

2

Thank you all for being here today to help us honor individuals and groups who have made special contributions to the campus. This meeting gives all of us an opportunity to reflect on the great contributions that so many people continue to make to this University and on behalf of our students. I will not talk long today since our major purpose is to recognize our colleagues. But, it is important to do a "summing up" of the year and prepare for next year. Both Richard Beam and I will ask you to keep some key issues in mind as we move into the next academic year.

I will start this talk with the giant elephant in the room--the condition of the state's budget. Okay--now I've said it--BUDGET! That's it. It's been mentioned. Now let's move on! We will come out of this situation a more focused and stronger university. You all continue to do too many good things for us to dwell on this issue. There will be another time to talk about--IT--not today. Today we celebrate.

Many years ago Western started down a path that was different than most institutions. The seeds of the institution were planted in the late 1800s and nurtured

by Robert Lee Madison to create the state's first rural normal school. The "Cullowhee Idea" as it became known was embraced by the state and it became the basis for the founding not just of WCU, but of Appalachian State and East Carolina. Through the years, the Cullowhee Idea was nurtured and continued to grow until it changed names and became "UNC-Tomorrow." Now Robert Lee Madison's basic concept of an educational institution that was designed to serve the specific needs of the people is state policy. The underlying logic of UNC-T and the Cullowhee Idea are the same: what to the people need from their University? In the case of the Cullowhee Idea, the "people" referred to the people of the western region. In the case of UNC-T, it refers to the people of the state. But, the logic is the same. UNC is the people's university and we act on behalf of and for the people of North Carolina. WCU derived its life from that concept and that concept continues to sustain us as we look to the future. This truly seems to be a case of "the more things change, the more they stay the same."

It also is particularly important to note that the Cullowhee Idea is embodied in our institutional positioning statement: WCU offers opportunities for those who aspire to make a difference in their world. Madison was about making a difference in the mountains; UNC-Tomorrow is about making a difference in the state. You are about making a difference in the future.

You as a faculty and staff have embraced this concept—making a difference in your world--and your recent work has made it clear that you mean it. First and foremost, changing our faculty reward system and our approach to education that is embodied in the QEP are the most far-reaching and potentially important actions by this University in decades. This year, you made a great deal of progress in implementing both initiatives. I know that we have a long way to go, but many departments and programs have made great strides and I know that the rest will follow quickly.

One of the outcomes of our emphasis on linking what we do to the needs of the broader community is that we have received outstanding national recognition

for our service learning program. WCU received the presidential recognition with distinction for our contributions to the region. There were only 88 universities and colleges so recognized nationally and the only other UNC campus to be included was Chapel Hill. This is a major accomplishment that was highlighted by President Bowles for the Board of Governors.

A second major indicator of the value of the work you are doing is the number of papers that undergraduate students have had accepted for presentation at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research. Brian Railsback tells me that 53 percent of all papers presented at NCUR by UNC campus students were authored by WCU students. Think about it--we had more students present papers than the entire rest of the system combined!! (By the way, we also had more students present than Yale or Cornell, among others.) What a statement about your commitment and work.

So, as we really get the wind in our sails on implementing the QEP, we have already separated ourselves from other campuses by:

- Receiving major, national recognition for our commitment to service learning.
- Outstripped the rest of the system combined with regard to undergraduate research.

Those are really nice outcomes from our preliminary work. Just think where we will be in three or four years when the entire Quality Enhancement Plan is in place.

You should be aware that these are not the only important outcomes indicators that are showing major improvement. This year, to date, we have received more than 12,300 applicants for our freshman class. That represents a very significant increase from last year's 7,400 and a massive change from two years ago when we had around 4,000. We anticipate that we will see a larger class and that the class will be at least as good as last year's. As of this morning, we had 1410 freshman deposits compared to 794 last year. As you will recall, in 2008, we repositioned our class; we will not see the full effect of that work for at least two more years, but initial outcomes are promising.

I want to particularly thank Fred Hinson, Sam Miller, the admissions staff, and all faculty and staff members who continue to work to bring in a larger and better class in these difficult times. It is one thing to make improvements when times are good; it is another to make them when times are bad. These folks have done a particularly good job and I publicly want to say "thanks". We look forward to seeing the final numbers in the Fall!

I also should mention that many of our staff, and especially the staff in Residential Living, are making major strides in implementing our retention rate for freshmen from fall-to-spring ^{program. This year} has increased significantly. ^{our} Two years ago it was 86 percent and this year it approached 92 percent. We also know that students who took part in the "Western Peaks" retention program had a significantly higher fall-to-spring retention rate than those who did not. This program is clearly working and as we continue to improve the campus, spread this program philosophy, and integrate students' educational experiences, we should see this important indicator continue to improve.

We also are seeing the impact of staff work in such areas as the leadership program, and our new campus recreation center. The University Center's leadership program, for instance enrolls more than 100 students and these students boast a combined GPA of over 3.2. Likewise, our new recreation center is contributing significantly to campus wellness. Since it opened, it is averaging 1250 visits per week.

We also should be very proud of the work being done in our design and media areas. Our staff created our new logo which was received with wide approval. Their work also has won several CASE awards and they coordinated the entire re-branding program for the University.

Also, in the fall, we will announce completion of the first-ever comprehensive fund-raising campaign in the institution's history. I don't want to steal the thunder of this program, but I will say that ^{the totals} ~~their work~~ exceeded all expectations. Special thanks to Jim Miller and his colleagues.

I also should not leave out athletics. We did have teams win championships in soccer and women's



basketball. But that is not the big story. The teams that won did so with academically nationally-ranked players. They won the right way: good students and good citizens who worked together to succeed on the field and court. That is what college athletics should be about. To both of these coaching staffs—thank you for understanding and pushing the notion of the student-athlete.

Returning to academics, we all should be proud of the recent announcement by the Veterans Administration regarding the choice of WCU as one of five veterans nursing academies nationally. What an honor and what recognition for the important work that is being done every day by our faculty and the graduates of this program. This is a major recognition of very important work.

We also have seen some very significant improvements in many of our graduate programs. Our MBA is now listed in Peterson's as a top program and #4 in the nation as a place for women to study. And, our Entrepreneurship masters' program is ranked #5 in the nation for adult learners by Forbes Small Business. These also represent some significant milestones. But, perhaps

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the most important development in graduate education at WCU is the increasing emphasis on graduate student and graduate faculty scholarship by the Dean and Graduate Council. It has taken several years to make this transition, but high quality graduate programs are critical to our future. It is very significant, therefore, that the best graduate students are awarded assistantships; that these assistantships support the growth and development of our graduate programs; and that the graduate school take the lead in supporting and extending our scholarly academic culture.

These really important improvements in the institution and its positioning with regard to fulfillment of our mission are just the "tip of the iceberg." When you think about the great efforts of our grounds crew to keep the campus beautiful; the juggling effort required to keep several major construction projects moving; and the sheer will power it continues to take to implement Banner, it is clear that every area of the University is building and contributing to what has to be a very bright future for this University. Thanks to each of you for all

that you are doing on behalf of our students and the people of North Carolina.

I want to turn now to some of the work of the colleges because there are some very significant efforts underway of which you should be aware. First, I want to commend Dean Ron Johnson and the faculty of the College of Business for their tremendous efforts at revising their approach to educating business majors. For those of you who have not been following their work, they have completely revised their curricula and focused it on creating "business ready graduates." As they finish this phase of their work, they plan to reach out to other colleges to encourage interdisciplinary development of student-run enterprises. Just think about the impact that this effort can have on the future of this region. Many of these enterprises--both for-profit and some not-for-profit, will stay in the region and contribute to a greatly diversified economic base that is required if any region is to preserve and promote its quality of life. Thanks to everyone in the college of business who is contributing to these developments.

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I also want to mention how impressed Kyle and I have been with all the colleges as we have made visits this year. Each college has such major work underway. I leave these meetings truly uplifted and excited about the future. Consider for a minute the possible center to promote creativity education that is maturing in the College of Education and Allied Professions; the great work on the QEP by the faculty in Recreation Therapy in the College of Health and Human Sciences; the very important applied research in environmentally-related sciences; the emphasis on public history and institutionalization of a bachelor's thesis in history; the tremendous recognition that WCU is receiving because of the successful authors in English; the push in the Kimmel School for effective economically-based outreach to business and government; and the wonderful development of the College of Fine and Performing Arts.

I want to talk about this college for just a minute because I was truly "blown away" by our meeting and this college is maturing into something that is becoming very special. Robert Kehrberg is obviously providing effective leadership of the college, but each school and

department is moving forward, integrating their work, reaching out, and raising standards. We have all known for some time about the quality of our marching band-- which by some accounts is among the top five in the nation. But, think about the development of stage and screen; the quality of our musical theater program; the outreach by art to the region; the success of the Fine and Performing Arts Center; the quality of exhibitions in the art gallery.

Those of you who were here will remember that there was some real concern over taking the fine arts out of the College of Arts and Sciences. But, folks decided to, as the English say, "give it a go." And, it is becoming wildly successful. What the people of this college are doing is thinking differently. They are looking at different models of how the arts can link to each other and create new strengths. They are talking across schools and areas that traditionally would have had little to do with one another are finding common interests. What a wonderful success story they are creating!

As I look more closely at what they have done, it is clear that they took a bold action. They started by asking

a different set of questions. I'm not sure that they would characterize their efforts this way, but from my perspective, they began their work by looking at the future and thinking about what "could and should be" instead of "what was." Now, I grew up in the era of the Kennedy's and I am struck by the fact that this college--and, by the way other people across the campus are doing the same thing--instead of asking "why", like Bobby Kennedy, they asked "why not?" Ya'll--great job at building what will obviously become a major presence in the arts.

Before ending this part of my presentation, I want to mention one particular initiative that the Department of Art began this year. They have a student ^(T. Leahy Karchmann) working on her MFA who is focusing her efforts on developing an arts presence in Dillsboro. As you may be aware, there is a closed land-fill in Dillsboro that is becoming a green ^{energy} park. As a land-fill it produces significant amounts of methane gas that traditionally would have been burned-off. Instead, this methane is being harnessed and is currently powering greenhouses and a blacksmith's forge. It also has the potential to become a key site for such important

arts as hot glass and metal sculpting. Additionally, the Kimmel School is helping develop a plan for an engine that can run on methane and produce electrical power.

Just think about this, folks. Dillsboro not only is suffering from the economic downturn like the rest of the region, the Smoky Mountain Railroad no longer regularly comes to Dillsboro. Their economy is devastated and without concerted action, it may not come back even when the national economy improves.

After hearing the presentation by the ~~graduate~~ *Tracy* student, I began to think about the possibilities. Given the fact that all departments and programs have to implement the QEP, and given the importance of Dillsboro, Sylva, and Cullowhee to our future as a University, could we, and should we, develop a consistent approach to working with the people of these three communities to help them prepare for the future? Could we, for instance, formally work with Dillsboro to promote its development as an artist and literary colony? How can we help Sylva promote a strong economy? What are its options? What do they need? Can we become formal partners and help them develop plans

and proposals to identify funding to help them? What about the future of old Cullowhee? What are the land owners interested in and willing to do to make that area attractive and viable again? If we begin to think about the Dillsboro to Cullowhee corridor as an entity, and if they are interested in working with us, we may be able to help them form and execute plans that can promote both prosperity and the quality of life in these valleys.

As a next step, I plan to talk with the mayors of the two communities to see what their interests might be, but I also ask you to think about this a bit over the summer. The QEP, Boyer, and the regional situation all seem to be coming together to suggest an important way in which we and our students can make a difference. Just as importantly, this approach can create the systematic linkages between student learning and regional development that is called for by our QEP and our mission under UNC-Tomorrow.

Now, I want to turn to the final topic for today: general education. I want to start by thanking Richard Beam and the Faculty Senate for taking leadership in formulating a process for reviewing Liberal Studies. That

will be a very important component of the discussion of general education and we will need such a review. I am asking, however, that we not begin the process of reviewing general education by looking immediately at our current program.

I am using the term "general education" purposely. "Liberal Studies" is our particular version of general education and it is important that we differentiate the two. By calling for a "review of liberal studies" I was using our local vernacular and in doing so, I may have limited my meaning more than I intended. What I am asking is that before we focus on the review of liberal studies, we create an institutional position on general education for the 21st Century. Since we implemented the current program, there have been many changes in the situation for which we have not formally accounted. Globalization has become a reality; the federal government and SACS are requiring increasingly stringent outcomes measures; UNC-Tomorrow has become a reality; and we have implemented our QEP. Also, the average academic capacities of our students are light-years away from where they were in the late 1990s.

And, we are increasingly moving to become a more mature university where the colleges and schools play a much more significant role in the institution both with regard to management and educational expectations. What all of this suggests is that before we look at our specific liberal studies program in a manner consistent with the Faculty Senate's resolution, we need to create an institutional statement on the objectives of general education. This statement needs to be informed by college statements of educational expectations so that we can assure that we understand, and address, key differences in expectations among our disciplines and programs. It also is critical that each of the learning objectives in our institutional statement of general education ~~expectations~~ define specific assessment expectations that are consistent with SACS standards. Once we have created this institutional statement, it will be very appropriate for there to be a review of our specific Liberal Studies program. We will, in effect, have created a common, reasonably objective, standard for that review. And, most importantly, it will allow the entire faculty to have the opportunity to develop a consensus regarding our educational expectations.

18

Again, Richard, thanks to you and the Senate for taking the lead in getting this process started.

To take the next steps, I am asking Chair of the Faculty Richard Beam and Provost Kyle Carter to meet this summer and hammer out a process for beginning to create a current institutional statement with regard to general education. It is important that all areas of the academic program be represented and it is very important that the process include the colleges and Kimmel School in a formal manner. Once you work out a process, I will share it with the campus to get feedback. General education belongs to all faculty and it is the most important component of our graduate's education. We all need to be involved.

As I end this talk, I want to again thank you for everything that you have done this year and to remind you of our positioning statement: WCU offers opportunities for those who aspire to make a difference in their world. Despite the economy, you continue to move us forward—you continue to make a difference in your world! Our students and the state are all the better

for your hard work. Have a restful summer, and thank you, again! You are the best!