

The New Era of a Great University

University Convocation
September 15, 2010
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Welcome

Welcome to the 2010-2011 academic year of Seattle University, the 120th since its founding. Thank you for coming together this morning to be back with one another again, to welcome those who have joined us, to go into the year together, and pick up on the energy and renewed hopes all of us have as we re-engage in our mission. Our law students are already in their fourth week and the rest of our 8,000 students will be with us within a week. So the new year is upon us! The University Convocation makes this new beginning more real and allows us as educational colleagues to come together, to be renewed by the support of one another, and to go into the new year with confidence.

Two Personal Comments

As president of Seattle University, addressing a University Convocation for the 14th time, I would like to say two more personal things at the start.

First of all, I want you to know how much I experience—and increasingly feel—that it is a privilege to be able to be president of this university with our sense of mission, with the kind of people you are as colleagues, with the kind of students who choose us, located where we are in Seattle, with the modern and beautiful campus we now have. It is a privilege to serve our mission, to serve you and with you, and to serve our students. I have come increasingly to love what I do, experience it as a full expression and exercise of my Jesuit and priestly vocation, and I feel healthy, hopeful, and renewed for the future.

When I became president back in 1997 it was joked that since Fr. Sullivan was the 20th president and served for 20 years, then I as the 21st president was expected to serve for 21 years. Well it is no longer a joke! I look forward to the coming years, have been cleared by both the Society of Jesus and the Board of Trustees to continue to lead—God willing—in an open-ended way. I welcome that I have been given this opportunity of service to and with you. I thought you should know how privileged I feel, how much I love this way of service and leadership, experience the blessing of God's grace and of good health, and have an unparalleled optimism in regard to what we are about and where we might go together.

This is the first more personal thing I wanted to say. The second is that I commit myself in a new way and our administration and university leaders to listen much more fully and widely to all the voices of the university as we shape our common future. I happen to think I am a good listener—perhaps we all do—but how do I really know that is true?

Does my self-confidence and my ideas of where we should go and what we should do get in the way of real listening to all the voices of the university? The survey we did of all faculty and staff showed—among other things about issues of compensation and fairness—that some of you think the leadership of the university—while fully competent, professional, and committed—could listen better to the whole community. In effect I am saying that this will be my priority and the priority of our Executive Team and of other university leaders. I will be indicating in my remarks some of the many opportunities, processes, and means to listen in the coming year to more voices and to do so more consistently.

I believe it is especially important that all of us find how to listen better at this time because building on what we have done together, we are now able to shape our future in an unprecedented way, making decisions about which great new opportunities we will pursue. Confronted with the challenge and call to create together a future as we have never before been so free and able to do, it is especially important that we listen to one another in a new way.

A New Era

Last year at this University Convocation I said:

“This year we will finish off that decade of 2000-2010 which our strategic plan called to be ‘A Decade for Distinction’. This is also the year we build the magnificent new Library and Learning Commons, common to all of us in what we do in our education, as the indicator of the achievements of the past decade and the marker of a new era.”

We now have that new Library and Learning Commons, not only on time and below budget, but surpassing all of our expectations in its design, beauty, academic empowerment, welcoming environment, functionality, and in its integrated wholeness. It’s yours; enjoy it. It’s our students’; I’m sure it will become their new home! It is the marker of a new era for us, the one I am inviting you to help shape. Let me draw on two images of the library to demonstrate how it marks the new era.

Two Images

First of all what we have constructed is both an old building, a beloved one, the Lemieux Library, and a new one, the McGoldrick Learning Commons. So it is both old and new, from the past and the future. But it is not just one alongside the other, but they are integrated so that the whole of the old is renewed and incorporated into the new, and the new flows from and depends on the old. Walk around inside and you will find that you do not know where you are because it is all integrated, all a unity, one harmonious reality. That’s the miracle of the new Library/Learning Commons for me and what surpasses all expectations: how the whole comes together in utility, modernity, beauty.

In this sense of the old and new as one integrated reality for our use, our enjoyment, and our future, it is a good marker of the new era. The new era is not created from scratch; it builds on, is made possible by the past, by all we have done and have been, and it forms one historically continuous, future era. We together build on what we have accomplished in the past and we build something new. We do it in such a way that the old and the new, the past and the future, is one continuous, harmonious, era true to who we are and to what we are becoming.

The second image I ask you to consider about the new era is the sculpture by Joel Shapiro which is the highlight of the new plaza, as the George Tsutakawa Fountain highlights the Centennial Quadrangle. (God bless, Dick and Betty Hedreen for the gift of this sculpture and of most of the art of the Library/Learning Commons!) When you look at this sculpture, this person, what do you see? Is it a person running uphill, racing ahead, lifting legs high in a dash forward? Or is it a person leaning back, almost falling back, reaching back, getting his or her balance? I am suggesting that as an image of our new era it is both. Yes, we are moving forward, even racing ahead, with plenty of steam and energy, but we are also reaching back to pick up on all we have done and leaning back to regather all we have become and are for what is ahead in the field of opportunity in front of us.

Building on what we have accomplished

What have we accomplished which we can now build on? Eight years ago we articulated our vision by saying, “We will be the premier independent university of the Northwest” and said that this would be showing “in academic quality, Jesuit Catholic inspiration, and service to society”. I think we are now beyond that, have achieved it and can simply say, “We are the great independent university of the Northwest.” We have recruited a new quality of faculty and staff to become this kind of university, have enjoyed an extraordinary period of creativity and now have a new research emphasis, now have the campus of a great university, have the strongest sense of educational mission and service of any university we know, are more and more the first-choice university for our students, much more consciously see ourselves as one university of undergraduate and graduate levels with 103 degree programs, have advanced our diversity, are tops in sustainability, now have an intercollegiate athletic program to match the quality of the rest of the university, are more positively, clearly and inclusively Catholic, have won wide support for a record-breaking capital campaign, and enjoy an excellent reputation in ever widening circles which we could not have imagined before. Although we do not want to pause and focus on rewriting our vision statement right now—because we have other more important tasks at hand—though we will need to do so soon enough, I think it is time to retire the phrase “We will be the premier”, and to assert more simply, clearly, and gratefully “We are the great independent university of the Northwest.” If that is indeed what we are, it is because all of us have contributed generously to making us to be who we are.

Of course, it's not simply that it is done, accomplished. We all know of hundreds of ways we are taking steps to improve, or are pressed to keep pace, to advance research, curricula, technology, student community, formation for leadership, development of faculty and staff, greater service, better professional standards, needed new facilities from fitness, to science, to residence, to classrooms and offices, to playing fields. We are taking seriously a review of the compensation and benefits of all of us and have been brought up short by some indicators of where we may be out of line. We are and will address this issue together with all the other areas which we are simultaneously moving forward as the great independent university we have become. My point is to highlight—as with the old and new but integrated Library and Learning Commons and the reaching-back-and-racing-forward Joel Shapiro sculpture—that there is so much to build on as we cross this threshold into a new era of a great university.

A field of opportunity

I believe there is an open field—or you might call it a vacuum—for Seattle University to move to a new level of quality and take on a greater role in our city and our region. Other universities both public and private are leaving to us, if we will seize it, the opportunity of a new leadership, influence, prominence, and service. By location, mission, programs, values, focus, insertion in the community, expertise and nimbleness we are positioned to be able to demonstrate how a great independent university in the heart of our city and region can serve the local, national, and global purposes the people of this region most want. I am eager to present in the next wider-scoped campaign a Seattle University which does not ask supporters so much what they can do for us as reaches out to new people and shows what impact we can have as their great independent university on what they most want for justice, for sustainability, for global health, for business and cultural relations with the emerging giant economics of China, India, and the East, for a city that works for all its people and especially its young.

There is a remarkable convergence of three things: how we have positioned Seattle U. by all we have accomplished, the continuity of our leadership, and an unusual open field of opportunity which asks us to think bigger about our future. While repeating and insisting on my earlier major point that we need to listen as never before to all voices in shaping our future, I am asking you “What great opportunities do you see in front of Seattle University?” It is not a time to be timid.

Some ideas of our great opportunities

Since the end of our last school year, some three months ago, I have been thinking about what I see as the great opportunities in front of us. I've been imagining them, playing with them, praying about them, talking with others about them. How do we build our future on the foundation of the five strategic priorities which guide us? Here are some ideas your president has about where we might go, what we could do. You need to know these from me. I need to know your ideas of the biggest and best opportunities for us to

pursue in this new era of our university. Let me try to present these ideas to you succinctly, then ask you for your ideas, and close my remarks by indicating multiple ways for you to have your voice heard and for you to listen to your colleagues in the months ahead of this exciting turning point of the university.

An international Jesuit university of Pacific Rim impact

A first opportunity. We are educating students in a Jesuit university who will live and work in the new reality of a world transformed by China, India, and other emerging nations and economies. Their world map will be centered on the Pacific Ocean rather than the one we have all grown up on centered on the Atlantic Ocean, on the East Coast of the US and on Europe. Seattle itself is one of the most prominent players in this new world. So a great opportunity I see is of Seattle University becoming an international Jesuit university of Pacific Rim impact. What if we formed a network—now possible through technology—with the Jesuit universities along the coast of North and South America and the string of Jesuit universities in Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines and focus on common Pacific Rim opportunities, cultures, challenges? Could this be one great opportunity of the new era? What do you think?

A catalyst for the city

A second great opportunity. We are rapidly coming to realize that no university is stepping into the challenge of being a catalyst for the city of Seattle and its region as we are. We've long been there in education, nursing, law, business, engineering, criminal justice, ministry, public service, not for profit leadership. We seem to be the university most interested and present to homelessness, poverty, health and human services, justice, minority and immigrant peoples, communities, governmental and non-profit entities. With the remarkable and game-changing Seattle University Youth Initiative and the long-term commitment it involves, we have, perhaps, the great opportunity of becoming the university which is a catalyst for the city of Seattle and its region. Why not develop a Center for the Study of Seattle? Why not plan a greater role in being the greatest resource for the adult education of the Catholic parishes of our region. A catalyst for the city... it is within our reach. What do you think of this opportunity?

A forum on critical issues of value

My third idea of possible great opportunities in a new era. By position and mission we can build on our unique focus on values throughout all of our education and across all of our colleges, schools and programs. We are not only a value university, but as a Jesuit university we believe in a freedom about values. Is there a great opportunity to build on what we are by becoming for our own students, for colleagues, for leaders, and for a wider public a forum on critical issues of value? Issues such as immigration reform and human dignity, sustainability and the poor, science and spirituality, globalization and

marginalized peoples, the churches and contemporary culture, technology and contemplation, politics and the common good, etc. Currently the best forum in Seattle is “Town Hall”. Couldn’t we be “Town University”, bringing to a new kind of forum the riches and width of a university and the depth and humanity of the values of our kind of university. What do you think?

Formation of professionals of depth and commitment

A final idea. If you take a clear-eyed look at what we are most about at Seattle U, do best, and where we have the biggest impact through our alumni, it is in the education of professionals. We are not primarily a research university which is an economic engine and incubator. What we do, and do very well, is educate students who permeate the professions: business, law, education, engineering, nursing, criminal justice, ministry, counseling, public and governmental services, civic leadership. But we do not only educate professionals, we are committed to “formation” of professionals. It’s the middle plank in our mission statement: dedication to “professional formation”. If this is what we are good at, could we claim it, and could we maximize it as a great opportunity? I’d call this opportunity “formation of professionals of depth and commitment”. Aren’t these the professionals, our alumni, whom our society most needs? What do you think?

These are four ideas I have been pondering, imagining, exploring for several months as I experience the university moving into a new era and needing to think big enough and bold enough about the opportunities of its future. All four of these are faithful, potential expressions of our key strategic priorities, which vice president Bob Dullea will highlight for us in a moment. All of them completely depend for their viability that we continue to drive toward the kind of academic excellence provost Isiaah Crawford has articulated. Consideration of a Pacific Rim focus depends on the leadership of associate provost Victoria Jones, the new point person for helping the whole university find its way forward in global engagement. So I want to give her a chance to speak of her ideas and how she is going about the animation and coordination of global engagement.

These are just my ideas. Not decisions, not plans, not initiatives... ideas of great opportunities, possible ways of how what we have done in the past can give direction to our future. What are your ideas? I want to hear your voices about the directions you think we should take.

Listening to the voices of the university

Let me now conclude my remarks by indicating many of the ways in which you can participate in and contribute over the next months and in the coming year to shaping the new era of the university. I invite you to make your voice heard and to listen to the voices of your colleagues. I want to call your attention to the following particular processes in which I invite you to be involved this year while underscoring the importance of the regular means which are vital to how our university advances such as

the Academic Assembly, the Deans Council, the Council of Administrators and Co-Leaders, the presidential open forums, college and school assemblies, divisional gatherings and directors groups, Mission Day, Colleagues in Jesuit Education evenings, the Rank and Tenure Committees, Advisory Boards, and other ways of service to the university. These are most important as means of exercising collective responsibility.

I want to highlight special ways of contribution which are particular to this year:

- Participation in the forums and consultation process of the compensation and benefits study. You will all have an opportunity to have your voice heard in this important process of collective responsibility.
- Your involvement in the creation of the new core curriculum of our university, based on the learning outcomes you have already helped articulate, and looking to a proposal and decision in a year.
- Active engagement October 4-6 in the site visit of an eleven-person team of evaluators from the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Schools as the conclusion of our 10-year accreditation process. Your participation is important in the interviews and open forums so that we can help our peers evaluate and advise our university.
- Participation in the Catholic Heritage Lecture Series in October, February, and April which this year explores the relation between science and religion. Sign up for a special reading group of faculty and staff for each lecture and help give content to our religious character as a university.
- Take part in one of the multiple opportunities provided this fall to publicly discuss and revise the five strategic priorities of the university and then help build out these priorities in practice. More on this from Bob Dullea in a moment.
- Learn of and give input to the work of a new Budget Formation Advisory Group headed by vice president Ron Smith with broad representation of the university.
- Assist vice president Marilyn Crone over the course of the year in the crucial task of devising a comprehensive strategic enrollment plan which will help determine the composition and development of the university.
- Join with associate provost Victoria Jones as she works with the whole university to coordinate, focus, and find the priority directions and programs for our global engagement. More from Vicki in a moment.
- Respond to the calls from Kent Koth as we launch the Seattle University Youth Initiative. This defining development of the university has room and need for the involvement of all faculty, staff, and students.

- Participate in the next six months in the university-wide NCAA certification process headed by dean Joe Phillips which, through consultation of the whole university, assures that we have an athletic program with proper oversight and which is integrated with the educational purposes of the university. Add your voice to the more than 50 colleagues already working on this.
- I am also announcing today that beginning this year I will regularly convene a Leadership Summit to be held in December and in July in order to bring a wide group of university leaders into an informed discussion and advising on the most important issues I see the university faces.

I hope that you see among all of these opportunities both a fulfillment of the commitment to listen better to all voices and ample opportunity for you to speak your voice and to hear the voices of your colleagues. Through these means and others we will in practice find together which of the great opportunities we will pursue in the new era of the university.

In regard to three more immediate opportunities I invite all of you to join me at 10:00 am on September 30th in the Mass of the Holy Spirit at Immaculate Conception Church to pray for God's blessing on our endeavors and to join in the procession back to campus after Mass which will lead to the dedication of the Lemieux Library and McGoldrick Learning Commons at 11:30 in the new plaza.

Please also join me and your colleagues of Matteo Ricci College in celebrating the 400th anniversary of the life of Matteo Ricci by attending the lecture on October 21, "The Global Legacy of Matteo Ricci: A Jesuit Humanist's Encounter with China". Ricci can be the patron of our Jesuit global engagement.

I also invite all of you to join me, in an act of gratitude for all we have been given and out of compassion for our brothers and sisters in need, in giving generously to this year's Seattle U United Way Campaign in October. We are linking the campaign this year to the Seattle U Youth Initiative since there are more than 13 agencies within our initiative footprint that benefit from our United Way campaign. Get involved with the campaign and support the initiative.

I return to where I started. Welcome to the 120th year of Seattle University and know how much it is a privilege for me to serve you and with you as your president.