



## **It's Like Your First Sip of the Morning Latte**

State of the University Address  
Philip W. Eaton, President, September 20, 2006

**Welcome to the 2006-2007 State of the University Address and the opening of our academic year.** My thanks to Matt Whitehead for his wonderful reflections this morning. And thanks to Tami Anderson for arranging the worship service and to Stephen Newby for his leadership. It is great to begin our year in worship.

If I can judge the state of the university by the spirit and energy in this room, we are indeed in great shape for the year ahead. I love it. I love this moment of opening.

I was telling the student leaders on Sunday that the opening of the year is like that first sip of a Starbucks latte in the morning. Don't you think? I've been walking early in the morning in the downtown streets and end up at my favorite Starbucks. On Saturday, as I headed back to the apartment with my latte in hand and my newspapers tucked under my arm, with the fresh, fall air all around—I took that first sip, and I thought, oh, yes, this is good.

And that's the way I feel as we open the year. Perfect beginnings. Things might get cold and stale later on, but this is perfect. By the way, I hear there is a group of student leaders who are calling themselves the "first sips."

**There are so many people to thank for bringing us to this moment:** I think about our communications and admissions and financial aid folks for recruiting our students; I think about our plant and facilities and landscape folks for getting the campus ready; our faculty and staff who have advised and registered our incoming students; our faculty for earnestly preparing the learning venture for our students; our Res Life and Student Life folks who have planned our orientation; our student leaders who have planned and led the student leadership conference. I think about the President's Cabinet for all of their planning and preparation and leadership.

Wow, what great and caring and competent folks you are. Thank you for all you are doing.

I would like also to acknowledge members of our Board of Trustees who are with us today. What an outstanding group of people we now have on our board. Gary Ames is our new board chair, and I am delighted to be opening this new chapter with him.

I would also like to recognize my wife Sharon, who partners with me every step of the way.

**Tomorrow night I will address some 870 new students and another 1,000 or so parents and family members.** This is a big moment in their lives and it is a big moment in the life of our community.

I am a firm believer that any organization makes a promise about what it has to deliver. We are making a promise to these students and to their parents and families about what we have to offer. Jiffy Lube says quite boldly they are not in the business to change the world; that's not their promise. They just want to change your oil.

Here's the promise I think we make: we have a story to share, a story of what is true and good and beautiful. To our students. In our community. To the world. And as we do that we believe we can change the world! That's our big promise.

And everyone of you in this room is part of delivering on that promise. Thank you. Thank you for your part, each one of you, for the role you play in our work, this grand venture of changing the world with good news.

**Let me tell you how I might characterize the current state of the university.** I want to tell a story. But Sharon tells me I better do some quick education first. In order to understand this story you need to know what a birdie is, a par, a bogie? I was surprised to learn that Sharon didn't have a clue. Nor did she care.

In any case, I was playing golf with my boys this summer. We've got this annual tradition for a three-day weekend of golf together. Just the guys (for the most part). We were in Sun River, Oregon this year. Some great country and great golf. What a thrill to be playing with my boys.

Now, our son Mark is one of the most intense guys I have every known. He's intense about everything: his career and scholarship, his marriage, about golf. He's just wonderful, and I love him for it. I was telling this story to Marj Johnson when I got back, about how intense Mark is, and she said "I wonder where he gets that." In any case, Mark was being especially intense in one of our golf rounds, and he wasn't playing very well. Every swing he would make, he had some negative thing to say about it. He was very grumpy.

And then Mark sunk a birdie, and Todd, our youngest son, said to Mark, "if I hear you say anything negative after that birdie, I'm going to kick you in the rear." Except he didn't say "rear." With masterful humor and yet blunt confrontation, Todd completely changed the tone of the rest of our round. Mark got the point.

For this State of the University, I want you to know we are making some birdies, folks. And we must celebrate those birdies. We have a few bogies here and there, and we are working hard on those. And we'll take all of the pars we can get. The birdies are the places where we assert our distinctiveness, where we define what it means to be a premier, national Christian university. And this positive posture is how we define and distinguish ourselves.

**Let me tell you some things I am encouraged about.**

- I am encouraged by the amazing amount of creative work going on among our faculty. I am truly amazed and excited. Our faculty are winning grants and receiving national recognition all over the place. And they are teaching with excellence.
- I am encouraged that we are connecting with a huge number of new partners, people capable of supporting us in new ways. Cultivating the next generation of partners is a task high among my priorities and goals in the years ahead. And we are making progress.
- I am encouraged by the quality of our students. In my meetings with the ASSP officers and the Centurion leadership and the PAs and all the student leaders—listen, we've got the greatest students in the world. We had an undergraduate applicant pool that went right off the charts: an 80% admit rate (down from 98% ten years ago). We have more men in this class and more ethnic minority students. Our graduation rate made a six-point jump and comes in now at 67%. We have an exciting bunch of students. We are healthy and our students understand this.
- I am encouraged that our endowment broke \$40 million this summer (in fact it is at \$41 million). This comes from new gifts and outstanding investment management. We are now managing over \$70 million in our Foundation. All of this represents great gains, but there is a huge amount of work to do. This is both a birdie and a bogie.

- We will be featured in an upcoming special report in the Washington CEO. We are announcing there that we have received some \$9.5 million in gifts over the last six months or so. This is very encouraging to me.
- By the way, the GNAC Commissioner wrote me yesterday to commend Tom Box, our coaches, and athletes: we currently have four of our athletic teams nationally ranked. We also won the All Sports #1 Championship in the GNAC last year and the All Sports Academic Award. Talk about premier, national Christian university athletics—we've got it. We are on the map nationally in athletics.
- I might also mention we had a 100% acceptance and placement rate for our pre-med students getting into medical school. This is huge.
- I am encouraged that we have some new energy and new success with our graduate programs. Two programs in Org Psych and our MFA are going great. Overall enrollment for grad programs is just above goal. And we will receive our APA accreditation site visit this fall for our doctoral psych program.

These are some of the things we are accomplishing together.

**But let me frame these specific accomplishments, and so many more, by talking about where I think we stand overall.** We have the 2014 *Blueprint For Excellence* in place. As you know I am a big planner. I believe we are an effective planning institution. I think we always need a map to guide our way.

By the way, Les Steele and Cindy Price are giving such great leadership for our ten-year, primary accreditation self-study and site visit that will happen in April. I commend them for this fine work. I believe we can have a whole lot of confidence about this study because we are a planning institution, and we have worked hard to evaluate and assess what we promise.

In any case, our vision language is in place. Our mission is clear and defined. Our Christian identity is clear and unquestioned. Our Statement of Faith is one of the finest I have seen anywhere. Our strategies are in place, some thirteen blueprint breakout strategies that are being completed each step of the way. All of this has taken an enormous amount of work, and it is finished.

But here is where we stand: we are now in the stage of implementation, a phase of what is sometimes called execution. Our work is getting very concrete. We are building the strategies to enact the blueprint. We are launching concrete initiatives all across the campus right out of our blueprint. And this is a great position to be in.

**Let me say a word about the Signatures.** One of the exciting pieces of the blueprint is our effort to sketch out our signature commitments. We are trying to take a deeper cut at our identity and direction for the future. What does it mean to go about engaging the culture and changing the world? How do we go about such a huge task? How do we keep from letting that vision become a cliché? What are our distinctive commitments?

I felt we needed to define clearly our signature commitments, and these signatures have become extremely meaningful to me to guide our thinking and our work. There are five of them. Think about them with me. Own them. Let them guide your work. Find your place in these signatures.

- We will be a place that knows and understands what's going on in the world (by the way, Bethany Krumm has taken the initiative to bring newspapers to our campus, and I am partnering with her on that);
- We will be a place that embraces the Christian story, becoming biblically and theologically educated;
- We will be a place that masters the tools of rigorous learning, becoming a vibrant intellectual community;

- We will be a place that models grace-filled community and practices radical reconciliation; and
- We will be a place that graduates people of competence and character equipped to change the world.

Each one of these has such rich and resonant meaning. Put them all together with our vision and mission and you define distinctively what Seattle Pacific is all about.

Think with me as we sharpen our focus around these central commitments.

**So, let me tell you some things that are on the table—concrete initiatives and strategies—all of which emerge right out of the signatures. This is the Blueprint in action.**

- Science and learning. Our faculty in science and education are placing us on the cutting edge of understanding how we learn science. In conjunction with our Advancement team, our faculty have received and applied for some \$7.6 million in grants for this work from places like NSF, Boeing, and Murdock. There is a vision here that will place us on the cutting edge nationally.
- Shaping the Campaign. As of January 1, 2006, we have essentially launched a new Campaign. We are hard at work to define very clearly the outlines, the team of support, the goals, the timeline in the year ahead. But count on it: we are in the very quiet phase of that campaign. Right now I have set the sights very high, and we are trying to gauge what the targets should be. Part of my work in the coming year will be to cultivate the next generation of partners. This is hugely important for our future.
- Reconciliation. I am so encouraged by the momentum in the work of the Perkins Center. When we launched the work on reconciliation, we said we are in this for the long haul, and I am hugely encouraged by our progress. Tali Hairston and so many others across campus are giving great leadership on reconciliation. By the way, two ideas I would like to get out there: I would like to see our gospel choir become the best in the country of any college or university. I have challenged Dante and Steven and Tali to recruit with me 50% of the choir from African American church choirs. Can you imagine? I also have a dream to film a documentary of our beloved partner in reconciliation, Dr. John Perkins, to capture something of his legacy. I have already talked to a foundation about support of this project.
- Facility plan. I want to bring the final contours of a new facilities plan to the Board of Trustees at the November meeting. I have asked us to focus on three major projects in the near future. We will be talking with the campus community on all of this in the coming months.
- Chapel/Performance Hall. As part of that facilities plan, and a significant piece of our commitment to embrace the Christian story and become a vibrant intellectual community, I will be leading fresh new efforts on the Chapel/Performance Hall. This is a huge dream of mine. I envision this as a grand, gathering center for our work. Completely driven by the signatures. I will be announcing a very significant lead gift on this grand project in the coming months. Stay tuned.
- Our national strategy. We continue the exciting work of positioning and recruiting and fundraising for Seattle Pacific and our vision on a national level. We want to build a team, a network of real players, in regional, urban pockets. You will see some of that emerge in the days ahead with ad campaigns in Christianity Today and elsewhere. You may have noticed our *ETC* magazine, truly a ground-breaking approach to recruit our next students nationally. We are moving forward on a target cities strategy, with focus for the year ahead in Portland and Phoenix.

**In all of this, I have three questions, three themes, I would like to put on the table for the year ahead. Again these are guided by the signatures. Again, these are**

**very concrete efforts.**

- **First, how can we learn to gather as a community more effectively?** I will try to make the case in the days ahead that we need to gather in order to become a vibrant intellectual community. Christian community formation must be one of our concrete strategies. We are trying to shape something very new this year.

And what an incredibly rich schedule we have ahead as a community. The President's Symposia: with Richard Hays and George Weigel. The Day of Common Learning with Joel Carpenter on "Becoming Globally Educated." The Downtown Business Breakfast. John Perkins on reconciliation. Rob Wall on the biblical text. Susan Gallagher on teaching the text. Stephen Newby will be guiding our worship together. Laura Jones, our 90 year-old Chinese alumna of the year.

I have been working with Marj Johnson, Tami Anderson and the Campus Ministries team, and a task force of students, faculty, and staff. We are making great progress. We have shortened the number of big, office-closing events and focused them. We have looked hard at the chapel programs and have asked our faculty to teach us as a community. We have asked Stephen Newby to join with our students and our Campus Ministries team to give even more guidance for our worship experiences.

Look, I don't have time to go to chapel either. But I'm going to try to attend as much as I can. Join me in these gatherings. This is a year of experimentation, a year of learning how best to do all of this. I would like to hear from you.

- **Second, how can we be more intentional about what it means to be global in our understanding of education at Seattle Pacific?** We must increase and intensify our focus on the whole world. Engaging with culture, changing the world, we say. What does the world mean to us in our day? How has global education changed in the last five years? This is an aspiration to bring the light of the gospel into the whole world. To serve the emerging, global church.

Two weeks ago Karen received a call from the office of the Secretary of Education in Washington, D. C. Secretary Margaret Spellings is asking if I would join ten to fifteen other university presidents from across the country to form a high-level delegation to Japan, South Korea, and China to establish ties with leaders in higher education, business, and government. I have no idea how I got on the invitation last January to go to D. C., at the request of the Secretary of State, to join one hundred presidents. And I have no idea how I get on this list, but this trip is a real honor, and I have accepted gladly and enthusiastically.

All arrangements and expenses will be handled by our consulates and embassies in these countries. I will be traveling in November, and before then I will be gathering various groups around campus to discuss our own commitments at globalization.

I would like to lift up this question for our campus. How can we sharpen our focus, our intentionality, our sense of purpose and identity on this question of globalization? I don't know where this is going, but I feel an urgency to get this issue on the table.

- **Third, how can we place the biblical text at the center of who we are?** I have been thinking long and hard that every university claims a story of what is true and good and beautiful. Even if the claim is that no story lays claim to the truth,

that is a story. We have an astounding story to share. It is the Christian story. It is the good-news of Jesus Christ.

The Christian story is anchored in the biblical text. We need to know even better how to read that text. We need to develop effective theological tools.

I don't know where we are going with this initiative either, but I think this is very significant work. I have been working closely with Les Steele, Rob Wall, Rick Steele, and Bob Drov Dahl from the School of Theology. Marj and I have been working with the team in the Office of Campus Ministries. I am in conversation with a foundation for a \$1 million plus grant to launch our efforts. We want to host a major, national summer conference with Christian Smith and others on biblical illiteracy. Most of all we want to focus on our own campus: how can we all, faculty, staff, students, alums, trustees, become even more biblically and theologically educated.

I would like to see us on the cutting edge of how to place the biblical text at the center of who we are as a university.

Trust me here. I am not trying to make us into some outmoded model of a Bible college. I am a university president, not a pastor. We are a university, not a church. But if we have a story to share, and we do, then the biblical text must be in the center of who we are.

Stay tuned.

**Let me finish with this.** Romans 12 is a guiding text for me for the coming year. I will be speaking on this text in our Opening Convocation trying to lay out some of the philosophical and theological foundations for all of the efforts I have been talking about.

But listen to this language, and reflect with me as we move into this year: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by (because of) the mercies of God, to present your bodies (your whole selves) as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual (reasonable) worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."

But then Paul immediately lays out some of the requirements of "being transformed." He says "don't think too highly of yourselves." Everyone has a gift to bring to the table. Everyone in this room has a gift to bring to the enterprise. Let us honor and develop the gifts we have been given and rejoice in the gifts of others.

Come together in Christian community. Live in agreement, he says. Let hope keep you joyful.

This is the way to renew your minds. This is the way to be transformed. This is the way to change the world!

I think if we can be a community like this, and be leaders in just this kind of way, not thinking too much of ourselves, but being transformed constantly by the renewing of our minds, opening ourselves fully and wholly to God, I think we can be a university that will change the world. That's our promise. That's the story we have to offer our students, our community, and the world.

**May God bless each one of you as you begin the year ahead. Oh, it's like that first sip of the latte, isn't it? This is good.**

