

**2005 Fall Convocation  
Tom Buchanan, President  
Yellowstone Ballroom  
Thursday, September 15, 2005 - 3-5 p.m.**

**State of the University Address**

**This afternoon, I want to talk about the priorities of our University. The promotions we have just recognized are symbolic of our very highest priority: the excellence, success, and stability of a strong faculty—the core of any great university.**

**First, I can assure you that, on whole, things are going very well for UW. I am confident that the future is even brighter. I can say that because smart people in many places care about our success. It hasn't been hard for me to discover that.**

**I'll begin with the Trustees. This spring, as you can well imagine, I had some very long talks with the Trustees. The caliber of our conversation exceeded my hopes and expectations. Our discussions were open, frank, and wide-ranging. I may, and most likely will, disagree and argue with the Trustees from time to time, but it is clear to me that this particular group of very smart people cares deeply about our university, and we will all benefit from their collective wisdom.**

**I am glad to seek their views, because every college president worth his or her salt believes that Elbert Hubbard was right when he said, "every man is a damn fool for at least five minutes every day; wisdom consists in not exceeding the limit." The Trustees have vowed not to let me exceed my daily quota.**

**I'd like also to mention another bunch of smart people who care deeply for UW. Whatever qualms you may have about me being in the captain's chair, you should be comforted that Robert Aylward, Sara Axelson, Gary Barta, Ben Blalock, Bill Gern, Beth Hardin, Phill Harris, and Rick Miller are rowing the boat with UW's very able Associate Vice Presidents, Deans, Directors, and Department Heads. Myron Allen is at the rudder.**

**I'd like to take this opportunity to thank them all for standing firm during this transition, and I'd like to thank Myron in particular for stepping up. I'm going to try really hard to stay out of his hair! I'm being particularly nice here, since it is my intention to toss them any truly difficult questions you may care to ask at the end of this talk.**

**As I look around our campus, I see the result of great vision combined with excellent planning and unparalleled wealth for the State of Wyoming.**

**Prexy's Pasture has never been more beautiful. We've celebrated the opening of a new Child Care and Education Center; we've broken ground on our new Wyoming Technology Business Center; we'll soon celebrate the opening of a fabulous new College of Health Sciences Building; the Convention Center is on track; the residence hall renovations**

continue; we'll have a new building for Anthropology before you know it; and Coe Library will undergo a very large expansion as soon as we can get Anthropology out of the way! Despite the current inconvenience of having the Classroom Building off-line, the quality of classroom instruction will benefit—for many years to come—from the renovations that are underway.

We have more than 100 million dollars worth of construction going on now—or in the ramp-up phase—and it's clear we haven't seen the end of it.

It takes my breath away when I tell folks that we've just completed a 204 million dollar capital campaign. We started thinking seven or eight years ago that 60 million dollars might be possible, and then Al Simpson stepped up and put us on the fast track to bring our *Distinction Campaign* to an astounding conclusion.

Let me put this in perspective. In 1995, the University and the UW Foundation had a 54 million dollar endowment. From 2000 to 2005, in five short years, we raised nearly four times the amount that we had raised in a century. The fund will go to academics, students, faculty, technology, State service, and the UW Annual Fund. Our hats are off to our alumni and friends—and the Wyoming Legislature that matched the largest of the donations to the campaign. And I thank all of you in the audience—administrators, faculty, staff, and students—who did your part by contributing, by supporting our college and unit-level development efforts, and by making UW a place worth investing in.

Well, all that money and all those new facilities don't mean a thing without the folks inside them....our faculty, staff, and students. Buildings don't matter as much as what goes on inside them. That brings me neatly back to my priorities for the coming year. I want to tell you a bit about what's going on, what we're spending our time doing, what we expect the results to be, and what my expectations are for all of us.

A decade ago, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (affectionately known in administrative circles as NASULGC) issued a report warning that unless public colleges and universities became the architects of change, they would be its victims. The core challenge, the report concluded, had little to do with physical facilities, but rather how to foster academic excellence and learning. This could be done only if land-grant universities tenaciously and faithfully remembered that our institutions must become genuine learning communities, which support and inspire faculty, staff, and students of all kinds.

The message is as true today as it was when it was written. Our priority today must be to strengthen our faculty and staff, and to build on the extraordinary decade that has brought us to this point. Our roofs don't leak (or soon won't), our campus is well cared for. Our attention now must be directed to what goes on in the classroom—during the lecture, in the studio, at the seminar, on the stage, and in the laboratory. We have an opportunity to transform UW from a good university to a great one. Our Governor expects it, our Legislature expects it, our Trustees expect it, our students expect it, and the citizens of Wyoming expect it. We can do it.

**I believe that UW is positioned like never before to recruit and retain the finest faculty and staff in the nation. It isn't easy, but we can—and do—compete with the very best.**

**Have you ever noticed the interesting slogans etched in stone on the front of some of our buildings? There was a statement etched into the cornerstone of Old Main in 1886. It's in Latin: *Domi Habuit Unde Desceret*—He (or she!) has a home where he may learn. Learning was our highest priority when we dedicated our first building, and it remains our highest priority now. It was no accident that the University of Wyoming was created before statehood.**

**Over the past 15 years or so, we have stretched our teaching dollars to the limit, assigning more and more classes to part-time and temporary faculty that were once assigned to our tenured and tenure-track professors. Don't get me wrong, we have an extraordinary cadre of dedicated part-time and temporary faculty, as well as graduate students. We value them, and we need them. But we also need to carefully consider the balance and the role that they play at UW. From 1996 to 2003, the percentage of classes taught by temporary academic professionals at UW increased significantly—and not as a result of any plan.**

**Despite great strides in funding, it now often takes the salaries of three retiring faculty—long-time teachers and researchers with distinguished careers—to hire two entry-level assistant professors. The most striking examples of this challenge can be found in the College of Business, the College of Education, the College of Engineering, the Humanities, and the Fine and Performing Arts.**

**We need to bring our tenure-track faculty numbers back up to an appropriate level. I am determined to do so, and I have begun with the 2006 budget request to the Legislature.**

**This is a place where progress must be sure and steady. I understand the State's reluctance to commit funding that requires continuing, rather than one-time allocations. Our Legislature has been extraordinarily generous in funding our capital facilities. But make no mistake, at the heart of the University are its people. We will be an attractive, hollow shell if we stop now and accept our wonderful new facilities as sufficient to meet Wyoming's needs.**

**We have fewer faculty in the classroom today than we did seven years ago. This isn't acceptable. The State has clearly provided resources to restore UW to competitiveness. We are without doubt a good university. To be a great university, we must have additional faculty. In far too many areas, we are a mile wide and an inch deep. This year's budget request will continue that conversation with the Governor and the Legislature.**

**I say "continue" because, as you probably know, the Wyoming State Legislature has committed 70 million dollars in future revenues to fund endowed chairs at UW. This will probably produce enough income to fund 12 fully endowed chairs.**

**It's hard to overestimate the impact of a pre-eminent scholar. It's not something easily measured from year to year, but the impact is palpable. Done right, each of these endowed**

chairs will serve as a magnet, attracting other outstanding faculty and students. The curriculum will improve, teaching quality will be elevated, research will flourish, and UW will continue the move from good to great.

Four of the endowed professorships will be in Education, as specified by the Legislature. The others will be concentrated in disciplines identified in *Academic Plan II* as areas of distinction. And the legislatively created committee that is working to define operating principles for the endowment has agreed that long-term flexibility is key to successful implementation. Make no mistake, we will do our very best to pirate away the best faculty from other institutions.

In addition, if our budget requests are approved, at the end of the next legislative session, we will have about \$30 million committed for faculty and staff salaries and benefits over the biennium (\$26+ million in salaries/benefits plus the senior faculty request). We are in a unique position among state universities: the State has great mineral wealth. Relationships with the Legislature have never been stronger, and expectations for UW have never been higher. We will take every possible advantage not to squander this opportunity.

Let me turn now to our students—the reason why UW exists.

We all know that UW has terrific students. Over the past 10 years, we've had 10 Goldwater scholars, six Truman scholars, four Fulbright scholars, two Rhodes scholars, two Udall scholars, one Madison scholar, and more than 600 students per year in the UW Honors Program.

We can do better. There are fine students graduating from Wyoming high schools, but currently only 52 percent of Wyoming high school graduates enter college immediately after graduation. This figure is below the national average. It is unacceptably low.

Again thanks to a visionary Legislature, with support from the Governor, a portion of our mineral wealth will be dedicated to increasing college-going rates in Wyoming. The Hathaway Scholarship Program creates a 400 million dollar endowment account to give every adequately prepared graduating senior from a Wyoming high school the financial support to attend UW or one of the community colleges. The details are being fleshed out as we speak, but the lack of a few thousand dollars should never again be the reason a good student cannot attend college in Wyoming.

Another challenge we face as an institution is to bring the diversity to the campus that is representative of Wyoming—better yet—representative of our nation. Again, this is a theme in *Academic Plan II* and is linked to our commitment to internationalization. There are issues in attracting faculty, staff, and students from U.S. minorities; but we're committed to making progress. We can also make progress in the diversity of the University community through our international efforts in recruiting students from around the world. In addition, we are working hard to support and promote international academic experiences for UW students and faculty.

Now I'd like to turn to Wyoming's economy more directly. Wyoming's incredible energy resources are providing budget surpluses in government and, indeed, the means for astonishing private donations to UW. I believe that UW has a responsibility to support those industries—that supply us all with such great wealth—with the best research and the best educated students in the world.

For years we have had an Enhanced Oil Recovery Institute, an Institute for Energy Research, graduate programs in areas such as Petroleum Engineering, Geology and Geophysics, and Environmental Economics, and other degree programs that focus on the earth sciences and natural resources. This is an area of distinction for the University of Wyoming. We've recognized it in our *Academic Plan II*, and—with the support of the Governor and the Wyoming Legislature—we will propose a School of Energy Resources. The school will have three elements:

First, academics. We will attract internationally known professors—senior scholars who can help recruit talented junior faculty members and develop and advance the curricula to their highest levels. The school will have a technological focus, building on UW's very strong expertise in a variety of energy-related disciplines within the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Agriculture, Engineering, Business, Law, and Education. Students from Wyoming and beyond our borders will choose to study here with these faculty. Businesses will compete for our graduates. A first step in this effort has been taken already: At their meeting on September 30<sup>th</sup> of this month, we will ask the Board of Trustees to reinstate the undergraduate Petroleum Engineering degree program.

Second, research: We will concentrate on traditional energy resources, such as gas, oil, and coal, but also on coal bed methane, solar and wind power, power transmission, reclamation technology, and energy conservation—with all work relevant to Wyoming's huge energy portfolio.

Third, service: A new Energy Outreach Center will be tasked to disseminate technical information—including the results of research—to support Wyoming's energy industries. We will aid State policymakers by responding to their requests for analyses to inform their decisions and assist long-range energy planning. The University is committed to supporting the economy that enables UW to punch above its weight in academe. We have the potential to be “world class” in this arena, and we should be.

Now let me talk a little about the big hole in the ground that you see over on Harney behind the Central Energy Plant. That's the Wyoming Technology Business Center. It should be up and running by next June, and it is UW's own technology-related business incubator to assist Wyoming entrepreneurs. It is the brain child of Bill Gern, but it is being built through an incredible combination of state, federal, and private support. It will have room for about 12 companies and will provide educational and mentoring programs, business services, and a place for entrepreneurs to work. The Wyoming Technology Business Center should be a major contributor to diversifying the Wyoming economy and provide an opportunity for faculty to transform their research into commercial reality.

Part of our effort to support the State's commitment to economic development must be to build and strengthen the College of Business. The jury is still out on the much-publicized idea of expanding our business education programs to a campus in Jackson. While the idea may be laudable—and we are grateful to the sponsors of the bill in calling attention to the importance of our College of Business in building Wyoming's future economy—we must remain committed to our educational mission. Re-staffing the teaching mission in the College of Business is among our highest priorities. If the day is to come that we are able to launch a world-class “premiere” business program out in the State, it will only happen if we have built it upon a solid foundation in the degree programs that we currently offer.

Before I close, I need to comment on the divisions that support our academic mission. Athletics is one of these. I've learned a great deal about intercollegiate athletics in the last several months. We are incredibly fortunate to have Gary Barta, Barbara Burke, and their outstanding staff at the helm of our athletics program. They understand the true meaning of the term “student-athlete,” and they understand the role that athletics plays in students' academic careers. I am delighted to be a part of a new era in UW athletics—an era in which people take pride in the fact that our athletes' graduation rates and GPAs equal those in the general student population, in the fact that sportsmanship is part of our character, and in the fact that athletics complements academics instead of competing with it.

Other divisions are also critical to the support of academics. Our success depends on the continued health of our administrative structures, budget management, student services, information technology, and fundraising. And this is the year to pay close attention to these support services. Within the next few days, Phill Harris will post the first draft of UW's *Support Services Plan*—a plan that needs to take its cue from the *2004 Academic Plan*. We need all of your help to make sure that the Support Services Plan reinforces the institution's academic mission as effectively as possible. Please take time to review, discuss, and comment on the draft. This is your chance to help us see what needs fixing at UW and to help make the institution a better place to teach, learn, and work.

Well, I could go on, but I'd better conclude since the popcorn seems to be running out. In 1929, an unknown author, writing about the newly-formed Wyoming Associated Student Endowment, declared: “Wyoming's greatest natural resource is not its cattle and sheep, not the crops produced on fertile fields, not the unmeasured mineral wealth within its mountains, not the beauty of its scenery, but the intellectual and spiritual potential of its people.”

From the very beginning, bricks and mortar did not have primacy at the University of Wyoming. That spot was reserved for learning and potential. It is the job of this university to keep learning and potential at the top of our list and to keep it as exciting as possible. Over the last decade, we have reported almost one-half of a billion dollars in external awards—65 million dollars of that this past year. We are training the next generation of scholars, while at the same time creating new knowledge and new applications of existing knowledge. And we are committed to serving the people of the State.

**We're all in this great enterprise together. As Arnold H. Glasow commented, "Success isn't a result of spontaneous combustion. You must set yourself on fire." This fire should burn in service to the people of Wyoming, to provide the light of intellectual inquiry, the warmth of personal growth, and the transformation of our future.**

**Thank you. I'll be happy to answer any questions you have—and I'll reserve the right to toss them to UW's VPs, as appropriate.**