

**UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT OMAHA  
2010 CONVOCATION ADDRESS  
CHANCELLOR JOHN E. CHRISTENSEN**

**"A TIME TO BE BOLD: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN 2011"  
OCTOBER 6, 2010**

Good morning and welcome to the 2010 convocation. Thank you for attending and as always, it is a privilege to work with the students, faculty, and staff of this incredible institution. I trust you share my pride in being a Maverick.

Today, I want to spend our time together considering three general areas: Metropolitan Fit, Budget and Accomplishments. I hope at the end, that no matter what challenges we may face as a campus, you believe, as I do, that the future remains bright for UNO and for the students we serve.

Metropolitan universities are where the action is now and going forward and opportunities to make a difference in the lives of our students, our respective disciplines, and our community, are many. We are blessed to be located in a vibrant and growing community that values our work, understands our significance as a partner for the future vitality of Omaha and its citizens, and is actively engaged in supporting our mission and success.

Pause for a moment and look at this place we call UNO. It is a thriving, high quality institution that is teeming with activity, contributing to the economic, educational, social, cultural, and intellectual well being of our city and beyond. Your fingerprints, my friends, as well as those of the community, are on the accomplishments and progress we currently enjoy, and it will be our collaborative efforts that allow us to realize our dreams for tomorrow.

The University of Nebraska at Omaha has tremendous momentum, and during the most recent convocation I shared some thoughts about what UNO will look like in 2020. As I said at that time, our planning and preparation for the future may be viewed as ambitious by some, but it is "our time" and we have an obligation to think big, push the limits in all we do, and transform potential into reality.

I believe the title of David Sokol's book "Pleased But Not Satisfied" reflects where we are today. We can be pleased with our many individual and collective accomplishments, but clearly we cannot be satisfied, not even for a moment.

So, as we look to 2020, we will not be just a metropolitan university as one of many, but one that is in the vanguard of institutions that are moving their cities, regions, and nation forward in this knowledge-based global society. As a result, it is important to understand how we currently align with our metropolitan colleagues. Actually there are

two major national organizations that directly represent metropolitan institutions. The Coalition of Urban Serving Universities representing Research 1 institutions, and the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (referred to as CUMU), which is a blend of comprehensive and Research 1 institutions.

CUMU, of which we are a founding member, has recently completed a survey of its member institutions with the purpose of developing an organizational profile. These data points will be analyzed during the coming year and I will share the outcomes when made available. In the interim, UNO's Office of Institutional Research has provided a preliminary look at comparisons of UNO and the CUMU universities that participated in the recently completed survey. Although much analysis remains, I'm pleased to report UNO generally compares favorably with our metropolitan peers on a variety of Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) measures. In other words, commonly collected institutional measures like cost, persistence, graduation rates, diversity, etc.

Furthermore, I'm pleased to report that UNO received among the highest "peer evaluations" of our CUMU colleagues, according to the US News ratings, which simply suggests that we are heading in the right direction as related to national perceptions. For some, perceptions are reality!

And finally, UNO recently has been invited by Ira Harkavy, a preeminent authority on metropolitan engagement through teaching, research, and service, to participate with a select group of institutions and organizations in a national task force. This Anchor Institutions Task Force has been convened as a permanent organization to help create and advance democratic, mutually beneficial anchor institution-community partnerships. The task force will be hosted by the University of Pennsylvania and again I will be providing the campus with that information as it becomes available. I spent time with Ira last week and have also extended an invitation for him to visit campus in the spring, and he has accepted.

Importantly, I believe that this type of involvement coupled with peer institution benchmarks will serve as a meaningful reference for our continuing efforts to achieve excellence as a metropolitan university.

Now, the elephant in the room is the looming economic situation in Nebraska as well as the nation. We are facing the single largest budget challenge in my memory and perhaps in state history. Paradoxically, the ongoing economic downturn parallels the generally held view that higher education must be a priority throughout the country at this time in history. President Milliken presented the University of Nebraska's "Agency Efficiency Review Plan" to the Legislature's Appropriations Committee in September as part of the State's budget planning process for the upcoming biennium. As part of this process, he re-emphasized the growing need for investment in higher education. He highlighted the many advantages of college graduates including greater earning power,

less unemployment, better health, less reliance on public assistance, and more engaged citizenship. Without question, Higher Education institutions and their graduates are significant factors in our state and the country's economic competitiveness, now and in the future.

President Milliken also provided a context for the legislature as it considers budget implications for the Nebraska system. He reported that the U.S. has slipped to 12th in the world in the percentage of 25-34 year-olds possessing postsecondary degrees. Although Nebraska ranks second in the nation for high school graduation, we rank 18th in college going rates. Results of a Georgetown University Study reported that by 2018, two thirds of Nebraska jobs will require a bachelor's degree or higher, which clearly brings into focus the critical need for sufficiently funding higher education in our state.

To compound the seriousness of this situation, higher education in our state has grown at a rate 40 percent less than the growth of all of state government in the last 25 years and the University of Nebraska has made more than 68 million dollars in budget reductions in the past decade (including this year). Several factors will ultimately determine the final magnitude of Nebraska's pending fiscal problem, but even the best case scenarios will be difficult.

The President and the Board of Regents have been proactive in preparing for these challenges, as have the campuses. At the system level, all senior academic and business officers including deans have been working collaboratively to identify systemwide opportunities for increasing efficiency, enhancing revenue growth, and reducing expenditures. The University also is reviewing state statutes and mandates to identify possible elimination and/or modification of those that contribute to duplication of effort or have counterproductive financial or management impact regarding our University. Additionally, the campuses have been charged with academic program review, workload and productivity analysis, and business operations and facilities utilization reviews, all of which are currently underway.

Beyond these efforts, UNO has merged our campus Budget Advisory Task Force under the umbrella of the Strategic Planning Committee. I believe this will ensure the broadest possible constituent representation while providing a strategic framework for all decisions. We will continue to have open forums and an interactive web site to share information and gather input and ideas. Obviously, it is imperative that all voices are heard, budget planning activities remain transparent, and internal communication continues as a priority.

In June, as is the University practice, campuses will make recommendations to the President and he in turn will make recommendations for the system, to the Board for their consideration and approval where appropriate.

The economic conditions are indeed daunting, but trust me when I say this is not the time to hunker down and wait for the storm to pass, rather it is the time to be bold. We cannot temper our aspirations for the future and must seize the moment. We will necessarily make the hard decisions, preserve and strengthen our core mission, and continue to move this great institution forward. It goes without saying, that our opportunity to manage this considerable challenge will, in large measure, be dependent on our ability to effectively collaborate within and across the campus and marshal our best creative problem solving in a context of the "greater good" of the campus. I'm convinced that after several years of reductions, what we have in place today is valued and valuable to the campus, but we are likely to be at a point where "must haves" and "nice to have" will warrant careful consideration.

Now, in spite of it all, you have made great things happen throughout the campus and in the community. You have been true to our strategic goals by keeping our students at the center and serving them well, building quality and striving for excellence in all you do, and freely committing your time and talents to the betterment of the community.

I congratulate you on your many accomplishments, but unfortunately, time permits highlighting only a few. Clearly, having such a lengthy list of achievements each year is a nice problem to have, and this year is no exception.

During the past year, we made considerable progress toward building capacity for the future with the special assistance of facilities and business support staff.

Let's begin by taking a look at the changing face of the campus landscape:

Mammel Hall, the new home of the College of Business Administration has opened this fall and this extraordinary facility will be dedicated October 15.

The HPER renovation and addition is complete and will be dedicated this afternoon.

The former Hayden house just west of Weber Fine Arts now serves as the new home for orientation and recruitment services. We'll dedicate the new Welcome Center on Friday, appropriately, on the anniversary of our founding.

The new DJ Sokol video boards are now part of Sapp Field House and Caniglia Field, adding to the Maverick fan experience as well as providing creative opportunities for broad campus applications.

Roskens Hall, the new home of the College of Education is undergoing a complete renovation and will open next fall.

When Education moves into Roskens, Kayser Hall will provide additional classroom and multipurpose space for the entire campus.

University Village, now owned by the campus, has been upgraded, and student programming support in conjunction with neighboring Maverick Village is being maximized.

And as demand for housing increases, we have responded. Accordingly, Scott Court, on the Pacific St. campus opens next fall with 480 beds, bringing the total number of beds to 2,080 or about 13% of our current student population.

On deck:

The Community Engagement Center received unanimous support from the Regents' Business Affairs subcommittee and will go to the full board for consideration this month. This facility will significantly expand the quantity and quality of our partnership and outreach activities, exemplifying the hallmark of metropolitan universities.

Renovations to the Peter Kiewit Institute (PKI) have been approved by the PKI Board of Policy Advisors with the express purpose of enhancing research space and collaboration. Additional plans are under consideration for the possible expansion of PKI and construction of a research facility between Mammel Hall and the Institute.

Enrollment increased again this year and we are now serving approximately 15,500 students on the UNO campus. But, the real story is in the numbers this year as we saw:

- 10,000 plus, full time undergraduates for the first time in our history; and record number of credit hours being delivered.
- We realized record minority enrollment which stands now at more than 14%, and coupled with international students representing 119 countries, this brings campus diversity to approximately 19%.
- This fall also saw a record number of full time graduate students. Part-time graduates, however, have continued to decline over the past two years and I believe we need to examine this trend and make whatever changes are appropriate.
- The Metropolitan Advantage Program, serving Iowa students from Harrison, Pottawattamie and Mills Counties has continued to draw increasing numbers from across the river, and enrollments have almost tripled since beginning the program. I believe it is time to consider expanding this program to additional neighboring counties located in the 1-29 corridor.
- The Advanced Placement (AP) Dual Enrollment Program now serves over 3200 students involving 15 districts and 28 high schools, and continues to grow. Past trend suggests that about 40% of these students will matriculate at UNO

immediately following graduation. Importantly, this program has enhanced AP opportunities and participation throughout our service area and beyond.

- Thompson Scholars Program has grown to over 500 students, while the Goodrich Program continues to be at capacity. Both of these programs are models for supporting students to be successful in higher education and life. The Avenue Scholars, a college readiness program for students at risk, will advance its first complete graduating class of 175 next spring. A significant number of those students will enter UNO directly, while others will enroll in 2-plus-2 programs with our partners at Metro Community College, ultimately joining us at UNO.
- None of these enrollment advances, however, would have taken place without the considerable commitment of time and effort devoted by UNO's NESIS implementation team, who ensured students could apply and enroll in a timely fashion this fall and the campus could conduct business as usual.
- Faculty, staff, and the Office of Sponsored Programs have had a record setting year for external funding. The campus received almost \$17 million dollars supporting basic and applied research and instruction.
- Athletics has established a new leadership team and is making remarkable progress in working with community leaders to ensure financial stability and explore the development of Chili Greens as a University/Community partnership. Athletics has also prioritized connecting with the campus to enhance student life, community engagement, student recruitment, and academic excellence.
- Several graduate and undergraduate programs hold national ranking which continues to signal the academic quality on campus while UNO remains in the top tier of comparable Midwestern Universities with a ranking of 17th out of 145 private and public institutions. The Chronicle of Higher Education ranked UNO among the top 50 Fulbright producing comprehensive institutions in the nation, a first for our campus.
- UNO has received significant national recognition for our engagement effort in being named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, receiving the Washington Center's Higher Education Civic Engagement Award with "Distinction", and being cited as one of 25 "Best Neighbor" institutions for university/civic partnerships.
- The Service Learning Academy supported more than 100 academic courses involving 1500 students, which I believe is about twice the Campus Compact average nationally. The Academy also supports hundreds of university and high school students as they participate in special interdisciplinary projects during Fall and Spring Breaks, Martin Luther King Day, Global Youth Services Day, and

## World AIDS Day.

- At the State level, Governor Heineman and Nebraska Diplomats Inc. presented PKI with the State's "Partnership Award" in recognition of their outstanding contributions to economic development as a leading civic partner.
- We continue to be included on the definitive lists of Military Friendly Universities by GI Jobs and Military Guide, highlighting a tradition of service that began with the Bootstrappers in the 50's.
- And, this past spring, we approved a new approach for University General Education. A University General Education Committee with college representatives will be responsible for the oversight and assessment of the General Education curriculum. The committee has begun its work and the new campus-wide curriculum will be in place for students entering in fall 2011.

Finally, we need to celebrate the progress being made in the Capital Campaign. Special thanks to the leadership of Jim Young, Chairman and CEO of Union Pacific, our campus campaign committee comprised of community leaders, and 35 special community project volunteers ... more than \$111 million dollars has been raised to benefit our campus mission with support for capital projects, students, faculty, and programs. Of course, this does not happen without the tireless efforts of our UNO partners at the University of Nebraska Foundation under the leadership of Lori Byrne and Joe Selig and their team of colleagues. I would like our foundation friends, committee members and volunteers to stand and be recognized.

Once again I'm reminded of the generosity of our community, the value they place on our work, and their commitment to adding a margin of excellence to Omaha's University. With four years remaining in the campaign I would remind you that our minimum campaign goal for UNO is \$150 million dollars and our wish list or perhaps better described as our needs list exceeds \$250 million dollars. I sense an absolute commitment to reach or even exceed the \$250 million dollar mark. This is my personal goal and if you didn't know, Vikings are a persistent lot-very friendly, but persistent!

In closing, let's not forget that throughout its history UNO has repeatedly faced lean times, and yet, the campus has done much more than survive. It has thrived, seemingly, on adversity. When some said, it is not possible, UNO faculty and staff have always responded with a resounding "Watch us make it happen" And we did, and we are ... and we will.

I am enormously proud of what we have accomplished in the past 12 months, and our progress toward achieving the targets we've set for 2020. Getting there will require all of us to continue to believe in ourselves and our mission. But we control our destiny, in large measure.

My favorite author and philosopher, Dr. Seuss, perhaps said it best:

"You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself in any direction you choose. You're on your own and you know what you know. And YOU are the one to decide where to go .... "

AND WE WILL.

Thanks to each of you for making the University of Nebraska at Omaha special, and let's make it another great year!