

The Opportunities Ahead
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Address to University Senate
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Good afternoon. I am honored to be with you today. I take great pride in serving the students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of this great university.

My role as provost can be both simple and complex. My task is to do everything possible to create a supportive environment in which all of us can accomplish our personal, professional, and institutional academic goals.

Given our core missions of knowledge creation, knowledge dissemination, and service, such a focus constitutes a unique leadership privilege that I value and for which I am grateful.

This annual meeting with the University Senate is the traditional opportunity for the provost to provide the university community with an overview of the state of academic affairs. This afternoon, I want to start that conversation by discussing some core values that serve to focus the efforts of my office. I also want to talk about the philosophies that guide my own personal behavior.

In effect, I want to tell you something about who I am and why I focus on particular issues. I will then discuss the economy and a series of actions that I believe reflect some of our important institutional values.

There are many new and continuing initiatives under way at this great university. From my perspective, they are consistent with and supportive of the five core value commitments that guide what I do.

The first of these is a clear sense of respect and appreciation for all members of our academic community—for our differences as well as our similarities. We each bring multiple talents and interests that enrich our collective lives. These varied attributes are invaluable to the overall success of The Ohio State University.

Specific contributions may vary over time, just as their centrality to individual or institutional success may change. But I believe that a level of civility and appreciation for differences must guide all our actions. Of course, passions may and do run high as we engage in debate and discussion—but these make up the heart beat of any great university. It is our commitment to civility that provides the guidelines that allow discourse to occur with minimal negative consequences. That is something to be cherished.

This commitment is reflected in President Gee's focus on cultural change and a need for all university leaders to ensure that values supporting cooperation and mutual trust dominate our institutional lives. In this regard the focus is not on achieving minimal levels of civility. Instead, it is on achieving levels that allow for full exchange of ideas in a caring and mutually supportive environment.

The second of my core value commitments is a firm belief in the continuous need for accountability in all that we do. Other than the protection of our basic rights, none of us is “owed” anything by the university or the state.

No administrative unit can simply do what it wishes without regard for consequences. The same applies to each of us as individuals. One of the joys of being part of our community of scholars is the clear appreciation of that principle among faculty, staff, administrators, and students. Each of us may have high expectations. But, at the same time, we all understand that we accept responsibility for the effects of our actions. While there is a clear institutional commitment to provide sufficient resources for success, an unwillingness to perform at expected levels cannot and should not be seen as acceptable.

This commitment to accountability can be seen in the doctoral program reviews that have been completed and the resource reallocations made to support these assessments. It also can be seen in our willingness to continually rebase college budgets because of program performance and quality—and not as some formulaic response to the growth or decline in enrollments. In fact, to respond to differences in levels of achievement, the Offices of Research and Academic Affairs have redirected more than \$140 million during the period from 2003 to 2008.

Third, along with civility and accountability, I believe in the value of planning. Success does not come about primarily through serendipity. Instead, planning strategically and aligning resources with goals are essential to success. As you know, university strategic planning processes have been expanded considerably in scope and depth. Throughout the planning process, I have been struck and gratified by the willingness of faculty, staff, deans, and unit directors to build reserves to address unknown but anticipated resource difficulties. Such contingency planning is critical, particularly during times of rapidly changing environments.

I should note that to be effective, such planning must be trans-institutional. President Gee’s sense that our focus must be on “One University” rather than independent units clearly establishes this broad view.

The fourth core value that serves as a guide for me is the belief that a commitment to excellence must be the norm that we all embrace. Mediocrity can not be an aspiration, nor can it be seen as a source of comfort. At a time when the State of Ohio, and the country, are placing their hopes for the future in higher education, we cannot fall into the belief that “good enough” is in fact “good enough.” Our standards must be high, and we must have the courage to hold each other and our institutions to those expectations.

It is not easy to meet the standards that we must set for ourselves and for Ohio State. True talent is scarce and requires differential distributions of resources to be sustained. Achieving excellence requires great expenditures of energy and a focus on efficiency. It requires constant reexamination of what is being done and how it is being accomplished. It also calls for a willingness to change behaviors as requirements for success change. I know that achieving excellence creates levels of uncertainty that are uncomfortable for many. But the commitment to excellence is a core value that we must reflect in all that we do if we are to fulfill our obligations to each other and to society.

Finally, I believe that a commitment to reasoned action is to be preferred over delay. If we treat each other with civility, accept accountability for our actions, plan appropriately, and are truly committed to excellence, we should also commit to making decisions with reasonable speed.

Unnecessary delay in decision-making is often far more damaging than making a decision that ultimately may need adjustment. Unnecessary delay conveys a level of disregard or disrespect for colleagues just as it implies a lack of strategic planning and an absence of curiosity. At times, unnecessary delay also reflects an unwillingness to be held accountable for the consequences of a decision. We cannot succeed as an institution if we hide behind bureaucratic structures, are paralyzed by ambiguity, confused by uncertainty about lines of authority, or seek escape from progress by hiding behind traditional barriers to change.

It has always struck me as interesting that in virtually all of our scholarship “zero risk” is seen as an unobtainable goal. Indeed, in our best journals a five percent risk of being “wrong” is seen as acceptable. In some, a ten percent possibility of error is still seen as a rigorous standard. And yet in much of what we attempt to do in governance or administrative planning, we seem to prefer “paralysis through analysis.” We prefer to delay until we find a zero risk alternative. This is not prudent decision-making. It is a mechanism for avoiding change and an unwillingness to be held accountable for reasonable decision making. Timely decision-making will continue to be an Academic Affairs goal. I hope it will be reflected in the deliberations of all governance bodies at this great university.

It is important to note that I stress these core values in the context of a dynamic university of increasing stature. As just one example of our institution’s growing reputation, *U.S. News & World Report* has ranked Ohio State 15th best among national universities in its new “up and coming” category.

We continue to rank 19th among the nation’s top 50 public universities and are the state’s top public institution. *SmartMoney* magazine has ranked Ohio State as 11th in the nation on the basis of the long-term value created by receiving a university degree. In that study, OSU ranked higher than any of the nation’s private universities.

One indicator that supports such rankings is the quality of the freshmen we welcomed into our classes last autumn. With average ACT scores of 27.3, these students are the best-prepared in Ohio State history. This year 54 percent of our incoming freshmen were in the top 10 percent of their graduating classes. Just two years ago, that number was 44 percent.

Student retention has never been higher: in autumn 2008, almost 93 percent of our first-year students returned for their sophomore year. That is more than five percent higher than just five years ago. Nationwide, according to a just-released survey from ACT, Inc., only 71 percent of first-year students at four-year colleges returned to the same institution for their second year.

Our faculty have likewise never been more impressive in their accomplishments. This year, for the fifth time in the last six years, Ohio State led the country in the number of faculty chosen as fellows of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The 17 fellows named this year bring Ohio State’s total number to 159, making ours one of the largest contingents of AAAS fellows in the country.

In addition, the National Science Foundation has recently moved Ohio State onto the list of the nation's top five universities in industry-financed research expenditures. Since 1991, Ohio State's research support from industry has more than doubled. This year our total research expenditures exceed \$700 million.

In another measure of excellence, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has recently recognized Ohio State among those universities selected for its 2008 Curricular Engagement and Outreach and Partnerships classification. Of the 119 institutions recognized for both community-engaged curriculum and community outreach efforts, only four of our benchmark universities were also chosen this year for this distinction.

I hope that it is clear to all that the academic engine of The Ohio State University has never been more powerful or more dynamic, nor has it been better tuned for even greater performance. Today's successes are the product of the energy, imagination, good will, and tireless commitment of our entire university community.

Hanging over these successes, however—indeed, hanging over us all—is an economic climate that we will be weathering for an undetermined period.

Today's version of a troubled economy is characterized by a looming global recession, a depressed and unstable U.S. stock market, a more than \$700 to \$800 billion Wall Street bailout whose effectiveness remains to be seen, multi-billion dollar loans to the auto industry, and a public—all of us included—that is understandably anxious about what tomorrow will bring.

The State of Ohio has a \$2 billion shortfall this year, with an anticipated \$7.5 billion gap over the coming biennium starting on July 1. Nevertheless, this university continues to enjoy strong support from Governor Strickland and excellent bi-partisan support from leaders in the Statehouse. We are deeply grateful to them for keeping their commitment to fully fund the two-year tuition freeze. And we support the Governor and our elected leaders as they work through budget issues for the next biennia.

Of course, Ohio's own budget crisis is being replicated across the country. The State of Washington may slash \$1 billion in school funding; Pennsylvania has eliminated raises for more than 13,000 nonunion state employees; California may drop more than 150,000 children from a healthcare program; Nevada college students are facing a 25 percent fee increase. And every day we learn of more reductions impacting higher education across the nation, particularly in private universities many of which seemed immune to such reductions in the past.

The work of Ohio's political leaders is immensely complex, as they attempt to deal with structural difficulties that make significant investment in higher education problematic. They—and we—know that families are finding it increasingly difficult to pay for higher education, and that students are accumulating increasing debt loads to pay for college.

These are challenging times, to be sure. But even in the face of economic difficulties, we can and will continue to make advances on our goals. During the past year, we have taken several anticipatory steps to ensure that we do so. For example, we have saved nearly \$100 million through administrative efficiency and cost-avoidance.

In addition, because of foresight and fiscal conservatism by unit heads, deans, and vice presidents, we have developed targeted reserves that will be used for any short-term budget difficulties. As one of the nation's largest direct student-loan lenders, in conjunction with our Students First initiatives, we will continue to help students and their families to finance their education at reasonable costs. And, of course, we are moving ahead with planning for the upcoming capital campaign that will provide additional sources of revenue. Additional contingency plans across a broad range of expenditures have been examined and discussed by the Senior Management Council, Executive Committee, and the Board of Trustees. This is a regular part of our management process. You can be assured that Ohio State is prepared to respond to a variety of budgetary scenarios.

But it is important to think beyond contingency measures, necessary though they are.

Let us consider how this moment of economic challenge can present us with opportunities. Indeed, our academic priorities for 2008-09 have been developed to allow us make the most of this challenging moment.

At the top of the list, our number one priority is the retention and recruitment of talented faculty and staff. President Gee and I are personally committed to attracting the very best minds to Ohio State—and then keeping them here. And we will continue being personally involved in that process.

To ensure that we do our utmost to provide faculty with the tools for success, a Talent Acquisition, Retention, and Engagement Strategy Committee was charged last year with evaluating trends and issues among Ohio State faculty. Guided by a faculty culture survey that many of you may have taken, the committee proposed a number of strategies.

As just one example of what we are doing to boost faculty success, my office is working with deans and faculty leaders to develop new principles that recognize and foster trans-institutional activities in distributing resources to faculty. These principles will be discussed with department chairs and all of you shortly.

Our human resources priority will naturally include our students. As a second priority we want to ensure that the Ohio State student experience is full immersion learning—academically, culturally, socially, personally—from the moment students arrive on campus. In all of this, our goal is to better prepare students to participate fully in the diverse world they will face upon graduation.

This means expanding and enhancing programs that promote students' success throughout their career at Ohio State. It also means considering options for an improved and expanded student housing portfolio and the learning communities such housing will make possible. And it means paying greater attention to supporting the post-graduation aspirations of our students.

A third objective this year is to allocate resources in a manner that enhances interdisciplinarity. As a result of strategic planning efforts initiated last year, faculty and colleges are identifying specific goals and tactics for achieving integrated academic activities. To support these efforts, we will aggressively align financial resources with strategic goals.

As announced recently, we will be competitively awarding a limited number of Centers for Innovation and Innovation Groups, a program created by the Office of Academic Affairs and the Office of Research to encourage trans-institutional scholarship. These new centers and groups will be focused around faculty research in emerging areas of intellectual interest that cross college boundaries.

Our on-going Targeted Investments in Excellence are now in year three of this five-year program. To date, the investment in the TIE programs has stimulated external funding, enabled our university to be more helpful to Ohio's economic development, and assisted us in recruiting and retaining top faculty and graduate students. These programs are also collaborating among themselves and, in this way, serving as the best possible examples of trans-institutional collaboration.

As a fourth priority, our aspirations must also include engagement with evolving plans for the ongoing development of the University System of Ohio. These plans aim to make higher education a principal driver of Ohio's economic prosperity in the twenty-first century. We are working with Chancellor Fingerhut and other state officials as well as colleagues at institutions throughout Ohio to support these anticipated quality enhancements.

Focusing on improving university infrastructure will be the fifth area of academic priority this year. We will turn special attention to enhancing the learning technologies available to faculty and students. As our campuses become more uniformly wireless, the demand for technology-enabled classrooms is increasing dramatically. We must continue to upgrade our university facilities so that they provide the latest technology tools for leadership in teaching, research, and career development.

Our infrastructure will also get a boost from the recent alteration of Ohio State's capital planning process. We have moved beyond the traditional renovation or construction of one building at a time in response to the needs of a particular college. Such a college-centric approach led to duplication, was inefficient, and reduced the impact we could have with today's limited funds. Our capital resources, already diminished by a 40 percent decline in state capital dollars over the last 10 years, are being further stressed today by the aging of our infrastructure and many of our building systems. To deal with these issues, we must do our utmost to leverage state and local funds as well as development opportunities.

In addressing this issue we have adopted a "One University" perspective, in large part through the new Integrated Physical Planning Group chaired by Jeff Kaplan, senior vice president and special assistant to the president. In this new planning process, our university-wide facilities and technology needs will be aligned with our colleges' strategic plan goals for programs, recruitment and enrollment targets, and cooperative initiatives. The new planning process will allow us to provide facilities adjacencies that increase interdisciplinary opportunities and better utilize current space.

Helping us inaugurate this new process is a major gift to the university from College of Engineering alumnus William Lowrie and his wife. Thanks to their generosity and commitment to leveraged investments, we are embarking on planning for a new integrated Chemical Engineering and Chemistry facility.

As a sixth area of focus, academic programming will be a priority for 2008-09. For example, efforts are under way to better coordinate the many life sciences and environmental and earth sciences programs across the university.

Pending Senate action, we are also now planning for a possible move away from the quarter system in 2012.

In addition, our ongoing department and school program reviews are proving helpful in identifying programmatic foci for our academic units. In many cases these reviews by external teams have identified areas for cross-department and college interaction.

Programming will certainly be affected by one of the most sweeping initiatives ever undertaken at Ohio State. Last year, as you will remember, the administrative structure of the arts and sciences federation was reviewed. In light of the review, Dr. Joan Leitzel was named the interim executive dean and vice provost of arts and sciences. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Joan for her unflagging service to the arts and sciences, which will always be at the academic heart of this or any university. She took on a complex, uncharted role and has calmly, purposefully, and collegially begun the process of more tightly integrating the arts and sciences disciplines.

Let me also thank John Roberts, Matt Platz, and Giff Weary, who serve as the interim deans for the arts and sciences and have been active partners in these changes.

Together, these colleagues are working on a daily basis to promote the collaborative relationships that will strengthen individual units and the arts and sciences as a whole.

The expansion of Ohio State's international presence is still another special programmatic focus this year. I am delighted that William Brustein, currently the associate provost for international affairs at the University of Illinois, has agreed to take on the brand-new post of vice provost for global strategies and international affairs. William will be joining us on July 1.

Finally, in the coming year we will also be reorganizing the Office of Academic Affairs to continue enhancing our emphasis on undergraduate education. Martha Garland has announced her retirement as vice provost for enrollment services and dean for undergraduate education, effective this summer, although she has agreed to work on special assignments through December. Martha's contributions to this institution are truly incalculable, and much more will be said about them in due time. Today, let me simply note that she has proven invaluable in helping us think through ways to strengthen still further our focus on undergraduate education. As a result of these discussions, we have decided to more clearly divide her responsibilities between two positions. The first will be that of an associate vice president for enrollment services, a position that will focus energies on attracting and retaining the highest quality student body possible. Based in part on the successful redefinition of expectations for the dean of the Graduate School, the second position will involve an expansion of the responsibilities of the vice provost and dean of undergraduate education. We will expect the vice provost and dean of undergraduate education to coordinate all undergraduate program reviews, ensure that student experiences are of the highest quality, support special programs like our nationally respected Honors and Scholars programs, and act as a catalyst for new undergraduate program developments.

Dividing Martha's dual role will allow us to clarify expectations for these two critical functions as we face a very challenging environment for student recruitment and retention. These administrative changes will require Senate approvals because we will be altering titles and responsibilities. But this is another example of how, in moving forward, undergraduate students and programs remain at the core of our institutional identity.

In tackling the six academic priorities I have just discussed, we are fortunate to be able to call on the talents of a wonderful set of new colleagues in senior administrative positions. These include:

Kathy Starkoff, who assumed leadership of the offices of the CIO this past June. In July, Cheryl Achterberg became dean of the College of Education and Human Ecology. Christine Poon, previously the vice chairman of Johnson & Johnson, has been named dean of the Max M. Fisher College of Business and will join us April 1.

We are fortunate, too, that John Hubbell and Greg Washington agreed to serve as interim deans of the Colleges of Veterinary Medicine and Engineering, respectively, and that Alan Michaels exchanged his interim dean title for that of dean of the Moritz College of Law.

Carole Anderson has also left her post as interim dean for the permanent deanship of the College of Dentistry. As a result, she will be leaving her position as vice provost for academic policy and faculty resources, and we will begin the search for a replacement.

Carol Whitacre, too, moved from an interim capacity to become our vice president for research.

Ohio State is proud to be able to tap the expertise of these academic leaders, and as provost, I consider myself personally and professionally fortunate to work with them. They are truly exemplars of Ohio State's aspirations.

Still other structures and colleagues also contribute in countless ways to the stature of our institution.

Our Senate and its leaders continue to work tirelessly to ensure that the university runs more smoothly, more ethically, and more effectively. I would especially like to acknowledge the efforts of Chris Zacher, the secretary of the University Senate; Heather Allen, chair of the Senate Steering Committee; Dick Gunther, chair of Faculty Council; and Tim Gerber, who as Faculty Council vice chair, will succeed Dick next year. President Gee and I have come to rely on these leaders as we seek advice and guidance.

I would also like to acknowledge our committed staff and student leaders; the deans of our colleges and regional campuses; my talented colleagues in the Office of Academic Affairs; our staunch advocates on the Board of Trustees; and, of course, the members of the University Senate.

Together, and with the leadership of President Gee, we are poised for even greater institutional successes. We will achieve those successes and make progress on our academic priorities and other institutional goals, despite the economic challenges that exist today.

As both President Gee and I have said on many occasions, this institution is a primary catalyst for Ohio's economic growth and prosperity. We are an extraordinary agent of opportunity—even in this moment of economic instability. I look forward to working with you to use this moment to our great and lasting advantage. Thank you.

I will now be happy to respond to any questions you may have.