

President Randy J. Dunn, State of the University Address

August 15, 2008

Good afternoon and thank you. It is a pleasure to welcome everyone to this great event which kicks off the new academic year on the Murray State University campus! I look forward to working with each of you over the course of the year. Now is indeed an exciting time and there is an electricity and intensity that starts as we gear up for a new academic year -- that is also evidenced by the increased flow of traffic and long lines at restaurants here in Murray. We are glad to have all of you back. For those of you who are new to this event, it is when the State of the University Address is typically given.

First, it is interesting to note that the College of Business and Public Affairs came in second while the starving artists came in first in the President's Cup standing! Dean Ted Brown is an excitable type but I have not seen him beam like that in a long time.

And the new faculty and staff who just came in and heard reference to the "grumpy old men" may have thought we were referring to the row of vice presidents at the head table today but instead we were referring to the group that provided the wonderful music for our luncheon.

I would especially like to thank Jay Morgan and Gina Winchester for their work over the past year as your Faculty Regent and Staff Regent, respectively. It has been a pleasure for me to work with both of them. They are creative thinkers and are working hard to represent their constituencies, and it has been a joy for me to have the opportunity to work with both of you. Great leadership is being reflected in both the Faculty Senate and the Staff Congress, and I feel very confident as we forge through some of the challenges and trials that we continue to face that your constituency bodies are in good hands with those folks at the helm.

I would also like to add my own welcome to the new faculty and staff -- Ronda and I really enjoyed meeting many of you last night at the reception in historic Pogue Library and we welcome you as new Racers. In the academic market as it exists it is very difficult, but as you look at the recruiting class this year Dr. Brockway is absolutely correct that we have much to be proud of in these new hires. I would say especially to new faculty that you will find a great and supportive body of scholars, researchers and teachers as you have an opportunity to work with them throughout the course of the coming years. Whether it is the case that you are here for a few years in your career trajectory, which is sometimes the case, or whether you make your academic career at Murray State University -- and more of you will do this now than you think -- we wish you all the best in being the best you can be as teachers, researchers, artists and those providing service. We do want you to succeed and we will help you in that role.

Now, for those of you who are returning this year, thank you for all your collective efforts. I had a chance this morning to stop in at some of the college meetings, at the request of the deans who extended the invitation, and one of the things I said was that I needed to spend a few minutes to thank all of the folks gathered (and I wanted to send that same sentiment to all of you) for getting through last spring in amazing fashion. We went through some very difficult budgetary times -- it was very tough -- and there is a potential when that type of unsettledness happens to a system,

that it can suck up all of the organizational oxygen, and things start to go into chaos, and the wheels come off the machine...but that did not happen here. Things continued to go on at the University and teaching and learning took place. Work got done and everyone soldiered on in amazing fashion. That doesn't happen everywhere and I thank all of you for your patience and fortitude in getting through all of that. We hope for a better day to come, and are doing all we can to ensure that happens.

Also, for all faculty members who were tenured or promoted – or tenured *and* promoted – this past academic year, we are going to prepare an ad to get that publicity out...but if you were within that esteemed group, please stand and receive our congratulations.

Some part of most State of the University speeches to some extent includes looking back and recounting successes, but I have changed gears on that a little bit. For the past two years I have been giving this address I would go through a laundry list of great bragging rights, or points of pride for the University. As you know, we have moved now to doing an annual report document for the University which came out during Commencement Week this past May. If you have not had a chance to look at our *2007 Annual Report*, please make sure and get a copy to review. The publication lists all of our points of pride and all of the bragging pieces that we must make sure get out to the many publics we serve.

But I so disappointed Maestro Dennis Johnson when I said I was not doing the laundry list of good things that happened last year – he even got a tear in his eye when he found out I wouldn't be making this announcement: So, Dennis, I will say that the Marching Racers this year total 246 individuals – and your point of pride has officially been announced! For those of you who have not had a chance to do so yet, though, I do recommend you review a copy of the *Annual Report*.

I will use the remainder of my time today to look at three main areas, but will try to move with all dispatch so you can get back to your important work in preparing for the arrival of our students next week. I do want to spend a little bit of time with a continuing focus on the strategic imperatives that I think all of you know by now, and why they must continue to have primacy for us, and why I think their urgency for the University is unabated. I spent a lot of time over the last year-and-a-half talking about these imperatives, stressing their importance, but I did not spend quite as much time on *why* this approach to change for the University is one that I think is right for us at this point in time – as opposed to the more typical strategic planning that many of you are accustomed to seeing. Strategic planning as a model has been out there for quite some time and we can spend a few moments discussing that.

I additionally want to provide a preview in brief fashion on some of the specific initiatives that we want to start working on a University-wide basis to plug into those strategic imperatives. In these past annual speeches I have not spent a lot of time doing that, but instead only mentioned a couple of things that we are considering. I will not be spending time today to update you on the things that are already in the hopper, many of which had to do with creating and improving our “organizational infrastructure.” If you want to find out about those things, review the newspapers, the *Annual Report* and the website and you will find updates on our 12 x 12 enrollment push, what's going on with the new Extended Campus in Paducah, and progress that is now continuing on the Chemistry Building - as well as about other ongoing issues affecting the

campus. Instead of recounting those updates again today I want instead to look to the future. But I do want to spend just a few minutes today talking about initiatives I would like to start moving to the front burner on a University-wide basis that will bring to life these imperatives.

Finally, I want to go beyond the imperatives themselves to have us think a little bit about what the role of planning is at the University and what has to be done to round this out. What I'm going to tell you is that, if you don't know it already, I sort of reject the notion of strategic planning on a comprehensive, University-wide basis as we look at these imperatives. However, the imperatives themselves are not enough to constitute "planning" and there are now additional pieces that we must start talking about and folding in to our efforts. There are missing elements that must be added into the system and we must make those elements part of our conversation as we move into the future to figure out how to foster the improvement we need and have the University always moving forward. Shortly I will discuss what is being done at the unit level to accomplish this objective.

I.

As I have said before, large organizations are an amalgamation of plans if nothing else. A lot of times those plans may just be "stacked" one on top of another, but what you would really like to see is a "nesting" or a coupling of what is happening within planning across the entire University. Some of our offices, divisions, and agencies within the University are doing great planning at the unit level and above. At the University level - at the institution level - I am looking more in terms of what is happening with the imperatives themselves; there is a way to blend both unit improvement and University imperatives, that is, including the things that you are doing within the units that I commend you for and which must continue. These planning outcomes are not mutually exclusive. In fact, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) is not going to let us not abandon unit improvement planning and the accrediting agencies for the units are not going to let us not do it either. And the QEP system remains in place...but there is a way the units can do these things at their level, and at the institutional level, to focus more on these larger imperatives.

There is a reason that we really do not do strategic planning in the way that many of you think of that concept and I am sharing this with you to explain why we continue the focus on the imperatives. We are in the post-strategic planning era: We even have one book titled *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*. There are other reasons, but you are not here for a lecture that the College of Business and Public Affairs could give – one reason has to do with the fact that resources change. You can do a great five-year plan and suddenly your resources get shot all to heck. I think we can all talk about that with some certainty here - and then the plan goes out the window. There is not maneuverability with strategic plans and many times we can get locked into one particular plan that stays there forever. People change and agendas change – elections cause that. Environments change as well. I don't care what the strategic plan for any university in this country was in April 2007, but after Virginia Tech, the focus of every university and college in this country switched overnight to something new. After a year we are still just getting those pieces put together following the Virginia Tech tragedy.

I also feel that most strategic plans tend to be top-down undertakings. We know that good institutions tend to operate in an environment of stimulus and response in higher education. Actually, that is how great organizations work and to achieve that there must be an emergence of creativity that comes from the units – those doing the work of the University – as opposed to a top-down approach which, in my view, strategic planning represents many times. Anyone who teaches organizational theory across the University that wants me to come and deliver a lecture on why that is I am glad to do so! But it has to do with when strategic planning started in the 1960s, when government funds were being thrown all over the place, and there was money to do anything you could invent. We have moved beyond that in the fiscal environment of public higher education.

For those of you, again, who follow this and read in this area, the great organizational theorist, Henry Mintzberg, said that *it is possible to rescue a planning baby from strategic bathwater*, and that is what we are trying to do here. For those of you interested in social research, the great social researcher Aaron Wildavsky said that every strategic plan is a failure. I tend to believe that, by the way. It is just the nature of these very complex institutions.

Now, that is not to say we don't plan, but rather the way we think of planning becomes very difficult at times, and I come back to this focus on the imperatives. It does strike me that a way for these to move the University forward, to be responsive to what we are expected to do, is to have the imperatives in place and allow all of you within your units to figure out the best way in terms of how to respond to those given where your units find themselves at this point in time. Some of you will rock and roll with that, some of you will be more challenged with it, and some will sit back and just worry about improving your own departments or offices for a while before you are able to take these on – that is fine because all of this type of work has to take place no matter what. What we do know is that complex, difficult organizations (and universities *are* those) must have strong, defining, mission-driven elements – and not more than three or four – and a great organization or institution can figure out how to respond and how to attach the improvements coming from the units toward the direction where the complex organization – in this case Murray State University – is attempting to go. I submit to you if we are going to reach the potential for what MSU can be as a beacon of great national mid-major universities, this is the work that must be taking place.

As you will recall from past years, at this point in the summer, we like to dangle out information on the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings, but this year we do not yet have that information. We expect to receive that information in about a week and will share that news with you as soon as we have it. We do think that we are in very good shape for 2009, but in order to continue in that role we must have and we must adhere to those three or four defining pieces and then continue to push on those pieces.

I will also submit to you that the nation and those influencers, or those “deciders” as President Bush would say, have determined that these types of things (while they go by different names and titles at different places) – in our case, fostering excellence, creating community, and building partnerships and by all of that extending the outreach of ourselves to the world in which we live – these things constitute the role that has been given to universities similarly situated to Murray State. If we are going to be about the business at Murray State University of breathing

that rarified air of some of the great mid-level universities in the country, we must focus on our imperatives. (By the way, none of this suggests that we *aren't* in that upper class of institutions, but we are not firmly cemented there in my view, though we can be working our way up into it.) There is consensus around the country that great regional, comprehensive universities are taking on this work. If you do not subscribe to that notion I suggest you visit a few websites, primarily some of the organizations that serve all of the institutions across the country but particularly those like ours, and see what the conversation is that is taking place. This is our work.

But it is not *just* because there is a consensus that has developed that says great mid-major universities are going to focus many efforts around similar ends. I spent quite a bit of time last year sharing with many in this room the fact that this region and the Commonwealth of Kentucky *needs* us to be doing this too. As I recall from last year – and I went back and read the speech again in preparation for this year – I went down a listing of a number of things around educational attainment, child and adult wellness and well-being, citizenship participation, culture, arts and historic preservation – all of these “quality of life” indicators in Kentucky that we must be moving the needle on. For those of you who come here from somewhere other than Kentucky, please acquaint yourself with our beautiful and wonderful state. This is a wonderful place to be, but there are severe needs in this state and it is being looked upon us to figure out a way to respond to those needs – how to improve on these quality of life indicators. I think these imperatives give us an opportunity to go there and make a difference.

These same imperatives won't necessarily be the ones forever, maybe not even until the next President is hired! For now, however, I remain committed to the fact that these are the areas in which we need to make a difference. Over time we may be able to mature in our focus and develop that more richly and start talking about improving some of the overall quality indicators for our University. (I will touch on that a little more in later comments.) But for now we remain committed to doing this work. For those of you who have the capacity, the ability and the desire within all of the units across the campus to be part of this effort, we want to support and help your reaching out with time, money, visibility, and notoriety...whatever we can do to assist as you figure out ways across the campus to be a part of moving these indicators.

II.

Let me change gears now and talk a little bit about some of the specific initiatives I hope we can start to get some traction on in the coming year. Again, I did not do a lot of this last year and I do not know where some of these initiatives I'll share will go ultimately, but I do want to take a look at getting some of these efforts underway.

It would be inappropriate, I think, coming out of a year where we have had a very difficult fiscal environment and a budget that none of us was happy about, and raises that are dismal, for me to stand up here and say: “Let me announce to you these five and six new initiatives, plans or pieces of discrete work that we are taking on...let's go gung-ho,” You in turn would say: “Well, my spouse and I had a nice dinner in Nashville on the raise I got this year.” But of course, we all know that there is no stasis in organizations. We either keep trying to move forward and chip away at improvements or we are going to fall back – that is the nature of the beast that we work within. So we are looking at how we can make some moves and keep going always forward,

while at the same time always being cognizant that we do not have money to be throwing around or throwing away for crazy efforts that we end up wasting time on or which have very little chance of being implemented.

With regard to **fostering excellence** we have previously talked about the fact that teaching and learning is at the core of any great university, particularly a university such as ours that is focused on teaching. To ensure we are at the zenith of that work we must figure out how to move forward on a new academic library facility. We have many needs for capital construction on this campus, yet we must figure out how to chip away at this goal. We will form a Library Planning Task Force in order to get that work underway and I have asked Adam Murray, Interim Dean of University Libraries, to take on that role. A group representing the constituencies across the University will be involved, and we will also work with our alums and potential donors who are very interested in seeing progress within this area. The Murray State University Foundation, even though we are cost shifting a little bit of Adam's Library budget to the Foundation to assist for this academic year, still is sitting on well over \$1 million that is available for us to start some of this work – to figure out what kind of facility we need for the 21st Century to serve the University for the next 50 years - and that is a state-of-the-art academic library facility. We must determine what that facility looks like, what is included in it, what is the right mix of print versus electronic holdings, what meeting rooms and access rooms are needed, and what size coffee bar do you put in – and you do not build a library these days and not put in a coffee bar as one of the amenities! We will be putting together a group to undertake that work and will use what money is available to begin some planning and perhaps conceptual work with drawings and preliminary designs as we head into the 2010 legislative session...to enable us to have something to talk about and a case to make.

Also within the area of fostering excellence we are going to take on (and this is where I was a little worried I would create a bit of a rumble) but we are going to take on a branding study of Murray State University. As Gary Brockway mentioned, we are headed into a capital campaign's public phase, but probably not for about a year still. As many of you may recall, we talked about the fact that we might be going public on this potentially about now when we mentioned it a year ago. However, we know from some studies conducted this past year with our campaign consultants that we have more work to do with our key donors to be ready for the public phase of this campaign, and we are doing that work and will continue to do this work over the course of the next year.

Before we go public, though, we need to think about the branding efforts for the University as a whole. The "Kentucky Public Ivy" branding is a mixed blessing. For some, there is a cache there and it has meaning and it gives us sway that we might not otherwise have. For other audiences, it seems to some degree to push the credibility issue a bit. I do not know who is right. But I do know that we cannot head into the public phase of a capital campaign, where we are going to be asking individuals and corporations for \$60 million-plus, without first figuring out who and what we are. There is going to have to be a way we can show excellence and that we can show quality through a more thoughtful branding effort.

We must have a way we can communicate the private school feel that students experience when they come to this public campus, and a way that we can talk about our history and tradition (also

with a very heavy private school feel), but still deliver a message that is credible, clear and consistent across all of the audiences we serve – all the way from that 90-year-old schoolteacher who never married and is thinking about leaving her estate to the University (and doesn't think of Murray State as a Public Ivy, but rather as something very different when she attended school here) – all the way to the venture capitalist half-a-nation away who knows she wouldn't be where she is without Murray State University and is poised to give a seven-figure gift. We must have in place something that satisfies everyone across that continuum - and to accomplish that we are going to work on branding.

For those of you who are saying, “hmmm,” we are going to figure out a way to pay for this initiative by looking at carryforwards, and a single-year contingency account, to determine where we can steal together pots of money from many little hidey-holes on this campus to get that done. For those of you who say that is a waste of money, look at what UK has done, what U of L has done and what Northern Arizona University has done – a place out in the middle of nowhere that has declining enrollment and is trying to figure out what it is about. Please investigate the case of Northern Arizona and see what branding did for them. Murray State, too, is going to have to figure out this branding aspect. It is only then – and I'm not saying that the Public Ivy piece will go away, because it is already on some billboards – but it is only then that we figure it out and have, as a result, a consistent message as we go into that public phase of our capital campaign and that more-certain identity will carry us forward into the future.

Within the notion of **creating community**, and I don't know what it is going to look like, but we are going to have on campus this year some sort of meaningful diversity initiative. I created in the budget two years ago a minority hiring pool and it has not been tapped. The Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) just completed its Committee on Equal Opportunities site visitation this past April, and the University will be addressing the CPE in October to defend that report. I thank the many of you who were involved during the CPE's visit to campus. This University must understand that we have to look at diversity in a meaningful and realistic way, and must consider the fact that if we are going to be true to creating community we have to be true to the ideals of what community is, and that is pushing and fostering diversity – looking at the representation of marginalized groups and figuring out how to have all of those bodies and groups represented and having that circumstance of what all campuses must be – and if it doesn't happen at a University it happens nowhere in our society – the University as a place that is inclusive and has a spot for everyone to belong. If we do not do it here, then it happens nowhere else in society.

I do not yet know exactly how we are going to do this, but I do have some things I want us to look at. We currently have a standing committee of the University on affirmative action and I will work through the proper channels to change that to a diversity committee. I know we had a blue chip panel to look at this issue, but we need to have a standing committee at the University committed to diversity instead of one being worried solely about counting and compliance. I encourage you to look at the charge of the Affirmative Action Committee if you have not done so lately.

We need to switch our thinking to be proactive in this area and figure out how the University leads in that regard. We have to figure out a meaningful recruitment plan for faculty and

professional staff. This is not to suggest for you a deficit model to date as I know that many of you are working hard on this. We have had some success and I applaud that tremendously. Still, we must do more. We are going to look to institute a President's Award for Diversity and I think there is just a world of ideas that we can look at to try to figure out how to do this better.

Another initiative within the creating community imperative is the fact that we need to figure out how to keep pushing on our international focus because I also want to look in these times of very tight budgets to how we can create community by pushing internationalization even more. I do not know what some of those tricks will be but we will figure them out. I do like an idea I've seen at Portland State University where there are internationalization mini-grants that allow for redoing courses, rewriting and reinventing courses, to have wider international focus, and maybe providing some money to do international events or activities. Again, I'm not looking to create a new part of the budget, but just to bundle some money together from different places so that you can do it in your classrooms, labs, studios and farm fields...as I know we are all trying to push progress around internationalization of the campus.

With regard to **building partnerships**, I know many of you are aware that we are in discussions right now with a number of groups around looking at having Murray (and I did not say the University directly) working in conjunction and in partnership with the Murray-Calloway County Hospital to host a cohort of third- and fourth-year medical students from the College of Medicine at the University of Kentucky. We have a lot of work to do on this, and I do not know if we will pull it off, but such great opportunities will exist for our students, for our faculty and for our researchers from doing upper-division medical education right here in Murray, Kentucky, of all places. That then leads to an opportunity maybe years down the line for residency centers. How helpful could that be when we now shift back to talking about creating and improving community for this region – to get physicians here – to improve this quality of life indicator. If you think we cannot afford to do that, well, we are going to be looking at servicing those medical students who would in essence be folded into this campus and that will provide revenue for us and over time help offset what we might have to do to contribute to the cost of this initiative. Again, no specific plan is in place, but talks have advanced far enough that we need to keep looking at this.

Further, with regard to building partnerships, many of you are aware if you follow what the Board of Regents does, is that we passed a Campus Master Plan this past spring and it is very exciting for us because a master plan had not been done for some number of years. It changes the footprint of the University over the next 20 to 25 years. I have some big blowup posters that I will bring to meetings so you can see what we are planning, but one of the things that we have to do on this campus is move forward with capital work.

Toward that end, we are going to figure out a public-private partnership with third-party financing to replace College Courts. We have to do something for our upper-division students, for our graduate students (and this is a qualitative issue too), but we have to do more to push graduate education at MSU. This is tied to how we are going to get these 12,000 students and also how we keep pushing on the research enterprise which we also must develop more fully. First we must have a decent place for them to live, and that also includes married students. We are going to have a lot of work to do. Even though I like to kid Tom Denton, he has worked very

hard to figure out how this University moves forward to do these creative financings with third-party vendors so that we can replace College Courts. John Rall, our University Attorney, has been involved in that work as well. You are going to see some exciting stuff happen as we go forward.

III.

I want to now spend a couple of minutes talking about some missing elements as far as looking at planning as a system or model on our campus since we have moved away from doing a traditional strategic plan. Otherwise there would be an action plan that you have somewhere with very discrete objectives around it, and then you would look at the objectives to see what we did and after a year life goes on. But we are instead looking at continuous improvement – always moving forward, doing new things, innovation – around the imperatives. I do want to throw in some of the missing planning components many of you are aware should exist, because now that we have established these imperative, and are working on them, we need to add in some additional elements of a more typical planning model.

One aspect of this is a better communications system - and we are going to take a crack at this out of my office. We have all of these plates spinning - again, I am just speaking for initiatives taking place that cut across the University at the institutional level, as opposed to the unit level. For instance, the Department of History may be doing great and wonderful things and we probably won't update to the University Community, although Chair Terry Strieter can find ways to do so through his website, departmental outreach or newsletters if he wishes. I am talking here more institutionally. We need to figure out a way to communicate changes in something closer to a real time fashion, so we will look at a way, probably web-based, to have something in place where if you are interested in what is going on in Paducah, or wonder whether anything actually happened on the branding deal, for example - that you can take a look at a website to see the latest developments. (Some of you will recall the Parking and Transportation Work Group that did a lot of work last year and you may be sitting there wondering what happened to that group? That group did not disappear and I was ready to institute its findings but we had no money to do it and we could not figure out a way to get a fee put in place to help with the cost, so that is now on hold.) We need to have ongoing communication for these things so all of you are aware of where we are trying to go as a University, as a community, as a campus. As President, I owe that to all of you who are doing the work of the University. It is also what we are trying to accomplish in regard to transparency and opening things up for how our "business" is done. I hope we can figure out a way to take that on. That is a piece of work that Josh Jacobs will have within his portfolio. Many of you who knew Becky Watts and enjoyed working with her over the past 18 months know that she is now Chief of Staff at Ohio University and I wish her the best. Josh is now filling in the Chief of Staff role to take on much new work and continue all that has been done to this point. To that end, he will be working on this planning communications element.

Another thing that we have to now reinstitute for a good planning model is unit-level planning. Some of you were hoping that what we had been doing a couple of years ago at the unit level maybe was going to disappear. It is not. We have to figure out a way to have a planning structure within your departments, offices and divisions. What we were doing before needed to

be changed so Gary Brockway and Bonnie Higginson have been working on a new way of doing unit planning. What we want to do (and we will probably put this out a little later this fall) chairs and directors and those of you who are getting worried about timelines of what we previewed with you last spring...don't worry, we are going to fix it. We need to have a way of doing unit planning that lets you work on the stuff you want to be doing as an individual unit. I will go back to the Department of History example. There are things in that department that they want to do to make themselves better among their peers across the country, and as a discipline, and they need to be doing that work. It will be driven by what needs to be done to improve as a unit...but we will also ask for each unit to be picking off at least one imperative because I would like to push that work down to this level. You (as units of the University) can decide what it is you will choose to improve - and you do not have to do something on every institutional imperative - but we can combine unit improvement along with maybe working on at least one imperative-related initiative, if even in a very small way. That will become both a unit improvement and imperative plan, pushing this broader University work to the unit level in conjunction with the ongoing improvement of regular operational plans. There is also the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) work that has to stay for accreditation purposes. We cannot just abandon that and, of course, you all want to be better within your areas. You want to have the things you work on internally for betterment - for your departments to be the best they can be; I am asking you to talk also about how to maybe take on the work of any one of the imperatives to expand your present efforts.

The last missing piece on this ad hoc or hybrid planning system that I am trying to use at Murray State is an accountability component. Again, we do not have a strategic plan with action elements so this is tougher to do. You can set up an objective that says, for instance, "recruiters will have 100 high schools" that they shall visit. Then you go back at the end of the year and count and see if they met that goal - but to me that does not say anything qualitatively about what happened. It just says you went to 100 high schools - and I am not picking on Enrollment Management - that was just an example. We do have to figure out the accountability element and that can be difficult. What I am talking about now is at the University level, the institutional level. I am not talking about some overlay we are going to give to all of you (and the deans, chairs and directors now are going, "Oh my gosh not something else..."), but I am talking about an accountability that attaches to the University to do these things we are talking about doing.

I believe that we need to have a set of indicators in place for Murray State University that set out for us what we aspire to do. These will be aspirational accountability indicators or characteristics that we see in those universities around the country who we most want to be like. We know those places. If you went to the budget meetings last spring we talked about that list and it included Truman State, Portland State, Miami of Ohio, Evergreen State and even some privates that kind of look like us and are doing the same type of work. We need to figure out the best characteristics of these places - that those who know in this country have said are the beacons and are issuing the clarion call around excellence and quality improvement for what mid-major institutions need to be doing - and use those as the characteristics we measure ourselves against.

I will be talking to the Board of Regents at their Retreat, their work session, scheduled for September 5 about this. What I am going to try to do at that time is get them to review, adopt,

accept and embrace some set of like indicators. We are not talking about 50 of these – we are probably not even talking about 25. Fügen Muscio, Coordinator of Institutional Research, and others on campus are currently trying to figure this out. But we are going to pick a set of indicators and I'm going to try to get all of us, the Board and myself, plus all of us as a University Community, to work toward performance on that set of aspirational indicators for accountability so that we know we are going where we need to be going.

We have a lot of good and acceptable schools in this country. (I impertinently named some of those schools at the budget meetings this spring and I won't do that again because as I look back on it I think it was pretentious and not well serving for me as a President of the University to say something like that in a public meeting, and I wish I hadn't.) I named some universities but you know these places: They are good, acceptable schools but they are sleepy. They look only to their own corner of the world. They may talk about how to step forward but they never seem to quite get there. They do not look as much about – and I believe this and know most of you do as well, or else you would not be doing this work and would go to work for a regular company or whatever – but they do not look at how they can change the world through their students, staff, faculty, the learning that is taking place, the knowledge that is being generated, the cultural performances taking place, the service, the outreach...indeed, all of the wonderful things that have brought Murray State to where it is. We are at the top of that lesser heap, but instead of being at the top of that heap, I would rather have us start working up the ladder with that other group – the Miamis and the Trumans, – and we can do that.

Remember last spring I said that the future of this institution – whether we go up in stature or not - is going to come down to hundreds of decisions on all kinds of things over the coming years... around budget, tuition, pricing, programs we add, people we hire, where we go, what we do. I do not like the randomness of that. I do not like the ad hoc nature of that quite so much and after stewing about all of this stuff in May, and trying to figure out how we proceed from here to keep us in that group we want to be in while always moving forward, I needed to determine what to do. In thinking about that it did strike me that if we can come to an agreement on the *indicators* for what we want to be, around the characteristics we want to define us, then that can be a means to not have to have hundreds of different decisions collectively determining our future. (Although that is a bit “tongue in cheek” because we always have to have those discussions I suppose.) But instead of having our fate directed by the latest local happening, or the latest newspaper article, or by what somebody has said to somebody else, we can now re-establish ourselves around these aspirational accountability characteristics, looking at how they can place us in that group of great mid-major universities in this country so we can continue to push on the excellence and quality that we want to achieve.

We are going to come to a point where we can be proud to compare ourselves on these indicators (and you will watch this roll out over the next year, and two and three) while instead of just worrying about how we are doing next to “x” state university in Kentucky or surrounding states, and feeling pretty good about that lesser comparison. Rather, we are going to start talking about how we do in comparison to these other grand places – the outstanding master's level universities of the country. I think over time we can feel good about that and we must keep telling ourselves how we can push forward to be like other lighthouse institutions nationally. Murray State can be solidly in that group, I have no doubt. I have not one moment of hesitation

about that. We can be in that group, and we shall, but we have much work to do and we don't have much time to do it. We've got challenges with resources (and again, with some of the organizational infrastructure pieces that I have talked about) and all of us have been working very hard on these issues for the past 18 months. But remember, many people desperately need us to be doing this and then going forward.

The work of great universities, whether they are a mid-major or otherwise, *and the outcomes that spring forth from those places*, are not the result of a President. They are not the result of a Regent. They are not the result of who we were able to hire as a great researcher or a great artist or a great grant writer that we were lucky enough to grab. No...this work is the result of a collective effort that is driven by all of us in this room today and many others. I have been here long enough to know that the talent exists, the passion exists, the drive exists, and the intelligence exists for us to be able to do this and more. I look forward to working with all of you this academic year. If there is anything the "grumpy old men" up here can do to assist you as you "be the best that you can be," please tell us. I am proud to count us - and continue to count us - in the roster of great regional comprehensive universities in this country and it is because of you. Thank you very much and have a great year.