

## **Installation Remarks**

**Benjamin J. Allen**

**Friday, September 29, 2006**

President Gartner and members of the Board of Regents, State of Iowa; Senator Grassley, members of the Iowa General Assembly; President Geoffroy; Superintendent Prickett, Superintendent Schild, President Curris, Vice-Provost Cain, representatives of higher education institutions and societies from across the nation; faculty, staff, students and alumni of University of Northern Iowa; friends, colleagues, and special guests...

Pat and I are extremely grateful to you for being here to share this proud moment in our lives, and this important day for the University of Northern Iowa.

I am deeply honored to be serving as the ninth president of the University of Northern Iowa.

The fact that I am only the ninth president of an institution that has a 130-year history clearly suggests the outstanding and stable leadership of the presidents who have led this great institution.

To have one of the three living former UNI presidents on the platform with me this morning is especially important to me. Thank you Deno for being here today.

I am ready to accept this responsibility that you have given me.

I am excited and eager to lead the University of Northern Iowa.

I am ready and prepared to lead because of the opportunities that I have been given over my career—most of those at Iowa State University.

I have many people to thank for those opportunities. None is more important than President Geoffroy.

Greg, I thank you for your gracious introduction but, more importantly, for the experiences and mentoring you provided me over the last five years. I sincerely hope, however, now that I am president of UNI, and this comes from my heart, that UNI beats ISU tomorrow.

Pat and I have received a very warm welcome to the University of Northern Iowa and Cedar Valley. I have received tremendous support from UNI faculty, students, staff, community members, and people throughout the State of Iowa. This support is deeply appreciated.

One of the really wonderful aspects of this opportunity is that it allows Pat and me to continue living and working in Iowa and with the citizens of Iowa.

We have the nation's best students right here in our state and, in addition, we have citizens who appreciate and support higher education.

I do want to take some time to acknowledge the four females who have been and continue to be very influential in my life: my wife, my daughter, my mother, and my granddaughter.

I first want to acknowledge the support from my wife, Pat. We are making this new journey together as we have made all journeys during the past 39 years. She has played many important roles in my life but she plays one that is very important for a person in a position like this one. She makes sure that I know that I am not as good as my supporters suggest but not as bad as my detractors claim.

Equally important is the support from my daughter, Jessica, along with our son-in-law, Gregory, and our granddaughter, Avery—all of whom are here today.

Unfortunately, my 90-year old Mother, wanted to attend today, possibly to confirm that I do in fact have a job, but the distance prevented her from attending.

My mother instilled in me, among other things, the values of honesty, humility and hard work—all of which have contributed to any success I have experienced and I thank her publicly today.

My mother was an A student in high school but was not able or even expected to attend college, and this is one reason accessibility and gender equity issues are so important to me.

I am also very pleased that my sister, Donna, and her husband, Larry, are here today.

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Before I discuss my priorities and, in effect, my vision for the University of Northern Iowa, I thought it might be helpful to look at the current and expected environments in which the university finds itself.

Only by understanding the context of our environment, and our likely future environment, can we assess our strengths and weaknesses, and identify our real challenges and our most important opportunities.

More importantly, only through such an understanding can we provide the best educational experiences for our students so that they are prepared to be full participants within the world that exists for them after they graduate.

**What does the current and future external environment look like for our students?**

When referring to our external world, very few speeches are made today without some reference to the book, The World is Flat, by Thomas Friedman, who, incidentally, spoke at UNI last year on this subject.

The message of that book has many dimensions with both economic and geopolitical predictions that are rather frightening at one level. It is difficult to succinctly define what he means by a flat world but saying the “playing field is now flat” for more than half of the world gets close to it.

The flattening of the world, which he argues happened at the dawn of the twenty-first century, has important implications for countries, companies, communities, and individuals. Friedman notes that “We Americans will have to work harder, run faster, and become smarter” to maintain our place in the world.

The world is changing and our role in that world is changing—and changing not only at a rapid pace, but also in ways that are difficult to predict.

We must ask ourselves how we can best prepare our students to live in such a world.

We also live in a time period, and are likely to continue to do so, when terrorism and the threat of terrorism to some extent defines how we in America travel, how we behave, and how we perceive other countries and other peoples.

An understanding of different cultures, different religions, and different countries has become more important and at the same time more challenging because of the emotions of fear and suspicion that exist after 9/11.

We must also ask ourselves how we can best prepare our students to deal with such challenging times.

Of course, we live in a time of rapid change as a result of a number of economic, social and technological changes.

Those economic, social and technological changes have tremendous impacts on jobs and careers. One can expect to change jobs a number of times, and in fact, one can even expect to possibly change careers several times.

We must ask ourselves how we can best prepare our students to adapt to such changes.

Right now in this country most say the economy is growing and we certainly have many Americans who are making gains in their economic well being and overall quality of life.

But at the same time, many Americans are not enjoying the growth in the economy—the percentage of families living in poverty, as defined by the Department of Labor, has remained stubbornly constant with 10.9 percent living in poverty in 1970 and 10.8 percent living in poverty in 2005. Higher education,

which has long been considered the primary vehicle for social and economic mobility, has failed to reduce this percentage.

In addition, the standard of living that we enjoy today may well be better than the standard of living that my granddaughter, Avery, will enjoy because of the economic and social forces working in the Flat World. Thomas Friedman argues, and I agree, that we are in a crisis but one that is unfolding very slowly and quietly. The call for action is more difficult in a quiet crisis. This crisis calls for more investment in higher education, more students taking science and engineering curricula, more students learning to be entrepreneurs, more students becoming knowledgeable and comfortable with other cultures and more investment in education at all levels.

We live in a state that has traditionally supported all levels of education but in recent years has not been a national leader in this regard.

Last week the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education gave the State of Iowa a grade of "F" with respect to affordability of higher education.

The State of Iowa has one of the most rational systems of public universities in the country.

The University of Northern Iowa is one of the three universities in the Regent's system, each with very different missions but all having the mission of serving the entire state.

The relationships among the three public universities—and that relationship will vary over time from collaborative to coordinated to even occasional competitiveness at the intersecting boundaries as defined by the three different missions—but those relationships will in part determine the success of the University of Northern Iowa, and more importantly, will determine how effectively the Regents' enterprise will meet the needs of the citizens of Iowa.

Each university, in the context of its specific mission, will need to demonstrate both creativity and discipline within their missions to provide the relevant, high quality programs in an efficient manner.

We know that there are major changes taking place in and challenges facing the State of Iowa.

Iowa has the potential for providing leadership in the country in the area of biorenewables, in many areas of health care, and in issues relating to Pre-K through 12 education.

One of the significant challenges, if not the most significant challenge to future economic growth in Iowa is a resource that it lacks most--enough people, human capital, if you will.

As noted in a recent editorial in the Des Moines Register, with the workers from the baby-boom generation nearing retirement, combined with a much smaller cohort of younger workers to replace them, Iowa will have a major shortage of skilled workers

in the not-too-distant future. This shortage is estimated to be 150,000 by the year 2012.

This huge shortage in skilled workers has been titled the “demographic cliff.” This worker-shortage suggests a need for the State of Iowa to shift its public policy to investing in workers rather than subsidizing employers.

The University of Northern Iowa works in an industry that has its own opportunities and challenges.

The Regents universities are faced with more competition from a variety of institutions including for-profit institutions and community colleges that are sometimes our partners, sometimes our competitors.

The U.S. Secretary of Education Spellings **Commission on the Future of Higher Education** stated that “American higher education has become what, in the business world, would be a mature enterprise: increasingly risk-averse, at times self-satisfied, and unduly expensive.” The Commission’s report, which was released very recently, is critical of higher education in America as failing in the area of access, affordability, accountability, and innovation.

Last week the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education issued a performance report which showed that the United States is beginning to slip from its status as a world leader in higher education. While the U.S. has not been necessarily regressing on most measures of how well it has

provided postsecondary education to its citizens, other countries have improved their systems.

So this is the external environment that we at the University of Northern Iowa find ourselves in:

In an industry that typically moves and changes slowly but is becoming more and more competitive.

In a rapidly changing world that places new and varied demands on our graduates.

And in a state that still greatly values higher education but has a stagnant workforce population, insufficient financial support for higher education, but increasing reliance on assistance from higher education.

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In the context of this external environment we find ourselves in, this university faces two important questions:

Are we educating students to lead successful lives, both inside and outside the workplace, for the world as it now exists and as it will exist over their life times?

And, given this changing external environment and the resulting challenges to the State of Iowa, what should the University of Northern Iowa be doing to help the State of Iowa?

Only by answering these questions (and there will certainly be differences in opinion on the answers) can we determine what the top priorities and direction for this university should be.

### **Are we educating students to lead successful lives in tomorrow's world?**

#### **First, how have we done so far?**

The empirical evidence, based upon a non-random sample of alums, strongly suggests that the university has done a first-rate job of educating students for successful lives.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that alums of the university are very proud of their degrees and credit their UNI experiences in some part for their successes in life.

One might also measure UNI's effectiveness by listing its graduates who have made it to the top of their profession, and WE HAVE MANY, but a better measure would be to determine the outcomes for ALL of our graduates.

**And to what can we contribute this success?**

Without a doubt the most essential component of a quality university is excellent faculty, and we DO have excellent faculty members here at UNI, surrounded by excellent staff.

We have outstanding teacher-scholars who are dedicated to student learning, who are engaged in their disciplines as scholars, and who are active in their communities.

And the educational experience is special at the University of Northern Iowa because the focus of our scholar-teachers is primarily on the undergraduate students.

The teaching is informed by the scholarship, creative activities, and discovery of the faculty member.

We also have selective, high-quality graduate programs as a key part of the educational offerings at UNI.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that another essential component of a quality university is an active, engaged, thoughtful student body and we CERTAINLY have that here at the University of Northern Iowa.

**So how do we continue to be successful but adapt to the changing external world?**

We must enhance our commitment to student learning and teaching excellence.

We CANNOT stray from our history of having full-time professors, not teaching assistants, teaching our undergraduate students.

We need to increase the percentage of our classes taught by tenure-track and tenured faculty members by making additional hires and more effective use of technology.

We must continue to hire the best of the best academicians and those who will be dedicated to UNI's mission and culture of "Students First".

We must also provide our new and existing faculty with the necessary resources and make abundantly clear our very high expectations.

We must not lose sight of the importance of this special students-first faculty-driven culture at the University of Northern Iowa.

We must maintain our commitment to a personalized learning environment—an environment with small classes and substantial interaction between the faculty member and student. That frequent

and personal student-faculty interaction is and should continue to be a critical part of each student's educational experience at the University of Northern Iowa.

We must remain committed to providing an educational experience that leads to a baccalaureate degree that represents both a broad liberal education and specialized learning—both are essential for a high-quality education.

It takes more than specialized learning to be a well-educated participant in and contributor to our constantly changing "Flat World."

The brief discussion of the rapidly changing and complex environment in which we live should also clearly indicate the need for and support of a strong, common liberal arts core for all graduates.

The liberal arts core establishes the foundation for living a productive life in this rapidly changing world, for being a fully engaged citizen of the world, and for engaging in life-long learning in this continually evolving world. Science, literature, philosophy and religions, language, arts, and others—all are important to broadening perspectives and to honing critical and analytical thinking skills.

The commitment, however, should not be to just have a liberal arts core curriculum, but to have one that is considered a national

standard--a liberal arts core that is coherent, engaging and rigorous but with a clear rationale and with explicit educational goals.

This is a curricular issue that is already receiving attention by the faculty and will undergo a full review as we work to create a stronger, more efficient, and most effective core. My hope is that a revised liberal arts core will ultimately be based upon a more interdisciplinary approach, the same hope expressed by Dr. Curris in an address in 1983.

In addition to an important liberal arts core is, of course, having strong majors that are recognized regionally and nationally by employers and graduate schools.

This is essential at a public university, a comprehensive university such as UNI. Majors should function as "learning communities" and must provide tools for students to enter the workforce.

All students expect and deserve an educational experience in their major that is of the highest quality. I do believe, and it is one my priorities, that all majors should be integrated with the liberal arts core, should be connected to practitioners in the field in a meaningful way, and should provide substantive experiential learning opportunities for all students.

Again, as with the liberal arts core, the quality of a major is not measured by how many hours it has but by its composition.

A recent Business Week article, that listed the top 50 firms for launching a career, reinforces the importance of UNI having strong majors along with a strong liberal arts core. Each of the top 50 firms listed the most desirable trait for entry level people coming out of universities.

Fifteen firms indicated that the college major was the most important factor they look for in a new hire; ten firms listed leadership skills, and twelve listed communications and analytical skills.

All of those skills can best be developed by these two components of an education.

A related priority for the continued success of the University of Northern Iowa, a top priority for me, and one that will challenge the culture of this university, is to develop a process to identify those select programs with the greatest potential for being among the best in their fields nationally, and then invest accordingly to achieve the required level of excellence.

This effort will take strategic investments of general fund money, focused efforts on marketing, and coordinated private fundraising.

And a continuing key to the success of our students is maintaining and strengthening our selective, high-quality graduate programs.

They are an important part of the educational programs offered here at UNI, but again they should be limited in number and tied to those areas of excellence on campus.

To ensure that our graduate programs are of the highest quality, we need to review the programs offered and make certain that we are, in fact, offering graduate programs central to this university. This may mean adding some programs that we currently are not offering but should be and eliminating some programs that we currently are offering but perhaps should not be.

### **Where can UNI make the greatest contribution to the State of Iowa?**

While the university has a large number of excellent programs to serve businesses and citizens of the State of Iowa, the greatest contribution that the University of Northern Iowa can and does make to the State of Iowa are the graduates of UNI and the number of those graduates who stay in the State.

The UNI employment survey for 2005 indicates that 76 percent of the UNI graduates surveyed took their first job in the State of Iowa. That is an amazing figure!

While, of course, our main focus is on maintaining an excellent academic program for our students, we have a responsibility to address needs and opportunities facing the state.

As noted, we have a number of programs and individual faculty members, staff members, and students addressing and solving real problems facing citizens, industry and non-profits in the State of Iowa.

This morning, I want to focus on just two of the many challenges facing the State of Iowa that the University of Northern Iowa is well positioned to take on an even stronger leadership role in finding a solution.

The first of these challenge areas is found in the Pre-K through 12 educational systems.

The University of Northern Iowa was created in 1876 in response to the great need in Iowa to have a public teacher training institution, or normal school.

The University of Northern Iowa, with its array of strong programs in five undergraduate colleges and the graduate college, is a comprehensive university. I am committed to maintaining the strength of the programs in all five colleges.

But the rich history of this university is largely defined by its commitment to preparing teachers to serve the State of Iowa and beyond.

On September 14, 1876, James Gilchrist, the first president of the University of Northern Iowa delivered an address entitled "Normal Schools -- Their Origin and Office" at the Inauguration of the Iowa State Normal School, one of the predecessor names for the University of Northern Iowa.

In that address, President Gilchrist states (and I quote): "How to prepare teachers is the problem of the hour; the problem which, tonight, is seeking a partial solution at our hands."

One hundred and thirty years later, we have the same urgent need in the State of Iowa and in the country, and I believe it should be largely in our hands here at UNI.

We must respond in the same manner now to the great need in the State. Again, I believe, addressing the issues facing Pre-K through 12 education in the State of Iowa is the "problem of the hour."

Over the last 130 years, the impact of the University of Northern Iowa on pre-k through 12 educational systems in the State of Iowa and beyond has been extraordinary.

While more than 30 academic institutions in Iowa have teacher education programs, more than twenty three percent of the 36,000 plus public school teachers in the State of Iowa are UNI graduates. Almost 30 percent of the superintendents of public schools in Iowa are UNI graduates.

The University of Northern Iowa graduates more than 500 students a year who become Pre-K through 12 teachers, most of whom do so in Iowa.

My discipline of economics has a term called the “economic multiplier” which estimates the number of times a dollar spent in an area turns over in a year.

I suggest that we should develop another term, an “educator’s multiplier” that measures the number of Pre-K through 12 students taught by one teacher over that person’s career. In the report by the National Academy of Sciences, *Rising Above The Gathering Storm*, that number was estimated to be 1000. Think about it! One teacher we educate reaches 1000 students.

If we take this analysis upstream to who teaches the teachers, this educational multiplier becomes even larger. One professor in our College of Natural Sciences may teach several hundred future high school math teachers who will each be teaching 1,000 students. The University of Northern Iowa is having a tremendous impact on the future of the State!

With its rich history, its size, and quality, UNI must position itself to take the lead on issues related to pre-K through 12 system.

The teachers' education program at UNI, though led by the College of Education, is a university-wide program involving all five undergraduate colleges.

We MUST have UNI positioned to be the leading academic institution in the State of Iowa for preK-12 issues. Iowa State University is unchallenged on its leadership on agriculture, the University of Iowa is unchallenged on its leadership in medicine. Accordingly, the University of Northern Iowa must be unchallenged on its leadership on issues related to pre-K through 12.

If we are not now in that position, we must assess our position and determine priorities and strategies to be in that position. Given the recent criticisms of all Colleges of Education and teacher education programs, we must have the courage to do some introspection and assessment of our own program to determine how much responsibility we have for some of the problems, and how much potential we have to be a leader in finding the solutions.

There is an array of challenges facing this state and this country in the education of Pre-K through 12 students.

Given the national crisis as identified by the report, *Rising Above The Gathering Storm*, and our historical strengths in math and science education in the context of our teacher education program, UNI needs to be the “go to academic institution” on this issue.

As noted earlier, another major challenge in Iowa is having enough skilled workers to meet the demands of industry.

One answer to this problem is to encourage more immigrants to live and work in Iowa. In this regard, UNI has taken the lead in Iowa in promoting the accommodation of immigrant workers and their families.

UNI’s Center for Immigrant Leadership and Integration is the state’s most progressive agency in promoting the integration of immigrant newcomers. Its work is guided by a strong appreciation for the critical role newcomers play in ensuring the long-term social and economic vitality of Iowa's businesses and communities.

Given the critical role immigrants will play in Iowa’s future—and indeed the future of this institution—UNI needs to expand its role in promoting immigration to the state by growing the scope of the Center, by integrating the university’s resources with the recruitment efforts of the state’s major employers, and by

promoting progressive immigration policy in the Iowa State Legislature.

All of the UNI colleges are involved with international programs that are growing. The College of Humanities and Fine Arts is a particularly rich resource in the areas of understanding of different cultures, customs, music and language. The university needs to more fully integrate the work in all of the colleges with the Iowa Center for Immigrant Leadership and Integration. I believe UNI can be the gateway for immigrants from many cultures into the State of Iowa.

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I firmly believe that the University of Northern Iowa has an exciting future. I am thrilled about being a part of that future.

UNI needs to make a renewed effort in being the best undergraduate program in the State of Iowa—to be without peers.

The enemy of being great is being good. We need to take steps to make our undergraduate education great.

Our educational programs will prepare the student for a society moving from entitlement to entrepreneurship.

Our educational programs will prepare the student for an economy and society moving from U.S. based to a global economy to a Flat World.

Our educational programs will prepare the student for a society that needs to shift somewhat from a basis of self-interest to more of a community interest

Our educational programs will prepare the students for a world where it is important to know not just what you think but why you think it.

Our educational programs will serve the place bound citizens of Iowa in need of life-long learning opportunities in discipline areas where we have a comparative advantage and excellence.

Although we will strategically invest in a limited number of masters and doctoral programs, the focus will be on building the excellence of the undergraduate educational experience.

Like the commercial of a leading manufacturer of technologies used in a variety of products, UNI does not make the Ph.D. in Chemistry, **it makes the Ph.D. in Chemistry** better by providing an outstanding undergraduate or masters level experience and by providing through its many Pre-K through 12 teachers in the State of Iowa an outstanding start for students in the areas of science and math.

UNI needs to have the courage, the confidence and the commitment to take the lead in addressing one of the most important challenges facing Iowa today—the need to better prepare students for higher education and for the workplace of today and tomorrow

UNI needs to have the courage, the confidence and commitment to take leadership on other major issues facing the State of Iowa. I believe one of those is—immigration. We have the opportunity to take the lead to address the problem of the state falling off the “demographic cliff” and to enrich the state through diversity.

Universities are filled with and defined in part by traditions and memories. We at UNI cannot forget the identity of UNI and should not forget our past accomplishments. My goal in working with the members associated with this remarkable learning community called the University of Northern Iowa, however, is very simple—to make sure each person connected to this university has more dreams **FOR** UNI than memories of UNI.

It is an extraordinary honor and privilege to serve the students, faculty, staff, alumni and the State of Iowa as the ninth President of the University of Northern Iowa.

I thank the elected representatives of Iowa, the president and members of the Board of Regents, State of Iowa, and the University of Northern Iowa University community for giving me this opportunity.

I thank you for your support, your counsel, your advice and your assistance—together we CAN and WILL make a difference for our students, our state, our university and ourselves.

Thank you.