

## President Randy J. Dunn, Inaugural Address – April 20, 2007

Good afternoon and thank you all for taking time to be a part of today's events. There is a special relationship that each president has to his or her board, especially to the hiring board that takes a leap of faith anytime a new president is appointed. I will always be grateful to the members of Murray State University's Board of Regents who have been introduced, for their strong support and encouragement—now and in the future. I also want to take a moment here to give special thanks to Lori Dial, Don Sparks and Dr. Terry Strieter who were serving on the Board at the time of my hiring.

Ever mindful that the university operates within a broad political landscape, I extend my thanks to the public officials—local, regional, and statewide—who are here with us today and have been recognized. I thank them not only for their presence, but for their strong support of the university, as well. We could not be where we are today as a nationally prominent university without their loyal showing, often at very critical times when help is needed in Frankfort or Washington.

It is an honor to have so many representatives from the Commonwealth's higher education community with us today. It is wonderful to see this delegation from our colleges and universities, and I have been warmly welcomed into Kentucky's higher education ranks. As a president (and Senator Winters—also having done a stint in the chair you know this as well), I am especially honored to have the University and College presidents present. Mike, Barbara, Jim, Mary, Judy, Gary and Robert, I know how unbelievably busy your schedules are and I am deeply grateful that have carved out time to be a part of our celebration today. And Tom, I place you in this group too—it's good to see that an Illinoisan can come to the great commonwealth of Kentucky and with some help, figure things out.

And speaking of Illinois, I want to thank the executive committee of EC5 who came down to join us today from southern Illinois. What I've learned from your outreach and policy advocacy for PK-12 education is something I hope will help me as I become part of that same work also going on here in the western Kentucky.

And, finally, I thank each of you who are part of the Murray State University family in attendance here today—great students, dedicated staff, outstanding faculty, community members and friends. Your presence here today is symbolic and significant of what we have come together to celebrate.

This week we have been reminded that we belong to an even larger community. No university could think about coming together for a celebration this week without taking a moment to send our thoughts and prayers to everyone associated with Virginia Tech. Because there is such a strong bond between universities, when tragedy strikes one, we all share in that grief and loss. Please join with me in a moment of silence to remember the students, faculty, family and friends of Virginia Tech who have suffered so deeply this week.

Thank you.

A presidential inauguration is really much more than the investiture of a new president. An inauguration ceremony reaffirms the meaning and power of the shared mission of all of us who make up the university community. It reminds us of the institution's unique traditions and pays tribute to its rich history.

Looking at the presidential succession process as an institutional rite of passage, the rituals and symbols of the inauguration invest the president as a primary representative of the institution, indeed, as one recognized symbol of the institution itself.<sup>1</sup>

But in fact, the inaugural ceremony is filled with many symbols—the mace, the flag, the regalia, the presidential medallion, the alma mater and the University Shield.<sup>2</sup>

Each of these symbols represents different aspects of the university and its relationships to the larger society it has to serve if it is to have relevance, be meaningful and effective, and continue to renew itself to maintain its vibrancy in our society.

As one of these symbols, Murray State's shield exemplifies the strong ties the university has with our community. Its emblem is taken from the coat-of-arms of William Murray, Earl of Mansfield, and ancestor of the family for whom our city is named. The three stars on the shield symbolize hope, endeavor and achievement. What is it that the modern university should stand for, if not these ideals?

Each person present here today is also a symbol. Your presence represents thousands of people who for more than 80 years have been strong partners of this university, playing a key role in all that Murray State University has been and all that it will become.

And each individual brings unique gifts to the University for our future efforts together—a crucial responsibility for me as president is to recognize, cultivate, and reward those gifts for the betterment of the university. Through Murray State's stewardship in the region, those gifts are returned to the same community that nurtured them in you.<sup>3</sup>

Today's ecumenical gathering—while really meant to celebrate the life of the university—also embodies one of the greatest personal rewards for a university president. Charles Franklin Thwing described the university president as “privileged to...do his work with the best people...who... reveal and use the best powers of their best character.”<sup>4</sup>

And so we come together today—you and I—with a shared responsibility to put forth our best efforts to build on the strong foundation of Murray State's proud past in the pursuit of future imperatives of excellence, community and partnerships for a better tomorrow for our fellow citizens—those in Kentucky, across the nation, and indeed around the world.

In his book, *Recollections of Murray State Teachers College*, Murray State's first president, John Wesley Carr included a list of the “problems to be solved” before the school could be opened. Remarkably, this “to-do” list that Dr. Carr established in 1923 includes many of the tasks that we still have before us today.

Dr. Carr's list included recruiting faculty members, securing facilities, setting a “suitable course of study”, “advertis(ing) the school and canvass(ing) for students.” Now some 84 years later, we still tend to those core responsibilities. But, because of the great work of Dr. Carr and those who followed him, we are able to stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before to add to that list so that we can reach ever higher and go even further in what we want our beloved university to become.

In pursuit of that continued growth, I am setting forth three imperatives for the University during my tenure as president.

### **University Imperatives**

Each university president has a set of defining elements or themes or outcomes which define his or her presidency. Universities—like all complex organizations—have multiple and overlaying systems of plans—short term, long term, programmatic, financial, strategic, personnel or position-based, and the like—that collectively indicate what it is that the university shall “do.” Those of us who have worked long enough in higher education have of course seen and been part of a wide number of these planning and goal structures. As university-types, for those of you who aren't blessed to work in higher education, please know that we do love a good meeting. But as we have all learned, these many and multilevel goals only mean something if they have a focus, can lead to tangible initiatives and create change in the life of the campus.

In that vein, I have set forth three distinct university imperatives for my presidency—three key focus areas for work that I want to do during my time at Murray State. Under each imperative, we shall work together to establish a variety of initiatives to bring the imperatives to life—some of those initiatives I’m pleased to share here—and some we have yet to even dream of.

### **Fostering Excellence**

The first imperative is Fostering Excellence. Supporting this imperative are some crucial initiatives that we must undertake. Murray has such a wonderful record of excellence— independently verified and endorsed—in its academic programs and services, accomplishments in its classrooms, labs, studios, farms, athletic fields and other venues—that it is worthy of the brand we have taken on as Kentucky’s public ivy. Yet, it is clear that universities will have a very difficult time relying on state appropriations or tuition increases to get the needed resources to always be moving forward and continuously improving. We will have to look to support ourselves in that regard. Hence, a key initiative under Fostering Excellence will eventually be a Capital Campaign for Murray State.

So that we have a means to pay for the excellence that our region, our commonwealth, and our students demand of Murray State University, I hope we can begin work on a Capital Campaign by sometime in the fall of this year.

Capital campaigns are not new to MSU. Our most recent campaign started about ten years ago and was successful. We will multiply that success in our next campaign. Most of you may be under the impression that our next campaign will be the second for Murray. Actually, it is probably the third. Indeed, our first big fundraiser took place in 1922. Led by our University’s Founder Rainey T. Wells, that campaign committee raised \$100,000 with contributions coming from more than 1,100 individuals. We can ask our development director Bob Jackson how much that is in real dollars today—one hundred thousand meant something in 1922! But that raised money was taken where it needed to be taken to create a new state college for the Purchase region of Kentucky—and here we are today.

History has shown that this community and region are strong supporters of the University and its resource needs. We will work hard on the upcoming Capital Campaign to continue that proud tradition that the university and the community share.

As we work to Foster Excellence, we will embolden, enrich and continue to add vitality to our extended campuses. As I’ve already alluded to, we have an outstanding inventory of academic degrees, related programs and services, majors, minors, and areas. We don’t want to lessen that. However, for the future, our approach will not be to grab hold of any

and all types of new programs but to take our existing strong programs and services and push those out in even richer ways to the extended campuses.

That said, of course where programs need to change to reflect new demands of society, the things that our students want and need to be learned individuals and contribute to the commonweal, we will move toward those new academic areas. But the process of carefully and thoughtfully adding new programs has to also include a careful look at the currency and relevance of existing programs, revising or revamping programs as necessary.

While we keep a clear focus on the programmatic aspects of our endeavors as a university, it is the case that we need high quality facilities to support strong programs.

In terms of our extended campuses specifically—where we will renew our focus and push out on what we are doing—we have a beautiful stand-alone facility at Hopkinsville, a new partnership at Madisonville for a post-secondary education center and a highly functional (if not beautiful) center in Henderson.

With that said, we will need to look at our facilities in Paducah—a noted community nationally and a vital part of our region. We have to assure that our facilities there are sufficient in both size and quality to serve that community's needs.

In addition to the gains we've made in our extended campuses, there has been a great deal of attention given to the facilities on the main campus over the past few years. As you can all see today, this is one of the most beautiful university campuses in the country.

We are a real jewel in the crown of Kentucky higher education. But, there is still important work to do be done on our main campus to support a core aspect of higher education in the 21st century—our library.

While libraries have been at the heart of university campuses for centuries, their importance, ironically, is even greater today in a time when we are moving toward "virtual knowledge" becoming predominant. The advent of new technologies has increased the importance of the library on a university's campus.

Today a library has to be both a physical location and a virtual library using the latest technologies to support campus research and instruction while supporting distance learning and electronically-based technologies.

On top of those demands, a library has to offer a centralized study hub for the campus—a place where students and faculty have dedicated space for group study, individual

contemplation and research of all types. It is the academic heart and soul of any higher education institution.

We must think about designing and building a library that supports a framework for knowledge acquisition and dissemination in the 21st century—so it may continue to play the central role in the academic life of the campus.

Beyond the needs for a new library facility, work will certainly continue on all types of campus facilities. In that vein there will be an emphasis on replacement and renovation of our housing stock to support the goals of the Residential College system here at Murray. And, we'll continue moving forward with our work on the Science Campus, a dramatic expansion of our main campus to the west.

Yet, as all other facilities improvements continue, I will keep a strong emphasis on a new library facility. It will be a key focus during my time at MSU and an important initiative under the imperative to Foster Excellence.

### **Creating Community**

The second imperative is Creating Community. The initiatives to support this imperative will look at all aspects of community—the campus community, the regional community and the international community.

Higher education institutions in the 21st century have a responsibility to prepare our students for success anywhere on the globe. Murray State has had wonderful success in International Education, emphasizing the importance of the global community for our students and faculty. We have international students here at Murray State, native students who study abroad, faculty who have taught and studied throughout the world and ongoing programs with partners in such locations as Cyprus, Korea and China. But, there is more that we can do to reach out internationally and our students and the university community will be the better for it. The world is changing around us and as learned men and women of the Academy, a larger international focus will only help us in trying to keep with those changes.

At the same time, though, we must increase the diversity of our campus. There is an ongoing need to increase faculty of color in our classrooms as we better reflect the makeup of the commonwealth and the country. We want to look at what we can do to increase multiculturalism in our campus community.

In Kentucky, Hispanic children are a growing segment of the public school population. In particular, the state has experienced 135 percent growth in the Hispanic student population over the last decade. There are even greater increases in children birth to age four, with an almost 200 percent increase in the last ten years. We must also broaden our reach to warmly welcome more Latino students to our campus over the coming years.

But as we work to assure that our university reflects the diversity of our commonwealth, our nation and the world, we know that we are citizens of Western Kentucky—good friends and neighbors of Murray, Calloway County and the immediate region we serve. The University must work hard to be good neighbors in areas where we can make good progress together.

While we clearly have an obligation to build partnerships throughout the world, we live in the region of Western Kentucky and must attend to “home” first before venturing out further. We can only build friends around the world if we show we can make and keep our dear friends at home.

During my presidency, we will always be looking for new opportunities for partnerships—whether that be to support the environment with shared recycling efforts or working together on shared transportation initiatives or looking for public/private development projects that serve the campus and the greater community.

And the key to success in these efforts will lie in our ability to form and nurture partnerships, which leads me to our third imperative.

### **Building Partnerships**

Building Partnerships will be key to the University’s future, just as those partnerships have been to its past.

In a concerted effort to build partnerships, Murray State University has developed a Regional Stewardship Plan that has won funding support from Kentucky’s Council on Post- Secondary Education. The fulfillment of this plan will advance core stewardship values, commitment, and action by emphasizing and rewarding service initiatives, and placing a centralized institutional focus on stewardship in the region.

We owe special thanks to a group of MSU folks who developed and formalized the Regional Stewardship Plan. Led by Dr. Sandra Jordan and Dr. Gary Brockway, we applaud this group’s work and pledge our commitment to implement the plan.

To that end, MSU's Office of Regional Stewardship and Outreach will be a new unit in President's Office to make fast progress in this area.

As the University works to build partnerships, we will look at all aspects of life in the region to see how we can partner on a project in every sector—from PK-12 education, business and economic development, public health and wellness to social and cultural improvement. As this initiative continues over time we'll have at least one project in every one of those sectors. The region (not us here at MSU, but the region) will determine what is best for its development and improvement and look at how we can be a part of that, linking to existing groups and efforts.

Let me share a couple of examples of what I am talking about in this regard.

One longstanding partnership for the university is the PK-12 education system. There is an important role for universities to play in fostering continuous improvement in the entire education system of the Commonwealth.

As Kentucky adopts universal administration of the ACT exam for all its high school students, there is an important role for the University to play. We can have a role in actively promoting advanced placement courses at the high school level to help students be better prepared for success when they begin their university studies.

Given my background, these connections between PK-12 and higher education are very important to me. Interestingly, that background is one I share with one of my predecessors here at MSU. Dr. Harry Sparks, Murray State's fifth president, served as Kentucky's Superintendent of Public Instruction immediately prior to his presidency at Murray State.

As another example, it will be incumbent on us to partner with health care providers to address the health and wellness issues in our region. In this area there is opportunity for great gains by working with the health experts in our region.

With them, we will need to accelerate the progress that has started. It is not sufficient for Kentucky to move from 42nd to 39th in "America's Health Rankings"<sup>5</sup> While any improvement is good, Murray State needs to increase our level of participation in this important work. It is our responsibility to be part of that work.

Part of the role of our University is to set aspirations for the Commonwealth and then help it reach those goals. The University has much to offer in building partnerships, including some

of the best faculty in the country—faculty who are conducting meaningful research alongside their other teaching and service responsibilities.

### **Overarching Principle – Outreach**

In looking at the three imperatives for the Murray State University—Fostering Excellence, Creating Community and Building Partnerships—the common thread that runs through them is outreach.

Outreach may be the one best way to characterize what will happen at Murray State under my watch. Some of that outreach will be in our extended campuses and with communities in the region and some of it will be on the other side of the globe. As an outstanding regional university, it is outreach that is a defining element for us.

Just like Dr. Carr had his “to do” list in 1923, I have set forth a “to do” list for today. In Dr. Carr’s writings he stated emphatically that he believed “it could be done—and would be done.”

I, too, believe it can be done and will be done as we work together to build on the achievements of the past. We will carry the mission of Murray State University forward with excellence, in community and through partnerships.

Thank you so much for your attention here today.

1 Bornstein, Rita, Legitimacy in the Academic Presidency (Praeger, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003) 184.

2 Manning, Kathleen, Rituals, Ceremonies and Meaning in Higher Education (Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 2000) 13–20.

3 Manning, Kathleen, Rituals, Ceremonies and Meaning in Higher Education (Westport, Connecticut: Bergin and Garvey, 2000) 13–20.

4 Thwing, Charles Franklin, The College President (New York: Macmillan, 1962) 290.

5 United Health Foundation, America’s Health Rankings TM 2006.  
<http://www.unitedhealthfoundation.org/ahr2006/media2006/shrmediakit/2006ahr.pdf>