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State of the university address

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State of the University Address September 29, 1997 Blackman Auditorium

I am pleased to have this opportunity to address the Northeastern community as I begin my second year as president. My enthusiasm for this position, and my excitement about this university, have only grown during the past year. John Gardner has described my feelings exactly: "What could be more satisfying," Gardner has written, "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?" My hope is that each of you find your opportunities to contribute to Northeastern as rewarding as I find mine. Joined together in this spirit we will continue to lift this great university even as we ourselves are lifted.

This past summer I visited South Africa for the biennial meetings of the World Association of Cooperative Education. There I observed firsthand the international eminence this university enjoys in what many of our colleagues call "work-integrated learning," and I realized more fully than ever what an asset that reputation is to us. I also had the opportunity to experience the hopefulness of a nation that has pulled itself back from the edge of disaster and is joyously reinventing itself as a multiracial society. I confess I thought often about Northeastern during those days in Africa. I thought about our own

determination to embrace diversity and how important those efforts are. I thought about our excitement at coming back from a precipice to achieve not only a measure of stability but a new plateau of possibility. Both our challenges and our potential took on new meaning for me this summer as local manifestations of global educational and social movements of great consequence.

Northeastern's potentialities are especially evident this fall. We begin our centennial year on an institutional roll. You have heard from Mike Baer that our applications and enrollments for this fall are excellent, that our entering freshmen constitute the best prepared entering class in anyone's memory and that we have made striking progress in expanding our class of transfers. This is wonderful news, and I want to thank everyone who contributed to these accomplishments, particularly our team in enrollment management - Jean Eddy, Alan Kines, Michael Wildeman and their staff.

As Bill Kneeland has indicated, the financial news parallels the enrollment report. We ended last year with a solid surplus, and we begin this fall with every reason to expect another year of financial stability. I am also pleased to report that on Friday the trustees approved my recommendation that Mr. Lawrence Mucciolo of the City University of New York be named our new senior vice president for administration and finance. Larry Mucciolo's arrival will bring welcome strength, and will permit Bill Kneeland to return to his duties as our comptroller. To Bill I extend my deepest thanks and respect for a job well done: another first-class contribution from one of Northeastern's all-time administrative all-stars.

There is good progress on other fronts as well. With respect to facilities, our top priority is student housing. We worked hard and successfully to acquire additional rental units for this fall, even as planning for a new dormitory moves ahead on a fast track. Our proposal to create mixed-use housing with additional student beds along Columbus Avenue is in the final stages of consideration by the Boston Redevelopment Authority.

We are enhancing our facilities in other ways as well. Both the Latino Center in Forsyth and the new advising center for arts

and sciences in Meserve will enhance our capacity to support our students, and the fine new sculpture garden behind Curry enriches our visual environment. We expect a final vote by the BRA on the transfer of the Registry building within the next several weeks. All these projects have required sustained effort by a number of people, and I want to express appreciation to Vin Lembo, Tom Keady, Jack Martin, Joe Murphy, Joe Warren, Karen Rigg, Ron Martel, Ross Fraser and the talented people who assist them.

The Centennial Campaign rolls on, under the outstanding leadership of Robert Marini and Dick Meyer. Last year we increased total giving by 15 percent to \$27 million, the largest development year in Northeastern's history, moving us well past the overall five-year goal for the campaign. As we prepare to launch our centennial during next month's homecoming weekend, we have ample reason to be grateful for our strong and increasingly active base of alumni/ae.

In the classroom, laboratory and library and on co-op assignments, our faculty and students are reaching higher levels of achievement. The Academic Common Experience and the various intensification projects launched by the colleges last spring are strengthening the quality and distinction of our programs, especially by fostering greater integration among our three great learning traditions present here: professional education, liberal education and co-op. I want to thank Mike Baer, Daryl Hellman, Coleen Pantalone and all the deans and faculty members whose devoted efforts are turning these ideas into realities.

We have new reason this fall to be proud of our educational work. The competition for the first presidential scholarships produced 189 well-qualified applications and dramatized for all of us the terrific achievements of our students: the 12 winners represented six colleges and had an average QPA of 3.88.

There is good news in the arena of scholarship as well. To take just two obvious points of reference, during the past year Northeastern faculty published 54 books and won grants totaling \$32 million, a spectacular 45 percent increase in external

funding over the previous year. Thirteen colleagues - Barry Karger, Richard Lapchick, Lisa McIlrath, Paul Zavracky, Carey Rappaport, Mike Silevitch, Carmine Vittoria, Patrick Manning, Patricia Meservey, Roger Giese, Steve Reucroft, Clare Dalton and Jim Fraser - were each responsible for winning research or education grants in excess of half a million dollars last year, and the faculty of arts and sciences collectively doubled its output of sponsored projects from \$5.5 million to \$11 million, a truly remarkable achievement. My congratulations to all the scholars who have raised the level of our intellectual work so dramatically and to Ron Hedlund for the energy with which he is working to attract external support.

It is predictable, of course, that a proud president would want to stand before you and extol your accomplishments. But outsiders, too, are noticing the change at Northeastern. I hope you all saw the front-page Globe article last month, headlined "At Northeastern, less is more." Not only did the story highlight the great strides that Northeastern has made but it led to a subsequent editorial likening our current progress to that achieved historically by Harvard, MIT, BU and BC in moving from local origins to national recognition. What the Globe has yet to appreciate fully is this: we have only just begun to achieve our potential. There is much, much more to come.

Mapping the future

The realization that all the hard work of the past six years is producing such impressive gains comes at an important moment. With our first century coming to a close, having our financial house in order has allowed us to think creatively about the challenges of the new century.

Last year was fruitful in this respect. When I addressed this audience last September, I suggested several broad themes to guide our efforts to achieve a new level of excellence. I spoke of Northeastern as a national research university that is student-centered, practice-oriented and urban. I offered these five words and phrases - national, research, student-centered, practice-oriented, urban - as a way to characterize this university, a kind

of institutional mantra that summarizes the major dimensions of our historical evolution and, even more important, directs our energies toward the future.

The year ahead will provide every one of us with an opportunity to think about how Northeastern can be strengthened within the framework of the mantra. Two levels of activity will be particularly important. First, as Provost Baer has mentioned, we are beginning our decennial accreditation review by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. We will use this process both to elaborate more clearly what these five themes should mean for us and to set new goals to guide our work in each of them. I want to thank all those who are serving on the accreditation committees under the leadership of Steve Morrison, and I want to urge all of you to participate in the deliberations that these committees will sponsor.

At the same time, we will be asking all academic units to consider the implications of the mantra as they undertake the planning and goal-setting process called for by the provost. I anticipate a rich flow of ideas from these activities that will paint for us a picture of the future Northeastern in even brighter and more multichromatic colors than we can see today.

But we must be about action as well as planning, and so, as our deliberative processes proceed, we will move ahead aggressively with a number of initiatives that will help us achieve our long-range purposes.

A national university

We now understand, for example, that Northeastern must become a more national university even as we continue to be a place of opportunity for students from this city and commonwealth. We must embrace wholeheartedly our destiny as a destination of choice for talented, ambitious students who are drawn to our distinctive form of education.

Already half of our first-year students come from out of state

and 10.5 percent of all students come from other countries. Our graduates have formed strong alumni/ae associations in key regional centers, and we have a growing list of co-op placements and research relationships with employers around the country. Internationally, we are strengthening our home country co-op program and forging new relationships with overseas universities.

These out-of-state and international connections constitute the base on which we can build to broaden our applicant pool. In the coming year we will enhance our programs of admissions outreach with a particular emphasis on greater involvement of alumni/ae. We will implement this year plans to get admissions, alumni/ae relations, co-op, development and corporate research relationships all working together in specified regions of the country. And we will put in place an aggressive university-wide public relations effort to underpin these initiatives.

To symbolize our emergence as an intellectual force of national significance, I announced last January a new program of endowed trustee professorships. This program will enrich our faculty with eight renowned scholars whose work supports professional practice in the various disciplines we offer. Three colleges - arts and sciences, business and engineering - have been authorized to conduct searches this year, and I call upon all involved in these recruitment efforts to bring us candidates who are worthy embodiments of Northeastern's aspirations.

A research university

And what about our aspirations as a research university?

We must encourage all forms of scholarship in the disciplines assembled at Northeastern, but our reputation depends chiefly on the work we do in applied research where advances in knowledge contribute directly to bettering human lives. We must continue to raise our level of sponsored projects with the goal of doubling our productivity over the next five years. To this end, the new Office of Technology Transfer recommended last spring by a special presidential task force will become fully

operational this year.

We already have a clear example of the way a systematic, university-wide effort in technology transfer can lift us to new heights. Over the summer, a dedicated team of scholars from five colleges and 10 academic departments, led by Mike Silevitch, assembled a proposal for an Engineering Research Center focused on sensing and imaging that has attracted \$4 million in corporate support in a few short months. In the year ahead, we must identify additional areas where new research centers and institutes can take advantage of the exceptional intellectual resources present on this campus.

A student-centered university

As a result of our work last year, we have also further defined what it means to be a university centered on students.

Our Student-Centered Service Program seeks to enhance the service orientation of all student support activities. I want to thank the initiators of this effort, Kater Pendergast, Karen Rigg and Bob Vozzella, and the eight units that are participating in the pilot stage. This year will be critical in implementing the findings of the pilot program and extending the project to other university offices. We will pursue other dimensions of student-centeredness as well. We will continue our commitment to upperclass financial aid, which is so critical to assuring the ability of our students to stay in school. We will implement the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Advising. We will ask each academic unit, as part of its own planning activities, to articulate how its work reflects the university's focus on educating students. With George Harris coordinating the leadership group, we will install the university's new software system so that the various offices that directly serve students can coordinate their activities more effectively. And we will enact the vitally important recommendations of last year's working group on adult and continuing education so that we can keep University College vital and competitive in providing services to non-traditional students.

A practice-oriented university

Our single most distinctive feature, the one on which our institutional aspirations ultimately depend, is our orientation toward practice in both education and research. The central reflection of that commitment, of course, is our program of cooperative education. And we are very clear about the major challenge we face to keep co-op vital in the years ahead: that is to greatly increase the cross-fertilization between co-op and classroom. Several experiments are under way to improve our performance in this respect - including initiatives in business, engineering and arts and sciences - and I urge everyone involved in these activities to pursue them with the vigor that their urgency demands. In addition, we have before us this year the report of the Working Group on Cooperative Education, which contains a number of productive ideas for improving co-op. I urge that this report be mined by each department and college.

Our strength in practice-oriented education also depends on the vitality of the individual colleges, where we face daunting competitive pressures in virtually every field. The year ahead will be particularly important in the health sciences, in law, in business and in engineering in developing new strategies to address these challenges. I am also eager to see progress in creating double majors along the lines proposed last year by the College of Arts and Sciences; it is especially important that we craft curricula linking two or more colleges, particularly programs that combine a professional field with the disciplines of the arts and sciences, and I am grateful for the initiatives along these lines in computer science and criminal justice.

An urban university

Finally, we are and we will remain an urban university committed to active engagement with the city of Boston. Through our partnership with the public schools and our expanded financial aid program, we will remain a place of

opportunity for urban residents even as we set our academic sights higher and even as we struggle through some of the pressures that Provost Baer reported. Through programs like our new Merchant Academy, CCHERS, our plans for the Registry building and our proposal for mixed use housing on Columbus Avenue, we can become a national model of active partnership with the surrounding community in promoting urban revitalization.

The urban agenda for Northeastern this year is long. We will pursue our efforts to be a model of diversity through the continued implementation of the Lane Commission report. We will use our central role in hosting next months' Massachusetts Summit on Volunteerism to intensify our community service programs. And we will produce operational plans to strengthen the schools of Roxbury and to promote economic development in this same part of the city through the work of the Urban Outreach Council, led by Michael Dukakis and David Hall, and the Boston group led by Jim Fraser.

Husbanding resources for future growth

So far I have been talking about dreams and hopes - how can we make Northeastern finer in the ways we care most about? Those hopes must rest on a firm financial foundation. Assuring budget stability will not be easy for a university that has always been a lean enterprise. Even as we plan optimistically for our future we must make sure our patterns of organization and resource allocation represent the most efficient way to achieve our hopes.

Last year we began two activities intended to address critical questions of resource allocation at Northeastern. The first of these entailed a review of our graduate programs, an exercise called for in our strategic plan of 1992 but never fully undertaken. We all know that decisions about graduate programming are among the most important we make in terms of resources, because the programs are significantly more expensive than undergraduate offerings. At Northeastern, we have no choice but to be selective at the graduate level, pursuing excellence in a limited number of fields that make sense for us.

A group of dedicated faculty members undertook this essential examination, working closely with the provost, the vice provost for research and graduate studies, and me. By the summer this process had produced a series of findings about our programs, and those findings are now undergoing administrative review.

Also, last year, the Planning Council, led by Edna Seaman, was charged with recommending appropriate sizes for each of the colleges and defining the level of resource support that each college needs to deliver a quality program. The council will issue its report in draft form this week. I have followed these deliberations with care. I know the discussions have been thorough and responsible. I want to thank the deans, faculty members, administrators and students who have worked so on this assignment.

The review of graduate programs and the report of the Planning Council remind us that progress is hard work, that the joy of gain is invariably linked with a portion of pain. In our case, the challenge is clear. We must make large investments to achieve our hopes:

- Our students need more financial aid, new housing, better services.
- Our library needs more books and better databases.
- Existing facilities, especially our laboratories, cry out for renovation, while new facilities particularly for the health sciences are desperately needed.
- Our salaries must remain competitive.
- Technology must be constantly upgraded.

Where are the dollars for these and other needs to come from? We are working hard to increase fund-raising and sponsored projects, but these activities can contribute only modestly to operating revenues. Our budget depends chiefly on the tuition students pay and the number of students we enroll. We have good reason to want to keep both from rising very fast. We want

to restrain tuition to keep Northeastern affordable; and we want to restrain enrollments to strengthen Northeastern academically.

So here is our dilemma: we want to be smaller and better. Better costs money. Smaller keeps us from increasing our resources through growth. So I repeat the question: where are the dollars to support needed investments to come from?

Two years ago, a special committee of faculty members and administrative leaders reviewed Northeastern's financial situation and concluded that we needed to reduce our costs by about \$15 million dollars to stabilize the budget while meeting anticipated needs. A year ago, in commenting to this audience on that report, I noted that I did not think it necessary at that time to effect the recommended cuts, but I also stressed that sustained budget discipline would be needed in the years ahead to address the issues that the committee had identified. Those budgetary pressures remain.

Over the next several months, urgent questions about our graduate programs, the size and support of our colleges, indeed about the overall efficiency of our operations, must be addressed. Achieving resolution will not be easy and the potential for divisiveness is great. So I must ask you, as we celebrate current accomplishments and as we anticipate future possibilities, to remember that the fulfillment of our aspirations depends on our willingness to face up to difficult choices.

The budget will not be the only place where we will feel the pressures born of our hopes. Becoming more effectively student-centered is hard work, as those of us involved in our student-centered service program are finding out. Increasing sponsored research and enhancing technology transfer are demanding challenges, as those involved in the arduous work of preparing the Engineering Research Center proposal demonstrated. Forging new links between co-op and academics requires intense effort, as so many of you already know.

We are in an exciting but also a demanding time. I think the two rather go together. I know we have the organizational will to get the job done, because I know we have shared dreams for

Northeastern's future. But I also know how much this organization values its human qualities. It is those values that sustained us through the difficult years of the early 1990s, and it is those values that can carry us even more triumphantly into the 21st century. I am determined to sustain that spirit as we address the difficult issues I have mentioned. Reasoned dialogue on hard questions like graduate programs and college sizes is essential. And it is vital that we stay focused on achieving outcomes that represent the best long-term interests of the entire university. I have great confidence that our leaders at the department, college and university levels and in faculty and student governance, including Holbrook Robinson and the Senate Agenda Committee and Stacey Archfield and the Student Government Association can work together collaboratively in the months ahead. I will do everything in my power to conduct these discussions in a spirit of collegueship.

There are other things I can do as president to keep our community strong. I am committed to maintaining faculty and staff salaries at competitive levels through the regular allocation of resources to merit increases and to a close examination this year of equity in faculty salaries, including a review of how we compensate and recognize our most accomplished scholars. We will continue to remain among the most competitive university in terms of associated with working at Northeastern. And we will continue the established practice of the four-day summer work week. We will, I am resolved, achieve our potential and achieve it as a strong and united institutional community.

Conclusion

In closing, let me share with you one additional moment from the time I spent in South Africa this summer. One stormy afternoon, during a lull in the conference proceedings, I drove down the peninsula from Cape Town to the Cape of Good Hope to stand on the promontory where the Atlantic and Indian oceans come together. This was the point, I knew, that represented the hopes and fears of so many sailors during the age of discovery, the magical corner of the earth where one could turn from

Europe toward the east and contemplate the allurements of Asia. It was also a place that sailors feared because of its reputation for violent winds - so violent that the Portuguese navigators who first explored it called it the Cape of Storms. But in time, as they mastered their fears of the place, learned its harbors and patterns of safe passage, the hazards of the Cape gave way to the possibilities that it represented, and the Cape of Storms was renamed the Cape of Good Hope.

As I stood watching the waves lash the rocks, I thought about the storms that South Africa has survived as well as those that this university has endured. I thought about the promise that lies ahead for that great nation and for this great institution on the courses we have each charted. And I realized that both of us have found ways to transform our capes of storm into capes of good hope that we and they have rounded those capes to discover new and promising horizons. Thinking such thoughts, I offered up a little meditation to the spirits of Vasco da Gama and Nelson Mandela, one a sailor of immense physical courage, the other a statesman of immense moral courage. I felt the hope that we, like they, will have the tenacity to pursue our purposes to completion and the magnanimity to do so as a united community. With such models of human potential in our thoughts, and with such possibilities for educational greatness as we possess to fire our imaginations, I am confident that we will stay the course we have set and achieve the dreams we have imagined.

Thank you very much.

Other addresses:

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- [State of the University Address](#), October 8, 1998
- [Address to the Northeastern Corporation](#), May 21, 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
- [Address to the Northeastern Corporation](#), May 28, 1997
- [Remarks to the Boston Chamber of Commerce](#), April 4, 1997
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