

Good afternoon and welcome to each and every one of you. Thank you for joining us here today.

This is truly a special day on campus!

It's a day in which we have welcomed approximately 460 new first-year students and 145 transfer students to SMSU for the start of Gold Rush Days.

It's a day in which many of you having gotten a little sweaty toting plastic tubs, suitcases, duffle bags and television sets – you name it – as you help move students into their new home. It's a day when we recommit ourselves to these students who have entrusted us with the privilege and responsibility of transforming their lives and helping them gain the knowledge and skills they need for a successful future.

It's a day when we join together as a campus community to officially welcome everyone to the 2015-16 academic year!

It's also the day when we look back on the past year and what we accomplished and look forward to this year and the opportunities that lie ahead of us.

#### **To Recap 2014-15: A Year of Focus and Planning**

- One year ago we welcomed 471 new freshmen and 150 new transfer students to campus. We also learned that our graduate employment rate was again very high, at 96% based on the Class of 2013.
- In mid-October we hosted the Commission on Collegiate Nursing for our initial accreditation visit and late in the Spring we received official notification that our RN to BSN Nursing program is accredited!
- Also in October, we hosted a full-scale visit of the Higher Learning Commission - a visit that resulted in reaffirmation of SMSU's accreditation for the next ten years!
- During Homecoming week and throughout the year, faculty members welcomed nearly 50 alumni to speak in classrooms across the campus; alumni who shared their own personal Southwest Success Stories with our current students.
- Last fall the University Gala had the highest attendance to date and raised over \$53,000 for student scholarships.

- Our Volleyball team had an extremely successful season last year, advancing all the way to the National Championship and finishing as the National Runner Up. They achieved a number of awards, including the award for the highest team GPA and Claire Sames, won the Elite 89 Award for the highest cumulative GPA. Clearly these student athletes are winners on the court *and* in the classroom!
- And thanks to the generosity of Emeritus Professor of Theatre Bill Hezlep, a new museum made its debut on campus --- the Museum of Indigenous Americans – located in Social Science 101. It’s the site of the former Anthropology Museum – make sure you visit there soon and explore the wonderful collection of artifacts that have been assembled.
- For the first time in the history of SMSU and Marshall High School Theatre, our two institutions partnered to present the musical, “Spamalot.” The cast included SMSU students, Marshall high school students and teachers and Marshall community members. It was a wonderful collaboration and even featured a few SMSU cameos!
- We expanded our academic collaborations by adding 21 new articulation agreements with two year colleges in the MnSCU system and we entered into a unique partnership with Normandale Community College to offer classes in Exercise Science at their Bloomington campus.
- Last year we made tremendous progress in our offerings in agriculture and this summer we officially joined the Southern Minnesota Center for Agriculture, partnering with South Central College and Minnesota West Community and Technical College to promote our collective ag programs.
- And speaking of agriculture, the Minnesota State Legislature was very generous to SMSU by allocating a total of \$450,000 over the next biennium to support our investment in Ag Education
- In mid-July as we were preparing to bid farewell to our 37 graduate students from Taiwan who were completing their MBA’s, we hosted a contingent of 25 visitors from China. Professors and other university leaders from campuses in Mainland China visited SMSU to discuss establishing cooperative partnerships with us on specific academic programs and majors.

- Over this past year many people were involved in our extensive efforts in Strategic Planning. With the very talented leadership of Stacy Frost, Dr. Betsy Desy, and Dr. Lori Baker, over 31 individuals served on the All-University Committee, or on one of the five Sub-Committees – some served on both!! Will those of you who served on the All-University Committee or on a sub-committee please stand and be recognized? We want to thank you for your excellent work!
- Finally, I want to commend those of you who are supporting our students financially. This past year we attained a 60% faculty and staff giving rate to the SMSU Foundation. We anticipate this will be the highest in the MnSCU system. Thank you!

### **Looking Ahead to a Year of Increasing Momentum and Progress**

As we celebrate our past successes, we also look ahead.

This will be a year of energy and motion, a year when we increase our momentum and build on our progress so far. It will be a busy and very important year.

Our overarching Strategic Priorities for the institution will include:

- A Focus on Strategic Planning – engaging SMSU campus and beyond
- A Focus on the campus-based process of Charting the Future – building on SMSU’s high impact practices
- Expanding partnerships and collaborations in the region & beyond
- Improving our institutional metrics that are focused on:
  - Student Retention and completion/progress to degree
  - Achievement/opportunity gap in completion/progress to degree
  - Composite Financial Index
- Last year our Strategic Planning efforts consisted of recommitting ourselves to our mission and vision by first identifying the top values that guide us as a community. We also engaged in a dream exercise in which we envisioned what we wanted for SMSU and the role we imagined our university could play in the community, region, and broader world. What we see on this slide is a representation of how our core values, goals, and

objectives connect to our three themes: Student Learning and Success; Academic Excellence and Distinctiveness; and Meaningful Partnerships and Engagement.

- Throughout last year we *fully engaged* the all-University Committee and sub-committees in identifying goals and objectives that would propel the university forward and fulfill our mission. Much work has taken place on strategic planning and more work is yet to be done. Your voices have been crucial in our work to date and your input will be equally important as we move forward this semester and ultimately finalize the plan.

This year we will expand our exploration of opportunities and will include community involvement in our Strategic Planning efforts. We will enhance the engagement of SMSU's Boards and Advisory Councils and the greater Marshall community as we seek their input. It will be very important for us to listen to our constituents and partners to ensure that our strategic priorities align with their needs.

- Our Strategic planning efforts this year will include a move to the campus-based phase of system-wide planning efforts known as Charting the Future. The all-University Strategic Planning Committee will oversee these efforts and we will focus on this work in an all-university conversation later this fall.

We are all aware of the realities facing higher education today, in particular the funding challenges and the shifting demographic trends. Our local communities and the workforces that make up our regional population are changing dramatically.

As an example, in the last 10 years, the population of Marshall has grown by nearly 10% while the racial diversity of the city has increased by nearly 6%.

The increase in the population of color in the Marshall community as well as other regional sites such as Willmar and Worthington, provides an opportunity for SMSU to transform our programs and our workplace culture into an open and affirming environment.

We must use our will, motivation, and dedication to our students to realize our dreams and seize the opportunity to challenge ourselves to achieve our goals and build trust in our communities.

As we work together in new and meaningful ways, we will continue to transform lives and make a difference.

How will we do that?

We can transform lives and make a difference by:

- Fully developing our environment in which teaching and learning flourish across the campus; where we focus on the student experience, on student learning and success; where we challenge students to connect knowledge with choices and action; where we engage students with the big questions; encourage inquiry and innovation; where we foster civic engagement and personal and social responsibility, as we help our students prepare for a world of unscripted problems.

What if when each of us works with students in the classroom or as student employees, we challenge students to “expand their bubbles” as in the words of Dave Werpy, SMSU alumnus and Commencement speaker last May? According to Mr. Werpy, “bubbles are a metaphor for ‘comfort or awareness zones.’” When people ‘grow’ their bubbles or comfort zones, they are “far more likely to achieve professional and personal success and fulfillment.” He states that this “involves personal risk-taking, lots of self-reflection, and even a willingness to accept criticism.” I ask that each of you help students expand their bubbles, take intellectual risks, and learn to be reflective learners.

We can transform lives and make a difference by:

- Renewing our focus on the potential of each student where every student aims high and where we support students on their journey; where students learn resilience; where we shift to a holistic focus on student learning in each situation – in and out of classroom, in internships, service learning, community involvement, and leadership roles; where students find their voices, practice leadership, and develop GRIT: gravitas, resilience; intent; tenacity.

What if we challenged each student to set the bar high and then held them accountable? In Wes Moore’s book, “The Other Wes Moore,” he talks about the significance of setting goals and aiming high. As he asserted, “no one ever reached a target they couldn’t see!” I ask each of us to work with our students to set their sites on targets that will stretch and challenge them, and in so doing, will help them develop new skills and abilities. It will help students learn to reflect on their experiences and gain knowledge from each situation.

We can transform lives and make a difference by:

- Building a more welcoming and inclusive community where diverse experiences are celebrated, embraced, and affirmed; where our students become citizens of the world, and we start first at home, right here in our campus culture; where our students

interact, learn from, and connect with a culture, ethnicity, or race different from their own on campus and in the Marshall community; where equity, diversity and inclusion are the work of all of us.

What if each of us got to know students and other employees who are different from us? What if we were to intentionally reach out to new members of our community; what if we engaged with students and employees and learned more about each other, especially those who may have had a different background from us? Many people have traveled a great distance to join SMSU – whether the distance is in miles, kilometers, or in life experiences – and *all* our lives will be enriched if we connect more with one another. Let's build bridges instead of silos.

We can transform lives and make a difference by:

- Celebrating our successes and milestones; where we are a campus where everyone takes great pride in SMSU and each one of us serves as an ambassador of this fine place; where, as a campus, we are known for spreading the word about our numerous offerings and the remarkable experiences of our students; where we are truly the “university of choice” for students, families, and employees!

What if we were to re-commit ourselves to our students and our University on a daily basis? What if when you are out and about, you wear your SMSU t-shirt, sweatshirt, or cap with pride? Share your SMSU stories with your family members and friends. Refer the names of your nieces and nephews, neighbors, and babysitters to our Admissions Office so we can be in contact with them directly.

I ask that we also lift up the examples of students making a difference in our community through their volunteer work, internships, special projects, and activities. Be sure to tell the Communications and Marketing staff members about the student and the difference they are making so we can spread the word. Last week Dr. Sturrock shared an article written by one of our students who is a summer intern in our nation's Capitol. The student is interested in sharing his insights and we are eager to highlight his accomplishments.

Every person on our campus can make a difference in the lives of our students.

Each of us has a role in shaping student experiences at SMSU and each of us has the ability to help our students aim high, to help our students learn how to learn, and to help our students develop resilience.

Please keep this in mind: every student on our campus needs someone who is their “rock,” someone they can turn to no matter the situation, someone who can give them the guidance they need.

Each of us is an educator, and I ask all of us to reach out and be that “rock” to help guide our students and show them the possibilities.

Now is the time to build on our strong history and deepen the resolve to make this institution truly thrive.

Today is the day and the time is now.

Thank you for your kind attention.

All-University Address – August 20, 2015