



CONVOCATION ADDRESS

PRESIDENT JAMES M. SMITH

AUGUST 24, 2009

Thank you Dr. Courtney.

It is an honor for me to be here today addressing you as the sixteenth president of Northern State University. I thank all of you for making Connie and me feel so welcome and such a part of this great Northern and Aberdeen community.

Let me be one of the first to say, welcome to the 109th academic year at Northern State University.

As most of you now know, I have spent many years serving higher education in various leadership capacities. I have been extremely fortunate to serve institutions as an academic dean, chief campus executive for a regional campus, and most recently, as vice president for economic development at a large doctoral granting institution. I have learned a great deal from these many roles. I have learned a tremendous amount about myself and about the myriad institutions for which I have worked. What I know and believe in the most passionate of ways is that smaller institutions, like Northern, have the best opportunity to impact overall student learning. We know our students – our students know us. We do direct advising; we do career planning; we are not just names listed in the class roster or noted on office directories – we are the people who engage with our undergraduate and graduate students on a daily basis. It is precisely that type of environment and that type of context that attracted to me this institution. I applaud all that you have done in the past and pledge to work collaboratively with you to gain even more in the future.

As I speak of the future, I would be remiss not to mention a few of my goals for the upcoming academic year. Although, like all of you, I have many goals that I think about on a daily basis, I do have a few that I believe are now solidified and in a format that bears sharing. They are seven in number and are delineated as follows:

- Enrollment – Enrollment, overall, must continue to grow in a steady and consistent manner. Our graduate enrollments should increase more rapidly as new programs are developed and approved. Off-campus and nontraditional enrollments (like Rising Scholars) must grow more rapidly as well.
- Scholarships – The Wolf PACT Scholarship will be fully funded for years to come – that is a simple goal to say but much more complicated to bring about. Nonetheless, we have developed a great partnership with the NSU Foundation on this front and the results of that partnership have proven powerful for the attraction of some of our very best students. We will, therefore, continue to make the Wolf PACT a reality for students of the future.
- E-learning – We will remain true to our E-learning mission and articulate its importance whenever possible – a number of our programs will grow to have a flavor for E-learning, our existing graduate program in that area will be re-examined this year, and our work with the

E-learning high school will mature with consistent and unwavering university support.

- Internationalization – As I speak of our mission areas, we must keep our international focus in clear view. As an institution demarcated as the international business university for the state of South Dakota, we are going to continue to move forward with respect to international students coming to our campus and, conversely, we must work to create situations for our domestic undergraduate students to go abroad and see the world they might well experience for years to come in their various fields of work.
- Change – We will work to change with the instructional times – laptop computing, mobile computing, Internet-based instruction and other similar forms of instructional delivery will be examined and explored this year. Not all of us will engage in this work but it will be work that many of us will be doing to meet the needs of tomorrow's students. I believe that this goal speaks to our students who are on campus, as well as those who might be working with us from distant locations.
- Funding Sources – Simply stated, grants and sponsored research activities must grow here at Northern. To that end, I am pleased to announce that Provost Tom Hawley will have a committee formed soon to begin the search for a new Director of Research and Sponsored Programs. I am also delighted to announce that we have just entered into an agreement with the Hanover Research Group to assist with grant submissions and, furthermore, to assist all of us at Northern State University with the “scouting” of grant funding sources. These actions will include examination of federal, state, regional and even international funding opportunities that are best aligned with the work we do here at NSU.
- Strategic Planning – And, finally, our strategic planning efforts – university-wide – will begin soon – this will be the basis for much of our change agenda as we move forward. The Senior Cabinet will meet with one or more strategic planners in a few weeks to assist us in designing an agenda for planning that moves us forward in both a positive and thoughtful way. However, an external consultant will not do our strategic planning for us – it will be a community effort and many of you in the audience will be asked to lead sections or serve as active participants in this process. Remember, strategic planning allows us to move the organization to a new desired state. We must actively participate in order to make certain that all of our voices are heard.

Moving from my goals to our present day realities, it is clear that we are continuing to expand our outreach to new regions and states; this fall we will have students coming to NSU from as far away as China and Argentina and as close, or nearby as Sioux Falls.

The unprecedented economic times of the past year or so have seen a steady headcount increase over that time period – it appears that we will remain consistent in total on-campus numbers for fall and that we will see a nice increase in online learners as well. It appears that our credit hour generation will exceed that of last year. And, to say the least, last year was a very good year for NSU.

You will continue to see expanded marketing efforts on the Web, television, online, billboards and at mall kiosks. Our new tag “Be You, Be Us, Be Northern” is playing well in all of these expanded and popular mediums for our target audience.

Let me transition for just a moment and talk about some of your most recent successes. Convocation is a time to recognize and applaud your good work and I don't want to bypass some outstanding things that are, and have been, happening.

First, last month many of you joined me in watching as one of our very own shined brightly on the national stage. As all of you probably know, Coach Don Meyer was recognized by ESPN as the recipient of the Jimmy V Perseverance Award at the annual ESPY event in Los Angeles. Let's take a listen to a bit of Don's comments.

(video presentation)

We are taking full advantage of this to market ourselves and use Coach Meyer's celebrity to promote Northern. After he got back from the events in Los Angeles, Coach Meyer told me to “ride him like a horse” and that is what why we are doing an extensive follow up campaign. Stay tuned to see all that we will do to build on Coach Meyer's celebrity and to utilize that fame to expand our Barnett Center – a real vision for Don and all of our coaching staff. Congratulations Coach Meyer.

Just released a few days ago were the now famous *U.S. News and World Report's* College Rankings. I am exceptionally pleased to share with you that NSU is again among the top of the top. In the category denoted as top Public Baccalaureate College for the Midwest Region of the United States, Northern was rated third overall. Our sister Regental Institution, Dakota State was rated first – watch out President Knowlton, we will give you a real run for your money next year! All kidding aside, this is a wonderful recognition for the work that all of you have done and continue to do. Please allow me to applaud you for your outstanding efforts!

As part of any institution's claim to fame is how we deal with two very critical areas – recruitment and retention. Recruitment and retention continue to be two key priorities facing Northern State. I would like to thank the entire campus and especially our faculty for assuming a strong role in recruitment this past year.

But, your work isn't finished.

Admissions is only one part of the total enrollment picture – retention is equally as critical. In case you haven't heard me say it before, I'll say it again: We are ALL recruitment and retention specialists. Please do not hesitate to reach out to new and returning students. You will never realize how important your personal touch is to the continued success of a young man or young lady who has just stepped foot on this campus, in some cases after leaving home for the very first extended stay in their young lives.

There is another crucial player in the recruitment picture here at Northern and that is the Northern State University Foundation. The Wolf PACT scholarship program, under the leadership of Todd Jordre and the Foundation staff, is making a huge impact on this campus. As I noted earlier in the talk, this is an essential element of our forward movement for this campus. To give you a view of the sheer magnitude of this importance, this year there will be nearly 500 Wolf PACT scholarship recipients on campus, totaling more than \$700,000 in total awards.

Not only has this been the deciding factor for many students but I am also pleased to report that the average ACT of incoming freshmen continues to exceed the national average. And, at the same time, the number of students eligible for the President's Scholarships is at an all time high.

Since I am talking about the Foundation, it is important that you know that this year we are preparing for the acquisition of greater funding for both our future students and our various programs. The Northern Foundation is preparing for a major capital campaign. Although I will not steal the thunder of campaign chair, Jim Keeler, or Foundation board chair, Mike Evans, much of this money – a very large goal I might add – will support future Wolf PACT and athletic scholarships but additional dollars – also significant in number – will support programs, facilities and other needs on campus.

Let me add a plug here for the Foundation – all of us are presented with opportunities to give to various charities. As the old adage goes, “the best charity begins by giving at home.” Let's not forget the importance of giving to the NSU Foundation – as a colleague receives national acclaim, you can recognize that individual with a gift to the Foundation. As a friend or colleague recovers from surgery, a gift in that person's name to the Foundation is far more impressive than a small bouquet of flowers. And, we all have loved ones who pass away, an unrestricted gift in that person's name is a gift that lives forever. So, please consider speaking with one of our Foundation friends about how these types of gifts can become a common practice for all of us. I'll always remember the custodial crew who gave a gift in my name to BGSU when I left the executive position at our regional campus to become vice president for economic development. By many estimations it was a small gift in magnitude but it is one I'll always remember. How wonderful it would be to have a 100 percent faculty and staff listing of contributors to the NSU Foundation for academic year 2009-10.

The reach of our Foundation is wide, and so too is that of the Center of Excellence in E-learning. The E-learning faculty and staff continue to do outstanding work, under the fine leadership of Principal Mary Cundy, with respect to outreach to high schools across the great state of South Dakota. About 50 percent of South Dakota's public school districts participate in E-learning; with approximately 900 students enrolling last year, the NSU "brand" associated with the E-learning delivery mechanisms is, without question, far reaching. As I noted before, we must remain true to our E-learning mission and articulate its importance whenever possible, not just for our high school numbers but also through our distance undergraduate and graduate offerings, as well.

Speaking of technology, I would like to discuss our Mobile Computing Initiative for just a few moments. This fall we are beginning a pilot program where our students will be required to bring their mobile devices to class. The pilot program has involved 24 faculty to date and four course sections that will be launched for the fall semester. To support this new initiative, 47 smart classrooms throughout campus now have wireless projection capabilities. If that isn't impressive enough, we also have more than 100 access points in the residence halls, MJ and the Technology Center to provide complete wireless coverage in each of these buildings. Going forward, all campus buildings, the outside, quad and Seymour green space will all have wireless access. I must admit that I am envious of those who have full wireless access now – Spafford Hall, second floor, is not fully "up" yet but it will be soon. I am looking forward to that moment coming about and I do want to congratulate Debbi Bumpous and her staff for the excellent work done to get these enhancements in place at a very impressive rate of speed.

Speaking of speed and momentum, another successful season of the Northern Fort Playhouse helped accelerate momentum for our new degree in musical theater. It was a pleasure for me to see the performance of "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown" at the Playhouse. If you have not yet gone, please make plans to do so next summer, the setting is almost as impressive as the quality of the summer stock work. Congratulations Professor Dan Yurgaitis!

Continuing with recognition for the School of Fine Arts, this past May another successful Artapalooza was held in conjunction with the first ever School of Fine Arts Alumni Reunion and Berggren Gala Concert. From all indications it was a tremendous success. And, just a few weeks ago, we were honored to host the All-State Honor Choir here at NSU. Under the leadership of Dean Al LaFave and the direction of Professor Tim Woods, the very best young choral talent was assembled to work, and work, and work in order to perform a stellar concluding concert. What a tremendous group of young people!

For the College of Arts and Sciences, it was a joy to learn of approval, by the Board of Regents, for a new associate's

degree in applied gerontology. This degree will help prepare students for careers serving the rapidly aging population of the upper Midwest. I am pleased to note, as well, that Provost Tom Hawley and the deans have several new undergraduate and graduate degrees in various stages of planning and development, some in Arts and Sciences, some elsewhere – NSU will be very active on the Board of Regents' agendas for the upcoming months, as these degree proposals move forward through the system.

The Rising Scholars program was strengthened this past year and is better structured with a new half-time program director. This is already making a large impact in our fall numbers and the positive press from these actions have been very well presented and received.

Let me talk for a minute about Dean Celestino Mendez. I came across a scholarly work written on the "Category Properties of Borel Plane Sets and Borel Functions of Two Variables."

In this paper, the authors have titled an earlier work, for which they base their conceptual frame, as "the Mendez ideal" – the work of Dean Mendez was the source for their findings. While I have to admit that I can't understand much of scholarly paper, I am indeed impressed – congratulations Tino!

Along with Dean Mendez's recognition, Professor Alyssa Kiesow was recognized recently with a competitive grant from the Board of Regents. According to system Vice President Gary Johnson, Kiesow's proposal was one of 49 submitted system-wide – only six, yes six, were funded. With the institutional match, Professor Kiesow will have approximately \$77,000 to carry forth her work on population genetic structure analysis. Congratulations Alyssa!

The School of Business had another great year as well. The Center for International Business signed eight new exchange agreements; in addition we have renewed one exchange agreement and established a dual degree memorandum with one institution. In other words we continue to strengthen opportunities for students to study abroad – both here at Northern and for our undergraduates going outside of the country. Again, as noted previously, we must continue to keep this international focus in clear view, with specific attention on travel abroad for our undergraduate students.

Our banking and financial services program developed and delivered its first course online last year. We now have 87 banking majors at NSU and will continue to strengthen this program with special emphasis at our centers in Sioux Falls, Pierre and – coming soon – to Rapid City. Let me also congratulate Interim Dean Sharon Paranto who was named the Aberdeen Chamber of Commerce Woman of Spirit for her involvement in the community – Paranto's dedication to the business world, outside the halls of academia, will

prove valuable to us for this year and for years to come. Congratulations, Sharon!

With respect to the School of Education, as I continue to meet people across the state I am learning that we have graduates from our School of Education working as teachers and administrators in virtually every school district in South Dakota. We are continuing to strengthen our reputation as a regional leader in preparing some of the best and brightest teachers for our children. Here is just one example of that kind of excellence.

Recently I heard about one of our graduates, Ms. Liz Dalzell. Dalzell was recently named the Air Force Association Teacher of the Year for the state of Colorado. She has now just been accepted to be a NASA teacher liaison and, to add to the wonderful nature of this story, I am told that Dalzell openly articulated that fact that if it weren't for her professors at Northern State, she would not be anywhere near where she is professionally and would certainly not be the quality teacher she is today.

And, for those of us who attended the new faculty luncheon sponsored by the Aberdeen Chamber of Commerce, few will forget the excitement, enthusiasm and humor presented by Mr. Kerry Konda. Konda is a recent NSU graduate and is currently teaching speech and debate at Aberdeen Central High School – his speech included quotes from Interim Dean Connie Geier and Multicultural Director Peni Munga. But above all, Konda's love for teaching was a great testimonial to all that he learned and gained during his undergraduate years here at NSU.

And, for the School of Education, yet another example of positive momentum was felt a few weeks ago when we had more than 30 young educators on campus for the third annual Early Childhood Academy. Congratulations to Professor Gayle Bortnem!

Now let's take a bit of time to focus on our students. In a few days Kramer Hall will re-open, welcoming 73 students to the newly renovated two- and four-person suites. As part of Student Life's "engaged community" initiative, themed residence halls have been created, and every hall will develop a unique community that not only connects students to one another, but to the entire campus and larger Aberdeen community. The environmental "green" community, global community, fine arts community, campus involvement community and healthy lifestyles community each offer a unique living and learning experience.

Our students are, to say the least, the essence of our work. These young men and women come to us with great plans and great dreams. Just a week ago, I had the opportunity to speak to our football team. I wanted to share a few thoughts with them that were important to me. Well, I remembered an old set of ideals that the legendary Notre Dame football coach, Lou Holtz, used to share with his coaches and other leaders in the community. One of those ideals seems

particularly relevant to all of us gathered here today; it goes as follows:

I don't know how you can be involved in anything and not care. I hate to be around people who don't care and when they don't care, they don't try to do things the right way. The greatest thing in the world is to be around people who genuinely care about what they are doing – there's enthusiasm and positiveness. I don't care if it's important to anybody else, as long as it's important to those who are involved in it.

This is just what I think of when I think of our students – they care that we love our disciplines, that we love our work and that we are willing to share that degree of love and caring with them. Coach Holtz was right, we need to articulate that importance of caring, not just on the football field, basketball or volleyball court, or baseball diamond, but in the classroom and the office area, all around campus, as well.

As I think of caring, and as I was preparing for today's talk, I received a list from Vice President Don Erlenbusch of all the improvements and planning that is taking place for area facilities on campus – I decided that I could be here for the rest of the day just going over that list, so let me share some of the highlights.

First of all, have you really noticed what a beautiful campus we have? My first trip here was in the winter, and after[R3] I had accepted this position I was welcomed by minus 47 below return trip. Yes – you remember that day too. Regardless of winter or summer, I continue to be amazed at how well kept and beautiful a facility we have here – we all have something to be very proud of. And, if we don't take a minute or two to thank Monte Mehlhoff and his staff, we have failed on that scale of caring I noted a minute or two ago.

As for facility improvement, many of you have seen the new Harvey Jewett Conference Room in the enrollment services area; it is, indeed, an impressive sight. Graham and Lincoln Hall each have new steps; we have lights again at Swisher Field and renovation activities are moving forward on the new science lab upgrades in MeWaldt-Jensen. At the same time, we have solid plans now for the Barnett Center expansion and major Student Center remodeling as well.

Let's talk a little more about the excitement taking place in the Barnett Center. Our student athletes continue to shine both in the classroom and on the court. Our women's volleyball team received the American Volleyball Coaches Association Team Academic Award – this award is given to the teams, throughout the country, who achieve the highest level of academic success. Congratulations, Coach Lisa Shriver!

As we have seen continued growth in the numbers of student athletes at Northern – their grade point average has also increased for the past four years. Of course I mentioned

earlier about Coach Meyer. While it has been approximately one year since his accident, I think it is fair to say this has probably been a very unique year for the Northern community. This past winter I was proud to join you when you recognized Coach Meyer for becoming the all-time wins leader in men's collegiate basketball. I know you all join me in continuing to support and send our best wishes to both Don and Carmen as the upcoming year moves forward.

There are many more achievements that I simply don't have time to mention that are very important to the mission of this university. Successes such as these build the reputation of the university and make it a vibrant and an exciting place to be. Thank you all for making Northern shine and shine so brightly!

In closing, and as was noted at the beginning of this talk, my most recent background is in the field of university economic development. Therefore, I often look at the world with one eye focused on economic interactions. One phenomena that I continue to see over and over again is the positive relationship that exists between the city of Aberdeen and the Northern State University community. The town and gown separations that are so ubiquitous at other places – both larger and smaller than us – simply don't seem to exist here.

For example, do you know what brings the largest amount of visitor spending to the Aberdeen area on an annual basis? If you guessed pheasant hunting, although a good guess, you'd be wrong – the answer is events hosted at our very own NSU Barnett Center. We are part of the city and the city is part of us – it is a unique symbiosis and, again, is something we should speak of with pride.

To gauge the impact of this type of interaction and to expand on the previous point, Professor Hillar Neumann recently did an economic study specifically to examine the

impact that NSU students had (and have) on the city of Aberdeen – the results of said study were exceptionally impressive. Dr. Neumann's study showed that our students make a \$15,900,000 plus impact on the Aberdeen community and that this calculation is specific to the nine-month calendar only – so that we were totally fair, we thought it would be interesting to examine only our state supported students (and, thus, factor out all self-support students) – that number, I believe, adjusted to reflect state-support students only was a bit above \$12,200,000 per academic year. As I just mentioned, we are Aberdeen and Aberdeen is us. These data will be shared in the course of the next few days via media packets and other executive summary materials but I wanted all of you to hear Neumann's findings first. I think these data will prove useful for all of us as we discuss the importance to our presence to the larger community that surrounds us.

Let me conclude with a final quote from President John B. Simpson, at the University of Buffalo. I used this quote on the day I accepted this position and, not surprisingly, I find it even more powerful today. Simpson once said: "It seems to me there are no great American cities these days without a great hometown university." We are indeed in a great American city with a great hometown university, of that fact I am certain. And with the collaborative interactions we will bring forth in the coming months and years, that phrase from Dr. Simpson will become more and more apparent to those who view us today only from afar. Again, I thank you for all that you have done for this university and, additionally, thank you for all that you will do in this upcoming year to make NSU an even greater hometown university!

Thank you.

