

**UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA  
2007 INSTALLATION REMARKS  
CHANCELLOR JOHN E. CHRISTENSEN**

**“LIVING IN THE FUTURE, UNDERSTANDING THE PAST”  
OCTOBER 9, 2007**

Thank you, President Milliken, Regent Wilson, and the entire Board of Regents, for the opportunity to lead an institution that is truly one of the rising stars of metropolitan universities nationwide. Let me also offer special thanks for the incredible support you have provided during this transition period. And, JB, please know the access and guidance you made available has been valuable and deeply appreciated.

Chancellor Hemenway, thank you for sharing your insights on this special day; my years on your campus were pivotal in my professional development and I look back on that time at KU with great fondness.

A special welcome to Mayor Mike Fahey, whom I consider a good friend to this university, and who genuinely, understands the strong bonds that can and must exist between a community and its metropolitan university.

My sincere appreciation to fellow alum Deb Mclarney for representing UNO's 76,000 alumni worldwide. The support of our Alumni Association has always been critical to our success, as have our many collaborative endeavors.

Alex, Scott, and Jennifer, I look forward to working with each of you as the representatives of our Student Government, Faculty Senate and Staff Advisory Council, respectively. Your campus leadership and the partnership with your constituencies are critical to UNO as we embrace the future. This campus needs and appreciates your support.

Heartfelt thanks to John Langan and the campus/community planning committee members for organizing today's events. Your attention to detail is evident and I appreciate your efforts on our behalf.

I would like to recognize Janet Philipp, President of Dana College, my undergraduate institution, home to the origins of my career passion, and of course the Vikings.

And, special greetings to all students, faculty, staff, community leaders, fellow chancellors, institutional representatives, colleagues, friends and guests; thank you for attending.

It is said that all of us stand on the shoulders of giants, that is certainly true, as it gives me great pleasure to recognize Dr. Ronald Roskens, whose vision of UNO as a modern

metropolitan university with strong ties regionally, nationally and internationally set us on the path to our future. Ron, thank you for honoring me with your presence today.

My sincere appreciation to Chancellor Emeritus Del Weber, who was the architect of today's UNO. Under his leadership, UNO experienced dramatic physical and programmatic transformations. Del is currently out of the country, but he and Ron have been of enormous help to me throughout my career, and particularly over the past 13 months, with their willingness to offer advice and counsel. I am indebted to them both.

This day is made all the more special by the presence and support of my family. My wife Jan, partner of 35 years; our sons Anders, Erik, and Dana, our daughter in-law, Colleen, and our extended family and friends. You have always been an important part of my personal and professional journeys, and that was never more evident than during the past several months.

I simply want to say "thank you" for always being there, and I love you all.

Also with us today in spirit, I believe, are those whose impact on my life was profound, and by whose example I continue to measure any success I may enjoy.

As the grandson of Scandinavian immigrants, who made their way to Omaha Nebraska, to begin a new life, leaving behind the security of family and country for this new land full of opportunities and unknowns. They instilled in my parents, Ann and Axel, and me, the belief that education held the road map to the future.

Although my parents didn't have the opportunity to experience education beyond high school, they insured the opportunity was available to me, and I am forever grateful for their wisdom.

As you can tell, I am proud of my Scandinavian heritage, and it is therefore somewhat fitting that the great Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard provide a context for my reflections today. Fitting also, because Kierkegaard captured what I believe to be the essence of UNO's strength, and its character, when he wrote "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

UNO, has always been an institution which prides itself on "living forward," pursuing its destiny with a sense of purpose, anticipation, vigor, and fearlessness. From its earliest days as Omaha University, its founders sought to "establish, endow, and maintain a university for the promotion of sound learning and education." That same vision was evident in 1968, when the Municipal University of Omaha became a partner in the University of Nebraska system, forging what one merger committee member called "the greatest educational gain in this city's history."

These achievements were, however, not without setbacks, as financial constraints and growing pains many times threatened the viability of this young university. Yet, with determination, the support of community leaders, and the generosity of countless benefactors, Omaha's university grew and prospered, providing opportunity for generations of students, in this community and beyond.

Today, as we look back to those early founders, as Kierkegaard believed, we understand and appreciate the enormity of the obstacles they faced as well as the significance of what they accomplished. Our challenge, as stewards of today's UNO, is to keep their dream alive, and, more importantly, dare to dream large ourselves.

Over the past 13 months, I have had the opportunity to talk to literally hundreds of individuals about the future of UNO. From students to faculty/staff, from alumni to benefactors to civic and corporate leaders, without exception, these conversations were infused with a spirit of optimism, and sense of urgency to get on with the tasks ahead.

To many, UNO represents the single best opportunity for students and families to achieve a brighter future, for our city to become increasingly competitive and thrive economically, and for meaningful collaboration within the metropolitan area. Higher education, and particularly the metropolitan university, has the capacity and the responsibility to bring parties together and expertise to bear on the critical issues facing our society. I'm proud to say, that UNO is particularly well-suited to this task and can point to many successful collaborations, with many more to come as the College of Public Affairs and Community Service's Collaborative Commons opens next spring, and as the Institute for Collaboration Sciences evolves.

This afternoon, on the cusp of the 100th anniversary of our founding, and four decades since joining the University of Nebraska system, there is a new UNO emerging that will help to define and shape the future of Omaha and Nebraska. It is a university built on the solid foundation of service to students, a commitment to academic excellence and unceasing discovery. **It is a metropolitan university engaged in exciting and innovative partnerships throughout our community and region, and one which actively seeks to forge strong bonds among business, government, education, the arts and human services.**

It is a university whose benchmark achievements, including increasing retention and graduation rates, recruitment and retention of under-represented students and faculty, rising ACT scores, and high satisfaction among graduating seniors, demonstrate why, year after year, UNO is the university of choice for more than 14,000 students. And why, when asked "Would you recommend UNO to a family member or other prospective student, the answer is a resounding "Yes."

Tomorrow at our annual Fall Convocation, I'll share more specifics about these achievements, which reflect a collaborative spirit that is so much a part of the UNO

landscape. Taken together, these stories of creative and forward-thinking reflect a UNO on the threshold of transformation. We are a place of opportunity, a source of solutions and our stewardship is making a difference.

Yet, in the near future, UNO's ability to live forward successfully will require our attention to five critical areas:

First, we must commit our energies to create a genuine calendar year operation, breaking away from the old agrarian-based nine month academic calendar, as befits a modern and responsive metropolitan university. To aid in this endeavor, a task force has been convened to review issues of capacity, efficiency, continuous curricular offerings and better ways to interface with the community. If we are to continue to serve our student population well, then we must accept the reality that an academic year, based on the calendar year, provides untapped potential for continuous learning, improves progress toward degree, and better "fits" with today's multitasking student lifestyle while at the same time maximizing available resources.

Second, we must actively seek out opportunities to develop public private partnerships and collaborative relationships that define us as a metropolitan university. Moreover, we must be engaged in the business of broadening those currently in place. Nearly a decade ago, a business/industry, state and university partnership made the Peter Kiewit Institute a reality. Today, PKI stands as a model of best practices for such collaborations. New opportunities are on the horizon with the opening of Ak-Sar-Ben Village, and continued development of the Pacific and Center Street campuses. The future is bright, a generous community wants involvement, and we are limited only by our capacity to reach out, innovate, and make incredible things happen for the community and university. The key will be strategic planning and implementation based on mutual benefits while maintaining our core values.

Third, we must deepen our relationship with PK-12 partners, so that the road from elementary to middle school, middle to high school and on to college is paved with initiatives that address these transitions, the achievement gap, poverty, health, assistance to families, and issues of access. I am proud of UNO's strong presence within Omaha's Building Bright Futures and other educational initiatives. Through innovative thinking, systemic change, university/community commitment, and increased resource availability, I believe generations of Omaha students will have the encouragement, incentive and support they need to graduate, and successfully transition to college or career. UNO and its formal partnership, the Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium, including Douglas/Sarpy County school districts and Educational Service Units, will play a vital role for both the short and long term. These are our future students and they represent the future of our campus and community as well.

Fourth, we seek to expand the horizons for traditional age students, while putting programs in place that ensure the success of other populations we serve, such as

minority, transfer, international, non-traditional and first generation students. As a metropolitan university, the campus environment must be safe, responsive, caring and welcoming to this vast array of learners and their personal and educational goals.

In other words, we must make an absolute commitment to being an inclusive campus which embraces, but reaches beyond demographic difference, and is sensitive to diversity of experience and values. As realized, our students will be personally and academically successful and graduate so they too can live forward.

Finally, we must remain vigilant and aggressive, pursuing continuous academic improvement, maintaining a high quality faculty/staff and creating and maintaining state-of-the-art facilities, equipment, and technology. Together, this will support academic and athletic excellence, research and creative activity while providing for a rich campus life and college experience. Our success will be actualized by being strategic in our actions, remaining committed to our values and vision, and being available to new ways of collaborating, teaching, learning, and serving.

UNO is a remarkably talented campus, with students who invite challenge, dedicated faculty on the cutting edge of their respective disciplines, and a caring staff on the front lines of our service mission. I believe our campus has the desire and talent to contribute to creating efficiencies, improving our effectiveness, or simply, to making UNO a better place at which to teach, learn and serve. To this end, we will be engaging in a continuous campus dialogue intended to embrace constructive change and foster new ideas. Status quo in today's educational environment translates to missed opportunity and unrealized dreams. Instead of thinking outside the box, we need to construct a new box, better suited to living forward.

Some thirty-plus years ago, I arrived on the UNO campus with the goal of completing my studies and moving on with my life. Instead, the road led me back home; to a place and people that I care for more than words permit I am enormously, and sincerely, honored to have the opportunity to lead this incredible institution at this exciting point in its history. I am so very proud to serve as the 14th Chancellor and to be the first University of Nebraska at Omaha graduate to have the privilege of holding this position. I share Kierkegaard's regard for the past, believing in the lessons it can teach us, but I also subscribe to the practice of "living forward," knowing that it is not in the present, nor the past, but in the future, where our deeds will be judged.

William Herzog Thompson, former dean of the College of Arts and Sciences provided a glimpse of that future when he said, "Let us fix our eyes upon the greatness of the university, as you have it day by day. Let us fall in love with her; and when we see her rise in beauty and splendor, be reminded that this greatness was won by ... courage with knowledge ... Let us then not only be responsive in her time of need, but let us also gather around in the happiness of her prosperity to enjoy her finest hours."

I believe that for all her greatness, UNO's best hours are yet to be. Let us begin that journey today, living forward.