

Northeastern University

Freeland Speeches Richard M. Freeland

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Address to the Northeastern University Corporation

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Office of the President

SPEECHES OF RICHARD M. FREELAND

Address to the Northeastern University Corporation May 21, 1998 Ritz-Carlton, Boston

Ι

I am delighted to welcome you to the annual meeting and pleased to have a few moments to report on both the progress we have made during the past year and the prospects we see for the future.

1997-98 has been an exciting, hopeful year at Northeastern University. We have celebrated our Centennial with pride. Under [trustee] Bob Marini's inspired leadership, we have completed our most ambitious development campaign ever and exceeded our goal of \$225 million by nearly 20 percent. We have beautified the campus, balanced the budget and enhanced the faculty. We have taken important steps toward realizing our vision of Northeastern as a national research university that is student-centered, practice-oriented and urban. And we have done all this while attending to our primary business of educating our 24,000 students, 3,400 of whom will graduate this spring at our joyous Centennial commencement.

To our students, faculty and staff, some of whom are here today,

I extend my respect and thanks for a year of dedication and accomplishment. To the members of this Corporation, let me add this personal word as I complete my second year in the presidency. John Gardner has expressed my feelings precisely: "What could be more rewarding," Gardner once wrote, "than to be engaged in work in which every capacity or talent one may have is needed, every lesson one may have learned is used, every value one cares about is furthered." That is the way I feel about leading Northeastern, and I am deeply grateful for the opportunity you have given me.

I am especially pleased this morning to express thanks to Northeastern's maximum leader for the past nine years: our [trustee] chairman and friend, George Matthews. I will not attempt here to do justice to his many contributions. On June 5, we will have a full evening to express our appreciation, and I hope you will all be part of that moment. This morning, George, let me simply say "thank you" on behalf of the university for another year of inspired, dedicated, caring leadership by you and also by Kathy, and let me add my own personal "thank you" for your guidance and support.

I am also pleased to congratulate Neal Finnegan on his election as the next board chair. Many factors have combined to bring about Northeastern's recent resurgence, but fundamentally we are where we are today because of wise strategic decisions about our future taken during the crisis of the early 1990s. As much as anyone in the university, Neal has played a key role in conceiving the new Northeastern. He has the strength and stature to help us make that vision a reality, and I look forward to working with him in the years ahead.

I wish also to recognize several members of the senior administration who are stepping down after years of exceptional service: Michael Baer, our provost for the past eight years; George Harris, our vice president for information services, with 20 years of service to Northeastern; Robert Lowndes, our dean of arts and sciences, with 30 years of service; and Ed Mullen, our registrar, with 35 years of service. Jim Gozzo, our dean of Bouvé College, who is moving on after 26 years of service, could not be with us this morning. To all these dedicated

Huskies, who together represent more than a century of service, I extend the thanks of the university; Northeastern is a better place as a result of your contributions.

II

In my few moments with you this morning, I shall attempt to do three things: first, to summarize some the major indicators of our progress over the past year; second, to review in greater depth my reasons for thinking Northeastern is poised for national leadership in practice-oriented education; third, to outline the critical steps we must take to realize our potential.

Six years ago, as part of a major repositioning mandated by the trustees, Northeastern set out to become smaller and better. At the heart of that vision was the challenge of significantly enhancing the quality of both faculty and students to a level appropriate for a national university.

I am pleased to report impressive progress on both these fronts. Increasingly, members of our faculty are achieving national recognition for their work. Consider Barry Karger, whose Barnett Institute was the focus of a special issue of an international scientific journal with a circulation of 200,000 in the United States and Europe; or professor Stephen Reucroft, one of a select group of U.S. scientists invited to Washington for the signing of an historic international agreement on particle physics; or law professor Wendy Parmet, part of the team that took a case involving AIDS discrimination to the Supreme Court. Consider as well our department of electrical engineering, where four faculty members have won National Science Foundation Early Career Development grants, and where total sponsored research ranks in the top 10 percent nationally.

These individual and collective achievements are beginning to produce positive effects in some of the more prominent academic rankings. In this year's U.S. News & World Report review of graduate and professional schools, our graduate engineering program rose six places, from 7lst to 65th among

219 universities listed; our part-time MBA program was 21st among all such programs in the country; and our School of Law was featured in a full-page article.

So national recognition is growing and it is bringing us ever stronger students. Applications for freshman admission continue to rise, and the quality of the applicant pool continues to improve. Next fall's freshmen, like last year's, will be the most highly selected and best prepared entering class in 25 years. These changes are manifesting themselves in many ways. Retention rates are improving steadily; we did better each quarter this year than last and we did better across every classyear transition across the full five years of our undergraduate program. Individual students are winning national recognition. Consider Jeffry Ross, an electrical engineering major who achieved a 3.993 grade-point average and was recently named Outstanding Electrical Engineering Student of the Year by the International Honor Society of Electrical Engineers; or our MBA case competition team, which emerged victorious in two international contests this year over teams from more than 35 other colleges and universities.

As word spreads about the new Northeastern, we are attracting more students from across the country and around the world. The percent of our graduates from out of state continues to increase; next fall we anticipate that 53 percent of our freshmen will be from outside Massachusetts, the largest percentage ever. With regard to international students, we currently rank 20th among all colleges and universities in the United States in the number of foreign students we enroll.

We are on the way to our goal of recognition as a true a national university.

We have also made impressive progress in research. Our Snell professor of engineering, NU graduate Al Sacco, has made NU a major player in the U.S. space program with the establishment of the Center for Advanced Microgravity Materials Processing, which is being supported with a \$6 million grant from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Biologist Carol Warner has brought in some \$3.5 million in grants all by herself.

Closer to home, Paul Harrington and his colleagues at our Center for Labor Market Studies are the driving force behind the efforts of the Massachusetts Business Roundtable to enhance job-training programs in Massachusetts.

Once again, aggregate statistics reflect individual achievement. Last year I was thrilled to report that total sponsored research at Northeastern had increased by 45 percent. To be honest, I didn't think we could match that record this year. I was wrong. Currently, research awards are running 10 percent ahead of last year's levels.

We are steadily strengthening our position as a research university.

While we are proud of our scholars, we still say we are student-centered. Education remains job one at Northeastern and strengthening our environment to support students is a key institutional priority. So we are increasing the financial aid budget by nearly \$7 million. We are expanding opportunities for on-campus housing through two major projects, West Village on Parker Street, which will provide 600 beds by the fall of 1999, and Davenport Commons on Columbus Avenue, scheduled to add another 800 beds by the year 2000. We are persisting in efforts to improve the quality of student support services through our Student Service Excellence Initiative, which has won kudos from students for improvements in the financial aid office, the bursar's office and Lane Health Center.

We are taking seriously our commitment to being a studentcentered university.

We are equally serious about our urban character. We aspire to be a national model of the positive impact a university can have on its urban community. As part of the Davenport Commons project, we are planning 65 units of affordable housing for neighborhood residents. This past year we assumed responsibility for developing Parcel 18 in Roxbury, site of the former Registry of Motor Vehicles building and a symbol of unfulfilled hope for economic development in our neighborhood for over a decade. Where public policy failed, Northeastern is

succeeding. We have renamed the project Renaissance Park. We are well on the way to leasing up the existing building at competitive rents; we are close to final approvals for a new parking garage, and we have begun the feasibility study for an anticipated hotel.

We are equally involved in community renewal along Huntington Avenue, where Northeastern people have been instrumental in sponsoring a \$15 million project that will transform the grungy urban roadway we have known for years into a tree-lined boulevard worthy of its new name as the Avenue of the Arts.

On campus, we continue to nurture a diverse academic community. Last fall we opened the first Latino Center in New England. This spring we celebrated the African-American Institute's first 30 years - with the proud announcement that we have raised more than \$100,000 to sustain this critical part of our community, including a major gift from trustee Ed Owens.

Ш

So we are ending a year of achievement. We have established a framework for pursuing excellence and we are acting within that framework. But what are the conditions that impel us forward? And where shall we find the most important pathways to heightened recognition?

A few moments ago I referred to Northeastern as a practice-oriented university. This term embraces several facets of our character. It refers, first and foremost, to our commitment to coop. But it refers also to our emphasis on professional education and to our work in applied research. I believe our orientation toward practice - toward putting academic knowledge to use in the professional lives of our graduates and in the activities of our scholars - is our most important and distinctive characteristic. My ambition for Northeastern is that we become a destination of choice for students across the country who seek a practice-oriented education.

This is a high goal. Yet it is within our reach. Conditions in the world around us are working in our favor in ways that have not been true in the past. Two landmark events symbolize the change.

The first occurred when our predecessors gathered in 1948 to celebrate Northeastern's 50th anniversary. The keynote speaker that day was Harvard president James Conant. In his address, Conant lauded the diversity among American colleges and universities. In doing so, he praised our departure from the traditionalism of schools like Harvard while drawing attention to the somewhat marginal place we occupied in the world of higher education.

Nearly 50 years later, another president from across the Charles addressed a Northeastern convocation. Last October, at our Centennial convocation, Charles Vest of MIT also applauded Northeastern's contributions. In contrast to Conant, however, Vest proposed that in the contemporary global society, the Northeastern approach may be one of the most important models for the future success of higher education.

I believe that Charles Vest is right. I believe we have the opportunity to move from maverick to leader, not in place of traditional education, not in opposition to traditional education, but shoulder to shoulder with the great universities of the nation at the head of an important educational movement that I call practice-oriented education.

Today's students are far more concerned about preparing for the workplace than were their predecessors of 20 or 30 years ago. At leading universities, even at liberal arts colleges, students are demanding programs responsive to their interest in the practical world and useful skills. In reaction to this pressure, there has been an explosion of internships programs in American higher education. Today, nearly all colleges and universities offer such programs, and over half claim to offer some form of cooperative education.

The interests of students are paralleled by those of parents and employers. There is a vast cultural weariness with forms of higher education that require students to spend four years of study, at great expense to their families, only to emerge with no idea of what they want to do with their lives and with little functional capacity to assume the responsibilities of adult life. Both employers and parents are looking to higher education to close the distance that separates traditional academic concerns from the real-world worries that college graduates must face.

So the challenge to higher education is creating forms of education that speak to the practical concerns of students, employers and parents while offering the best in liberal learning that an academic institution can provide. This will require a new form of education, one that shakes free from the old notion that a student must choose between an education in the liberal arts and a professional field, and one that links classroom learning squarely to the development of useful capacities.

This context is made for Northeastern. Let us consider our strengths. First and foremost, we are clearly and authentically, nationally and internationally, the leader in cooperative education. We have done it longer than almost anyone else, and we have invested more heavily in supporting it than anyone else. We know its benefits. Last year, we conducted a study of the class of 1996 six months after graduation. A full 83 percent were employed full-time in a field related to their studies at an average salary of \$33,000. Few institutions can match that record.

While co-op is our central asset, its success rests on effective programs of professional education, and this is our second area of strength. More than most traditional universities, we have made a commitment to professional studies. In our six professionally oriented colleges, in special programs within our College of Arts and Sciences, in our graduate professional programs, in University College, students at Northeastern have access to an extraordinarily rich array of opportunities to prepare themselves for the workplace.

Our third key asset is the arts and sciences. This is recent and crucial. We must offer our students a full experience of the liberal arts, including the opportunity to major in a basic

discipline. We must have scholars who command respect in academic fields. We must never allow ourselves to be labeled as merely a vocational or technical school, and our strength in the arts and sciences is our chief defense against any such charge. Moreover, much as we want our students to have successful careers, we also want them to be exemplary citizens, to have strong moral compasses, to respect ethical complexity, to possess an understanding of culture and diversity, and to lead rich and thoughtful private lives. The arts and sciences will help them develop all these qualities.

So we are entering a period of opportunity in a favorable position. But success is not assured. We are not alone in seeing new forces at work in higher education. Others assert that their new internship programs can accomplish in four years what we have done in five. There is change, creativity and experimentation in the world of cooperative education. The competition within professional fields is intense. We will have to work hard to assert the position of leadership in practice-oriented education that I believe is ours to grasp.

IV

Three critical challenges are of paramount importance.

First, we must re-establish our claim to national leadership in cooperative education through new approaches that link classroom learning more effectively to co-op experience, and we must forge new synergies between our professional programs and the liberal arts and sciences. We must develop a rich array of dual majors that cut across collegiate lines. We must ask faculty in our professional programs to help students understand why their conceptual, moral, ethical, cultural and esthetic development is preparation for work as much as it is for life. We must ask faculty in the liberal arts to help students understand how liberal learning can be useful and applicable in the practical world. We must, in short, build a new model of practice-oriented education that fully integrates the three great learning traditions that we offer: professional education, liberal education and co-op.

Second, we must strengthen the competitive position of each of our schools - college by college, program by program - enhancing quality across the board. We must raise the stature of our graduate programs. We must strategically position the university in each of the distinctive markets where we compete, as we have begun to do with new strategic plans in engineering and business - and with the merging nursing and Bouvé into a new College of Health Sciences. And we must reverse the recent downward trend in University College by becoming much more entrepreneurial, much more effective in reaching nontraditional students with new technologies, much more nimble in responding to changing market forces.

Third, we must aggressively increase our efficiency and effectiveness in both academic and administrative operations. We must become a high performance organization not only in the quality of our service but in our productivity. At the same time, we must work imaginatively to increase our revenues from sources other than tuition. That means continuing to raise the bar in annual fund raising and working harder to garner external research dollars.

In 1996, when I stood before the university to be inaugurated as its sixth president, I identified two initiatives to symbolize our promise as we face a new century: appoint Trustee Professorships, to bring to campus new faculty with national reputations in their fields, and 12 Presidential Scholarships, each to provide full tuition for the final three years for sophomores who have demonstrated excellence in both classroom and co-op. For me, the effort to establish these two programs has represented a test of our ability to raise ourselves to the next level without relying on tuition dollars. So it is with pleasure and appreciation that I report today the initial successes of our three-year effort to obtain support for these two programs. Two loyal alumni and trustees have committed themselves to supporting Presidential Scholarships: Ron Rosetti and Alan Tobin. In addition, the Class of 1943 is endowing a third Presidential Scholarship as its reunion gift this spring.

With respect to Trustee Professorships there is also wonderful

news. Three members of our governing boards have pledged their support: overseer Fred Brodsky in the College of Business Administration, trustee-elect Robert Brooks in the College of Criminal Justice and [trustee] George Behrakis in the College of Health Sciences. In addition, the Stern family is endowing a fourth Trustee Professorship, the location of which remains to be determined.

We have made a start at raising the resources we need to move to the next level. And just this week, two other trustees pledged significant new support. First, Arnold Hiatt has committed a major gift to create a new center for voluntary community service by students and has also significantly increased his support for the fund for the public interest in the law school. Second, and most dramatic of all, trustee George Behrakis has made a naming gift to support a new building for the life sciences. George, in my mind, with this gift plus the Trustee Professorship, you have just guaranteed the future of our new College of Health Sciences, and I - all of us - are deeply in your debt.

Conclusion

So: we are on our way, building on the impressive achievements of the past, optimistic about our future. As we pursue the goals I have outlined, as we raise our academic sights, as we become more national and more selective, we must never forget who we are or what is at our core. Of all the achievements we celebrate in this Centennial year, none makes us prouder than the fact that we have always been a place of opportunity for talented, ambitious students from modest backgrounds.

The men and women we celebrated and thanked at the campaign victory celebration last month, many of whom had given tens of thousands, or hundreds of thousands, or even millions of dollars to Northeastern, were almost entirely individuals who had few advantages at birth, who achieved their current positions through hard work and the opportunity that Northeastern provided. Nothing is more wonderful about Northeastern than that. As President Clinton reminded us when he spoke at our

graduation in 1993, the Northeastern story is the American story. We will never forget that. As we reach for greater heights, we shall keep faith with the values that have brought us to where we are. And if we get to the mountaintop, it will not be solely to enjoy the view. It will be to insure that others can follow the path we have cleared, so that they, too, might partake - in the century that lies ahead - the opportunities Northeastern has created for a century and which give us such pride as we celebrate our Centennial year.

Thank you.

Other addresses:

1998

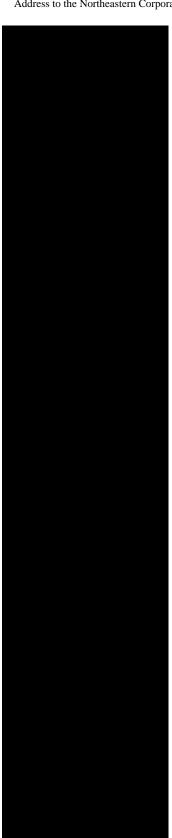
• State of the University Address, October 8, 1998

1997

- 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
- <u>Inaugural Address</u>, January 17, 1997

1996

• State of the University Address, September 30, 1996



• Acceptance Remarks to the University Community, May 29, 1996

Return to top of page