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Address to the Northeastern University Corporation

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Address to the Northeastern University Corporation May 20, 1999 Ritz-Carlton, Boston

Members of the corporation, it is my honor, on behalf of the campus community, to welcome you all to our first meeting of Northeastern's second century. And it is my pleasure to assure you that we are heading into the next 100 years - and into the next millennium - in a position of institutional strength.

The first test for any university is the number and quality of students it attracts. For each of the last two years we have enrolled the best prepared freshman class in a generation. We will do so again next fall, as 16,300 applicants, 14 percent more than last year, compete for only 2,800 first-year places, a ratio of nearly 6 to 1. For each of the last two years we retained and graduated an increased percentage of those we admitted and we expect these numbers to continue improving as well.

Enrollment strength begets financial strength. We will close out this year with a balanced budget and a modest surplus. As vice president [Larry] Mucciolo has reported, our endowment hovers just under \$400 million, and we are setting records each year in

sponsored research and annual giving. The campus grows more beautiful, the faculty more distinguished and our programs stronger both in fact and in reputation.

It is - taking it all together - a hopeful, inspiring time at Northeastern. And I am pleased to report that our own optimism was echoed this year by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges in granting us unconditional reaccreditation following their exhaustive decennial review. Members of the corporation can feel proud of your achievement in restoring the strength of this fine old university from its period of vulnerability less than a decade ago.

Yet it is also a challenging time, and as we celebrate current progress, we are acutely aware of objectives yet to be fulfilled. We are operating in the most competitive academic arena in North America. We are an expensive, independent institution surrounded by well-regarded private competitors and heavily-subsidized, academically-formidable public campuses. Given this setting, and an honest assessment of price/value relationships as not we but the marketplace assesses price and value, we have much work to do. The selectivity of our admissions program is not yet where it needs to be. Our graduation rate is not yet where it needs to be. Our academic reputation is not yet where it needs to be. Our efforts in development and sponsored research are not yet where they need to be.

And so we used the occasion of our reaccreditation review to identify the areas where we must make progress to assure our competitive position. Our work in the period ahead will focus on performance within the framework we have established. The time for planning and goal setting is completed. The time for achievement beckons.

My comments this morning will have two basic themes. First, I want to outline the goals we have identified and briefly summarize our progress toward them during the past year. Second, I shall speak in greater depth about the arena where, more than any other, we must succeed if we are to achieve our overall aspirations.

Before turning to that review, however, I want to recognize several individuals who are especially deserving of acknowledgment today. Heading the list, of course is chairman Neal Finnegan, who has faced the daunting task of filling the unfillable shoes of George Matthews, and who has done so with both grace and intelligence. To Neal, to all members of our hardworking Board of Trustees, and to members of the overseers as well, I wish to express my appreciation for your efforts and your support. I look forward to many more years of service and progress in the cause to which we are all dedicated.

We have added new strength in administrative positions as well. David Hall has done a wonderful job in his first year as provost, as have Jim Stellar, our new dean of arts and sciences, Leon Zaborowski, our vice provost for adult and continuing education and dean of University College, Robert Weir, vice president for information services, Donnie Perkins, dean and director of affirmative action and diversity, Linda Allen as registrar and Pat Meservey as special assistant to the president. We have also been well served by several excellent interim appointments: Richard Porter as vice president and Robert Tillman as acting dean of cooperative education, college deans Patrick Plunkett in health sciences and Daniel Givelber in law, and school deans Judith Barr and Mary Watson in pharmacy and health professions. I am also pleased that the trustees recently promoted Jean Eddy to vice president for enrollment management, and that Tony Pirri will become our new director of technology transfer.

This meeting marks a turning point for several members of our leadership who are stepping down after years of service. I wish to express particular thanks to Jamie Fox, our outgoing dean of criminal justice; Robert Vozzella, who retired this year as vice president for cooperative education; and Charles Coffin, who is retiring after 20 years, most recently as director of university relations.

I mentioned a few moments ago that we have defined broad directions for institutional development and that our attention is shifting from setting goals to achieving them. The directions to which I refer are based on a conception of Northeastern that I

discussed in my comments last year - the view that we should seek excellence as a national research university that is student-centered, practice-oriented, and urban. During the past year we have turned this broad aspiration into a detailed plan for our future, and we have asked each academic and administrative unit to indicate how they will contribute to our overall goals. From now on the broad framework we have articulated will shape decisions about hiring, resource allocation and program development - department by department, unit by unit - and my annual reports to you will chronicle our progress in achieving excellence in these terms.

And there is, indeed, achievement to report in all key dimensions of our plan.

During 1998-99 we welcomed 32 new tenured and tenure-track faculty, among them our first trustee professor, Barry Bluestone, and distinguished chairs for pharmaceutical sciences and history, Vladimir Torchilin and Thomas Havens. These are additional jewels in the crown of a faculty that is completing a year of impressive scholarly accomplishment. Jacqueline Isaacs of mechanical and industrial engineering received an Early Career Award from the National Science Foundation. James Scorzelli of counseling psychology won a Fulbright fellowship. Major grants were awarded to Donald O'Malley of biology, \$760,000 from the National Institutes of Health; Joe Ayers of biology, \$861,000 from the Navy; Carey Rapport of electrical engineering, \$1 million from the Army; and Al Sacco, \$1.2 million from NASA. Most impressive of all was physicist Steve Reucroft's receipt of our largest grant ever, \$20 million to head an eight-university consortium working in particle physics.

While we are proud of the research achievements of our faculty, we mean it when we say we are student-centered, and we place special value on indications that our outstanding scholars are devoted to teaching our students. We were delighted this year that three of our professors, Robert Case of mathematics, Eileen Zungolo in nursing and Gerald Schumacher in pharmacy received national awards for educational excellence, and that engineering professor Sarah Wadia-Fascetti received nearly \$900,000 to encourage young women to pursue studies in math

and engineering.

Outstanding teaching produces outstanding student achievements, and this year Lea Ruscio was one of 40 students nationally to be selected for a Marshall Scholarship, while, closer to home, a team from the College of Business, coached by Ray Kinnunen, won the Boston-area Case Competition Beanpot for the second time in three years.

The fine work of our faculty and students is bringing increased recognition to our academic programs, and it is gratifying to see the national media paying more and more attention to Northeastern. Professor David Sonnenschein of music was featured in a New York Times Education Life supplement on distance learning. Jamie Fox and [sociology professor] Jack Levin were sought out repeatedly for expert commentary in the wake of the tragedy at Columbine [Colo.] High School. [Modern languages chair] Harlow Robinson regularly provides commentary on opera for national radio.

The strengthening national profile of our work is showing up in the formal rankings as well. In the U.S. News and World Report ratings of professional programs our graduate program in engineering has moved up 11 places in two years and is within striking distance of the top 50. Our part-time MBA program in business climbed this year from 21st to 15th out of 317 schools. Our physicians assistant program ranked 11th in the nation and our nurse practitioner program ranked 22d out of 237. This year's issue of the Newsweek/Kaplan guide to colleges singled out Northeastern as one of six schools around the country notable for having a distinctive mission.

National recognition is bringing more and more talented students to Northeastern from around the country. This past fall only 44 percent of our freshman were from Massachusetts, and a record 32 percent were from outside New England. We rank 27th in the country in the size of our international student body. The latest edition of the Princeton Review summed up our progress by noting that "the academic profile of Northeastern's entering class has been on an impressive rise of late - and it shows."

As we strengthen our academic work, we are committed to enhancing the total student experience at Northeastern. We are building residential facilities as fast as we can do so. The first phase of West Campus will open in the fall with 600 new beds. We will break ground for the second phase, which will provide another 400 beds for the fall of 2000, at the end of the month. Davenport Commons on Columbus Avenue is scheduled to open in 2001 with another 600 beds. We also continue to increase financial aid for our students, especially through the continued phasing-in of our equalization initiative; by the year 2000 we will have fully honored our commitment to sustain students across five years at the level of support they were awarded as freshmen. Northeastern University has always been a place of opportunity for young people from modest backgrounds, and we are determined to keep it that way.

We are, of course, gratified by the increased national reputation of our faculty and programs, but Northeastern has a strong commitment to this city, and we are faithful to that tradition even as we reach for wider recognition. During this past year we achieved notable milestones in contributing to community development, with the successful renting-up of Renaissance Park and the approval of Davenport Commons. We were pleased to be recognized for our work in fostering minority business enterprise by Black and White Boston Coming Together. We are also gaining national recognition for our work with the community, as evidenced by our prominence, along with the University of Pennsylvania and Trinity College, in the recent review by U.S. News and World Report of urban outreach by major universities.

So we are making progress in those parts of our character that represent the keys to our future - national recognition, scholarly research, our support of students and our urban involvements. And yet, as I noted at the beginning of my remarks, we have a long way to go in each of these areas. The standard of true excellence is a high one, and we know that standard is not just a slogan for us but a competitive imperative.

I referred earlier to one aspect of our institutional aspiration that is especially vital, and that is our goal of preeminence in

practice-oriented education. I discussed this concept at some length in my report to you last year, noting that it is based on our historic strength in cooperative education but goes beyond our traditional approach by stressing the interaction of workplace experience and professional studies and by fostering linkages between professional course work and the liberal arts and sciences. I argued last year, and I believe today, that practice-oriented education offers the most promising arena for us to credibly claim national attention.

I also observed last year that we face conditions in this field that are uniquely promising and uniquely challenging: uniquely promising because so many trends suggest that young people are eager for educational opportunities that will prepare them for the workplace while also offering a full collegiate experience; uniquely challenging because other institutions, some of our key competitors among them, have seen these same trends and are moving rapidly to create programs that imitate our own.

The world of higher education is moving in our direction. We are in a wonderful position to catch this wave, but the difference between riding the crest and being overwhelmed lies in our readiness to change, to build on what we have historically done and make it better, more educationally compelling, more relevant to today's conditions. I would stake the future of Northeastern on being the quality leader in practice-oriented education. I have summoned the campus community, and would ask all who care about this university to place energy and support behind this effort.

Last year I identified three "musts" for us if we are to secure our position as the quality leader in practice-oriented education: first, we must enhance our students' co-op experiences; second, we must improve the competitive standing of our professional colleges; third, we must build distinctive strength in the arts and sciences. Let me review the progress we have made in each of these arenas.

Last September, after extensive consultation, provost Hall and I issued a "Call to Action" that outlined a comprehensive

program of change for our co-op program. Over the past nine months, under the inspired leadership of provost Hall, vice president Porter, dean Tillman and the deans of the colleges, we have moved systematically to implement the provisions of the Call. In this effort we have enjoyed the energetic, creative engagement of the co-op coordinators and vital support from key department chairs and faculty in the colleges. We have also appreciated the work of the trustees' Special Committee on Cooperative Education chaired by Mike Cronin and of a very useful Employer Advisory Board. I wish to thank all those who have contributed to this important process.

There are three basic elements to the Call to Action. The first is strengthening co-op as an educational experience; the second is strengthening co-op as an employment experience; the third is undertaking an in-depth program of research regarding co-op. While much remains to be done, I believe we can report solid progress in all three areas. On the educational front, the key to improvement lies in fostering a true partnership between co-op and the colleges, and designing for our students, college by college, an integrated learning model that makes full use of both classroom studies and workplace experience. To facilitate this change, we are altering reporting relationships to bring the co-op coordinators under the joint supervision of the college deans and the dean of co-op, and we are rearranging office assignments so that co-op coordinators will spend most of their time physically in the colleges, where they can interact with both students and classroom faculty in the primary locus of the student's education. On the employment front the co-op coordinators have developed detailed protocols to guide their work with individual students and to define their responsibilities for developing employment opportunities. Finally, on the research side, we are well along in designing a comprehensive assessment program that will, at long last, provide us with solid documentary information about students experiences on co-op as well as the benefits they derive from participation in the program.

The second element of practice-oriented education involves our professional colleges. The challenge here can be stated quite simply: Northeastern University should be at least a regional

leader in every area of professional education that we offer, and we should achieve genuine national stature in some fields. This year we have made progress in each of our colleges, but I will illustrate our efforts by referring to just three units which undertook particularly important work during the current academic year. In engineering, under the leadership of dean Allen Soyster, we completed a strategic planning process that has provided critical focus for investments and program development. We created a new major in computer engineering, opened a new laboratory for integrative project work and instituted an aggressive program of student recruitment that has produced the most promising enrollment picture in years. In the College of Business, led by dean Ira Weiss, we are also concluding an extended planning process that has identified two fields - international business and technological entrepreneurship - as critical foci for development, and we are close to appointing a trustee professor to the Brodsky Chair of International Business. In the health sciences, under dean Patrick Plunkett, we have implemented the merger of the former Bouvé College of Pharmacy and Health Professions and the College of Nursing into a comprehensive, integrated College of Health Sciences; we have taken the first steps toward leveraging the educational and research potential of this new structure and initiated design of the much-needed instructional facility made possible by the generous gift of trustee George Behrakis.

The third element of practice-oriented education involves the arts and sciences, the basic disciplines that are the fountainheads of new knowledge and essential elements of a full university education. Our challenge here is threefold: first, to have the strongest possible departments and programs, field by field; second, to build within each of these disciplines, options and courses that reflect Northeastern's special strength in practice-oriented work; third, to build, in collaboration with the professional colleges, intercollegiate programs - double majors, dual majors, major/minor sequences - that will make it possible for every Northeastern undergraduate to prepare for future work and also achieve a full general education. Here, again, under dean Jim Stellar, there is important progress to report. Biology and journalism have undertaken major overhauls of their curricula, and new efforts were launched to

enhance instruction in writing. An innovative new School of Education within arts and sciences was approved by the Board of Trustees. And new majors bridging professional and liberal studies have been added - physics linked with computer science; American Sign Language linked to theater, or psychology, or human services; cinema studies linked to communications; an individually-designed minor has been created to enable students in any college to pursue an organized sequence of study in the liberal arts.

So, that is where we are headed and that is what we have accomplished this year to get there. We seek excellence as a national research university that is student-centered, practice-oriented and urban. We intend to lead the way in practice-oriented education. These are our basic answers to the challenge put to me by the trustees at the time of my appointment: how to achieve the better part of the smaller/better formula.

I have been at some pains this morning to lay out these directions of development because it is vital that members of the corporation understand our vision for the future and share our enthusiasm for it. It is vital for one simple reason: we shall never fulfill our aspirations without your participation and support. Just as our strategy and planning has been based on the wisdom of our governing boards, so our success will be based on your continuing involvement.

Resources far beyond what we can realize from tuition revenues will be needed to accomplish our plans. And so, only a year after the victory celebration for the centennial campaign, we are in the early stages of planning the next one, led by development committee chair Ron Rossetti and vice chair Arthur Pappas. Over the next year we will be reaching out to many of you for assistance in organizing this effort, asking you to identify others who can help, asking you to consider your own capacity to lend support. I hope you will be willing to do so.

As we plan, we also work, and there is concrete progress to report in the development arena as well. After resting for a year on the plateau achieved in the final year of the centennial campaign, we returned this year to the goal of a 15-percent

increase in annual giving, a trajectory we intend to maintain throughout the next campaign. I am happy to report that we are well on the way to success. I want to thank you for your contributions to this record and also acknowledge vice president [Richard] Meyer and his colleagues for their work in producing this result.

Some individual contributions have been particularly generous. As you know, our two highest priority initiatives are Presidential Scholarships and Trustee Professorships. The scholarships provide full-tuition support for the final three years for students with outstanding records at the end of their sophomore year. The professorships help us recruit nationally-prominent scholars to Northeastern. Since last May we have received commitments for five new Presidential Scholarships, bringing our total to eight. Three of these have been given by our trustees, and I want to thank Arthur Pappas and Don Kramer and, in absentia, Roy Beaton, for their assistance. Since last May we have also obtained one additional Trustee Professorship, bringing that total to five; we will be announcing the source of this gift within the next few weeks.

There is other wonderful news as well. Corporator Irving Brudnick and his wife, Betty, have made an additional commitment of \$800,000 to the support of the Center for the Study of Conflict and Violence. A new chair at the million dollar level in criminal justice will be announced next month. Another anonymous donor has committed half a million dollars to support Jewish studies and other purposes still being defined. Trustee Arnold Hiatt and Nonnie Burnes have greatly increased their previous commitments to a total of \$370,000 each to fund a major new program of public service scholarships in the law school.

There have been major corporation and foundation contributions as well. Dick Egan's EMC Corporation contributed \$1.4 million in equipment. Raytheon provided \$600,000 to support engineering's new Center for Integrated Sensing and Imaging. The Culpepper Foundation has provided a quarter of a million dollars to support the new Educational Technology Center.

Finally, I am pleased to announce a very special gift from overseer Robert Shillman and his wife, Mo. Bob has made an outright gift of \$3.2 million, \$3 million as a naming gift for the classroom building and the remainder for scholarships in engineering. We will have a special building dedication ceremony next fall. Please join me in expressing our appreciation to Bob for this wonderful act of generosity.

So, we are moving. I am more convinced than ever that this university is on the cusp of great opportunity. The nation is interested in our distinctive qualities as never before. I see this interest in government, where Vice President [Al] Gore has sought out our perspective on the role of education in preparing Americans for 21st century jobs. I see it in the corporate world, where the Employment Management Association, representing 100,000 human resource professionals, has asked our Center for Labor Market Studies to assess co-op as a source of high-level labor supply. I see it in the admiring comments of college guides, like Kaplan/Newsweek, which speaks of "opportunities you can't get anywhere else," or the Fisk Guide that recommends us to students "who have a good idea of what they want to do in life, or at least a strong desire to find out." I see it in the educational press, where the Chronicle of Higher Education published a two-page spread outlining the virtues of practice-oriented education, which in turn led to a commentary about practice-oriented education on National Public Radio rebroadcast on dozens of stations across the nation. Most of all, I see it in the increasing number of talented students from all over the country and around the world who want to come here - students who, like so many of their predecessors see in Northeastern a unique opportunity to prepare themselves for the challenges of adult life.

Practice-oriented education is a winning strategy for Northeastern. National leadership in practice-oriented education is our destiny. I am confident that, with your continued support, building on the solid platform provided by our history, focused on our distinctive qualities and capabilities, we will seize the moment now opening to us and reach the heights to which we aspire.

Other addresses:

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- [State of the University Address](#), October 8, 1998

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- [Remarks before the National Commission on the Cost of Higher Education](#), November 7, 1997
- [Centennial Convocation Address](#), October 16, 1997
- [State of the University Address](#), September 29, 1997
- [Address to the Northeastern Corporation](#), May 28, 1997
- [Remarks to the Boston Chamber of Commerce](#), April 4, 1997
- [Address to the University Community](#), February 27, 1997
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- [State of the University Address](#), September 30, 1996
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