

A Tradition of Excellence and a Culture of Innovation

By President John Denis Haeger

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Thank you President Jewett, Regent McKay, Regent Boice, Regent Bulla, President Crow, Executive Director Blessing, President-Emeritus Lovett, Mayor Donaldson, and other distinguished guests, members of the university community, faculty, staff, students, and administrators. I am honored to assume the presidency of Northern Arizona University and consider myself extraordinarily fortunate to do so.

If you believe that certain events were destined to occur, I feel that way about my arrival at NAU. I am a person who has spent his career in academic life-- twenty years of undergraduate and graduate teaching, a research agenda that explored patterns of economic development and entrepreneurial innovations in the American economy, and an administrative career that was continually involved in building excellence in programming and expanding the horizon of universities beyond their traditional missions. I never imagined that I would be given the opportunity to serve as the president of an institution which today stands at the cusp of becoming one of this country's most unique and best-known public institutions of higher education.

This week, we have "celebrated NAU" and recognized NAU's strengths which have evolved over the 102 years since that first class in Old Main for aspiring

teachers. NAU's founding as a normal school was the work of enterprising Flagstaff entrepreneurs and as you stroll the campus, the names of buildings celebrate the accomplishments of Northern Arizona citizens: Babbitt, Gammage, Blome, Adel, Bilby, Prochnow, Cline, Rolle, Wettaw, and many more.

But presidents, donors, and regents do not personally accomplish institutional objectives; at best we facilitate the work of the faculty and staff who work directly with the students thereby defining the culture and quality of the institution. From the two faculty and one staff member in that single building not far from here in 1899, NAU today is served by 1400 full and part time faculty and 1900 staff, who work with nearly 20,000 students on the Mountain Campus, in Yuma, and at over 110 locations across the state in traditional classrooms, by WEB, and TV. This faculty and staff are drawn from the best universities in the world, their published works appear in the finest disciplinary journals and their books roll off the commercial and university presses. Some of the names we have become very familiar with such as Paul Keim and Wally Covington but others you may not know as well. Dr. Stan Lindstedt who is pioneering a new exercise machine using reverse exercise physiology to assist those with heart and pulmonary difficulty or Dr. Devon Mihesuah who has published prolifically on Native American history and culture and who edits the leading journal on Native American Studies in the country. Our incoming president of the Faculty Senate, Dr. David Camacho, is not only an accomplished teacher, but a distinguished scholar on issues related to the environment and to cultural diversity. Likewise our staff is equally distinguished from Dr. Patricia Haeuser, our Director of Planning and Research, a frequent lecturer at conferences across the country on issues related to institutional effectiveness, and Lisa

Nelson heading a Creative Communications unit, which has won numerous awards for publication design. These individuals serve to represent a faculty and staff that is in the classroom, working with students on a daily basis, or providing services to all in order to bring distinction to this university. As we assemble here this day in September, 2002, Northern Arizona University can point with pride to having fulfilled its core mission:

The College of Education graduates more teachers than any other Arizona institution, all of whom are highly desired by school districts.

In September 2000, the NAU Liberal Studies program was recognized nationally by the Association of American Colleges and Universities for Distinguished Achievement in Undergraduate Education.

We are deeply committed to the education of Native American students and now grant more master's degrees to Native American students than any university in the country. We are second overall in total degrees.

Close interaction with our faculty is a NAU tradition and students tell us they are here for that reason. Exit surveys with seniors indicate that 97% of our graduating students rate their educational experience as excellent.

Even though we celebrate NAU's accomplishments, we also must realize that these accomplishments do not guarantee our future. Today the world of higher education is in turmoil. Universities are entering a period of revolutionary change that will restructure nearly everything we do. Not only can we not rest on our accomplishments but we must rethink some of the very strategies and ideals that brought us to this point,

preserve those parts of our tradition still viable, and begin to sharpen our mission and focus. Frank Rhodes, former president of Cornell University, warned his colleagues not long ago that “I wonder if at times we are not like the dinosaurs, looking up at the sky at the approaching [meteorite] and wondering whether it has an implication for our future.” So what are the approaching [meteorites] that Northern Arizona University should be aware of?

1. *Financing of Higher Education.* In state after state, the funding of public higher education institutions is a precarious mix of tuition dollars and state appropriations, and each year the state legislature wrestles with difficult economic conditions and competing interests. Even in good times, universities must compete for dollars against compelling arguments for increased funding from other public sectors such as prisons, social welfare needs, transportation, and K-12. Our recent budget cuts are a stark example of the fiscal realities of our current situation.
2. *Growth of the Knowledge Economy.* The irony of our situation is that budget constraints appear at a time when higher education has never been more in demand. The public realizes that a college education provides a stake in our society, just as a high school diploma was essential three decades ago. Consequently accessibility to higher education is a major social issue and completion of a degree is an “imperative” for economic success. James Duderstadt, former president of the University of Michigan comments, “The

crucial strategic resources for prosperity have become educated people and their ideas.”

3. *Growth of Technology* -- Another driver for change in higher education is technology. Technology has broken down nearly all the space and time constraints of our daily lives. Banking and medical treatment are now available on line. We can seek psychological help, follow news events with a handheld device, take a virtual tour of many art museums in the world’s capitals, purchase a car, read a book, and of course, access education from the world’s great universities and most renowned scholars--all on-line. In 1899, Arizona Territory needed a “place” in Flagstaff to educate teachers. Today, the world of NAU is no longer constrained by its geographic location just as what we teach, how we teach, when we teach do not any longer depend solely on time or space.

But the changes in the economy, education and society provide enormous opportunity.

There are few universities in the country with brighter prospects in this new environment than Northern Arizona University. We are the right size, large enough to have assembled an incredible faculty and staff, with professional programs and research laboratories capable of cutting-edge discoveries; but we are also small enough to move quickly and adapt to disciplinary changes, enter partnerships with researchers around the world, and form educational consortia that offer programs that respond to market forces, if we choose.

We benefit enormously because we have a diverse mission. I know this has always been a subject of controversy on campus: our statewide mission and technology capacity seems incongruous with our traditional residential graduate and undergraduate campus role. Whether our predecessors realized it or not, and I suspect they did, our diversity of missions is arguably our greatest strength in this rapidly changing environment.

Today I would like to briefly outline our two most essential goals on which NAU can build its future, achieve excellence, and take some measure of control over the swirling winds of change in higher education. It is a propitious time to unite and come to terms with our tradition of excellence as a residential institution for undergraduate and graduate students integrating that with our culture of innovation in applied research and distributed learning.

A TRADITION of EXCELLENCE: The Premiere Institution for Residential Undergraduate and Graduate Education

NAU must first become the leading residential undergraduate institution in the West and a national competitor with institutions such as Miami of Ohio and Virginia's James Madison University. The mountain campus has a huge natural advantage. It is a special and unique place where students can look up every day at the majesty of the San Francisco Peaks and experience the unique environments of the Colorado Plateau. We

already possess the programs and a quality faculty and staff. But, in the future, we have to allocate more dollars to recruitment and to retention and to the educational programming demanded and needed by this generation of students. We have to be able to demonstrate to students and to parents that we care about the social and intellectual development of the student. We must first commit our resources to the classes of our freshman and sophomore students so that these students graduate with the ability to think critically, understand the importance of citizenship, write and speak with ease and conviction, possess abilities in technology and quantitative reasoning far beyond any previous generation, and understand the role of leadership in their communities.

Our reputation in this arena should be based on more than high school GPA and SAT scores because those measures only indicate that our students did well in high school. Our true measures of success should be the quality of student learning outcomes and our graduation rates. In an age in which a college education is a necessity and should be available to all who wish, in which 70 percent of high school graduates nationally will receive some form of higher education, we must rededicate ourselves to undergraduate students, to the curricula that we offer them, and to their successful path to graduation. We cannot give up on students because nearly all can succeed. Student success and the undergraduate experience must become a pervasive goal of the whole campus.

Imagine our institutional reputation, to say nothing of our contribution to Arizona and the western region, if we can say to parents and students that if you come and study with us, we will guarantee the best undergraduate curriculum, measured by the learning outcomes of our students, assure the student's interaction with permanent faculty in

classrooms and laboratories, and a high certainty that with their cooperation, graduation within three or four years. High standards, high expectations, and high graduation rates are a state and national imperative in the knowledge economy. If we accomplish this core mission and can demonstrate QUALITY, Northern Arizona University will never have to be concerned again with declining enrollments or uncertainty about the core mission. We will be known as an institution which provides all the advantages of a private education but accessible and at a price that the public can afford.

Rededication to the undergraduate mission involves an important corollary. We must also ensure that, as a residential campus, we build a community that reflects the changing demographics of our world. The majority population today will soon be the minority. The emergence of global economies, ubiquitous communications technologies, ease of transportation have so collapsed boundaries and redefined our world that our students must interact with a diverse faculty and staff and a curriculum that adequately prepares them for the world of the 21st century. We must continue to build our Native American, Hispanic, African American, and Asian student populations and fashion a curriculum reflecting that diversity. Our recruitment efforts should reach across the entire country and into foreign lands so that NAU becomes a community of disparate peoples and ideas. Learning is about confronting values and ideas and building community.

Graduate Education and Research

Linked inextricably to our mission in undergraduate education is our continuing growth in basic research and graduate education on the Mountain Campus. The ability to produce new knowledge and share that experience with students separates universities from proprietary institutions and from many state comprehensive institutions. NAU has an extraordinarily large and complex research and graduate education mission. Our goal this year is to garner nearly \$50 million in government grants for on-going research in the sciences, business, education, engineering, and the health professions. With only 20,000 students and 800 permanent faculty, this is a record of substantial accomplishment ranking us with many more well-known institutions such as the University of Wyoming, the University of Montana, and Portland State University. More important, undergraduate students regularly participate in the research projects and work in the laboratories of our most active researchers. Indeed research in the future must be constantly intertwined with both our undergraduate and graduate programs. It can be a distinguishing mark of Northern Arizona University.

A CULTURE OF INNOVATION: *Applied Research and Distributed Learning*

The legacy of the faculty, staff, and administrators who preceded us was that they set the stage for a university which could, at one and the same time, have several diverse but fundamentally related missions. Alongside our traditional undergraduate and graduate education and research mission on the Mountain Campus, we have built a highly entrepreneurial and applied educational and research mission that responds to the economic development and workforce needs of the modern economy. But we have been curiously reluctant to unleash this engine of economic development, uncertain of its

future, unsure about its challenges to our traditional mission, and unwilling to push the boundaries of this “uncharted sea”.

For example, alongside and sometimes in concert with our basic research mission, some of our most productive applied research centers such as the Ecological Restoration Institute, the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals, and Arizona K-12 Center, function at the institution’s periphery. These faculty and staff work with the United States Geological Survey, or United States Park Service, or the City of Flagstaff, offer degrees, interdisciplinary certificates or noncredit programs but remain outside the traditional governance structure of departments and colleges. But the seeds of organizational change are everywhere around us as our applied research mission continues to grow. Our new partnership with the Babbitt Ranch shareholders to explore new economic utilization of the vast Babbitt properties throughout the state of Arizona is one example where Northern Arizona University daily works to improve society, assist with economic development and involve undergraduate and graduate students.

In fact, the university has the most important infrastructure requirement of the new economy, intellectual talent, which can be used for research breakthroughs but also to establish new companies that then can provide employment to members of the surrounding community. The world of applied research will be about partnerships and about stimulating economic growth. In Flagstaff, it will continually bring us into closer relationship with community groups such as the Flagstaff Medical Center, City Government, United Way, the Greater Flagstaff Economic Council, and the Chamber of Commerce. The issue or goal may be a conference center or an applied research facility,

but in all cases, we will participate more eagerly with our partners in Flagstaff and beyond. Northern Arizona University, then, will continue to provide innovative, applied research solutions to the community and in return develop new revenue streams that support and complement our traditional missions.

Distributed Learning:

We have struggled for years in an effort to fit our distance learning mission into the traditional structure of the university. But it fits perfectly if we conceive of the modern university in broader terms. At its inception, distance learning was designed to provide access to undergraduate and graduate programming. It utilized the latest IITV technologies and evolved partnerships such as the 2+2 programs with the community colleges. As this mission evolved, we explored more and more programming in the Phoenix region and offered existing degrees to students anytime and anywhere. We built another presence in Yuma in association with Arizona Western College. Today we have 5600 students, who are taking undergraduate and graduate programs in nearly every county in the state, although the greatest number are in Maricopa County.

The economic reality today is that the market for undergraduate, and especially post-baccalaureate degrees and certificates, is insatiable. Education, moreover, is no longer reserved to the traditional university so that private institutions such as the University of Phoenix, have created a competitive landscape. But Northern Arizona University is already a major force in this environment. Last year we awarded 1900 master's degrees, and 1300 of these degrees were through our statewide programs. More surprising for many is that NAU today offers more master's degree programs in a year

than Kansas State University, the University of Wyoming, and Washington State University combined. The reality is that traditional campuses, such as NAU in Flagstaff, that we have come to see as the centerpiece of the nation's higher education system and which represent the largest capital investment by states, are not where the majority of students will receive their higher education degrees and certificates in the future. That is both a sobering thought and an indication of huge opportunities for Northern Arizona University as the next iteration of our "distributed learning" mission.

Because of our size and tradition of innovative technologies used in the classroom, we can respond with new courses and degrees that address workforce needs. Just in the last three years, faculty have developed highly innovative master's degrees in management, communications, and educational technology. More so than many institutions, we understand that post-baccalaureate education is the fastest growing area of higher education. Some of these courses are on the WEB; more often we combine WEB delivery with traditional on-site instruction always cognizant of the needs of the learner and the necessity of insuring quality. These degrees can be offered to Arizona residents at a fraction of the cost of our competitors ensuring that even the most economically disadvantaged students have access. This fact will assure our leadership in workforce development throughout the state.

Equally important, these degrees should be offered in a competitive market and in response to market demand. They should also carry a price that allows the university to recruit high quality faculty and return money to the university to continue to build the core. In a way, the university suddenly is involved in its own form of product evolution

maximizing its intellectual capital and innovating from its core activity. We have partners in this endeavor such as Arizona Regents University and faculty and programs from the University of Arizona and Arizona State University. Just as partnerships and mergers of interests will dominate our applied research endeavors, the future demands that we partner and cooperate with other institutions throughout the state, nation, and world. . The difference between success and failure will be determined by speed, innovation, price, and above all quality, both in academic programs and student services.

Conclusion:

The future holds great promise for Northern Arizona University. We are very lucky. Unlike many public institutions around the country, we have an incredibly strong core of undergraduate and graduate programming, research that equals our peers in both pure and in applied fields, and a reputation for experimentation in technology and program delivery. Our challenge as an institution is to find a way to harbor both tradition and innovation within our departments and colleges, to honor our humanistic and social science disciplines and our undergraduate focus alongside our economic innovations. We must celebrate the diversity of our missions and our university community of faculty, staff, and students. Northern Arizona University's TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE and its CULTURE OF INNOVATION can shape our future. I cannot imagine another place in the world that I would rather be today than helping faculty, staff, students, and friends of NAU pursue two overarching goals: (1) to become the finest undergraduate residential institution in the West and (2) to become the highest quality and most innovative public institution in providing accessibility to educational programs that meet

student needs and fulfill the economic demands of our economy –anytime and anywhere.

These are worthy goals, and they are within our reach.