

Northeastern University

Freeland Speeches Richard M. Freeland

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Address to the Northeastern University Corporation

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Speeches of Richard M. Freeland

Report to the Northeastern Corporation May 23, 2005 Ritz-Carlton, Boston

NOTE: This speech is accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation. Clicking on the slides will open a new window.

Thank you Chairman Finnegan and thank you, Neal and all members of the trustees, overseers and other members of the Corporation for continuing support, and for being here today to review another year of impressive progress for the university we all love. A special greeting to my predecessor who is here with us today, Jack Curry, and to Neal's predecessor as Chair, George Matthews.

A special word of thanks also to Ron Rosetti for his continuing direction of the all-important Leadership Campaign, which has now raised \$188 million towards our goal of \$200 million by the end of the calendar year. We were especially appreciative this year of three seven-figure gifts from alumni Anthony Manganaro, Ted English and a combination of Alan McKim and Richard d'Amore.

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The year now coming to an end has been full of good news for Northeastern University [click here to see slide 1]. Not yet top 100, but top tier at 120. It was a great moment for the campus community, and I hope for you as well.

Last fall brought other indications of Northeastern's burgeoning strength. Our freshman class was, once again, the most academically accomplished in our history, ranking in the top 70 in selectivity among entering classes at the nation's 248 national universities, with average SATs of 1211. [click here to see slide 2]. At the same time, our upper-class students returned to

their studies at rates exceeding our goals. We are especially thrilled that the class that entered in 2003—this year's sophomore class—is tracking toward a graduation rate of 70% by the spring of 2009, positioning us to achieve one of our most important goals, and promising further upward movement in our overall standing.

The physical development of the campus proceeded as well. We opened two more magnificent buildings on the west campus, buildings G and H, adding to our residential capacity and providing a new home for the College of Computer and Information Science. We also broke ground on the last building in the west campus master plan, Building F, which will house the African-American Institute and the Honors Program. Last week our master plan was recognized with an honor award for design excellence by the American Institute of Architects.

As the year progressed we were delighted by important programmatic innovations, including the launch of the School of Technological Entrepreneurship, the strong movement of the School of Professional and Continuing Studies into the graduate arena, and the dedication of two important research centers, the Center for Drug Discovery and the New England Inflammation and Tissue Protection Institute. We were thrilled by our selection by the National Science Foundation for two major, multi-year grants, one to strengthen science education in the Boston public schools, the second to build a research center focused on nanotechnology.

Individual faculty won important recognition as well: Rebeca Rosengaus and Emanuela Barberis received Career Awards from the NSF, while Armen Stepanyants received a similar grant from the National Institutes of Health. Judith Hall was listed among the most cited individuals in her discipline over the past 20 years. Barry Bluestone received the Good City Civic Leadership Award from the Boston Foundation. George Thrush was selected for the American Institute of Architects Fellowship, and Rich Katula for a Fulbright lectureship.

On the administrative side we added terrific talent to our team: Thomas Moore, Dean of the College of Business Administration; Brian Kenny, Vice President of Marketing and Communications; Frederick McGrail, Director of University Communications; Robert Jose, Director of Residence Life; Dr. Roberta Berrien, Director of University Health and Counseling Services; three members of our coaching staff: "Rocky" Hager in football, and Laura Shuler and Greg Cronin in men's and women's ice hockey; and finally, and most recently, our new Vice President for Alumni Relations Jack Moynihan.

Amid all these positive signs of progress, we pressed ahead on the two initiatives to which I devoted much of my report at last year's annual meeting: our five-year, seventy-five million dollar Academic Investment Plan, and our work to heighten Northeastern's visibility and reputation.

With respect to the Academic Investment Plan, being led by

Provost Abdelal and our college deans, we are making steady progress toward our goal of adding 100 new tenured and tenure track faculty to assure the quality of undergraduate education, build strength in selected graduate professional programs, and nurture centers of research excellence in carefully targeted arenas. During the past year we made particular progress in reshaping our MBA program and building scholarly strength in nanotechnology and urban public policy.

Our efforts to promote Northeastern's visibility and reputation also bore fruit. Since we last met our university has been the focus of feature articles in the Atlantic Monthly, the Boston Business Journal, Boston Magazine and the Chronicle of Higher Education. On the TV side, WCVB's Evening Chronicle devoted a full half hour to our transformation, and next August's issue of US News, the college rankings issue, will feature an article on our co-op program. Media successes like these will help boost the reputational component of our overall position in the rankings, where—as this slide indicates—we have made steady progress over the last three years. [click here to see slide 3]. We saw clear indications of our burgeoning strength in the recently completed admissions cycle for next fall's freshman class. With over 25,000 applications for our 2,800 seats, we are taking another step forward in academic selectivity, with average SAT's in the mid 1220s in a class that also sets new records for both geographic and ethnic diversity.

The good work of this year promises, of course, continued upward movement in our position. Top 100 is ever closer to our reach. And so this morning I will focus on the question that lies just over the horizon: Once we are established among the nation's top universities, what will be required to keep us there. Two vital relationships require attention in this context. The first involves our position in our city as it relates to our physical growth. The second is our support among alumni as it relates to our wealth. Let me say a few words about each of these relationships and reflect on the role of the corporation inhelping the university to strengthen them.

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At our annual meeting last spring I commented on our difficulties with our surrounding communities in the wake of last year's Super Bowl. In my remarks that day I noted how well the campus community had responded to those events, and I expressed great optimism that we wold continue our upward trajectory despite them. As it turned out, my optimism proved justified. Just a few months after the Super Bowl, as I have noted, we enrolled an exceptionally strong freshman class and jumped into the top tier of national universities.

As I reflected on the events of last spring in subsequent months, however, I realized that the challenges that came into focus at that time were not transient byproducts of a passing crisis but were, in fact, a call to partnership with the city and our

neighbors at a much higher level, a call that is consistent with our founding, our history and our core values. We were founded as an institution that would contribute to this city and region. We must remain true to that value even as we shape the new Northeastern and reach for the top 100.

We are only now beginning, through a master planning process led by Larry Mucciolo, to think systematically about long-term space needs, but some things seem obvious. We need to house many more students on campus than we currently do. Many of our academic facilities are antiquated. We will soon outgrow our research capacity. We have almost no recreational space for our students and our varsity athletic facilities are not competitive. Our ability to showcase the arts is terribly limited.

Over the past year we have worked hard to repair the damage done last spring and to foster a favorable disposition towards Northeastern. I believe we have made good progress, and I am deeply appreciative of the work led by our team of Bob Gittens, Jeff Doggett, Philly Mantella, Ed Klotzbier, Joe Griffin, Brian Kenny, Fred McGrail and Jean Fleischman. But along the way I have also realized how much more we must do both to contribute to the city and to tell the community our story. A reality we need to grasp is that changes we view as positive do not necessarily seem so to others.

Consider our growth as a residential campus. We are rightly proud that we now attract thousands of students from all over the country and world. But these same students are creating a stronger student presence in our neighborhood in ways that are not entirely welcome. Consider our increased selectivity. We are rightly proud that superbly prepared applicants now seek admission, but for those concerned primarily with opportunities for local youth, our rising admission standards can seem a loss rather than a gain. Or consider our determination to rise in the rankings. We are rightly proud of our progress, but thoughtful observers wonder if we are abandoning our roots in co-op and local service to pursue some sort of institutional ego trip.

As everyone in this room knows, we have good reasons for everything we are doing. Indeed we had little choice but to pursue our present course following the difficulties of the early 1990s. Building the new Northeastern is the only way we can preserve our core traditions—co-op, opportunity for young people from modest backgrounds, and engagement with the city. Beyond all this, I also believe that the changes we are making add value to Boston in all kinds of ways—from attracting talent, to boosting the economy, to beautifying our neighborhood and making it safer. And we continue to contribute to the schools, the hospitals and clinics, to the police, and to community development more intensively than any other university in the city. This is a case we need to make much more widely and persistently than we have done so far if we are to marshal support for expansion.

It is, of course, my responsibility to make this case with our administrative leadership and campus community. We have been

devoting energy to this task. But this is also an arena in which the university urgently needs the assistance of alumni and friends and particularly the members of this governing corporation. Many of you are from this area and command respect in this community. We need you to help interpret and explain what we are doing and why to your colleagues at work, your friends and neighbors at home, and to your associates in civic, charitable and recreational associations. If there was ever a time when our future well being depended upon the ability of our governing corporation to help us connect with our surrounding community, that time is now.

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A second arena for attention in sustaining Northeastern as a top tier university involves resources. Universities compete in many arenas—for gifted students, for faculty talent, for public acclaim, for alumni support, for resources. Over time, the winners in the competition for alumni support become, with that support, winners in the competition for resources, and winners in the competition for resources are likely to be winners in the competition for students, faculty and acclaim. This slide illustrates the connection between institutional wealth and academic standing by displaying the correlations between endowment size and national ranking. [click here to see slide 4]

When we look at Northeastern through the prism of resources we become aware of our very real challenge. Here is a list of endowments for our comparator universities. [click here to see slide 5] As you can see we rank in the middle of the pack but at the bottom of those that support major research and graduate enterprises. When we look at endowment relative to student body our position becomes a bit weaker. [click here to see slide 6]. Another dimension of our resource challenge involves philanthropic support. This slide displays total donations from alumni and friends among our comparator institutions. [click here to see slide 7]. As you can see, we rank far down the list and well below the institutions with cost structures similar to ours. This next slide makes the point even more dramatically by displaying total annual giving relative to student body size. [click here to see slide 8].

Many of you are aware of these financial realities. People in this room have been heroic in helping Northeastern address them. Our superb committee on funds and investments led in recent years by Jean Tempel, Nick Thorndike and Dick Chapman has done wonderful work building our endowment. Ron Rosetti, Bob Marini and Chet Krentzman have led even more ambitious fundraising efforts. Were it not for the work of these trustees and the generous support of many alumni and friends, including many in this room, Northeastern would have no chance at all of sustaining a position among the nation's top universities.

Still, we must keep watch on our comparative position. This slide lists the amounts raised or being raised by several of our comparator institutions in their most recent campaigns. [click here to see slide 9]. As you can see, even as we move toward success on a \$200 million effort others are raising the competitive bar. Unless we elevate our game to meet this challenge it will be difficult to maintain a top tier position for very long.

I mention these realities not to dwell on difficulties but to highlight the implications of our success. Until quite recently Northeastern was a very successful business. Throughout the 1980s we earned large operating surpluses from tuition payments that we used to build our endowment. In that low cost, high volume version of Northeastern, fundraising and alumni relations were far less essential to institutional economics than they were at more traditional high cost, selective universities where endowment income and philanthropic support have long been essential to meet operating needs.

But as we have built the new Northeastern our economics have become much more like those of other private universities. To sustain ourselves in the top tier we now need efforts in the arenas of fundraising and alumni relations of quite a different character than in the past. We cannot, for example, rely as much as we have done on the generosity of a limited number of loyal supporters and friends. We must take much fuller advantage of the tremendous resource we possess in our 165,000 alumni as active participants in the life of the university, as our advocates, our advisors and our investors. We must reach out to alumni who have the capacity and willingness to help but with whom we have not remained in close contact. And we need enriched ways for these alumni to connect with their alma mater.

This effort is already underway. We have expanded alumni programming. We are intensifying alumni communications. We are strengthening our network of alumni organizations and volunteers. In all of this, we are indebted to Bill Fowler, Dick Power and their colleagues in the alumni leadership for truly pathbreaking work. I also thank the chair of our Trustee Committee on Student Affairs and Alumni Relations, Carole Shapazian, who has spent many hours helping shape new approaches to alumni programming, and I commend the hard work professionals in the alumni relations office under the leadership of Senior Vice President Cunningham, Mary Groarke and Kathleen Fitzgerald.

To support these heightened efforts, we are adding resources to the Advancement budget and we will continue to do so. We will create an alumni center on campus during the coming year. We have elevated the top position in alumni relations to a vice presidency and appointed a talented and experienced alumnus to this position. At the same time, we have launched an extensive research project to improve our knowledge of our alumni and better understand their feelings toward the university. We will not undertake a new campaign for a period of time so we can

focus on broadening our base of support through a greatly intensified program of annual fund support.

I am greatly encouraged by the good work that is being done in alumni relations and fundraising and by the engagement of governing board members in helping the university work more effectively in these arenas. Yet here, as in community relations, we cannot succeed without the active engagement and broad support of the governing boards and our larger community of alumni and friends. Over the period ahead we will be reaching out to all members of the corporation to become part of this effort. Our collective success will determine our future prospects.

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So that is my assessment of the two largest claims on our attention as we contemplate the challenge of sustaining Northeastern as a top tier university. We have achieved remarkable things since our Trustees charged us to create a "smaller and better" Northeastern fifteen years ago. We are being recognized around the country as one of the academic success stories of recent times. We have much to celebrate, and our success has created opportunities for us to grasp.

We must grasp them together. Our chairman is fond of telling the faculty that the university can only progress as far as they will take it. That is profoundly true. But it is also true that the university can progress only as far as the governing boards and the broader community of alumni and friends will take it. There is no such thing in American higher education as a great private university that is not sustained by a strong, well organized and supportive alumni body.

We are a great private university. We are approaching an historic moment. We will achieve top 100 status. Our job now, as stewards of this university, is to seize the opportunities that come with our new position. I hope you share my excitement in doing so, just as I hope you share my pride in the achievements that have brought us to this point.

Thank you.