UVU: Our Best Days Are Ahead

State of the University Address
Utah Valley University
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Ragan Theater

President Matthew S. Holland

Good afternoon. I would like to thank Ian for his introduction. It is an honor to work by his side. And, of course, the energy and quality of his contribution is daily mirrored around this campus by a legion of other administrators, professors, counselors, technicians, custodians and cooks, in short, by so many of you sitting in the audience today or listening to a later broadcast. To all of you who spend your days, and often your nights, giving it your all, I salute your every effort and share with you now what I believe is a candid but very justifiably hopeful assessment of this marvelous university and where it is headed, thanks in no small part to your service and intelligence.

Headlines

As many of you are aware, UVU has enjoyed a bit of coverage in the press over the past five months. Perhaps the earliest splash during this academic year was the recognition that UVU had become the state's largest public institution of higher education. We knew this was coming but, frankly, when I first arrived, I never would have predicted that it would happen this year. Now, as you have heard me say before, we are not interested in growth simply for the sake of claiming the title of being the largest. In fact, in the immediate years ahead we may not always be the largest as other high enrollment institutions continue to grow and we implement sound growth management policies like structured enrollment and earlier and firmer admission deadlines. This is to say nothing of the soft enrollment cap that grows each year as demand increasingly exceeds capacity in a world where additional state resources fail to keep pace with added student enrollment—a world I hope will change, in at least some degree, this year.

That said, I do think there is something quite celebratory in the student population milestone we reached this year. A hint may be seen in this caption from the Tribune article, “The state’s college enrollment gains are tapering off this year, but students continue to flock to Utah Valley University in Orem, now the state’s largest student body.” The fact of the matter is, we have become a highly desirable destination school. The key question here is, why? Is it because of our spectacular setting? Is it because of our convenient, interconnected, and well-kept physical facilities? Is it because of the dynamic growth of this whole region? All of those things play a role. But, they are just a start.

Central in all of this is something that was noted by the Daily Herald. As that paper put it, “UVU’s continued growth is a reflection of the institution’s increased attractiveness to students from a variety of backgrounds.” We’ve become very adept at delivering against a broad mission to draw in students looking for an excellent educational experience, whether that be in four-year, two-year, or certificate programs. And, again, this is happening because of you, all of the outstanding faculty and staff who are dedicated to continuous improvement of pedagogy, policy, curriculum, and student support and activity, helping students succeed in the broadest possible ways. Little wonder then that students are voting with their feet, coming here in droves, and staying here in greater proportions than they ever have, because you are electrifying their minds, giving them valuable and
demonstrable skills, and providing abundant opportunities for intellectual, professional, and social development.

While our growth is something to be recognized in such celebratory fashion, it must not go unremarked that our growth also stands as part of a very sobering picture about the state of higher education today.

What I am about to share will be a repeat for some, especially for those folks who sit on our various administrative and university councils. But, I believe the subject is central enough that it must be shared to the broader university community, even at the risk of redundancy.

As I see it, this university sits in the vortex of a swirling set of forces, some felt by universities everywhere including UVU, others felt at UVU and perhaps a few other schools in a particularly acute way.

The first force is growth. UVU currently sits in one of the fastest growing counties of one of the fastest growing states in the nation. As the service provider of higher education in this region, this is putting, and will continue to put, immense pressure on the delivery capacity of this institution. And, the challenge here is not just raw numbers. As Dr. Pam Perlich demonstrated in her brilliant presentation at one of our recent Faculty Convocations, Utah is set to grow through more than the natural, geometric expansion of existing populations. It is, every year, attracting and producing more and more people with dramatically varying backgrounds, languages, and levels of economic and educational support. Ensuring access to higher education for this expanding, and increasingly heterogeneous, citizenry will be absolutely vital to virtually every indicator we have of civic, physical, and economic well-being. Heavy responsibilities rest here on all of our public institutions of higher learning, and especially those like UVU with a formal mission of growth and access.

The second force only adds to the challenge of the first. The challenge here is that as we move forward it will not be enough to simply meet the growth patterns we are facing with traditional levels of success in attracting and graduating students. Another cold, sober fact is that in the increasingly complex and globalized world in which we live, more students than ever before need to attend and complete some form of post-secondary education. Long gone are the days when a high school degree was generally sufficient for navigating civic life and opened enough doors for enough people to pursue a sustainable livelihood. In summary, what forces one and two suggest are that more students are coming our way than ever before, and we need to get an even higher percentage of that more populous advance. To be more specific, political leaders left and right, and reputable studies from top notch universities and educational foundations, all largely agree that a state like Utah must move from 39% of adults with some form of college completion, to 66%.

The third force is that in the midst of this growth and intensifying need for the competencies that come with a successful higher education experience, we are suffering through one of the longest periods of alternating economic contraction and sluggishness in recent memory. Put another way, just when higher education is facing one of its times of greatest need for additional money, there is less money to go around. How long this will last, I cannot say. Few, I think, expected our economic doldrums to last as long and be as severe as they have been. With gridlock in Washington, and debt crises still raging in Europe, we probably do ourselves no favor to believe this will all change dramatically in the immediate future.

At the risk of piling on, I mention force four—a force that only exacerbates the challenges of force three, and has the potential to completely undo any progress we may make once force three reverses and the economy reinvigorates. I speak here of the growth of entitlement programs—Medicaid in particular. I do so recognizing that reasonable people can reasonably disagree about the ethical, political and economic merits of existing entitlement programs. My point here is not to weigh in for or against those programs. But, I must note the bald, empirical fact that each year growing mandated entitlement expenditures—especially those connected to rising health care
costs—are taking up greater and greater percentages of states’ general funds which stand as the primary source of education funding in this country. Certainly that is the case in Utah.

The fifth force I consider something of a wildcard. It is the sweeping rise of technology. I consider this force a wildcard because it cuts in so many directions. Martin Heidegger—considered by some the towering intellectual of the 20th century—summed up his own extensive considerations on technology (a concept he imbued with far more meaning than I can give it here) with this bit of older, German poetry:

"But where danger is, grows
The saving power also."

At some level technology offers, and we must accept, a saving hand. Its ability to extend the capacity and reach of our increasingly limited physical infrastructure, its ability to provide the needed flexibility for so many of our students who work or are raising children, its ability to break down high and historic barriers of access to content all bespeak the need to actively, even aggressively, push forward with development of technology enhanced and delivered courses and services. Having said that, we must recognize that technology is neither cheap, nor is it, as some would claim, a morally neutral essence whose goodness or badness simply rests in the intentions and uses of its handler. Its sweeping use unavoidably changes our relationship with the natural world around us, and our relationships with one another. For education, first erected and sustained now through millennia on the very human relationship between a teacher and student, this should give us great pause in believing that technology is a uniformly positive force for the advancement of higher education and student success.

So, why do I bring all of this forward today? My goal is not to depress. But, of all organizations, certainly an organization like a university—dedicated among other things, and in different ways, to clear understandings of the world around us—we must be intellectually honest about the realities we are facing. Only if we do this can we start to think our way forward with intelligence and prudence. So, my primary objective in sharing these thoughts is to invite a broader university dialogue and reflection on these topics. Are these forces truly the main five forces? Are there others? Have any of these forces and their effects been overstated? How should we respond to these five forces as we move ahead constantly aiming to deliver on our mission with increasing excellence?

I think both formal and informal discussions across this campus on these questions would be a helpful thing and so I invite such. I will say that it is my studied conviction that at least these five forces are at work and leave us in what many people are calling the “new normal”—a set of conditions not likely to reverse anytime soon. Yes, times are daunting indeed. But, I also add, with equal conviction, that this is not a cause for despair. To the contrary, I am convinced that UVU’s best days are ahead—a phrase that serves as the title of my remarks this afternoon. Whatever educational and public good we have accomplished and professional enjoyment we have found in accomplishing it, I genuinely believe—and have good reasons to believe—is just a glimpse of what we will experience in the future.

First, our mission is better suited to the times than any public institution I know. When you look at the five forces facing all of higher education, the stark need is for greater levels of access and quality while controlling costs. Perhaps always, but certainly for the last twenty years or so, this institution has, each year, been rapidly expanding its student body while building up an increasingly robust academic environment and doing so with relatively low levels of tuition of state support. This is not to suggest that the funding models that have served us adequately in the past—

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particularly the most recent past—will suffice for the future. They will not. But, it is to say that we are long practiced in general habits that many other institutions around the nation may have to learn from scratch in order to survive.

If we turn to another set of recent headlines, those that came out in response to the announcement of our Structured Enrollment approach to admissions, we see additional reason for optimism about our future. As you know, Structured Enrollment came out of the work generated by a white paper exercise that wrestled with our need to advance the aims and values of a serious university operation while maintaining an inclusive outreach to students generally served by a community college function that was genesis of this institution. While no program can ever hope to garner unanimous support, internally or externally, the general response to this move has been highly favorable. The Daily Herald stated, “UVU deserves Utah’s Support” and then outlined the need for our unique approach: “Utah Valley University is working to maintain a delicate balancing act that has made it such a vital resource for our area.” The Salt Lake Tribune even opined that structured enrollment was a “good plan,” one that “makes sense for all Utah’s open-enrollment colleges and universities.” From informed education watchers all across the state, in the media, legislature, board of Regents, Commissioner’s office, and student leadership groups, our move to maintain open admissions while implementing new enrollment standards has been eminently well received. Even our K-12 partners have enthusiastically endorsed our efforts to communicate the need for greater academic preparation while still providing an access point for those who may need a second chance. Perhaps even more significant than the general enthusiasm of all of these groups for the specifics of our Structured Enrollment program, was their approbation of the more general fact that UVU was simultaneously looking to raise the academic quality of the institution, without shedding open access and a robust commitment to certificate programs and two-year degrees.

At this point, I do need to express my appreciation to the structured enrollment implementation task force, as well as all others who have been working around the clock to make sure that we are ready this fall in terms of advisement, course offerings, marketing, programming, admissions, etc. As I have said before, repeatedly, what we are doing is not an easy thing. But, it does appear to be the right thing to do right now, and so to all who are working through the kinks and putting in so much effort, I extend my most sincere thanks for your service. Please note that in addition to these changes associated with structured enrollment, we have been marketing our new admissions deadline of August 1. Among other things, we anticipate that this move will give faculty and staff more time and information to prepare adequately for an effective and rigorous start of the fall semester. We are also currently revising our registration payment (or purge) process in order to make sure students who really are not intent on taking course do not end up effectively occupying a seat that could be filled with a student who is.

Other initiatives related to advancing our unique educational mission include the hiring of a director of evening and weekend course delivery, as well as a director of summer school offerings. We are in the process of hiring a new Assistant Vice President for Community College Programing.

We recently conducted a community survey to assess the perception of UVU and just recently got back the results which we have started sharing in various campus councils and which our marketing department is scouring, along with other inputs, to make some recommendations about future marketing strategies.

Discussions regarding academic programs and faculty credentialing are currently under extensive discussion in the faculty senate and academic affairs council where critical issues are being raised and carefully considered.

After successfully making a number of personnel changes, our Distance Education department took up the challenge of the whitepaper this last year to be part of the solution to some of our key access issues (like too few classrooms and the need for more flexible course offerings)
and dramatically increased our delivery of technology-based instruction. Just this last year alone, UVU increased from 16.5% to 19.6% in the percentage of total FTE instruction. Most of that growth came in bottleneck courses, or in the development of hybrid courses, which, at my urging, is the primary focus of online development right now. While hybrid courses still require the use of a bricks and mortar classroom, they do not require the full use of the classroom. What this allows for is for two separate courses, even those in entirely different fields, to share—or ‘hot bunk’ as Dan Clark and his team like to call it—the same room during the same time block of the same semester. This last year, of the 65 developed hybrid courses, 48 were hot-bunked which effectively opened up 24 additional classroom spaces. But this is not the only argument in favor of hybrid courses. In what stands as the largest and most thoroughgoing study of student learning in different delivery formats—a study conducted relatively recently by the Department of Education—the differences in student learning between pure online and pure face-to-face were negligible. The one delivery format with a demonstrable uptick in student learning was the hybrid course. Finally, apropos to earlier and briefly sketched concerns about the nature of technology, the hybrid course helps us take advantage of online efficiencies and flexibility without surrendering the magic and inspiration of the human, teacher-to-student experience, as well as the specific pedagogical needs of some disciplines where online learning cannot possibly measure up at times. In this spirit, I would give encouragement to any faculty member with even a remote interest to go up to Distance Education and check out DE’s Innovation Center and see the remarkable support you might receive if you want to participate in this important initiative.

Again, a significant part of the power of all of these innovations is not only do they help address the immediate issues facing us, they engender tremendous public support—another reason for my great optimism moving forward. We continue to face up-hill battles in the legislature as we compete for ever-scarce resources. But, I have to say that I believe our relentless effort to tell our story—which includes not only a just complaint about a relative lack of funding, but a glowing commitment to do everything in our power to address our challenges with as much creative thought and energy as possible—is paying off.

On Monday, I made a report to the Higher Ed. Appropriations Committee. As I did so, outlining our Unique Educational Mission innovations and efforts to maximize our space on campus—I confess that I felt a great swelter of pride in you staff and faculty who are doing so much to make these things work. I will also note that upon getting the report of all that you are doing, legislator after legislator, many of them outside of our service region, commented in public and in private about how impressed they are with what you are accomplishing. No doubt this growing note of approval is playing into the warmest reception I have experienced yet in terms of our plea to do something about resource inequities in the system.

In this same presentation, I carefully laid out the findings of two recent studies. One came in response to legislation passed last year calling upon the Utah System of Higher Education to conduct a study about inequities in base budget funding for the colleges and universities. This study, conducted by an objective, nationally reputable operation—NCHMES, or the National Center for Higher Education Management—came in and studied equity in funding across two dimensions: one was how funding for each of the Utah institutions compares with the average, or rather the “median”, of funding of their national peers, the other dimension was how each Utah institution compares with other Utah institutions in terms of what percentage of their budget comes from the state. What the study shows—this came as no surprise to us—is that UVU was the lowest on both dimensions. As a result of this report, and other efforts, the Regents and Commissioner’s Office have for the first time ever, I believe, come forward with a line item in their proposed budget for some equity enhancements. Of course, this decision is in the hands of the legislature and we must keep in mind that available monies for Higher Ed, while looking like they might be in the black for
the first time in several years, are still rather sparse right now and being spoken for along multiple fronts. So, we still have our work cut out for us. Thus, we do call upon our legislative leaders—as our able trustees did in a public letter published last week in the major papers—to do whatever they possibly can do this year, as the first of a multi-year commitment to redressing UVU’s inequities relative to its state and national peers.

Last Friday I also made a hard pitch for a 250,000 square foot classroom building. This request was buttressed by another study, a space study, commissioned by the Utah System of Higher Education. Here again, and without surprise, UVU showed up as having the lowest square footage per FTE student as any institution of higher ed. in the state. Our ability to demonstrate not only tremendous need, but also a creative and energetic effort to maximize existing resources (can anyone say faculty offices built into hallways?) is turning heads, especially with our state legislators and building board who currently have us #3 on the priority list, one notch higher than we stand on the Regents’ list. However, even more so than base funding, the challenge here is available monies. Given the bond ceiling the state has hit, and the very limited amount of one-time monies available as of this day, it does not appear any major outlay will be made for any capital facilities project this year. We thus all eagerly await February budget estimates which will finally signal just how much margin, if any, the state will have this year for such investments. Meanwhile with the arguments of fairness, immediate need, and scales of efficiency, on our side, we will continue to make our case long and loud.

What this discussion masks so far is that my highest and most emotion-filled plea with state leaders right now, in virtually any setting, private and public, is for compensation increases for all of you. For three years you have toiled without any cost of living adjustment, and this during a time frame where we have taken on 1000’s of additional students and many of you have seen support needed to do your jobs cut back through budget reductions. You have made up the difference often in late nights, early mornings, and endlessly creative solutions. This is why earlier this year when it appeared the Presidents were going to be given a pay raise, I could not in good conscience accept such, and committed to pouring any such raise into a scholarship. For the record, I did not get the raise but still established a scholarship. As hard as times are, I believe we all need to give back something to help, especially if it directly helps our students. In any case, on this topic, just know this, that I have and will bend any ear, run any risk, and pound any lectern I have to in order to convey that if there is a cost of living adjustment deserved for any state employee it is nowhere more deserved than for the employees of Utah Valley University.

As surely you can see, it remains a challenging time. There is no getting around that. But our mission, our inventiveness, our tenacity, our size, and the justness of our cause all betoken in complementing ways a most promising future. I also find immense cause for institutional optimism when I see what we are currently accomplishing right now, even in the face of the five forces.

Engaged

In 2007, Utah Valley University was honored with designation as a Carnegie Foundation “Community Engaged Institution.” Over these past four-plus years, UVU has vigorously sought partnerships, service opportunities, and other collaborative ventures to fulfill the university’s mission to serve as effective community stewards. Thanks to the hard work of many talented and dedicated colleagues, we have made tremendous strides toward expanding opportunities for our students to develop their skills and abilities in preparation for lives of labor, service, and civic participation. As many here know, in 2009 we developed a Business Engagement Strategy designed to respond to the needs of local business and industry. In consultation with regional leaders, the university developed seven initiatives to more effectively respond to the changing demands of the local
economy. These efforts have been a major focus of my administration and I am very pleased with the progress in each of these areas.

A few weeks ago, we hosted Governor Herbert and more than 150 area business, government, education and community leaders at the ribbon cutting of our new Business Resource Center. Under the direction of Associate Vice President Steve Roy, UVU's Business Resource Center will serve as a one-stop-shop for student, faculty, and community entrepreneurs in our service region. Furthermore, as a large and dynamic business incubator, the center will spur Utah’s economic and business development by helping to create new enterprises, grow existing companies and produce new jobs—all of which will, among other things, expand the tax base so vital to higher educations funding.

The BRC will also house many of the programs and initiatives connected to the University’s business engagement strategy which led to the creation of a technology commercialization office where at least four new patents for marketable technologies have already been filed with the pipeline filling rapidly. Following that strategy, UVU has also hired a new director of its Entrepreneurial Institute (Shawna Theobald), is leading the state in its K-16 collaboration efforts for more rigor in the public schools, has been the convening institution for the Utah Cluster Acceleration Partnership in digital media, initiated a university-side China initiative with development of new academic programs and a major doing Business with China conference, and continues its dialogue with members of the business strategy group and the larger business community.

With respect to the engaged arm of our mission, we also recognize the vital role of the university in the civic well being of our region. To be truly engaged with our community, the university must provide opportunities to connect with the social fabric in a variety of ways. This includes partnerships with, and participation in, humanitarian, non-profit, governmental, and other related activities. To this end, the university has developed a comprehensive Civic Engagement Strategy. As a companion to the Business Engagement Strategy, the Civic Engagement Strategy will round out activities related to our institutional mission and provide opportunities for innovation and collaboration heretofore not seen in our region. In addition to pursuing our vital role as a convening force for civic dialogue, the university is seeking out ways to utilize our considerable strength as an institution to address specific issues and challenges to our region.

With this in mind, I am pleased to announce the University Project for Civic Engagement. As the flagship program of the Civic Engagement Strategy, the University Project is designed to marshal the resources of the university to identify, study, and provide concrete solutions to specific challenges facing our service region. After some months of deliberation in cabinet, the executive leadership council, and our community council, we have identified literacy and numeracy as the focus of this multi-year effort. With a strong K-16 Alliance, and with literacy programs already underway at the university, this is an area in which greater focus will have an immediate impact. Literacy and numeracy are not only at the heart of the educational enterprise, but are essential skills for success in all walks of life. With more than 30% of Utah County third graders reading below grade level, and with declining scores in math and science, there is an urgent need to help prepare our young people to succeed in these basic skills.

In working toward this end, the university will collaborate with key community partners to identify concrete and achievable goals and facilitate the process by which these objectives can be achieved. Most notable among these is our partnership with the United Way, whose Every Day Learners project is already at work championing literacy in Utah County. With careful, targeted, and strategic thinking, the University Project will integrate engagement activities, align academic programming, cultivate unique partnerships, and provide a vital public service to our region.

The project will officially launch next academic year and a task force is being convened as we speak to identify additional partners and plan related activities. We invite your input on, and
participation in, this exciting and rewarding project. For more information, please refer to the handout being distributed here this afternoon.

Another major engagement initiative is the development of our Institute for Professional Engagement. This past Fall, we hired Sherry Harward as Director of the Institute. Among other things, Sherry has implemented Career Passport, a non-credit, non-graded, self-paced, cost-free program that assists UVU students in actively engaging in activities that will result in more informed major and career decisions and career and life preparation in an engaged learning environment. A small list of some of the activities that will be involved in this experience include career exploration, career excursions, personality and interest testing, networking events, career mentoring, job shadowing, mock interviews, internships, e-portfolio creation, experiential learning activities, etc.

Inclusive

Another core aspiration of this institution is that we create a highly inclusive environment encouraging participation in higher education by all people, classes and groups. Upon arriving to UVU, one of the first data points made known to me was the unusually low percentage of women entering higher education. In fact, I have mentioned before that Utah’s female participation rate of 44% is an inverse of the rest of the nation which sits at 56%. Compared to all 50 other states, Utah is dead last in terms of the percentage of female students enrolled in postsecondary institutions and Utah Valley University sits at the lowest of the low at 43%. Our own Dr. Susan Madsen, along with Susan Thackeray and Cheryl Hanowicz, was asked to take statewide leadership on research related to women in education. We have supported this effort at the institutional level in a myriad of ways. From this effort, it has become apparent that UVU is playing and will continue to play a vital statewide leadership role with regard to women and education. In line with that, I have been serving as the Presidential sponsor for the state-wide Utah Women in Higher Education Network, designed to create support, counsel and networking opportunities for women to participate in and pursue leadership opportunities within Higher Ed here in Utah.

Recognizing that formal postsecondary education is a critical foundation for Utah women of all ages to be able to fully develop themselves toward reaching their inherent potential whether they plan to work or not, we are making a concerted effort to support more women in entering and completing degrees here at UVU. Earlier this fall, we repurposed the Women’s Resource Center into the Women’s Success Center under the direction of Anne Wairepo. The Women’s Success Center still retains the earlier and critical mission of the Women’s Resource Center for women largely in crisis, but it now has the added mission to encourage women of all backgrounds to engage and complete academic programs that prepare them for meaningful lifework in their homes, workplaces, communities and beyond. Additionally, the Center’s advisory board will also make regular reports to me and the Cabinet about other considerations UVU should make concerning female faculty, staff and students.

One critical issue facing women as they pursue their education is the availability of day care. Historically, UVU’s Wee Care Center has been able to serve a little over 100 children. That is simply not enough for an institution of our size. Thus, I am pleased to announce that as one of two major fundraising efforts this year, I will be working closely with the Development and Alumni Division to actively pursue $1,000,000 plus of private funding to supplement a $450,000 investment by the university for a major expansion of the University’s Wee Care facility. Plans are currently under development to triple Wee Care’s capacity by constructing an entirely new facility at the same location, hopefully breaking ground for this before then end of the calendar year.

While on the subject of fundraising and student access, I will take a moment to recognize a milestone achievement reached just a few weeks ago. During 2010-2011, UVU reorganized and
expanded its development and alumni team and began enacting additional best practices in fundraising in order to meet ambitious new goals. Following the 2010 Scholarship Ball, I determined that one of our top priorities had to be a dramatic expansion of the amount of scholarship dollars available to support our rapidly growing student population. In typical years, we’ve raised roughly $200,000 in brand new scholarship gifts and pledges. So I knew the goal I chose to set for our Development and Alumni team was ambitious— to increase that by tenfold and raise $2 million in new scholarship gifts and pledges by the next Ball.

Thanks to the volunteerism, hard work and generosity of our faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends, our yearlong scholarship drive was a great success. At last fall’s Scholarship Ball, we announced that the University had in fact received more than $4,071,000 in new gifts and pledges, including many new multi-year gifts and repurposed endowments that provide a more stable funding stream for the University’s future. A $1 million multi-year challenge match from the Huntsman Foundation highlighted the evening. The success of the scholarship drive enabled a 30% increase in the number of scholarship awards able to be made to students in 2012. Because we now launch drives for other key initiatives, we will not be able to immediately repeat that grand total. But, it does allow the University to establish a higher baseline for scholarship fundraising and then systematically raise that bar even further in the years to come.

Serious

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, UVU has become a destination institution. A large part of that comes from the seriousness of purpose we demonstrate in creating and promoting an intellectual and learning climate that is rigorous, stimulating and supportive.

Over five years ago, UVU received a Title III Grant focused on improving retention with special attention to first year students. This past September, the grant expired but our commitment to retention, persistence, and graduation have remained a priority. Our efforts to improve the experience of our first year students have paid off. Over the past five years, UVU’s NCHEMS retention rate has increased from 41.4% to 65.5% or an increase of over 24%.

The academic quality and preparation of students entering UVU is also steadily improving. Over the past three years the percentage of incoming freshmen with a composite ACT score of 24 or higher has increased from 21.9% to 28.9%. Our metric for merit scholarships recently had to be reconfigured because of the sheer volume of high achieving students who are choosing UVU. Just last week, I attended a banquet where our leaders in student affairs hosted—and did so brilliantly I might add—136 sterling scholars and their parents to celebrate their academic success. Nearly every student I spoke to had either decided to attend UVU or was seriously considering it. These data signal an elevated perception of UVU’s quality and significance.

Around every corner, our institution is raising the bar. In a just a couple of months, we will have the privilege of cutting the ribbon on our brand new science building. This new, 160,000 square foot structure will house: 18 lecture classrooms, a 400-seat auditorium which will be used for classes and special events, 27 laboratory classroom, 12 student research laboratories, 18 prep rooms for labs and classes, 57 offices for faculty and staff, and some of the most cutting edge science lab equipment within the USHE system, including, and see if this sends shivers down your spine too, 12 autopsy tables. Those could come in handy once we are done with PBA this year. In any case, I cannot wait to watch our students and faculty engaged in scientific discovery in this new facility.

We also continue to make substantial progress on—and must make further progress on—our essential learning outcomes. UVU’s Essential Learning Outcomes (or ELOs) are aspirational university-wide outcomes adopted by President’s Council in 2011. They reflect the ELOs developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities as part of the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) initiative. Essential Learning Outcomes can be considered the pillars of a
solid, undergraduate, liberal education, which prepares the individual to be, among other things, a broadly informed, independent thinking, and actively responsible member of a free and democratic society. In UVU vernacular, our Essential Learning Outcomes are designed to develop in graduates the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to become professionally competent people of integrity who serve as stewards of place. I am grateful for the work in the General Education program which provides the organizational foundation for our ELOs.

Given the increasing importance of ELO’s for student learning and the accreditation process, I do call upon our GE council, and faculty in general, to support our efforts to further engrave the ELO’s into our curricular activities all across the university. Students experience a reinforcing and deepening of the UVU ELOs in their major programs where the faculty provide discipline specific learning experiences that build upon the foundation laid in the General Education learning experiences. Co-curricular and extra curricular programs likewise can contribute significantly to students' achievement of the ELOs. More work here remains.

I make this call in the spirit of a larger call for us to stay relentlessly focused on ways to improve student learning, which for me is at the heart of student success which is, in turn, the heart of our institutional mission. As noted, more and more students are coming better and better prepared. Are we rising up to the occasion to teach, counsel and mentor them in ways fully worthy of a first rate university? Are we watching carefully our spending priorities to make sure that what precious resources we have go as far as possible to make the undergraduate experience at UVU a spectacular one? As I have been out on the fundraising trail to places like San Francisco, New York, Boston, and Washington DC, I have been so delighted to discover our Wolverine graduates in top flight graduate and professional schools, at prominent law firms and investment banks, working in the arts and public education, and walking both sides of the aisle in the halls of power in our nation’s capital. We may not have a lot of such alumni now, but we have them, and every year we must produce more. We must, because so many of the students now walking through our doors have that kind of potential and deserve those opportunities, if they desire them. That is why this institution exists.

So, yes, in the spirit of maintaining our unique educational mission, we have developed and will continue to develop practices and policies that will ensure broad access to an array of certificate and two year programs. But right along with that must come our continual commitment to hire, train, and promote faculty, and build four year programs and surrounding activities that can give the brightest and best prepared students of this valley and beyond an exceptional educational experience—one that draws out their most excellent work and ability and equips them with the freshest insights and training of our various academic disciplines.

To this end, I announce my other fundraising priority for this year. Working with Marc Archambault, Ian Wilson and the Deans and the college fundraising officers, we will soon be launching a mini-campaign in support of Academic Excellence. This campaign, which will last at least a year, and perhaps longer, will be aimed at providing academic leaders with expanded resources to recruit and retain outstanding teaching faculty, add or improve teaching labs or other training facilities, and supplement programs that foster the delivery of outstanding education opportunities and student success. Our Deans and leadership in Academic Affairs are currently hammering out their lists of top strategic priorities. With support provided by the central development team, including myself and March Archambault when helpful, the Dean’s, in concert with their college development officer, will play a leading role in securing their top priority items in the overall Academic Excellence Drive. With exciting things like this in front of us, it is just another reason that I see that UVU’s best days are ahead.

Student Success
In conclusion, let me say that as President of this fine institution, I have the competing fortunes of receiving emails from both happy and not-so-happy students and parents. Naturally, the lion’s share of these letters concern those two most critical issues that stand in the way of our achieving university greatness: I speak of parking and a football team. I should note that I was appreciative of someone this year calling my attention to a new issue that may begin to eclipse in significance these other two issues. Here I speak of that glaring campus problem, one-ply toilet paper. Well, in the midst of this, I also get some very wonderful messages from students about their experiences working with so many of you. Allow me to share just a few:

Dear President,

You should be exceptionally proud of your school. Through the years I have both attended and applied to a handful of schools in pursuit of both my Bachelor’s and Master’s degree. I was recently accepted into a Master’s program at Arizona State University. Through my path however, there has been only one school that has stood out in every way. That school is Utah Valley University.

I have never experienced a more compassionate, inspiring and supportive staff. This is not limited to the professors, but in every department from Admissions, to Financial Aid, to Graduation. I will forever be loyal to UVU due to my experience in both my educational pursuit as well as my every encounter with UVU’s staff members. I am a proud graduate of your school and a true advocate of Utah Valley University’s mission and practices.

I would like to specifically recognize Dr. Steven Clark and academic adviser Tara Ivie for their support and encouragement.

Dear President Holland,

I want to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude for a few of the very best professors I have ever been involved with in my educational pursuits. Dr. Kristine Doty, Dr. Cameron John, Dr. Jack Jensen, and Dr. Anton Tolman have gone above and beyond to help me grow as a student and a person. Each professor, with only a days notice were more than willing to submit letters of recommendation on my behalf. They are all stand out educators and people. They are valuable additions UVU and the students that they teach. I have formally thanked each one of them for their efforts and example to me, but I still feel like that is not enough. My experience at UVU has exceeded my own expectations.

Dear President Holland,

My name is [withheld]. I am 51 years old and newly single. I graduated from high school 34 years ago and I am in the midst of my first college experience. Last summer I stepped onto the UVU campus for the first time. I was learning how to enroll for the Fall 2010 semester. The prospect was daunting. Many exceptionally kind and patient people at UVU helped me get started and continue to help me make the challenging transition from Stay-at-Home Mom to Student. As you might imagine, I have had many things to consider. For example, I have two teen-aged daughters at home, we are living with very little income and I have no health insurance. I want to tell you how much I appreciate having medical attention available to me at UVU. I am mentally and physically well as a rule, but this year I have faced emotional challenges that have been very difficult for me. A counselor at the school has been helping me with this. I have also benefitted recently from the care of campus physicians.
Let me end where I began. You are an extraordinary group. It is a delight and a privilege to serve you. We are fortunate to work at one of the most dynamic institutions engaged in one of the most lasting and important projects—passing on the torch of those things that make us most human, free and prosperous to bright and deserving next generation. What a thrill, then, that our best days are ahead of us.