

REMARKS
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NIAGARA UNIVERSITY
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Good afternoon and welcome.

I am happy to speak to you today about the state of the university as we prepare for the start of our 152nd year. I enjoy this opportunity because it allows me to do two things: speak about some specific developments, but more importantly, to characterize the university in its entirety, to define the mission, purpose or uniqueness.

I generally use three words from our mission statement to describe Niagara, namely, Catholic, Vincentian and university.

Nearly four months ago, I listened to Pope Benedict XVI when he spoke to Catholic educators in Washington. I was inspired and energized by his address, and I returned more committed than ever to continuing our quest for excellence here at NU.

Pope Benedict recalled some of the great Catholic educators in the history of this country, people like St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and St. Katharine Drexel. He said he was thankful for the dedicated work of educators in our Catholic institutions, calling them “an outstanding apostolate of hope, seeking to address the material and intellectual needs of over three million children and students.”

Let me continue his quote about Catholic institutions:

“Their long-term sustainability must be assured. Indeed, everything possible must be done, in cooperation with the wider community, to ensure that they are accessible to people of all social and economic strata. No child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a nation.”

“Nurtures the soul of a nation.” How profound. How descriptive of the power of education, faith-based education grounded in Catholic and Vincentian values, to make a difference in the world.

Niagara is proud to be a Catholic university, proud to provide a gospel-based education that emphasizes Jesus' command that we love one another. We are a caring community that recognizes the God-given dignity and worth of every individual. We provide a holistic education to help our students develop themselves in mind, body and spirit, and to call them to use their gifts to help others.

The pope used another phrase, "intellectual charity," that struck home for me. He said, "This aspect of charity calls the educator to recognize that the profound responsibility to lead the young to truth is nothing less than an act of love. Indeed, the dignity of education lies in fostering the true perfection and happiness of those to be educated."

I'm convinced that we can only meet the pope's challenge by being a university that strives for excellence in all that it does. In the weeks ahead, I will be encouraging our faculty, staff and students to find new ways to fulfill our Catholic and Vincentian mission.

Acknowledging that we can always do more, I am very encouraged by the many wonderful developments here at Niagara. And people are noticing them.

This year, for example, we had a record number of freshmen applications, nearly 3,300. We expect to enroll a class of 735 first-year students this fall. Due to the large number of applications, admission to the university was more selective. The freshman class will show increases in both mean high-school average and SAT over the previous year. On the transfer side, we expect to hit our goal of 190 new students, matching the fall 2007 class, which contained the most transfers in nearly 15 years. This year, we are initiating a special office with full time staff to serve our transfer students.

We are projecting a fall 2008 full-time undergraduate enrollment on our main campus of 2,920 students, a 1% increase over last fall, and right in line with our strategic plan projections. Since 2000, our full-time undergraduate population has increased 29%--13% in the past five years.

Niagara's Bachelor of Professional Studies program, our teacher education program offered exclusively in Ontario, has enrolled an additional 150 new students this fall to join the 150 currently enrolled in the program. The enrollment is double the amount expected in this highly popular program.

We expect approximately 850 graduate students, which is about even with last year. Since 2000, our graduate population has increased by 28%.

There continues to be high demand by new freshmen, transfer and returning students, even those whose homes are within commuting distance, to live on campus. At the same time, demand is growing for quality off-campus housing, and we have established a new position to help serve our off-campus student housing needs and to work with the community.

Interestingly, our incoming freshmen hail from 20 states outside New York, including such distant ones as Alaska, California, Colorado and Texas.

The most popular majors for new freshmen and transfer enrollees are business management, accounting, education with a liberal arts concentration, hotel planning and control, biology, criminal justice, marketing, psychology, sports management and education with a social studies concentration.

Students are coming to Niagara because of the quality of our programs. They are telling us that in various surveys, and they are enjoying the educational experience we are providing. Increasingly, we are their first-choice school, because of our growing academic reputation.

Other people and organizations are also taking notice of Niagara's excellence.

- Just recently, the Chronicle of Higher Education ranked Niagara prominently in a survey of Great Colleges to Work For. NU was among the top five institutions in 20 of 27 categories examined in the nationwide survey, which recognized exceptional work environments.
- Last year, Business First of Buffalo recognized NU as a great place to work.
- In July, The Princeton Review named NU as one of the best universities in the Northeast.
- Our EAGLE program, Experience and Growth in Leadership Education, was recognized by the New York Leadership Educators Consortium with its first ever Innovative Program Award.

- Our new baccalaureate program in nursing has been accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education, the accrediting arm of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.
- Once again this past year, we were recognized as a national leader in service learning by being one of 12 institutions in New York state named to the President's Honor Roll.

These are just a few examples of how our university is becoming better known for its quality.

THE COLLEGES

Another reason for that is the great work being done by our colleges. In your media packets today are copies of our alumni magazine. The center spread shows a map of the world, denoting all the places visited by our faculty and students over the summer months. With the exception of Antarctica, NU was represented on every continent.

Time doesn't permit me to go into great detail, but I do want to highlight a couple of things from each college.

Education

Over the past year, 14 members of the Education faculty participated in international study and research, presenting and teaching in Paris, China, Thailand, Germany, Australia and the Netherlands. Through these partnerships, new research and areas of exchange have been explored. Most notably, the international leadership conference that was established by Niagara University last summer was held this year at the University of Munster in Germany. The international keynote address was delivered by one of our own, Dr. Paul Vermette.

This coming year, the college will continue to work with schools in Niagara Falls and Buffalo to boost student achievement. The Teacher Leader Quality Project grant has been redirected for this coming year to work directly with teachers and staff at Academy School 44 in Buffalo, which is for low achieving and over-age students.

Debra Colley, the dean, has received the distinction of being elected to the executive board of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, the major organization in the profession.

Business

The College of Business Administration was also busy abroad. Among other things, the college's Center for International Accounting Education and Research co-hosted its 10th annual conference in Shanghai with East China University of Science and Technology.

Back at home, the college is replacing its BS in commerce degree with separate majors in management, finance, marketing and economics.

Our new dean, whom you have already met, was barely unpacked when he was named to the finance committee at Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center. He's considered an expert in healthcare and hospital economics.

Arts and Sciences

Over the summer, the College of Arts and Sciences saw its students studying conflict resolution in Ireland and theater in England. Enrollment in the theater department, by the way, is up dramatically, and I thank Nancy McGlen for the intended pun. I'll say more about our theater plans a little later.

Our students in the sciences continue to gain great experience doing research with the Heart Center at Memorial Medical Center. Our biochemistry and chemistry programs are among the fastest growing on campus, and I like to think that the important partnership and research opportunities we have with the hospital and elsewhere are part of the reason.

COLLEGE OF HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM MANAGEMENT

I'm surprised to see Dr. Gary Praetzel here because he is usually traveling at this time. Apparently, after traveling to Europe and South America, visiting our programs in Italy and Peru, he's decided to come home to check on the store.

Seriously, the college's global presence continues to expand, in part because of its association with The Leading Hotel Schools of the World, of which it is a co-founder. In the spring, the college will offer a team-taught course with six other member schools via our video conferencing facility.

Gary, by the way, serves as chairman of the New York State Hospitality and Tourism Association's Tourism Educators Council's, which is indicative of his standing in the industry and in educational circles.

CAMPUS IMPROVEMENTS

In addition to academics, we continue to strive for excellence in our facilities. Several major improvement projects took place over the summer, and two of them should be completed very soon. The new artificial turf field behind the Kiernan Center will open for play on Aug. 25, when our women's soccer team takes on UB.

The lower level of the Gallagher Center has been completely renovated, featuring an enhanced dining atmosphere and a new convenience store.

Work also continues on the new Vincentian Residence adjacent to Meade Hall. It is expected to be completed in December.

Several other major projects, which we hope to complete by 2012, are also on the drawing board. They include the theater renovation and expansion, a new dining commons and a new science building. The exact timetable for those projects is dependent on a number of factors, including the progress of our capital campaign, "The Promise of Niagara." We are now at the halfway point toward its \$80 million goal, thanks to the generosity of our alumni, friends and support from various corporations and foundations.

I reaffirm my pledge to go anywhere, at any time, and to meet with anyone to ensure the success of this important undertaking.

SECURITY

In response to recent events, Niagara, like most other colleges and universities, has greatly increased its emergency preparedness. Just this month, we completed installation of an outdoor mass-notification system.

Speakers have been installed at strategic locations on campus, allowing us to broadcast alerts and messages by sound and voice.

Other elements of our campus safety program include:

- New card-access systems to buildings across campus.
- Closed-circuit TV monitoring in major buildings.
- Digital message boards throughout the campus.
- A comprehensive emergency communications system, including e-mail and voicemail systems and automated voice and text messaging.
- Campus radio and TV stations.

These are very costly but very necessary systems that we will continue to enhance to ensure the safety of the university community.

As a Vincentian institution, you all know that we are committed to playing a key role in revitalization of our community. Through a variety of projects, programs and centers, including our Community Outreach Partnership Program, our expanding Border Community Service program and over 60,000 hours of service learning, we continue to be dedicated to community engagement and being an exemplary town-and-gown partner. In the coming year, we will be consolidating our activities into an Office of Community Engagement.

CONCLUSION

Classes begin a week from today. As we await the Class of 2012, I am reminded of a phrase used by Pope Benedict to describe the Catholic educators whom he addressed in Washington. He called us “bearers of wisdom.” It is a humbling and challenging description, but one that we will continually strive to fulfill as a university that is both Catholic and Vincentian.

Thank you.