

UNIVERSITY CONVOCATION — SEPTEMBER 10, 2004

The following is an excerpt of the remarks delivered by University President Rev. Scott R. Pilarz, S.J., at the University Convocation held Sept. 10, 2004, in the McDade Center for Literary and Performing Arts.

Strategic Plan/Five Immediate Initiatives

Looking to the future, in this coming year, we will develop a plan for 2005 to 2010. Our process will engage faculty, staff, students, alumni, trustees and even the local community through our Board of Regents.

In short, we will be calling on you to weigh in on the themes and goals that will inspire our united efforts over the next five years. We welcome and need your feedback. While the planning process unfolds, our days and works as a University will also be shaped by the efforts of the task forces on assessment, diversity and education for justice, which is currently focusing on the issue of sustainability. Nevertheless, I want to draw our attention to making progress on five fronts:

- improving the quality of our common life;
- strengthening our Jesuit and Catholic identity;
- creating and sustaining centers of excellence;
- keeping a Scranton education affordable; and
- ensuring that the University remains an active partner in Scranton and northeastern Pennsylvania.

1. Improving the quality of our common life

We will respond deliberately to the climate study and to the recommendations from our consultants IEC Enterprises. Let me be specific.

- In the coming year, I will appoint a Steering Committee to help us set in motion a “clear, specific, and time phased plan” to address the findings in the document.
- Our Treasurer, David Christiansen, has already contracted with IEC to conduct independent follow-up surveys on two areas that fall within his division: Maintenance and Public Safety and Human Resources. These were two of the most frequently cited areas of concern from the study.
- At the same time, you can expect me to call on us all to take seriously the key priority from the study. I do not want us to lose sight of what the University is doing well and that we celebrate “...the many positive cultural attributes that the University can continue to leverage in this change process.”
- As well, we will continue the planning process for a new campus center. As you may remember, we long ago identified the need to pursue this project. We have not done so up to now for one simple reason about which I will say more in a few minutes. We need to have sufficient resources to do the job right. Last year, I shared with the campus governance bodies some ideas about where we might build a campus center. These ideas were suggested to us by architects and engineers. In the coming year, we will need to make our plans more concrete so that we can further enhance our ongoing efforts to seek external funding for this project.
- We will also actively recruit a diverse faculty, staff, and student body. Given the University’s immediate focus on diversity, I have asked Jo Ann Usry, Director of the Office of Equity and Diversity, to join the Administrators’ Conference this year. We can point to clear success in our efforts to recruit students of color, rising from 5.4% to 10.6% in the last four years. We need to complement these gains in our recruitment of faculty and staff.

2. Strengthening our Catholic and Jesuit Identity

In terms of strengthening our Jesuit and Catholic identity we welcomed Sister Bernadette Duross to our community this summer. Actually we welcomed her back because she is an alumna. She comes to us from the Jesuit Center for Spiritual Reflection at Wernersville. She brings expertise on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius and spiritual direction. Her efforts to help faculty and staff gain in their understanding of and appreciation for Ignatian spirituality will succeed those of the Center for Mission Reflection.

Our Trustees are leading the way on this front. In September, the Board will hold a two-day retreat on Catholic and Jesuit identity. The Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities and Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities will facilitate our conversations.

This year, we will look for ways to celebrate our rich history, one that continues to be marked by excellent examples of lay collaboration. We will as well plan lectures and other events that highlight the richness of the Catholic intellectual tradition.

3. Creating and Sustaining Centers of Excellence

With regard to creating and sustaining centers of excellence in the coming year, we will, for example, begin focused planning for a new, state-of-the-art science center that is worthy of the outstanding teaching and collaborative research of our faculty in the sciences.

We will also try to increase our selectivity in admissions. Our incoming class is outstanding and drawn from the largest applicant and inquiry pools in our history. We have to try to keep these trends moving forward, and the movement will be incremental.

4. Keeping a Scranton Education Affordable

With regard to keeping a Scranton education affordable, this task is simple but never easy. Simply, we must grow our endowment and other revenue streams.

Ours is a history of educating the sons and daughters and working men and women (firemen, police officers and nurses). During my tenure, this University will remain open to qualified students of modest financial means.

5. Ensuring that the University remains an active partner in Scranton and northeastern Pennsylvania.

Finally, with regard to civic engagement, we must also recognize how our community intersects with the City and region that surrounds us. We will, therefore, bring new life to our efforts to be an active partner in revitalization efforts aimed at Scranton and all of Northeastern Pennsylvania. A vibrant downtown, city and region makes for a vibrant University, and vice versa. To this end, I hired Patrick Leahy as my Executive Assistant this summer. Patrick is a graduate of Georgetown University and holds an M.B.A. from Cornell. Pat is our primary liaison with elected officials here in Scranton, in Harrisburg and in Washington, D.C.

In the words of Margaret Wheatley, “there is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.” Over the course of the last year, you have told me how much you care about the areas I have just outlined. These aspirations are inspiring, and they are rooted and grounded in our mission. Let us begin.