

## **Northeastern University**

Freeland Speeches Richard M. Freeland

May 24, 2006

# Address to the Northeastern University Corporation

Richard M. Freeland (1941-) Northeastern University

### Recommended Citation

 $Freeland~(1941-), Richard~M., "Address~to~the~Northeastern~University~Corporation"~(2006). \textit{Freeland Speeches.}~Paper~11. \\ \underline{http://hdl.handle.net/2047/d10000212}$ 

This work is available open access, hosted by Northeastern University.



- Biography/Vitae
- Speeches
- Op-Eds/Articles
- Annual Reports
- Staff
- Cabinet
- Presidential Scholars
- NU History
- Past Presidents
- Churchill Hall
- Contact Info
- Search
- President Home
- NU Home

## Speeches of Richard M. Freeland

Address to the Northeastern Corporation Richard M. Freeland, President May 22, 2006

I

This is the tenth and last time that I shall address this annual meeting. I want you to know how privileged I feel to have led the University and how much I appreciate the support I have received. The presidency has been the experience of a lifetime. I shall be forever grateful.

It was particularly wonderful last night, as we gathered to celebrate a decade of progress, to proclaim with pride that the major challenge facing Northeastern 10 years ago-to reposition ourselves as a selective, top-tier national university-has been accomplished. The fact that we achieved this while honoring our most important values is especially gratifying. When I first announced the top 100 goal, I was struck by the skepticism of the Northeastern community. I am equally impressed now by the widespread sense of confidence that we will rise even higher. Experiencing the growing awareness of Northeastern's true value and potential has been one of the most rewarding aspects of my presidency.

As I prepare to step down in August, I thank the members of this corporation for your individual contributions to our progress. I look forward to welcoming my successor. I will do everything in my power to accomplish an orderly transition.

Ш

This final report seems an appropriate time to reflect on the state of the University and on the challenges and possibilities that lie ahead. I will devote the bulk of my remarks to that assessment. Let me begin, however, with a brief review of major developments during the past year.

Any such account must start with celebrating the successful completion of the Leadership Campaign. By the official end-date in March, we had raised more than \$203 million against our \$200 million goal. I congratulate and thank Ron Rossetti and the entire team of campaign volunteers for their efforts, and I thank all members of our governing boards for their participation, which constituted 25 percent of the total raised. I also thank Trustee

Bob Shillman and the Estate of Elizabeth Bard for two magnificent gifts in the course of the current year.

This was also a year in which we looked beyond the Leadership Campaign to the next set of challenges in advancement, knowing that continued progress holds the key to our future. In that context, I am pleased to acknowledge two new vice presidents who are completing their first year: Jack Moynihan in Alumni Relations and Bill Bartolini in Development. With Jack and Bill in place, with Bob Cunningham and Marian Stanley providing continuing leadership, and with Henry Nasella and Carole Shapazian offering terrific support as Trustee Committee chairs, we are well positioned to take advancement to the next level.

Philly Mantella and her team in enrollment management continued their remarkable work in admissions. For the fall of 2006 we had over 27,000 applications, making us the country's fourth most sought after private university. We anticipate that average SATs for enrolled freshmen will climb to 1230. We will also welcome our first class of Torch Scholars, a scholarship program that enrolls high potential students who have struggled to overcome adversity. I am also pleased to report that we continued our pattern of recent progress with respect to freshman-to-sophomore retention as well as our six-year graduation rate.

2005-06 was a year of impressive academic accomplishments. We made nine senior appointments to our faculty, including the first Picard Trustee Professor in Electrical Engineering. Under the leadership of Provost Abdelal, we developed new doctoral programs in nanomedicine and nursing, and new masters programs in information assurance and health informatics. We completed plans for the new School of Social Science, Urban Affairs, and Public Policy under the leadership of Barry Bluestone, and moved strongly into the graduate arena in SPCS, guided by Chris Hopey. Total awards for research and sponsored projects increased by15 percent this year, with Kim Lewis, Alex Makriyannis, Misha Sitkovsky, Hortensia Amaro, Barry Karger, Vladimir Torchilin, and Srinivas Sridhar all winning multimillion dollar, multiyear grants to support their work.

All of these factors-growing selectivity, improving graduation rates, a strengthened academic profile-contributed to further progress in the rankings. This year we rose from 120 to 115 in the *U.S. News and World Report* survey and solidified our position in the top tier of national universities. Our College of Business Administration under Thomas Moore also achieved notable success by being ranked 37th among all undergraduate programs by Business Week, while CBA's program in international business was ranked 13th by U.S. News.

This was also a year of forward motion for campus facilities. Building F is on schedule to open in the fall, bringing to completion our plan for west campus. We will cut the ribbon on our new Alumni Center in late summer. We created a home for our new Asian-American Center. Larry Mucciolo, Bob Gittens, Jeff Doggett and their colleagues spent countless hours in a community-based process seeking agreement about the next phase of residential construction. We will submit our formal proposal to the city next month.

The year 2005-06 was good for Northeastern in many other ways that I cannot enumerate this morning. I thank my many colleagues in the campus community for their continuing dedication to the work of our University.

#### Ш

Let me now turn to the state of the University at the end of my 10 years. Such an assessment should not focus on rankings. Those metrics tell us about our position in the academic marketplace, and I have focused on them because of the urgent need to improve our market position. But the rankings are at best an approximate measure of institutional quality, and they severely undervalue distinctive institutional characteristics. Yet it is precisely those qualities-our deep excellence and the special emphases that distinguish us-that will sustain us in the long run. It is to those qualities that we must look to evaluate our current strength.

I have described Northeastern as a national research university that is student-centered, practice-oriented and urban. This characterization has framed and guided our pursuit of excellence over the last 10 years. So it is fair to ask now how well we have done in each of these dimensions of institutional life and how important these particular qualities should be to us in the future.

What does it mean to be a national university? Broadly speaking, the term connotes noteworthy quality in every aspect of our work. It means that we attract outstanding students, that we graduate them at a high rate, and that we send them on to significant roles in the world. The term also suggests a faculty of active scholars who contribute to their disciplines on a national basis. It means that our educational programs meet a national standard of quality in virtually every field. It also implies a strong, well-organized and supportive alumni body. And it should mean that intercollegiate athletics contributes nationally to our image as a high performance organization.

Over the last 10 years, we have advanced Northeastern in each of these arenas. Most striking, of course, has been the transformation of our undergraduate student body. Our admission standards now rank well within the top 100, and our diversity reflects the rich pluralism of our city and nation. Our reach is now strong throughout the Northeast and is extending nationally and internationally. We are less far along at the graduate level, though I am proud that we have reversed several years of declining enrollments and are attracting truly outstanding students to some of our programs. Graduate

admissions, along with graduate program quality, must be a significant focus going forward.

We have made notable progress too in strengthening our faculty. During the last decade we have appointed 15 senior faculty members to named chairs and distinguished professorships, hired approximately 200 junior faculty members with excellent credentials, and expanded the full-time faculty by 85 positions. Our standards for hiring, promotion, and tenure are appropriate for a national university. To continue our progress we need many more endowed chairs filled by individuals of national stature. With respect to our programs, we have established appropriate expectations of quality and reach, and are well engaged in translating these standards into reality discipline by discipline. We have yet, however, to advance any of our major programs to true national eminence. We are poised to do so if, in the next round of strategic planning, we are prepared to commit the resources that would be required.

With respect to alumni support and involvement we now clearly understand the challenge we face to compete at the national level. We are well and appropriately focused on this work. The potential is also great in athletics. Over the last 10 years, we have enhanced our organizational capabilities and achieved a degree of competitive success. Our new conference affiliation gives us a national platform for showcasing our strength.

Reviewing together the cluster of characteristics associated with national university status, it is apparent that we have made solid progress. It is equally apparent that we have much work still to do. We have reached a plateau. Our quality is commensurate with our top tier ranking. But there is no room for complacency. The pursuit of excellence is a way of life, not a destination. We must continue to promote this value at every level of our institutional community.

#### IV

I have stressed comprehensive, substantive excellence as defining national universities, but the term also implies something about reputation. It implies that our name is recognized and associated with quality on a national basis. That is one reason why we have focused so much on the rankings and why, also, we have worked so hard to tell the Northeastern story. I am proud that we are known as a leader in academic marketing. Our successes in undergraduate admissions and faculty recruitment testify to our success in advancing Northeastern's stature. However, name recognition across the country as a top-tier institution is a goal still in front of us.

Our approach to dramatizing Northestern's excellence is implied by the terms I have used to describe our distinctiveness: research, student-centered, practice-oriented, and urban. The surest means to the stature we seek is to focus on a few places where we can truly be a national leader. Wealthier, betterestablished institutions can seek comprehensive eminence. We must be selective.

Our most powerful distinguishing feature is that we are "practice-oriented." This phrase evokes our historic commitment to cooperative education as well as our more recent expansion into other forms of experiential education. The term also implies our traditional emphasis on professional preparation, which we maintain even as the arts and sciences has become a full partner in institutional life. Beyond our educational programs, the term "practice-oriented" is a philosophy that touches many dimensions of our work. In scholarship, we emphasize activity that makes the world a better place. In admissions, we look for students driven to make a difference in the world. In student life, we prepare students for effective engagement in non-academic arenas.

We have worked hard both to substantiate and assert our claim to national leadership in practice-oriented education. When U.S. News ranked universities known for linking classroom study with real-world experience, we placed first on a distinguished list. We have had, of course, much to build on, given Northeastern's history of leadership in co-op. Our contribution has been to recognize the value of this inheritance, reinterpret it to support our ascent as a top-tier university, and use every opportunity to trumpet our achievements. Today, we are and deserve to be the national leader in practice-oriented education, even if the term itself is not yet a household word. Building on this position must be our first priority over the next decade.

Our urban character is also a vital distinguising feature. The modifier "urban" evokes our history as a commuter institution focused on the local community. We honor that tradition today through engagement with our neighbors and with the major institutions of our city. But we have also reinterpreted what it means to be an urban university as we have raised our academic sights. We now emphasize policy-oriented scholarship by our faculty, community service among our students, and educational programs focused on urban life. Above all we aim to be the Boston-area university most conspicuously committed to partnering with governmental leaders and other organizations to promote regional development. Pursuing this aspiration powerfully supports our quest for national recognition. Other selective, private universities like Penn, USC, and Case Western Reserve have won widespread acclaim for urban engagement. In seeking recognition as New England's premier urban university, we are working to join this group.

Our most treasured legacy from our urban roots is being a place of opportunity for students from modest backgrounds. We have given special attention to this value as we have become more selective. We enroll more graduates of the Boston Public Schools than any other private university, and we provide more financial aid to Boston residents than our sister institutions. As our

admissions has reached beyond New England, we have extended the promise of opportunity through our patterns of recruitment and through expansion of financial aid, which has increased three-and-one-half times faster than tuition. But I confess to apprehension in this area. We face major challenges in aligning the needs of our students with our ability to provide financial support. Success here is essential to preserving much that we value about our University and our students. It is also the key to our continuing competitiveness in admissions.

A third arena where we seek to distinguish ourselves is research. Excellence in scholarship, typically linked to doctoral education, is both an effective way to achieve national visibility and an important social contribution. We have sought to enhance the University's research profile over the last 10 years for both these reasons, and our scholars have given us much to be proud of: an impressive outpouring of articles, books, creative works, and policy papers; more than a doubling of sponsored research expenditures, and success in major national competitions for federal support, including 2 of only 33 NSF-funded engineering and nanoscale research centers. As we continue our ascent, we need to broaden and deepen our strength as a research university.

The major challenge we face in research is the enormous cost of top quality work. For this reason, we have identified a few areas where we can truly meet a national standard. The Academic Investment Plan identifies four such fields: biotechnology, nanotechnology, sensing and imaging, and urban public policy. In recent years, our scholars have accomplished extraordinary things, and I believe we are on course to achieve our goals for both quality and recognition in all four. We need to continue being highly selective about major investments in research and doctoral education. We also need, as we develop at this level, to pay close continuing attention to the fourth distinctive dimension of our character.

That is our student centeredness. This term means that the education of students is our first priority and that the education of undergraduates is a particular focus. Dedication to teaching and classroom effectiveness must be a vital consideration in academic personnel decisions. Student centeredness also means that we care about each of our students and work to provide each with a rich experience in every aspect of their encounter with us-in the classroom, on coop, in extra curricula life, even in our administrative support systems.

The most important measure of our success as a student-centered university is our graduation rates. I am enormously proud of our progress in this area. Ten years ago, we graduated 40 percent of those who entered. Today, that number is tracking toward 73 percent. Yet even with this progress, we need to do better to be fully competitive with top-tier private universities, and we have major work to do to close the gap between majority

students and students of color. We also measure our success as a student-centered university by tracking student satisfaction across every dimension of institutional life. The numbers tell us that we have made solid progress in comparison with peer institutions, but also that we have work to do to be fully competitive.

#### V

So that is my review of our position on the pathway to institutional excellence-a pathway defined by our character as a national research university that is student-centered, practice-oriented, and urban. I would offer three summary observations. First, repositioning Northeastern as a top-tier university has been a means to an end, not an end in itself. We have sought top 100 status because that is where we need to be to flourish as a major private university. But our goal is to make our maximum contribution to society. It is my hope that, with top-tier status now achieved, we will be free to focus less on the rankings and more on the underlying excellence of our work. If we do that effectively, continuing increases in recognition will follow naturally.

My second observation, or hope, really, is that our pursuit of excellence will continue to be framed by the historical values that have always guided Northeastern. Those distinctive qualities, conveyed by the terms student-centered, practice-oriented, and urban, will always be subject to interpretation as circumstances change. But they do convey much of what is uniquely valuable about us. We should hold fast to them.

Third, for all the progress of the last 10 years-and no one is more proud than I of what we have accomplished-we remain very much a work in progress as a national university. We have achieved a crucial goal in competitive terms, but this is no basis for complacency. In every aspect of our work there is much more do be done and many opportunities for institutional development. That is the exciting opportunity that awaits Northeastern as we look to the next decade of progress.

#### VΙ

My days in the presidency draw rapidly towards their end. For myself, I look forward to new adventures. As some of you know, I will be on sabbatical next year as a visiting professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. I will do some teaching, some writing, and lots of thinking about the next chapter of my professional life. That chapter has yet to take shape, but I hope it will include a continuing connection with Northeastern.

It is no small thing for me to step aside from this work. John Gardner once asked: "What could be more satisfying 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 how I have felt for the past 10 years. It has been a labor of love.

I believe many in the campus community and many on our governing boards feel that way about our shared work. What has been done over the last 10 years has been done by all of us together. We have helped secure the future of a great university. There will be many beneficiaries. I feel fortunate and proud to have been part of this story. I thank you for the opportunity.

All Hail Northeastern!