



University of Nebraska Omaha
State of the University Address (2012-2013)
John Christensen, Chancellor
"Why UNO?"

Good morning and welcome to the 2012-2013 University of Nebraska Omaha State of the University Address. It is always a pleasure to meet with students, faculty, staff, alumni and members of our community to share information about our campus.

We have several special groups in attendance today, and as I introduce each group, would members please stand and be recognized? (Deans and Directors, Student Government, Faculty Senate, Staff Advisory Council, Chancellor's Council, University of Nebraska Foundation, and UNO Alumni Association). Thank you and thanks to all for attending today.

The State of the University is a time to look back on a year gone by and to look ahead to the months to come. I must tell you, I like what I see.

Before I share highlights of our collective work, I want to celebrate a truly monumental achievement. This year marks the centennial anniversary of our UNO Alumni Association. For 100 years, the Alumni Association has provided incredible support to our students, alumni and campus.

And, in honor of this occasion, the Alumni Association is giving the campus a very special gift: the "Maverick Monument" – an 8-foot-high, fifteen-hundred-pound bronze bull statue representing our mascot. This new campus addition is simply awesome and represents the spirit and determination of the Mavericks. Please join me in thanking the Alumni Association for this wonderful gift. (APPLAUSE)

And now, I want to share with you the good news – no, the great news – about UNO. Our future is bright, and yes, as Mike Kelly recently stated in the Omaha World-Herald, we are "Bullish on UNO" – thanks to the campus and the community's commitment to excellence.

During the past several years we have diligently worked to transform UNO into a premier metropolitan university and simply said, the progress has been remarkable.

These efforts are grounded in our strategic plan – of being student centered, academically excellent, and engaged with our community. The framework for this transformation centers on building physical, academic, student-life, and engagement capacity for the future.

To that end, the physical profile of the campus has changed dramatically; we have been reclassified as a doctoral granting research institution, and Athletics is successfully transitioning to Division I status.

Academic, Student Affairs, and Business operations have been reorganized and additional faculty and staff have joined our team. Strategic campus priorities are in place, and the campus has been rebranded.

The community engagement and service learning agendas have grown significantly as have our partnerships and collaborative efforts in the metropolitan area and beyond.

The efforts of our partners at the NU Foundation, coupled with the generosity of the community, have provided incredible resources for our students and faculty, as well as for capital improvements, making possible much of the transformational progress we realize today. I anticipate private contributions to be approaching \$225 million by the end of the Foundation campaign next year. That's almost a quarter of a billion dollars invested in UNO by our community. Now that deserves applause! (APPLAUSE)

Thanks to all for your extraordinary commitment of time and talent to the sea change taking place at

UNO. We have indeed accomplished much, but much remains to be done. In fact, continuous change, refinements, and quality improvements will always be at the core of the institutions that choose to lead. So buckle up, it's full speed ahead my friends. (PAUSE)

Yesterday, we turned 105 years old. And, since that very first day, UNO has served as the point of access for excellence in higher education.

Our equation for distinction is really quite simple: hire extraordinary faculty and staff; offer a broad range of relevant and unique programs; enroll dedicated and passionate undergraduate and graduate students; build state-of-the-art learning, teaching and living spaces; offer the most competitively priced tuition in the region; **infuse engagement, creativity, diversity and community into the culture;** leverage the opportunities of a great city; and build a network of over 40,000 alumni in the region.

Okay, so it's not that simple. Yet, that is the Maverick way!

Following conversations with a Maverick friend and fellow alum, Jim Young, a Union Pacific and community leader, it was apparent that UNO was one of higher education's best kept secrets. This is a campus of enormous value and vision. It is time to abandon that rather pervasive Nebraska modesty and tell our story. Defining the UNO value proposition does just that—it tells our value story.

Essentially, a value proposition explains the institution's worth. In other words, it sets your organization apart and indicates why your institution should be recognized as the best choice for those interested or in need of what you offer.

As Warren Buffett said, "price is what you pay, value is what you get."

Today, I would like to provide just an overview of UNO's value, as the details are rather extensive. I trust this will encourage discussion and promote additional input as we continue to share the UNO story.

I'm convinced that UNO should be at the top of the preference list for students and their families; those with university credit but no degree; and

professionals seeking to continue their education.

But beyond assisting families and students in making informed decisions, clarity of our institutional value will promote alumni and donors to become more deeply involved in supporting our mission, as well as serving as UNO ambassadors.

I should know, because it was UNO's value that brought me here as a graduate student. It is now approaching 40 years since I received my master's degree from UNO. I selected this institution because of its affordability, numerous community opportunities for part-time employment, and the professional reputation of the faculty in the degree program I was pursuing.

Following graduation, I was accepted into a doctoral program at an institution that was consistently ranked as one of the top five in my field of study. The education I received at UNO prepared me very well for the academic and clinical challenges I encountered.

As I have reflected on my UNO educational experience, I'm pleased to see that the value threads of the early 70's exist today, and have grown and strengthened. The faculty who taught me had high expectations, and they pushed me hard to perform at levels I had not imagined or experienced previously. At the same time, they supported my success every step of the way. Many UNO faculty members were mentors and friends of mine. Many, sadly, are no longer with us. But, I am very lucky to still have three of those faculty as friends and mentors, which is testimony to the professional, yet personalized experience UNO offers.

The same can be said about UNO faculty today. Our faculty continue to encourage and support students through their educations—on campus, and after they leave. I would say to Mr. Buffett, the price/value proposition at UNO continues to be outstanding.

So, exactly what is the UNO Value Proposition? What is the UNO Advantage?

For students seeking a metropolitan higher education experience in a people-friendly place, UNO is the answer.

And, UNO's greatest asset is Omaha.

Omaha has a small town feel with big city cultural, business, and social advantages. It is ranked as one of the best cities in which to live, work, play, and raise a family ... as well as one of the best places for recent graduates to reside.

It is the home to 5 Fortune 500 and 5 Fortune 1,000 companies as well as a variety of small and large retail/commercial, educational/medical, and social/cultural entities, all of whom value education and readily provide internships, job-like experiences, and employment opportunities for our students.

Of recent graduates, approximately 80% had internships or job-like experiences and 95% are employed or continuing their education. Place does matter. Great cities expect and deserve great public universities, and UNO is Omaha's great public university.

In addition, UNO serves as Nebraska's metropolitan university. We are a vibrant, affordable, diverse, and growing campus.

Overall, enrollment has increased 7% over the summer and 3% this fall, with fall numbers representing the largest first-year class in our history. 29% of the first-year class are minority students and 44% are first generation students.

Our Graduate school enrollment increased by 9%, including a 40% increase in minority students. And, we have students from 121 countries pursuing their undergraduate and graduate education at UNO this year.

UNO's transfer partnerships with local, state, and regional community colleges are perhaps the best in the country—providing another advantage for students seeking a bachelor's degree.

We take great pride in having the most diverse 4-year collegiate student body in the region. Diversity is celebrated on campus, and our students, faculty and staff foster a welcoming culture for all learners: from Omaha to Oman; from high school dual enrollment to doctoral studies; from on-campus to online. A wide range of rich experiences are possible when the world comes to study at UNO. (PAUSE)

At a time when the cost of higher education is being discussed and debated nationally, the University of Nebraska System and the University of Nebraska

Omaha have worked hard to manage the cost of education while at the same time significantly growing financial support for those attending.

UNO has the lowest tuition and fees of the 10 Eastern Nebraska 4-year institutions, is among the most affordable of our peer institutions nationally, and provides a high rate of return on investment. Not surprisingly, approximately 60% of our recent graduates left the institution with no debt or less than \$5,000 of debt. Beyond substantial scholarship and financial support opportunities, part-time employment on campus and in the community are readily available. Here again, our location, value, and partnerships provide advantages for our students.

Our campus is not only beautiful and ideally situated in the city, it is the home to world class facilities. During the past few years, we have significantly changed the face of the campus. We have added approximately 1.8 million square feet of new or completely renovated places and spaces. State-of-the-art teaching, learning, and research facilities such as Mammel Hall, Roskens Hall, College of Public Affairs and Community Service, the Peter Kiewit Institute, Criss Library, and the Biomechanics Research Building provide extraordinary enhancements to educational and research opportunities on campus.

Complimenting these campus additions, UNO offers unique learning environments off campus including river research stations and Glacier Creek at the Allwine Prairie Preserve. These facilities contribute greatly to the scholarly activities at UNO as well.

The additions and renovations to the Health, Physical Education, and Recreation facility have advanced campus health, wellness, and counseling opportunities while at the same time allowing for expansion of intramurals now serving approximately one third of our student body.

Residence Halls at the Dodge and Pacific locations are first class facilities for more than 2,000 students electing to live and learn on campus, and new housing is being contemplated—in response to the popularity and demand for residing on campus.

Finally, the Community Engagement Center is in the final stages of completion, the University/Community

Arena project is moving forward and will anchor the south end of campus, plans for another set of significant Student Center upgrades are in the works, and all aspects of campus safety are being monitored and enhanced regularly.

All of these facilities include the finest technology available. In fact, the entire campus enjoys the full advantage of cutting-edge technologies supported by an award winning and extremely talented IT support services team. Technological access and advancements are the future and we are leading the way.

Yes, all compelling reasons for UNO being the destination of choice, but that is only part of the value proposition.

Everything I have mentioned so far IS IN SUPPORT OF the activity at the heart of UNO... teaching and learning.

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of UNO's value is our academic quality, opportunities, and commitment to student success. Many academic programs on campus and online hold national rankings and professional accreditation, and approximately 90% of the majors align with growth occupations. UNO also maintains partnerships with 70 international institutions facilitating very rich study abroad opportunities, joint research possibilities, and collaborative academic program options. The Office of Research and Creative Activity is supporting and strengthening a robust research and scholarly activities agenda for undergraduate and graduate students and faculty.

The UNO faculty and staff are eminently qualified and talent rich, and hold student success as their highest priority. Coursework is almost exclusively taught by the faculty as opposed to teaching assistants and class sizes allow for personalized learning experiences. Students are not just a number on this campus.

Student Orientation and the First Year Experience seminars prepare students for success academically and socially as they adjust to life in higher education. Academic support services are readily available in our speech and writing and math/science centers, while the learning communities are providing students with mentoring, tutorial, social, and emotional support.

One-stop shops such as the Military and Veteran University Services Office, or Mav USO; Disability Services; the Academic and Career Development Center; and Multicultural Affairs provide students with easy access to a remarkable array of resources. All of these support systems underscore UNO's deep commitment to students' well-being and success.

Outside the classroom– recreational, social, and cultural opportunities abound. The campus is home to many sororities, fraternities, organizations, and clubs and the institution sponsors a variety of lectures, films, plays, art exhibits, and social gatherings; not to mention the extensive cultural, entertainment, and social venues within minutes from campus.

Athletics is a valuable asset to any university. Athletic events promote a strong sense of pride and unity on campus and in the community, bringing individuals and families to campus who ordinarily may not visit, and increase brand exposure home and away. Athletics is the front porch of the campus for many audiences.

The new University/Community Arena – when completed – will not only serve as the home for hockey, volleyball and men's and women's basketball, it will create an enormous boost in campus life and participation. Our student-athletes have recorded the best academic performance in history with a combined GPA of 3.34, thanks in part to the new Hamilton Academic Support Center located in the Sapp Fieldhouse, and the athletic department is getting "Championship Ready."

In addition to the athletic facility benefits for student-athletes and fans, the Arena will provide unique opportunities for university and community events, further deepening connections between town and gown.

The hallmark of metropolitan universities is community engagement.

UNO is nationally recognized for community engagement. Since 2005, the campus has been repeatedly named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, which is the highest honor for engagement granted by the Federal government. Moreover, UNO was in the first group of institutions achieving the prestigious

classification for community engagement granted by the Carnegie Foundation.

Given our history and commitment to all facets of engagement that we are building a "Community Engagement Center" – the first building of its kind in the United States.

When the building opens in the spring of 2014, UNO's Community Engagement Center will be a model for other universities and will greatly enhance our ability to make a difference in the Omaha metro area going forward. This Center will be a focus in 2015 when the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities holds its national conference at UNO.

At UNO, we actively seek partnerships and stand ready to collaborate with all sectors of the city by utilizing institutional assets to enhance the quality of life in Omaha. In turn, this engagement provides exceptional experiences for students, faculty, and staff as they teach and learn in real life settings, creating wins for all.

Our students have unlimited opportunities to be involved in service, service learning, and community based research. Thousands of students participate annually in campus events, such as 3 and 7 Days of Service, while colleges, student and staff organizations, and athletics also sponsor service projects in the community.

We are privileged to be home to one of the nation's leading Service Learning Academies. As a result of the academy's efforts we have more than 120 service learning courses woven into the campus curricula, each providing applied engagement activities that benefit students and the community.

The Academy is currently assisting metropolitan K-12 schools in developing and implementing this powerful pedagogy which compliments other P-16 partnerships in areas such as early childhood, STEM, Literacy, and economic education as well as AP dual enrollment.

Service learning and service activities add millions of dollars in benefits to the community annually, as well as enriching academic experiences and reinforcing the importance of citizenship for our students. This is a great source of pride on campus.

I will close today with some alumni survey results.

In 2012, the Office of Institutional Effectiveness employed ACT to conduct a survey of recent graduates. In many ways these data confirm several aspects of the value found on our campus.

The top five areas regarding "Educational Programs and Campus" rated with high satisfaction by alumni are:

1. Class size
2. Program quality in majors
3. Overall quality of instruction
4. Condition of buildings and grounds
5. Ease of credit transfer

The same top five ratings for "Student Services and Programs" by alumni are:

1. Library services and materials
2. Registration procedures
3. Health and wellness programs and services
4. A tie...Academic advising ... and ... Utilization of computing systems
5. Academic support services

The alumni also indicated high agreement with the following statements:

1. Academic success was encouraged and supported
2. The campus was free from harassment
3. There was a sense of personal safety and security on campus
4. Most faculty were readily available outside of the class room
5. The school had an intellectually stimulating atmosphere

Clearly, these results are encouraging and consistent with the strategic efforts of the faculty and staff. Obviously, we will continue to enhance all programs and services using the voices of students and alums to guide our endeavors.

A few weeks ago, UNO alum John Morgan donated

\$1 million dollars to the College of Business Administration. During his speech he said "There is no place like Nebraska. There is no place like Omaha, and there is no place like UNO."

He is so right.

You and I are the current stewards of this special institution of learning. What we do here, every day, is nothing short of helping our students change the trajectory of their lives and enrich the communities in which they will live.

There has never been a better time, no, never a better time, to be a Maverick, my friends! The momentum, spirit, and community support is historic. Our collective obligation will be to continue to embrace change in serving our students, disciplines, and community at the highest possible level.

Today, I am asking all of you to continue with the important work of transforming UNO into the vanguard of premiere metropolitan universities. It will continue to require "all hands on deck" to meet our strategic priorities and realize the dream of what we can and will be.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to excellence.

Now, please join me for a reception next door in the Milo Bail Student Center. And, on your way out, please make sure to take your copy of "The UNO Advantage."

A special thanks to the University Communications team for their work on this wonderful document.

This concludes the 2012-2013 State of the University Address.

Thank you and have a great year!