

## The Perspective of a 15-Year President

- President's Report  
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It has become the custom that I now begin a new year at Seattle U. with this report to you our board members, advisors, alumni, and friends. This is the Second Annual President's Report to you, followed by wine tasting. So the year for me as president—and this is my 16<sup>th</sup> year—begins this afternoon and it begins with you. As generous volunteers on our boards across the whole of the university you deserve and you need to hear directly from me about how I see where Seattle U. is, what are its challenges and opportunities, where it is going, and how I need your help in the leadership of this university.

I think of you as “insiders” to the leadership of the university and so I can speak with you more personally because we together share a common responsibility. Let me start by personally thanking you for your service, for choosing among all the wonderful and important things to which you could give your time and bring your experience, that you choose to help this university fulfill its mission for the sake of our students, our alumni, and for all those whom we serve in the wider community and world. Thanks. Now let's get about it together at the start of this new year, then let's enjoy wine and friendship together.

This has been quite a year for me. It has felt like a turning-point year. First of all I celebrated 50 years as a Jesuit. Then I was thoroughly evaluated in my leadership and was made available by the Jesuits and appointed by the trustees to a fourth five-year term as president, then I completed my 15<sup>th</sup> year of service and earlier this month had my 69<sup>th</sup> birthday. I am already four years older than any of my 20 predecessors were, but I seem to have the knack of letting the students keep me young and energetic. I do occasionally realize that I am a senior, an elder, a mentor, perhaps even a wise leader. I am very eager for the years ahead—however many they will be—and we now have the best senior leadership cabinet any university could want. I feel that fortunately the dimensions of the challenges and opportunities ahead are matched by our professionalism, experience, and dedication within the university. We need your help in a “Triple A” way, as Advisors, as Advocates, and as Ambassadors.

Let me tell you what perspective my 15 years as president gives me about where we have come from and where we are going, and in doing so ask for your help. My cabinet may be laughing when I speak of “The Perspective of a 15-year President”, because I have made it quite clear to them that my middle name is not really “Vincent”, but “Perspective”, “Stephen Perspective Sundborg”. Here's my perspective for you as insiders of our grand initiative.

## Amazing Mission

If you had told me 15 years ago that a mission had the energy and the power to fuel what we have done in the last 15 years and to unleash the creativity we have shown, I would not have believed you. How could a mission do all of that? We took a year, going back and forth between consulting groups and boards, and came up with a mission which has proven itself simply to be amazing. It seems so simple in its formulation but that is part of its incredible power: “Seattle University is dedicated to educating the whole person, to professional formation, and to empowering leaders for a just and humane world.” I would challenge you to find another university so animated in practice by its mission. It is everywhere and it inspires everything. It seems to gain in momentum with time.

This mission has transformed Seattle U. It has driven an academic ascendancy in quality, gave life to a \$170 million campaign, created a new award-winning campus, inspired a community engagement and a Youth Initiative which is nationally recognized, gave birth to a unique program called “MAGIS: Alumni Living the Mission”, brought us all the way into top-level intercollegiate athletic competition, pushed us to new levels of research, exciting new academic programs and degrees, attracted more and more students to Seattle U., guided our clearer and stronger Catholic and Jesuit purpose, shown us how to educate underrepresented minority, first-generation, foster youth, and economically disadvantaged students, grown the university, given it new confidence and a wider and clearer reputation, and most importantly has united and galvanized us as an educational community both on campus and with those like you, who are proud to stand with Seattle U. Of course it’s not the mission in the sense of a formula of words which does this, but the people who hold it, believe in it, share it, personalize it, contribute to it, live it, serve it. So my first perspective on 15 years of experience is of an amazing mission which has given the university such great life and momentum.

We need you to make known this mission; we need you to advise us on how to channel the energies of this mission; we need you to help us find new opportunities for its manifestation; we need you to be our ambassadors, to get the word out about how alive Seattle U. is; we need you to tell families, businesses, prospective students, donors, “Come to Seattle U. and discover its amazing mission and the people who live it!”

We want you to be part of the mission: to know it, contribute to it, enjoy it and be proud of it. We also need you to help the university find how this mission expands itself into and engages the new realities of technology, global engagement, sustainability, the promise and perils of the economy, the capacity for dialogue and civility, public education, a Catholic Church in need of a restored credibility, and the persistent realities of poverty, war, and discrimination. It’s not a time to revise the mission; it’s a time to expand its scope and application.

## Seattle's University

My second perspective from 15 years as president comes from what I thought should be its motto from the start: “Seattle University is Seattle’s university!” That does not exactly trip off the tongue. I actually thought it was quite clever! It may not have been a good motto but it was a good insight and it has come true: Seattle University has become Seattle’s university. If you look at the role we play in not-for-profit leadership education for hundreds of works, in formation of pastoral and spiritual leaders across a dozen local denominations, our service to vulnerable communities through nursing, the impact of our College of Education on schools, teachers, principals, counselors, superintendents, our centrality in criminal justice education, the pervasive presence of Seattle U. alumni in our region from our Business and Law Schools, and the amazing Seattle University Youth Initiative which won the national President’s Award for Community Engagement—if you look at this and dozens of other ways we are present to, impacting, and transforming our city and region, you really can say, “Seattle University is Seattle’s university.”

We can and should make this claim; it is ours to make; we’ve made it a reality. It has not happened only because of location, but more so because of vocation, because of the kind of university we are. “Location, location, location”, yes, but also “vocation, vocation, vocation!” I believe we have a claim on being an “ethical heart” of Seattle, providing a “moral leadership”, increasingly being “the university of justice” for our region. No university is so invested and engaged in, caring about, and in practice actively present there in the community as we are. By the way, we got the \$10 million Gates Foundation challenge grant for the library in the last campaign not because of the inherent value of a new library, but because we were able to demonstrate clearly that Seattle U. has a disproportionate effect on our region and that the library would happen to be the academic hub of this locally impactful university. The fact that the library has been designated this summer as a “Landmark New Library” among only five in the country, is well deserved for the inherent beauty and functionality of the library. The Gates grant too was deserved for the library of a university that so well served Seattle and its region as “Seattle’s university”.

Here is where you can most help us. Put simply, there is a new Seattle we want to be part of, to serve, to learn from, and to educate employees for. We need a whole range of new partnerships and connections with institutions in our region. Can you help us connect with the major regional institutions of global health, of sustainability, of technology and trade, the medical centers which ring us, with Microsoft, Amazon, and the new entrepreneurial businesses, with research centers, and with foundations? Critically, how can you help engage us with institutions and initiatives of STEM education (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) where we have more to offer for the future than in any other area of our engagement? We are poised for this; we need the partnerships. If there was one thing I would most ask of you it is this opening of doors, making introductions, using your contacts to help us develop the new partnerships which will be at the center of the new era of Seattle University being Seattle’s university. No one is better positioned to do this than you are. This is something you can do which we can’t do without you. Help us.

### Academic Ascendancy

Each of my two perspectives so far started with something I thought 15 years ago—“No way a mission could catalyze a university as powerfully as I hoped”, and dreaming “Seattle University is Seattle’s university” becoming a reality. My third and final perspective from 15 years of experience shared with you our “insiders” is that I have always felt, have always said, and still say today, that the lion’s share of the resources and the energy at our disposal need to be put into advancing the academic quality of Seattle U. overall and in each of its programs. If you want to talk about going “from good to great”, it is in academic quality that we are good and in which we aspire and intend to be great. We get pushed, for instance, to chase the new technology, but what we are setting our sights on is to have the new technology chase and enhance our academic quality. In every decision we make, we need to ask ourselves, “How does this improve our quality?”

I am proud of our record in this regard: we deserve our rankings, our superlative accreditation reviews, our growing scholarly publications and research grants, our development of new centers of excellence and of challenging deans to designate signature programs—known nationally as topnotch—in every school, our having the Professor of the Year for the State of Washington this past year, and again that best-of-class library. The record is good, the trend is clear, the momentum is felt. I believe we are at a tipping point in this academic ascendancy. You see our campus, you see our engagement in the community, you see our move to top-level intercollegiate athletics, but you need to know that more than half of all of our strategic investments are in academic quality. That’s what we have been doing and that’s what we need to do even more. If someone were to ask me, “For what do you most of all need new resources?” without hesitation I would say that we need a huge infusion of new resources committed to our academic ascendancy in quality. We need this not because we are weak but because we are good and we can become great. We want the top-of-mind perception of Seattle U. to be academic quality, that we are the first-choice university of all of our students—undergraduate, graduate, or law. We have the leadership to bring this about. We need your help.

As we build and launch a fundraising campaign to match our aspirations, we need you to help us gain the resources for academic quality and to be generous yourselves for the sake of the opportunity, challenge, and success of all of our students to have in an unsurpassed education. We need you, when you speak about Seattle U. to others—however proud you are of campus, athletics, justice, or our faith commitment—to speak about our quality as a university above all in our academic programs. We need to help you to do this, and we will, for we know that at the end of the day and in the new context of higher education today, it is quality which will win out and which will make any university and this university thrive. We need you to help us with the new branding and marketing initiative we are undertaking to get the word out, and the word is “quality”. And we need you to help us on all of the boards on which you serve to keep asking the question of quality in all the decisions about which you guide and advise us.

I have other perspectives than these three of “Amazing mission”, “Seattle’s university”, and “Academic ascendancy”, but these three will have to do for now. On other occasions and at the start of other years I could give you my perspective on being more positively a Catholic and Jesuit university, on our awakened alumni program, on how we are facing the cost and financing

of a Seattle U. education, on the experience of our students outside of the classroom, on the use of educational technology, and on how we invest and support the community of persons who work at Seattle U. “Stephen Perspective Sundborg” would love to get lost in all of these perspectives, but he won’t!

### A Great Campaign

Let me tell you about my primary goal this year: shaping the new, great capital campaign. Over the course of the year we will build toward the launch of the campaign. I have already tipped my hand that it will be concentrated for each and every school, college, and program around academic quality and in service to the community and region. In particular it will focus on four things:

- Its center will be gaining the resources and facilities for Seattle U. to make a previously unimagined impact and contribution to STEM education and the health sciences. This is in particular where we will go from where we are now to what will be new, and from good to great.
- Our education and the fulfillment of our mission and vocation as a university is only as good and as true to what we claim to be if we have the financial resources to make this great education available and affordable to all desirous and deserving students. Our campaign will seek to endow their opportunity for a great education.
- We have already moved boldly into global engagement and education. The campaign needs to make it possible for every student to experience and exclaim that his or her education was an exciting and future-enabling global education both in the classroom, on the campus, and in the world.
- Finally our campaign will face the fact that our Catholic and Jesuit university has an irreplaceable contribution to make in renewing the credibility of the Catholic Church and becoming the needed center in the Northwest for interreligious dialogue. We’ll be asking for the resources to establish that kind of a center as well as develop further our new Institute for Catholic Thought and Culture.

I think you can tell that I am excited about the campaign not only because it is my last great push as president, but because it really can fulfill our amazing mission, service to Seattle and our region in the most critically needed ways, and assure the academic quality and Jesuit educational ideals for which we have always stood for and to which we have aspired.

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Let me conclude—before I engage you in your questions and observations and before the Spanish wine flows—on the kind of personal note with which I began my report to you. I am sure you can perceive that I am a very blessed person and priest to be able to lead this Jesuit university for the past 15 years and hopefully for many more to come. I am confident you think

you and Seattle U. are lucky to have this kind of presidential leadership. I am the one who feels lucky and blessed. I wish you could receive all the gratitude that is poured out to me but meant for all, especially by students and families, for what Seattle U. is and does and how true it is to its claims. I wish you could know personally as I do just how many people like you and our faculty, staff, and alumni are working together so enthusiastically and committedly in our common mission. And I wish you could know the profound assurance I receive and feel from God in daily prayer that this is indeed God's work and that it is God who makes possible and blesses all we do together. This is the best place and the right place to end my report to you tonight at the start of our new year. Thank you.