Myron Allen and many of our deans and department heads have for several years been ratcheting up our faculty expertise in this third kind of science.

Developing our human resources in computational science turns out to have been an especially strategic move: not only does it position UW for the scientific future; it bolsters our developing partnership with the National Center for Atmospheric Research and our combined efforts with the National Science Foundation to site and fund a supercomputing facility in Wyoming. It is one thing to share a building; it is far more powerful to share an intellectual enterprise.

Last month I visited Washington D.C. with the Governor to meet with the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of Science and Technology, and the Director of the National Science Foundation. We came away with a firm timeline for the supercomputing project. I'm confident that we are on track for "moving dirt" as early as this coming spring.

At the same time, the Division of Information Technology here at UW began a university-wide initiative to restructure its support services. Budget challenges were the catalyst, but this restructuring is something we have discussed for years. During these last few years, UW's Division of Information Technology has developed into one of the best information technology units on any university campus in America, staffed by extraordinarily competent professionals and housed in a brand-spanking new facility with a world-class machine room that is the envy of anyone who knows anything about this stuff.

As a university, we need to think about our computational and technological future. Our students have grown up in a digital world, and the strength of our information technology affects every aspect of education and research that they experience. I challenge the university community to work with Robert Aylward, Vice President for Information Technology, and Bill Gern, Vice President for Research and Economic Development, to define a vision for information technology and computing that matches the quality of our facilities and the reputation of our faculty.

Second, let's talk about access and outreach. For several years we've talked about the growing importance of non-traditional students both on and off-campus. We've discussed their unique life situations and the personal and financial challenges they face. We've made progress, but not nearly enough.

I've asked Sara Axelson, Vice President for Student Affairs, to document the status of program and scholarship support for non-traditional students, and from this we'll set specific goals. Newly minted high school graduates enjoy the most financially supportive state in the country. The Hathaway Program is working and it's working well. However, our non-traditional undergraduate students, who now comprise 22 percent of our student body, have nothing comparable. They deserve better. In the past, I have urged state support for these students. This lack of support is an issue for all levels of higher education, not just UW. Given the current fiscal situation, state support is likely not realistic in the short term. But scholarship for non-traditional students will be a priority for our private fund-raising efforts at the University of Wyoming.

I also should mention UW's work study program. This federal program is an important source of aid for many students. But too many student positions have gone unfilled, and too many of the filled positions have little connection to our educational mission. We can and must do better. I have directed the transfer of the work study program to the Department of Human Resources, and I have charged the vice presidents with a significant redesign of the program to focus on jobs that are critical to the success of this institution. We can put some of these positions to better and higher use in our labs and in our studios, in our physical plant and in our security services, in our computer facilities and in our classrooms. It will take a little time to make the transition, but we will get it done.

A third ingredient to access is outreach. By now, I've made it clear that we're not the University of Laramie. Our campus is the state of Wyoming, and our reach is both substantial and significant. Non-traditional students are quickly becoming the enrollment bread and butter, and continuing education is increasingly important.

Associate Provost Maggi Murdock and the Outreach School help our faculty reach out into every county in the state, with degree programs and continuing education at a level that only a research university can provide. For example, on October 2, a group of Arts and Sciences faculty will travel to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, to deliver the first "Saturday University." This new program demonstrates a great effort on the part of the faculty. We need more of these innovative new programs, all over the state, involving all of our colleges. In the best future that Wyoming can imagine, UW faculty members will help cultivate the talents and capacities of all ages and backgrounds, in every home and in every profession in the state, and our reach will extend around the world. You have the vision; we'll help you get it done.

In the meantime, we're planning for a future that can accommodate even more effective outreach. Thanks to Governor Freudenthal's foresight, a statewide taskforce is developing recommendations for a more extensive and effective infrastructure to support distance education and teleconferencing throughout Wyoming. UW is playing a lead role in that effort, and we have reason to believe that UW's leadership will continue as these recommendations are implemented.

Our community college colleagues also play a critical role in promoting access to a UW education. Last month in Riverton, Central Wyoming College broke ground on a new Intertribal Education and Community Center. UW was there; we're a partner in that project, and by this time next year the university should be moved into the new outreach facilities with a 50-year lease. In Casper, under the leadership of Brent Pickett, Associate Dean and Director of the UW Casper College Center, our UW Casper College program continues to thrive. Our commitment to shared, consolidated, and expanded facilities on the Casper College campus remains strong, and we will be working with Casper College in the coming months to move forward. A joint facility with Laramie County Community College in Cheyenne is not far behind. What's more, discussions are underway for a strengthened partnership between UW and LCCC here in Laramie.

I would be remiss not to mention the hard work of the P-16 Education Council, whose mission is to guide the development of a seamless statewide system of education in which all levels of education coordinate, communicate, and educate as one system. It is vitally important for UW and the rest of the state to partner together and focus on the pre-kindergarten through college pipeline. We must better prepare our high school students for the transition to college. We must continue to increase access to a college education. We must continue to recruit and educate our future teachers.

Finally, outreach is not just about coursework and technology. It's also about the support services needed by our off-campus students. Vice President Axelson tells me that our Student Educational Opportunity programs are currently serving 5,200 students. These programs are designed to promote access to higher education in Wyoming and work with individuals who are economically disadvantaged, first generation college students, ethnic minorities, and disabled. 4,700 of these students are off campus, and 2,500 of that number are adult learners.

One final topic related to access is tuition. We've held undergraduate resident tuition constant for three years as the state has implemented the Hathaway Program. This fall I will take to the Board of Trustees a multi-year proposal to increase tuition for all students. For the last several years, the Governor and the Legislature have made it clear that Wyoming's resources were sufficient to avoid increasing the cost of attendance for undergraduate residents. This is no longer the case.

My proposal will direct funds from tuition increases to libraries and to instructional excellence. The Governor and the Legislature recognized the importance of both and supported funding increases for them in the 2008 budget session. Those increases fell to the budget cuts. We must not lose momentum in these long-neglected areas. I will ask the Associated Students of UW (ASUW) for their support and commit that their tuition dollars will go to support these needs, which are essential to the quality of education we provide.

Third, I want to turn our attention to internationalization and diversity. Just hours ago, thanks to a generous and forward-thinking gift by the Cheney family, we dedicated the new Cheney International Center. Consolidation of our international programs and offices in a new facility located in the heart of campus is more than a symbolic gesture. Enhancing the international experience is fundamental to engaging students in an ever-changing and interdependent global society.

Student study abroad opportunities have grown dramatically, but on too small a foundation. The Cheney family's generosity has allowed us to jump start this initiative. We need to continue their work with our fund-raising efforts for study abroad. To be timid at this time will limit the ability of our students to function in a global community.

In addition, we will continue to develop and enhance diversity. I am convinced that an encompassing approach to diversity is what we need. We have a rightful obligation to open our doors and our arms to all students, faculty, and staff, no matter what they look like, where they come from, or what their political ideologies might be. At times we will have to make special efforts to ensure that people from traditionally underrepresented and marginalized groups have fair opportunities to join the university community. We must not shrink from this responsibility even in a difficult economy. Now is the time to be bold in calling upon all our human resources. We will be better for it.

Diversity is everyone's business, but I've asked Nell Russell, Associate Vice President for Diversity, to take the lead on this university-wide initiative. The committee formerly known as PACMWA has been reconstituted as the Strategic Diversity Initiatives Committee. They have already begun their work, with a greater emphasis on the Laramie community at large.

Let me shift gears and talk about scholarship and research. For the umpteenth year in a row, UW's faculty, under the leadership of the Office of Research and Economic Development, has set a new record for funded research. This record is an astounding accomplishment and a tribute to our deans, department heads, and faculty. More than \$80 million last year in external funding for a university without a medical or veterinary school is nothing to shake a stick at. UW's research funding is strong in the biological and physical sciences, in agriculture and in engineering, and it's growing in health sciences, business, and education.

Five of our junior faculty were recipients of early CAREER awards, the National Science Foundation's most prestigious award for early career development. With Jun Ren from UW's School of Pharmacy at the helm, we will receive almost \$17 million over a five year period from the National Institutes of Health for our INBRE-related work (Institutional Networks of Biomedical Research Excellence). Twelve faculty have managed to tap federal stimulus funds for research totaling \$3 million. And we aren't done yet.

Our cross-college interdisciplinary efforts in energy are a big part of this growth. Faculty from the colleges of Arts and Sciences, Agriculture, Business, Education, Engineering and Applied Science, and Law and the School of Energy Resources have come together to respond to some critical energy and environmental challenges.

The High Plains Gasification-Advanced Technology Center, now in the final design stage, will give UW, GE Energy, and other researchers the opportunity to develop and validate advanced coal gasification technology solutions for Powder River Basin and other Wyoming coals. The center will also allow engineers, scientists, and students to gain experience in advanced coal gasification processes. The bottom line is that the center will identify ways to ensure Wyoming coal remains a strong player in the national energy portfolio.

I mentioned earlier the NCAR-Wyoming Supercomputing Facility in Cheyenne. This facility will be a cornerstone for UW's research efforts and will place UW among the front rank of universities in sophisticated scientific modeling.

And the Wyoming Carbon Underground Storage Project (WY-CUSP) is aptly named. UW is on the cusp of establishing a facility to demonstrate that sequestering carbon in underground structures will work, that it will work at a commercial scale, and that it will work best here in Wyoming. UW, the Wyoming State Geological Survey, and private industry have assembled expertise in geology, geophysics, engineering, modeling, and simulation to identify two huge capacity sites for carbon dioxide sequestration in southwestern Wyoming. These sites can hold Wyoming's present annual CO₂ emissions for more than 750 years into the future. We have been assisted in these efforts by our industry partners ExxonMobil and Baker Hughes who have committed data, expertise, and substantial in-kind support for our research.

Wyoming's investments in supply side energy issues over the past five years are beginning to pay off. But our commitment to supply side energy expertise is not all we're working on. If UW is a leader in energy research, we need to ensure we keep our own house in order as an energy user. We're doing just that.

As the School of Energy Resources has taken root, a quiet group of around 20 administrators, faculty, staff, and students from all over campus have come together as the Campus Sustainability Committee to address demand side contributions that UW can make to its own energy future. The catalyst for this effort occurred when I committed UW as one of the original signatories on the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment, a national effort of now more than 600 universities and colleges pledged to reducing our respective carbon footprints.

Integration of sustainable energy design in our Long Range Development Plan, commitments to achieve the United States Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver rating or better in all our new construction, appropriate integration of sustainability as a topic in classroom discussion, and modification of existing policies and practices to reduce institutional energy consumption are all part of UW's effort to balance our supply side and our demand side efforts.

Tomorrow I will share with the Board of Trustees the Climate Action Plan developed by the Campus Sustainability Committee for the Presidents' Climate Commitment. It's available on UW's website at <http://uwyo.edu/sustainability>, and I encourage you all to check it out. It's an impressive document that represents a lot of hard work.

This is no time for us to be timid regarding our responsibilities to sustainability. Balance is essential for a good education, and balance is crucial as we contribute to solving the energy challenges of tomorrow. It's not just about new science and new energy technologies. It's also about conservation, energy awareness, and human behavior. Our efforts in sustainability and in energy resources have to complement and support each other.

While I'm on the topic of balance, let me talk about the humanities and the arts.

Not too long ago I read some disturbing news about budget reductions and program eliminations in the arts and the humanities at UCLA, Washington State University, Florida State University, the University of Arizona, and Louisiana State University, to name a few. While budget reductions have clearly stung every corner of academe, the arts and humanities are bearing a disproportionate burden at many institutions because they are seen as less important than science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subject areas. I couldn't disagree more.

Our widespread recognition of the challenges that face science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education is important—these subjects are an important part of any university education in America. The support, growth, and development of STEM subject areas have garnered a substantial share of institutional resources.

But there's more to a well-balanced university education than science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. An article in last month's issue of *Harper's* magazine makes a brilliant case for the importance of the arts and the humanities in everyone's education. The deep civic function of the arts and the humanities is every bit as important a goal as technical and scientific education. The humanities are a superb delivery system for what we call democratic values. I remind everyone that UW is a “full service university.” We not only produce future employees, we produce future citizens.

What is taught at any given time at the University of Wyoming is a reflection of what we consider important. We have recognized, supported, and taught the arts and the humanities since the day we opened our doors, and our commitment remains constant. UW's faculty and programs continue to receive important recognition. For example, as it has done over the past decade, our Department of Theatre and Dance won the majority of awards at the northwest region Kennedy Center American Theatre festival. All 10 faculty members of UW's Art Department have had works accepted at national or regional exhibitions, and the Music Department's Happy Jack Singers were chosen to participate in the 55th anniversary of Shanghai Normal University—a recognition of their skill and UW's committed relationship with that institution.

Like the sheriff said to Cool Hand Luke, "You've got to get your mind right." It's not enough to support the arts and the humanities when times are flush. There is a crisis in America, and it's not just economic, it's civic. We may be able to “stimulate” ourselves back to economic stability, but over the long haul we will prosper only if our universities produce well-rounded, well-educated students, willing to step up to their civic responsibilities and provide the moral and ethical, as well as the technical, leadership our state and our nation need.

To this end, the University of Wyoming has not been timid. Our highest budget priority moving into the next biennium is funding the new Art Building. We have the capacity to bond fund this project with federal mineral royalties, and that is what we have proposed to the Governor. We have remodeled, renovated, expanded, and built new facilities for agriculture, education, law, engineering, the sciences, business, health sciences, and the libraries. It's time for us to build for the arts. It's important not only for our students but for our community and ourselves.

I also want to recognize the work of the UW Foundation and its Board of Directors, who are in attendance this afternoon. I called upon the Foundation to help UW achieve its state-mandated budget reductions by asking them to become a self-funded organization. In response, the Foundation restructured its operations to support all campus private giving programs in house and to eliminate state funding for its operations over three years. This new structure has required the Foundation to work closely with UW's colleges and academic units to better inform our generous supporters how their investments in the University of Wyoming will advance our academic vision.

The new UW Foundation operational model is one often found at major public universities. I have great confidence in this new structure for UW's private giving programs. The UW Foundation is a critical university partner—the role of private giving in support of the university is now more important than ever. It is frequently through private gifts that the “additional margin” of excellence at a public university is achieved.

We are all busy people—it's easy to forget, or not even to be aware of, all the good things we've accomplished here at UW. As you leave the convocation today, please look for a publication called *Taking Stock*. It's a great summary of the progress UW has made and a great reminder of how good UW has become.

It's also important to remind ourselves that UW has been largely insulated from the experiences of universities and colleges around the country that are experiencing cutbacks, program eliminations, and across-the-board salary savings measures designed to address budget shortfalls. This is not the path that we need to follow. Should there be more reductions in state funding, we will resist politically palatable across-the-board reductions that threaten to erode the first-class institution we have built.

Since the turn of the millennium, UW has been transformed. Governor Freudenthal and the Wyoming Legislature have made remarkable investments in our university. Generous UW alumni and friends, and corporations and foundations have invested millions in our school through their private gifts. The campus landscape is a testimony to this. The university's endowment has grown from tens of millions to hundreds of millions. State endowment and facility match dollars have elevated UW's private giving programs to new heights. Now is the time to focus our vision and our hard work to build upon all that we have achieved.

There is hidden but significant opportunity nestled among challenging economic news. We won't let our progress to date or our vision for the future be undermined. Now is the time to position ourselves to thrive when the economy rebounds. We will maintain our momentum. I ask you to continue to build our institution, to continue to seek opportunities for UW and our students, and to continue to raise the bar. This is no time to be timid.