



A Blueprint For Excellence: Seattle Pacific University, A Premier, National Christian University

State of the University Address

Seattle Pacific University
Philip W. Eaton, President
September 24, 2003

Welcome and Introduction. Thanks to the worship team. To Tami Anderson for her leadership. Welcome to new faculty and staff. Welcome to student leaders. Introduction of the Vice Presidents. Introduction of Sharon. Introduction of the trustees.

Well, here we are, the beginning of another year. The beginning of my eighth year as president. As I have said in a number of places: I am rested and full of energy. I have regrouped. I have had a chance for renewal and recharging. And I have never been more hopeful about the future of this institution—that we are on target and moving in the right direction.

This is the team, folks. We are it. And we are all basically pulling in the same direction. You realize how exceptional that is for an academic institution. We carry the charge for this university. We are the ones who will realize the vision. We are about some very good and important work here. And we gather as a team for that work. We are a Christian community. What a privilege. What an honor to be in community for this work. What a privilege it is to be your president.

I want to talk about two things this morning.

- First, I want to sketch out some of the things that are going on, pull out a few stories I think important, a State of the University through a few highlights. We will have a written State of the University available later this morning on line. I hope you will take time to read it.
- Second, I want to talk about where we are going. In particular I want to announce this morning that we are launching a process called a Blueprint for Excellence. This is a second grand conversation about where we are going, this time for the next ten years. What do we need to do to achieve excellence—a premier, national Christian university—so that we may engage the culture and change the world through the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ?
 - You can count on this conversation throughout the year. I hope each one of you will join in.
 - And you can count on me being in the mix of it all. This will not happen with me on the sidelines.

But before we look to the future, let me talk about the State of the University as I see it right now.

My overall assessment is this: we are flourishing. Things are going very well indeed. We have a clear and distinctive vision. We have an exceptional team, getting stronger every year. We have focus. The demand for what we have to offer is very strong.

Our challenges are real: the question of cost, affordability, and access is sweeping the nation right now. We can't stick our heads in the sand. We must have a clear understanding of our costs, defend our costs but not be defensive.

We face the challenge of articulating a compelling case for our Christian purpose to a

secular city and world that is indifferent and sometimes hostile to our purpose. But remember, our vision does not allow us to circle the wagons. We have to engage. And so this is a challenge.

So, our posture is one of strength and confidence, but we can never become complacent, arrogant, or cocky; we must always be attentive, informed, always looking forward.

Here are some things that I might highlight. Let me say there are so many people to thank here, so many players doing outstanding jobs.

- **We will dedicate the new science building after the picnic today.** This was an effort that required everyone: an exceptionally competent financial team (led by Don Mortenson), the Board of Trustees, the faculty team (led by Bruce Congdan), and those who handled the construction (Darrell Hines and Dave Church); the fundraising team (led by Bob McIntosh). This is the way it should work. Get the vision, build the team, and get the job done. \$28 million investment, another \$5 million in the renovation of the Miller Learning Science Center. One incredible piece of news: significant increases in applications for science students and pre-med students. An energized faculty now applying for major grants to support their work. A fresh new focus on undergraduate research. We shaped a vision of excellence together in the sciences and we have delivered.
- **We have now put close to a \$100 million into our facilities over the last seven years, a huge investment.** We have invested some \$50 million over the last ten years in technology. My brother David: do not take for granted the competitive advantage you have in this campus. FM General Conference and the NACCAP Conference—visitors from all over the country just dazzled by our campus. We have a \$200 million asset in our campus—we must know that we are utilizing it fully and maximizing the return on our investment. This has been an investment in excellence.
- **Our Campaign moves into the final stage.** The story here: our family is getting bigger. The donors we are working with now were not even on the radar screen when we began. Just last week we got word of now another major gift that will put us over \$40 million, by far the most this University has ever raised. We had a record year of giving, right at \$12 million, with close to \$1.5 million in unrestricted giving. We are on the move. We are even raising the goal by \$1 million in unrestricted giving. With Bob McIntosh and his team, we have been working hard to shape a vision of excellence for fundraising at SPU, broadening the base, raising the bar. Even in tough economic times, we are inching toward excellence. This is not a story, by the way, that is turned around in a short period of time.
- **We have a really big story of enrollment emerging.** Thanks to Marj Johnson, Ken Cornell, Jennifer Kenney, and the team, tomorrow we will welcome 680 new freshmen, 220 new transfer students, and 1,860 continuing students, the largest and most academically prepared freshmen class in our history.
 - For Freshmen, the average SAT scores are projected to be 1156, up from 1141 last year. The average GPA is projected at 3.65, up from 3.58 a year ago.
 - The admit rate has improved by 4 percentage points, projected at 92%.
 - Our work across campus to improve graduation rates is paying off with a projected 62% six-year graduation rate, up from 60% last year.
- **Demand is a big story.** Out of all of this I would remind you that our applications were up by 13%. Our demand is strong and clear. Lots of people are noticing our value. I would say we are moving toward excellence in visibility, positioning, recruiting, and delivering.
- **Our visibility has grown enormously.** I am not very big fan of the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings. But let me tell you something remarkable that has

happened in one category that measures our overall reputation. Changes in this measure take time. SPU's ranking has improved from 54th in 1994 to 11th this year. This is cool. We are not where we should be in this survey overall, but we are making progress.

- **So many of our academic programs are thriving.** There is a vibrancy in our academic programs. Not just with numbers but in real, solid quality. I want to thank Les Steele and all of the deans for their leadership. Our faculty is strong. I was dazzled at Faculty Retreat by some of the work going on, and strength of the conversations. I will stack this faculty up against any institution in the world of evangelical, Christian higher education. Outcomes assessment is very important work. The Common Curriculum is a very distinctive program.

Let me say a word about diversity. Here is an important piece of information from enrollment: new ethnic minority students are projected at just under 13%, up from 9.6% last year, a very respectable percentage for our kind of institution. This means we are making progress.

We have launched a diversity initiative, and I want you to know we are in this for the long haul. Three years ago I said, if we were going to really be about engaging the culture and changing the world, we had to be at the table of racial reconciliation in our city and beyond. Since that time much has happened:

- We launched the Ames Initiative. Gary and Barbara Ames stepped up with \$1 million for ethnic minority scholarships. We had 105 applications for five new positions. We now have 10 Ames scholars. We have an Ames Advisory Council to support us and give us counsel.
- Les Steele has taken hold of this charge and is working to get the question of diversity in our academic programs and Student Life programs, to make sure this focus is in the fabric.
- Les has arranged for Alex Gee to spend one week a quarter giving counsel and wisdom to our efforts. He is part of our team.
- Joe Snell has had a wonderful impact on our campus and our students, with forums and the Mosaic floor in Emerson.
- Tali Hairston, in addition to his other duties in Office of Campus Ministries, is now Assistant to the President for Community Relations. We are trying to build trust and relationship in the city. Tali is also in charge of Young Life in the Central Area.
- After my trip to Jackson, Mississippi, we began a conversation with John Perkins about a possible partnership with the Perkins Institute. He is coming here on November 6-8 to help lead us. I will be sponsoring a dinner for African American pastors. We want to build bridges into our city.

I think we are making progress. We are committed to three things: increasing our ethnic diversity among students and faculty and staff; improving our campus culture; building bridges with the racial and ethnic communities in our own city. We can beat ourselves up for not doing enough, and we can do all of this from the wrong motives of guilt. But let's stay the course. You will get leadership for this initiative from me, from Les, and from the rest of the Cabinet. It's all about committing for the long haul. It's all about building relationships. It's all about building bridges. We must continue to carry on a conversation about what this means for us. Ultimately, we do this so that all of God's children might flourish.

And so, out of all these things that are happening, what a great "state of the university." We're in great shape. How can I affirm enough the amazing things that are going on, the incredible accomplishments by you, our team?

Why do we need to write a Blueprint for Excellence? I've got a lot of reasons, but let

me sketch out this plan and what I want to see us do over the next year. I have asked Marj Johnson to be the point person to keep us organized and on strategic task.

Here is my premise for this moment in time: We have to define and declare our excellence and we have to deliver on our promises.

We are in a moment in time in higher education where this is necessary. We do this because it is the right thing to do, because our vision demands of us excellence.

We are not looking for a wish list here. We are looking for some good hard-nosed thinking about how to achieve excellence.

Let me begin with a personal note. All of this comes out of my thinking since about March of last spring. I have been working with the Cabinet all summer on fleshing out this initiative. I have been president for 7 1/2 years. I have been at SPU for ten years. We have accomplished much of the CP21. I realized I had a big question looming out there for me: where are we going for the next ten years? Where am I going? I needed a renewed vision, new clarity. If I needed a renewed sense of direction, I suspect many of you did as well.

I ran into a quote from Elizabeth O'Connor from her book *Cry Pain, Cry Hope*: "We are probably intended to embark upon a new work, or a new dimension of an old work, every seven years. This suggests the Jubilee cycle which incorporated the understanding that the seventh year, like the seventh day, marked the completion of a work, and that even the spent land would need a period of rest before being able to yield new fruits."

We have to embark on a new work or a new dimension of an old work. This is our seven year, Jubilee recommitment. A deep clarifying.

Here is what came out of all that reflection for me: I want to see us achieve even greater influence and impact in the world, in our community, and for the church. I have this deep yearning. Maybe it's my stage in life. Maybe it's that I can taste it in what we have already done. How can I have greater influence in my circles for the gospel? How can we as an institution have greater influence? How can our English Department have greater influence?

As never before in my lifetime, our value is in question. The question of costs in higher education is sweeping the nation right now. Reauthorization for the Higher Education Act is before Congress this year—and you will hear a great deal about costs. I gathered a group of very capable, savvy business folks to talk about costs last week. We cannot have our heads in the sand.

A few weeks ago I ran into an article entitled "Is Yale a Waste of Money?" by William Baldwin, editor of *Forbes* (August 11, 2003). An astonishing statement by the editor of this prominent business magazine, a publication, I must add, written and edited by college graduates.

"Someday the university education system will simply price itself out of business and save us all a lot of grief. In the meantime we have these bills to pay, \$300 billion a year." "As for the large part of the burden borne, directly or indirectly, by the government, the question to ask is: Are we getting our money's worth?"

His answer seems to be that we are a waste. The question is not so much cost, really, it is value. Is a college education worth it?

Is our vision worth it? Is SPU a waste of money?

And so the question of this initiative is this: Do we believe in our vision? Do we really

believe we can make a difference? Do we believe we are a player in the kingdom? Do we really believe we can make an impact? I think our vision will take excellence. It will take courage to make some decisions about priorities. What are the core disciplines or programs on which we want to stake the reputation of the institution? Where are we now in a leadership position in Christian higher education? Where can we have impact and influence with new investment and focus?

These are the questions of *The Blueprint for Excellence*.

Two things as I end my comments:

First, why? Why seek excellence. Why do we want to have impact and influence?

Because the gospel calls us to be a light in the world. Think about the issues our world is facing.

- How can we have an impact on peace in the world? How can we focus our own work, our scholarship, the preparation of our students so that we can contribute to peace instead of war and division and violence?
- How can we be an influence for integrity in business?
- How can we contribute to racial reconciliation in our own community and beyond?
- How can we make an impact on our crumbling schools?
- The church needs good theological training for its pastors and leaders. How can we really make a difference for the church?

I was at a Roundtable luncheon on Monday and heard Bob Herbold make an impassioned plea to change our schools. He was on the Microsoft founding team, highly influential. He is on the President's task force to determine the connection between jobs in technology and education. He made the statement from a sweeping study that "performance on standardized tests for math and science is directly related to national economic growth." And America is falling behind dramatically. In Singapore 68% of its students are receiving science and engineering degrees. In China 58%. In the U. S. 17%. His blame was on our schools.

Do we have something to say about this? Can we have some influence and impact on this situation, to reform our schools, to train for science literacy, to train for science education?

These are the reasons we care about excellence. This is why we care about engaging the culture and changing the world. This is why we seek to have greater impact and influence.

Finally, none of this will happen—a Blueprint, excellence, or impact and influence—unless we are a strong community. We must come together as a team. None of this will happen unless the real leaders on this campus step up, join in. Excellence will not happen in an adversarial culture. We did the right thing when we put the pursuit of grace-filled community in our mission statement. Excellence will not happen if we are splintered as a community. Excellence will not happen if we have divided and different visions for our work.

I am going to speak on this text next Tuesday, but reflect with me as we conclude on Philippians 2:1-4. "If then our common life in Christ yields anything to stir the heart, any consolation of love, any participation in the Spirit, any warmth of affection or compassion, fill up my cup of happiness by thinking and feeling alike, with the same love for one another and a common attitude of mind. Leave no room for selfish ambition and vanity, but humbly reckon others better than yourselves. Look to each other's interests and not merely to your own."

2: 14. "Do everything without grumbling or argument. Show yourselves innocent and

above reproach, faultless children of God [so that] in a crooked and depraved generation you [will] shine like stars in a dark world and proffer [model] the word of life.”

This is the growing edge for me as a leader. This is the growing edge for the SPU community. Let's come together. How can we really be a team?? Come together around our vision so that we can be effective instruments of God's love and grace in the world?

So, my thesis this morning: we are flourishing! Indeed. We have been pursuing excellence. You can see it all over the place. But we have a lot of work ahead. Let us define excellence, let us declare our excellence (tell our story), and then let us deliver on our promises of excellence. That's the deal.

God bless each one of you as you begin this year.

