

University of Wyoming
President Tom Buchanan
State of the University Address
September 8, 2011

Good afternoon, and thank you all for attending this afternoon to take a look at and talk a little about UW. As it happens, we are joined today by many of UW's advisory boards, as well as by many of the members of our Board of Trustees and Foundation Board.

To all of you and to our elected officials, visiting dignitaries, distinguished faculty, staff, students, and alums, thank you for helping to make UW what it is today and what it will become tomorrow.

Clearly, one of the best parts of my job is the privilege of working with so many folks who love this university, and who work so hard to make it better every day.

I want to take a moment to congratulate our newly-promoted faculty members. You know, we are a big, complex, multi-million dollar institution—a bureaucracy by any standard—but when you strip it down to its foundations, you'll find that the faculty is the foundation of any great university and the future of the UW enterprise.

This group of newly-promoted faculty is among the finest in the world. They care deeply for their students, their research, and their service, and I am honored to work with them. They are the reason our students succeed.

Now, these are perilous times for most universities. Struggling economies, competing public priorities, declining state budgets, growing calls for change for its own sake, demands for increased accountability even if the metrics are not meaningful, a volatile political landscape, and growing skepticism about our future ... these are real challenges that define most of our nation's higher education landscape.

But here we are: Wyoming and its only public university are islands of progress and strength in this growing sea of concerns. Wyoming is proud of its university, and we at UW are proud of Wyoming. In this state that some of those downstream folks perceive as isolated and even backward, we have a population that has set the gold standard for supporting education and especially higher education! Wyomingites understand very clearly that the most important investment in the future is in education.

I tried really hard to think of some bad news to give you, so that the good news might sound even better, but I can't come up with much.

At a time when public support for higher education is foundering nation-wide, we have unparalleled support from the people of Wyoming.

Our private donations hit a home run this past fiscal year with more than \$43 million dollars from friends and alumni, our faculty continue to bring in sponsored research dollars despite challenges in Federal funding, our enrollments are at an all-time high, we have the best faculty in our history, and the Hathaway scholarship program is the envy of the nation.

We have been working closely with Governor Mead and the new administration, and I firmly believe that UW will continue to receive great support from the Governor's office and our State legislature.

Oh yes, UW is also undefeated in football... for now.

It's no accident that UW has a special relationship with its many constituent groups and supporters. We know who we are, and we work hard to connect ourselves to the environment around us, to the students we serve, to the friends and donors who support us, and to our state.

I believe that much of our success is tied to our strategic planning process, which defines our vision, directs our resources, and holds us accountable for what we do. Our planning process makes our decisions transparent and clarifies our directions—to the public and to ourselves.

So at the risk of making you old-timers and my wife roll your eyes, get ready: It's time to start thinking about Strategic Plan IV, and we will count on all of you to help us make sure that we keep improving. You can expect the Provost to launch that conversation early next spring.

I noted earlier that the faculty are the foundation of this great university.

I also have to say that facilities are the glue that binds us together. Our facilities connect our faculty to one another and they provide the context and capacity for research and student learning. Our new facilities allow faculty to teach our students in ways that will prepare them for success in the 21st century.

I've tried to make it a tradition during my convocation speech to mention new facilities. These facilities provide the opportunity for great new forms of learning to take place all over our campus, from the laboratory facilities in petroleum engineering, to the trading room in the COB, to the simulation lab in health sciences.

The investment that together we have made in new facilities is paying dividends in better education across our great university.

The large new building out by the Centennial Complex is NOT, as has been rumored, another indoor practice facility for Athletics. It's the new Visual Arts Building, and it's going to be another stunner, aspiring to a LEEDS platinum rating on the energy efficiency and conservation index.

This new home for our Art Department is stage one in a two stage process that leads us to our top capital construction priority this year, a 32 million dollar request to remodel, renovate, and expand the current Fine Arts facility into a world class center for the performing arts.

The Berry Biodiversity Center on the north side of campus on Lewis Street is the beautiful building with the living roof. This building is the home of our budding biodiversity and conservation programs. We already have a task force working on ways to broaden and feature biodiversity and conservation in the new strategic plan.

I also want to tell you that I think it is particularly appropriate that the new Energy Resource Center is under construction right near the Berry Center. Certainly the development of our energy and natural resources and the conservation of resources and biodiversity go hand in hand in Wyoming. The level of support for both sides of this equation—from the State, from industry, and from private philanthropy—continues to be simply remarkable.

Just in case you thought you might be able to drive up or down Lewis Street after the Energy Resource Center is completed, guess again. Before too long, we'll be breaking ground on the Enzi Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics laboratory building right across the street.

The National Science Foundation estimates that 80 percent of the jobs created in the next decade will require strong math and science skills.

The Enzi Labs, which are dedicated to undergraduate instruction, will be the on-campus portal to science, math, and technology for all of our students.

The Enzi Labs, along with the newly finished NCAR Wyoming Supercomputing Center, will certainly spur our commitment to the computational sciences. In the past several years, we have quietly built a world-class community of faculty experts from a variety of areas who are just chomping at the bit to get that machine on line!

If you haven't been in the College of Education lately—the part we used to call the Annex—you must go and enjoy the amazing Sullivan Family Student Center. It is “an architectural and design wonder,” to quote some in the national press.

In that same area, we are about to put together a world-class literacy center. Fortunately for us, literacy is a very high priority for Wyoming First Lady Carol Mead, and we've already met with her to begin exploring ways in which we can help facilitate our shared interest in this critically important initiative.

Up on 22nd street and Grand, the Foundation is preparing to demolish the old Forest Service building and replace it with a new “gateway” building for UW. It will house not only the Foundation staff and its functions, but also some of the Alumni Association and perhaps others to enhance our external relations presence.

The current Foundation House across Ivinson Street near the center of campus will find an academic incarnation. I'm not sure yet, but I'm considering naming it The Guthrie House for the Humanities—stay tuned.

And by the way, the Honors Program will be moving its offices into its new home. We've purchased the red house on the corner of 10th and Ivinson. After some remodeling, g... which should take about a year, Duncan Harris and the Honor's Program will be moving into their new home.

Now to the challenges. Both on campus and off, we have much to do, and we are eager to move ahead. Bear in mind that some of these challenges will find their way into our next strategic plan, so I hope you'll think about them, and give us your best advice. Here's what's on the docket:

As always, our primary focus is on our students. This year we are going to streamline our general education requirements. We're taking a hard look at our expectations for our undergraduates and the ways in which we can make it easier for them to navigate the completion of their programs in an efficient and timely way. Cost effectiveness will certainly be part of this picture. But more importantly, we need to make the educational goals clearer and find ways to show that we're accomplishing those same goals.

And we need to do so in a way that takes real advantage of the expertise that a community of active scholars can bring to the table.

We will continue to review and improve graduate education as well. Smoother, more efficient, and more rigorous recruitment and admissions will set the stage for heightened expectations in graduate student quality, learning, and timely completion. Our role is to capture the best and make them better.

For both graduate and undergraduate students, our goal will always be the development of well-educated, appropriately skilled professionals ready to enter the workplace and make their contribution to society. It is a goal we will continue to meet.

We will continue to dedicate ourselves to providing a safe and civil environment in which learning can occur. We will continue to find innovative ways to ensure that our students have the tools to make good personal decisions about drug and alcohol use,

and we will continue to work to maintain a violence-free environment that encourages understanding and respect for others.

And while we're on the topic of ethical and moral sensibilities, let's talk a little about intercollegiate athletics.

Nationwide, it is evident that college sports has lost its way. That will not happen here because we've hired professionals who know how to do it right, and because at UW the "student" will always come first in "student athlete."

We'll win and lose, we'll do it right, and we'll expect our student athletes to graduate and move on to successful and productive careers as doctors, and entrepreneurs, and teachers, and ranchers, and—for a very few—professional athletes.

We will continue to find ways to internationalize UW. Our international programs are going gangbusters right now, but it's no time to rest on our laurels.

I hope that eventually, every single UW student and faculty member will have an international experience that goes way beyond meeting international students and faculty members. I support the commitment made by Academic Affairs to participate in a two year internationalization laboratory at the invitation of the American Council on Education. I expect that project to produce some concrete actions for our next strategic plan.

Global awareness and sophistication is increasingly a necessity for our graduates and for our faculty. We have by far more students and faculty participating in a huge variety of international efforts than ever before, and here is a place where we will continue to charge ahead in the years to come.

We will also develop a new, stronger focus on the humanities as we did with the arts just a few years ago.

It's time for a serious conversation about how UW's humanities programs can enhance not only their prominence but also their distinctiveness, given our remarkable geographic setting and our unique relationship to our state. There is a new "thought piece" about this that has been posted to Academic Affairs' website. Check it out.

We will continue to take UW out in the state, and we will continue to improve our outreach programs. We will absolutely be more aggressive in these efforts, both on-site and on-line. The University of Wyoming has an obligation to do so.

The UW Saturday University is so successful in Jackson that we're going to expand across the northern tier to Sheridan and Gillette. This has been mostly an A&S initiative—but thanks to Paul Flesher's leadership we've begun to feature outstanding faculty from other colleges.

We are sharing the construction of a new building on the Casper College campus that will house both their student union on the first floor and UW on the second. Our partnership with Casper is essential in both directions.

We also have some exciting plans in the hopper for Sheridan College, and I expect our efforts in Gillette and all of our community colleges will continue to increase. The community college presidents want an expanded way of doing business with us, and they are right. We will need a new model shortly down the road.

I meet with community college boards and presidents pretty frequently, and it is my strong belief that we need to have a stronger physical presence on each campus, customized to meet the needs of the community college.

Every town in Wyoming would like to have its own UW, but even though that's cost-prohibitive and unrealistic, we need to make every effort to take UW to every town. Every delivery method we can muster will be important in this continuing work. UW needs to provide strong leadership state-wide in higher education.

Both our Alumni Association and our Cowboy Joe Club are also important outreach vehicles, and both are under new management this year, so it's a whole new rodeo (I've always wanted to say that).

Internally, we need to ramp up the cultivation of our leadership on campus and off. While it is always important to bring new ideas and energy to campus from other places, it is simply not always true that the best new leaders must come from somewhere else. We must "grow our own" more aggressively in both faculty and staff.

It is already in our current strategic plan to do this, but we must increase our efforts. Leadership occurs throughout the university, and we plan to take advantage of our many outstanding employees who are up to the tasks.

This is a budget year in Wyoming, so I want you all to know that faculty and staff raises are our number one priority with the Legislature this year. Over the last decade, we've made up some ground, but we simply must protect our investment in human resources.

We need to continue our momentum, and I have every reason to believe that we will succeed.

With strong vision, leadership, and outreach, I believe that the University of Wyoming will continue its climb up the ranks of the great universities. As Michelangelo instructed so many years ago, our greatest challenge is not in setting our aim too high and falling short. Rather, it is in setting our aim too low and achieving it.

Two Sundays ago, Jacque and I climbed to the top of Medicine Bow Peak, and we recalled that it was 35 years ago that we first took that climb. When we first came to UW, there was great hiking, and UW was a very good school, but I don't think it was a great school then.

Now the hiking takes a little longer for us, but it's still great, and, in my view, the University of Wyoming has become a truly great university. I am so proud of all of the folks who made it that way over the years, and I am so proud of all of you. Thank you.