

# The Investiture of Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D., as the Chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Omaha

Thursday, Sept. 5, 2019

## State of the University Address from UNO Chancellor Jeffrey P. Gold, M.D.

President Fritz, members of the platform party, members of the audience, and, most important, Mavericks, thank you so much for this incredible honor. I'm humbled, excited, grateful, proud, and truly inspired to be part of the Maverick family.

This is truly a day of history for UNO, not for me as much as it is for the communities that we serve.

For those of you that are not aware, the concept of an investiture goes back a very long time. The Latin word "Vestis" means to dress or to robe. In feudal days, there was a ceremony in which an elected cleric would receive the symbols of the spiritual office, signifying the transfer based on inward-looking leadership. However, in the mid-1650s through 1770, referred to as the "Age of Enlightenment," the age of reason, knowledge, and freedom, this concept changed. It became the leadership of an outward-facing organization and an outward-facing investiture. That's when it became part of the academy traditions.

In 1687, Sir Isaac Newton was invested, Immanuel Kant in 1769, and then later, in 1782, Jean Rousseau. Now, it's Jean Rousseau that I'd like to comment on, because in his critically important work, "Du Contrat Social," he defined the social good, initially of government, but more so of leadership; the implicit agreement among members of society to cooperate for the benefits and the members of the society; the definition of a profession, with altruism, deep and broad expertise, and always to be self-critical, to always ask the question, "What can we do better, differently?" et cetera.

The basic premise is this. The delivery of public higher education is a profession and not a vocation. In Rousseau's social contract, he defines the higher commitment of education, in today's words, to be relevant, to be responsive to the needs of our society - outward leadership, the knowledge and skills to inspire others to do truly great things.

The idea to accept the theme of this investiture as "Access to Exceptional" was truly amazing, because this was not my idea. This came from the culture here, of the Maverick campus of UNO, to provide unprecedented access and, at the same time, to be truly exceptional.

Access. Accessibility. Two words that are rarely linked together with excellence and being exceptional. Certainly not in higher education. And yet, they are commonly linked together here at UNO.

"Access" - to be able to be reached, entered, obtained, and understood; and "exceptional" - meaning unusual, distinctive, remarkable, a journey of true excellence. A welcoming culture that is open to both incremental and transformative processes for students, faculty, and staff for the community that we serve and, of course, for the Maverick Spirit. This combination of accessibility and being truly exceptional underscores the culture to question current practices

to the status quo, a Maverick perspective, a culture of relevance and responsiveness, passion, and perseverance - of accessibility and, yes, of altruism.

Together, these concepts of "Access to Exceptional" demand a transformation. Not an incremental change, but a transformation of higher education. Those values have been present here at UNO since its founding more than 110 years ago today. All of us stand on the shoulders of giants that preceded us, and I certainly am privileged to be in exactly that position as well. But our challenge here is to pursue and to sustain the universal accessibility; the exceptional education; the research, discovery, and creative activity; and the community service that we are responsible for.

Let's recap, as part of my State of the Campus Address, which I promise you will be mercifully brief, because each of you have before you a white, glossy-colored document which contains many of the "Points of Pride" that would go into such an address, knowing that my time would be just slightly limited with you here this afternoon. But I don't base my comments as much on statistics, some of which I will share with you, as I do on 15 meetings with the UNO Student Senate, 21 meetings with the UNO Faculty Senate, 35 meetings with our vice chancellor, 22 town halls, 58 meetings with our deans and directors, 41 cabinet meetings, and, yes, two previous State of the Campus Addresses, soon to be three.

I'm trying to tell you that, in my own small way, I have come to know, to appreciate, and to love this campus for what it is today and for the potential that it has tomorrow. We have had three years of the largest incoming first-year classes and three years of the largest graduating classes in the history of UNO. Semester credit-hour production is up. We have students coming in now from 40 states, 25 countries, and 38% first generation in this fall's class. We've seen a 10% increase in international students, a 14% increase in non-resident students, and a 1% increase in transfer students. Our incoming grade-point average, in spite of the fact that we are so solidly focused on first-generation students, is 3.5, and our ACT average was 23.

Since the fall of 2016, the total unduplicated head count of all new students coming to the UNO campus was 16,245, so if you talk about being a resource for this community, it's incredible.

We've seen continued growth of retention and graduation, and this trend will only increase in the future with our Completion Imperative. The Thompson Learning Community alone welcomed 301 new students, currently supporting a total of 1,054 students here at UNO of nearly 4,400 across the entire system, 8.4% of the total undergraduate population, with a 94.5% first-to-second-year retention rate for these students.

The Goodrich Scholars Program had a 98% first-to-second-year retention this academic year. The Scott Scholars Program not only hired a remarkable executive director, but 25% of the graduating high-school seniors in the entire state of Nebraska who had perfect ACT score are now students in the Scott Scholars Program, a truly remarkable statistic. There are over 2,800 students currently enrolled in dual-enrollment courses at UNO. Last year, the Service Learning Academy had over 200 service learning courses, which is a 15% increase from the last year. 3,125 UNO students, 126 faculty, and 119 community partners participated in the Service Learning Programs.

Over the last three years, our instructional faculty has increased by 486 faculty members, soon to be 487; full time, 162, part time, 324 including our recently recruited rock star, the Senior Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Dr. Sasha Kopp. Our facilities, totaling 4.68 million square feet, 3.1 million square feet here on the Dodge Campus, 1.1 million square feet on the Scott Campus, and 700,000 square feet dedicated to our athletic programs, soon to increase, not to mention Glacier Creek and other preserves that we own, operate, and partner with.

But an even greater source of pride to me is this 320,000 square feet that are currently under construction, or renovation, on this campus, and another 770,000 square feet that are in

various stages of planning that will be done and completed on this campus; a true testament to the culture of the public-private partnership.

The College of Arts and Sciences built and began the first true medical humanities program in the region. We have brought phenomenal Holocaust art exhibition to this campus.

The College of Business Administration has broken ground on 4,400 square-foot addition to Mammel Hall and the recent establishment of a School of Accounting.

The College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media was recently readmitted to the National Association of Schools of Music. This facility was completed, again, as a public-private partnership. By the way, I too would like to congratulate Dr. Washington Garcia on the phenomenal music associated with this program. He is a true asset to this community and just continues to add an amazing amount of culture not just to this campus, but to the entire state of Nebraska. MavRadio has recently earned top honors, and the Weber Fine Arts exhibits have just been truly amazing.

The College of Education will soon be expanding the Biomechanics Research Building, and we've recently been notified of yet another major COBRE grant in biomechanics; congratulations, sir, which will add another \$10 million to the research expenditures on this campus.

The College of Information Science & Technology has recently established a new master's program in Science and IT Innovation and shares a bioinformatics major with UNMC and has participated in just under 400 new grants and contracts, totaling over \$19 million in funded research over the last two years.

The College of Public Affairs & Community Service was recently recognized for not only another yet great year of national award-winning performance, but a recent contract with Jet Linx and Southwest Airlines for training partnerships for the next generation of airline pilots. The online Criminology master's program was just ranked the top in the nation.

In our College of Graduate Studies, we continue to increase offerings with almost 100 graduate programs at the doctoral, master's, and certificates level. The number of graduate students, which I'm particularly proud of, from underserved communities now continues to trend up and is up 75% since 2012.

Switching to our athletic programs, our baseball team claimed the Summit League Championship, earning the first birth to the NCAA Division I regional in program history. Men's Basketball, Men's Soccer, Women's Soccer - all made it to the respective Summit League Championship games, and we're actively underway in preparing the site for the new baseball and softball facilities. But what I am most proud of is the student athletes earned a collective 3.38 grade-point average and continue to be one of the highest in the country and certainly in our conference in their academic performance.

Our libraries. People talk about the value and the role of a library on a great university campus. Last year, we had 481,000 visitors, 11,000 of which were at the KANEKO facility. 726,000 ebooks. 186,000 journals. 651,000 downloads of literature, of articles including 420,000 ebooks. Digital commons downloads were at 545,000.

In the area of academic and student success, our Completion Imperative is alive and well, which is focused on building a future for every single student. Our aspirational goal is not to exceed the average of great universities, but to set the standard and to make sure that 100% of our students who come here, who are willing to put in the time, effort, and work, have a 100% chance of graduation. We'll do that through a new summer bridge program, through an academic advising program rebuild, through major interdisciplinary exploratory studies that has just been started, and expanding offerings in key entry-level courses, all of which required

investment of time, talent, and treasure of the faculty and staff of this great university making this partnership truly successful.

The Student Success testing pilot program, which began last year, has been incredibly successful as well not only as it was initially focused on retention, but is now focused on student well-being and resiliency. I don't need to tell anybody in this audience that stress, depression, burnout, and indeed unfortunately even suicide is not unknown to higher-education institutions, and our focus on trying to blunt that curve, and reach out to every one of our students, staff, and faculty, is unwavering.

Our peer mentors experienced another amazing year of growth. The program increased by over 900 students year over year, which is part of the secret sauce of success for our student body. In sum, one mission, one vision, four goals, 430 initiatives with a 92% strategic completion last year. That is to say, of the 430 initiatives we embarked on last year, over 90% were completed with complete accountability of all of the colleges, institutes, departments, and others.

However, ladies and gentlemen, fulfilling the future promise, the promise of accessibility and being truly exceptional, a new model, by the way, is not without challenge. In order to address that, we have to understand the challenges. These challenges fall into multiple categories, challenges of relevance and reputation; challenges of cost and perceived value; challenges of diversity and inclusion; flexibility and resilience; challenges of real and perceived barriers; challenges of distinction; challenges of respectfulness; of recruitment; of retention, and a myriad of other existential forces both known and unknown as I stand before you this afternoon. But I am more confident than ever, hand in hand with our partners, we will not only face these challenges, but we will turn each of these challenges into unique opportunity to create new models of even more deeply intertwined higher education commonly and totally immersed into our society - a society that is served by and simultaneously serves us.

In sum, it comes back to the social contract, to Jean-Jacques Rousseau. A transformational model must include, I would say, five audacious goals.

In no particular order, to focus on learning and scholarly outcomes and not to focus on process drivers. To build stronger university-community partnerships. To tear down existing walls and make sure all the walls we do build are truly invisible. To create life-long learning models. To break down the barriers from Pre-K all the way through to continuing education and to not have it exist in silos, but to have it exist in partnerships that will create a continuum of life-long education, as indeed those trends and the necessity for that trajectory is absolutely critical. To, in a very real sense, blend high technology with high touch. To embrace experiential learning. And then equally importantly is to completely address and rethink the cost model to create affordability and, one day, to eliminate the cost of higher education completely. To make it accessible via exchange for service and for economic development for the communities that our graduates will serve.

In reality, we are asking our students to pay for their education, which could be one of the most important things that they will ever pay for with their time, their talent, and their treasure at the time that they can least afford to do it. We need to think about what it's going to take to reverse that model to be sure that each of them can pay it forward but obtain that education at a time, at a place, and at a level of affordability that truly makes it real.

In sum, I would say, Nebraska's story must be UNO's story, a story of Access to Exceptional: historic and yet relevant, welcoming and yet engaging; proud and, at the same time, humble; valuable and affordable; flexible and resilient; responsive and responsible; opportunistic and yet always strategic. And we must continue to realize that we can always lead the change we want to see. I have two favorite quotes. One came from President Abraham Lincoln, who liked to say that the only way to really see the future is to build it. The other came from Henry Ford,

who said that whether you think you can do something or you think that you can't, you're almost certainly right.

UNO's story must also be Nebraska's story, a story of Access to Exceptional, building upon remarkable transitions and legacies upon the shoulders of giants, expanding access to exceptional opportunities, strengthening community ties, and fostering new relationships that did not historically exist. This is the theme of this investiture, an enduring mission of our Maverick focus that must define Omaha, Nebraska, and indeed our nation moving forward.

It is with great pride, high energy, and an amazing team of colleagues and friends that I fully accept and laser focus on the challenges that lay before us and embrace the opportunities.

As I like to say, my job is three fold. One, to find challenges, no matter how big or small they may be, and turn them into opportunities. Two, to make other people's dreams come true. And three, to always remain focused on the social contract of our mission.

Ladies and gentlemen, I truly look forward to help make your dreams come true, to fulfill our journey of access to exceptional. I wish all of us God speed on this journey. Thank you.

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