Good morning everyone, and welcome back! I hope you all had an enjoyable and productive summer. I certainly did. In addition to whittling away on my to-do piles—piles that during the academic year stand somewhere between the Dubai Tower and the loft on Donald Trump’s comb-over—I made a most rewarding personal trip overseas. This was the fulfillment of a decade-long planned-and-saved-for trip for my parents and siblings and spouses to celebrate my parents’ 50th wedding anniversary. As part of these travels, and at my own expense, I was able to visit the Beit Lehi site in Israel where a number of our faculty and students in Engineering Graphics and Design Technology are officially partnering with Dr. Oren Gutfeld, the rising star of the archeology department of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, to uncover and record the data associated with the third largest archeological dig officially sponsored by the state of Israel—with artifacts and inscriptions stretching from 7th century B.C. to the Byzantine era. On a personal level, it was an utterly engrossing moment of historical and cultural wonder to tour the site. Yet, I must say that it was just as gratifying, if not more so, to listen to Dr. Gutfeld—a quite typical modern Israeli not given to false praise in the least—go on at length about the “truly extraordinary” (his phrase not mine) work being done by your colleagues, using machinery more sophisticated than anything currently existing in Israel, to digitally capture and analyze all of the physical dimensions of the excavated site to support the tide of scholarship that will come from this site. In the continuing flow—speaking of tides—of local, national and international evidence of the seriousness and quality of UVU’s academic pursuits, this was a real summer highlight.

In any case, the trip was fabulous, nearly flawless in fact. That was, until the very end, when, standing innocently with my parents in the Paris airport ready to head home after this ultimate, never-to-be-duplicated family bonding moment, my father suddenly announced: “when we get home, Matt and I are going on a diet.” I thought the comment was more than a little unfair, but I did quickly dispose of the full box of French pastries I was holding. Thanks for laughing. It makes me feel better about the cabinet and other university leaders who have now heard that story about seventeen times.

Well, here we are again, meeting on the cusp of what has become, for me, an annual highpoint of interest and emotion—the start of the academic year. I don’t know how it works for you but, for me, there are powerful mix of feelings that come to me this time each year, a mix I have experienced virtually every year of my life since I was six years old. Fortunately, in my adulthood, the balance between anxiety and excitement has decidedly shifted to more of the latter than the former. I am happy to report that long gone are the days when, on the first day of junior high I was forced by a jeering gaggle of 9th graders to push a penny up a handrail with my nose, and on the first day of high school I was forced into a locker by two hulking seniors who thought the new kid from up north was dressed just a little too pretty. To paraphrase my favorite female dictator, “don’t cry for me, Orem, Utah.” I did get over these things. As noted, these days I worry a lot less about such inauspicious starts to the school year. Of course, it helps now to be 6’ 4” and the President. That said, I confess that for the first week of school, I do have campus security shadowing Rushforth and Abbott.

Alternatively, the start of each school year does fill me with such excitement. Call me an educational nerd, but I get quite a buzz those first few days of school as the halls fill up with thousands of students, teaming with an energy, hope, and awe-struck wonder all their own. I sense the promise, as they do, of another year of new intellectual insights, practical discoveries and personal growth that will be nothing short of life changing. I eagerly anticipate a year of sterling accomplishment by you, the faculty, in your scholarly and creative pursuits that will make a difference in your disciplines, in the health and well-being of the community, and in the development of the students under your watch and care. And, finally, though not exhaustively, I feel the swelling motions of an invigorating resolve and sense of optimism about tackling the challenges associated with helping to lead Utah’s most dynamic institution of higher learning.

Organizational Changes
In that spirit, I wish to begin this morning by giving you an update of my efforts, providing a brief accounting of priorities both past and present, as well an update on changes in the senior staffing of the institution. After that, I have a few thoughts I wish to share about you, the faculty, and your role here on campus.

With respect to cabinet level changes, you should be aware that in June, I announced that Vice President of University Relations, Val Hale, had accepted a position to be the President of the Utah Valley Chamber of Commerce. This move gives Val a unique chance at further professional development while putting him in a role where he can still do much good for us, forging better ties with and support from the business community for UVU. While it is always hard to see a good colleague go, I am quite thrilled that we will have a UVU fan of Val’s enthusiasm and community connectedness in such an influential position in this valley. His departure obviously leaves a vacancy we are in the process of filling right now, with a pool, the search committee reports, of very strong candidates. You may care to know that with this move, I am also moving the office of economic development, headed by Steve Roy, out of Administration and Finance and into University Relations. For years, Val Peterson has very effectively shepherded this operation, bringing it to where it is to today with the state’s number one small business development center and a bustling new Business Resource Center, home to numerous supports for students, faculty members, and community members ready to move ideas into commercial activity. That said, our economic development and business engagement activities have now developed in such a way that a more streamlined point of coordination is required and the division of university relations is ideally suited to provide just that.

One other addition to this portfolio is driven by the recent and seismic shift in federal congressional funding models. As many of you know, Elaine Englehardt has played a vital role for me and this institution over the past few years as my Special Assistant for Federal Relations. In this role, she artfully and very successfully advanced campus priorities in line with opportunities for funding through the earmark process as secured by our federal delegation. With congressional earmarks now a thing of the past for the foreseeable future, the nature of our efforts in seeking support from the federal government must adapt. To be more specific, most of our former efforts must now move in the direction of more grant writing to the federal agencies, something we are already equipped to do through offices and personnel in both academic affairs and student affairs. What little bit remains, then, of managing our relations with our federal delegation is better served as an ancillary function of the Vice President of University relations rather than a major responsibility of a special assistant to the President. Consequently, Elaine will resume full time responsibilities in her other role as the university’s first “Distinguished Professor.” While we are at it, I will also note here that with this shift in Elaine’s duties, and in fulfillment of an ambition of mine since I arrived on campus, I will be taking this opportunity to team up with Elaine to teach a class. This fall we will jointly teach an honors section of Ethics and Values . . . and I could not be more excited.

Would you all please take a moment and join me in thanking Val Hale, Val Peterson, and Elaine Englehardt for these various and tremendous efforts on behalf of the institution.

Presidential Priorities 2012-2013

As we move into this new academic year, I wish to highlight of few of my priorities. These priorities are a result of extensive discussions over the past four months with my cabinet and other leadership bodies across campus. We approached these discussions with some blue sky questioning and some reflective consideration of those things weighing most heavily on our minds. We also gave thought to our mission and growth and what we need to do to close the gap between what we aspire to be and what we are. After wrestling with these things fairly extensively, each division went through its own priority setting exercise. I wish we had time for each of the cabinet officers to share their divisional priorities. We do not. I will take a moment, though, to share mine. Let me be clear, this list is not exhaustive. It does not contain all the things that the university will be focusing on this year or that even I, personally, will be doing this year. It does, however, reflect deliberate attention to certain areas of collaboratively determined priorities that must be advanced over the coming year.

First, while we have made great strides in garnering public support for UVU, I will remain relentless in expanding such support, especially with key new decision makers. This year we have a new commissioner
of higher education, new leadership in the Board of Regents, new leadership on the Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee and a host of new legislators who may not have heard UVU’s story and needs. A fair amount of my time this year will thus be spent on the road soliciting support from old and new allies for three things in particular: additional compensation, a new classroom building, and equity funding. I think you know that this past year compensation was something I fought for vigorously not only for UVU but for our higher education colleagues across the system. I wish we could have received more but I’m glad we were successful in getting at least the one percent increase other state employees were getting when we were told we would get nothing. I will continue to keep compensation at the forefront of the conversation regarding higher education funding. We were also fortunate to be the only institution to receive planning money, in the amount of $3 million, for a very large, 250,000 square foot classroom and office building. Such planning is well underway, with lots of input being solicited from Academic Affairs. But, it becomes critical now to secure the balance of the funding, nearly 60 million dollars, to build this badly needed facility. In what looks to be another less than flush year of legislative funding, this will require a full court press of our public officials. We must also keep up the fight for equity funding, meaning the effort to bring UVU’s base funding more in line with our sister institutions. After years of making the case, this last legislative session we finally convinced a majority of legislators and public higher ed. leaders that something needed to be done about this. Given the available monies, they made a good faith effort at addressing the issue but it was, to my mind, just a start. I will continue to press this case.

Second, even as we continue to push aggressively for broad public and legislative support, UVU must continue to develop a more robust private fundraising effort to expand critically needed funds to student, faculty, and program support. To that end, I will be devoting at least 20% of my time to development efforts this coming year. In doing so, I hope to amplify previous investments in the development operation under the direction of Vice President Marc Archambault and his fine team that are already starting to pay off. This last year, you may recall, we exceeded an ambitious goal of raising $2 million in new scholarship monies by raising over $4 million of new scholarship monies, nearly 20 times what we had raised in previous years. Even this year, with so many new and generous donors already pledged to multi-year commitments from last year’s scholarship campaign, we are on track to raise another million dollars in new scholarship monies. We have also had a major breakthrough in our efforts to address the needs of our student parents. As many have heard, Dr. Susan Madsen has been leading a research project throughout the state to assess the reasons more women are not enrolling in higher education and completing degrees in the state of Utah. One of the primary findings was the lack of affordable and accessible day care. After seeing this data, we launched a $2 million campaign to expand our current Wee Care facility [slide of current Wee Care building]. One month ago, I was pleased to announce a $1 million donation from philanthropist Barbara Barrington Jones towards the building of a new and much more expanded day care facility [slide of new Wee Care building]. Since that announcement, we have also raised another $600,000 from private sources, putting us well on our way to the roughly $2 million we need to break ground and provide hope and opportunity to hundreds of more low income students struggling to complete degrees and gain greater financial stability and independence in the face of demanding child rearing responsibilities. Parenthetically, I will note that while the State Building Board only gave approval for this project on the condition that the facility would be primarily used by students, we did secure permission to use some portion of it for the childcare needs of interested faculty and staff. Proudly, I will note that the key trigger for Barbara Barrington Jones, and many others, to step forward was an elegant and meaningful public luncheon hosted by my wife Paige, who was very personally anxious to do what she could to raise the profile of the problem of female participation rates in Utah Higher Ed. Yes, I finally unleashed my fundraising secret weapon, and what an explosion. Actually, as was the intention, many good things came out of that luncheon besides this great fundraising success. I would also be remiss if I did not also call special attention to Associate Vice President of Donor Engagement, Jane Urbaska, who, along with many of her colleagues in development, has played a central and effective role in the donor events and relationship management key to these successes.

Third, we must continue in our effort to delineate and implement our Unique Educational Mission and Strategic Plan for Managing Growth [Presidential priorities slide with third bullet point w/out phrase “including exploration of satellite campuses”]. This year, as part of that effort, the university has worked together in marvelous fashion to institute structured enrollment. As you can see, this was a nearly “All hands on deck” effort that is, frankly, being watched by many throughout the state. As put by one recent candidate
for a position in academic affairs, UVU is way out ahead of the rest of the country in sorting through the dilemmas of access and rigor. I should note here that the combination of implementing structured enrollment, earlier admissions deadlines, and an earlier purge of students who did not set up tuition payment by August 15, appears to be contributing to other state wide phenomena that will likely lead to a dip in enrollment of somewhere between 2-5%. (I say other statewide data because for reasons not yet fully understood, most other institutions appear to be basically flat in enrollments this year.) While this projection runs somewhat counter to the general assumptions of year-by-year growth built into our 2020 targets, we were expecting a dip this year based on these changes, and we are quite sure that the current bubble in our K-12 population will eventually erase this drop. It also must be stressed that our enrollment and admissions changes have already helped change both the perception and reality of quality at UVU. From superintendents to business owners, and from students to parents, more and more people are recognizing that UVU is not chasing growth for growth sake and we are not simply going after tuition dollars. We are innovating to provide a quality university experience and to communicate to our K-12 partners that students need to prepare if they are to be successful at UVU. As Vincent Tinto has researched over the years, students do not rise to low expectations. And yet, even with these new enrollment standards, we have remained, and will remain, a point of access for all interested students.

Another component of our Unique Educational Mission that needs to be thought about more carefully in the coming year relates to satellite campuses [Presidential priorities slide with phrase “including exploration of satellite campuses”]. As you have all experienced with the new interchange and creative routes in and around campus, the pressure of student traffic is upon us. With the addition of a new classroom and office building, this pressure will only get more challenging. While our master plan shows room for only several more buildings beyond that, it is not entirely clear that the supporting systems of roads, walkways, and parking can handle even those. Increasingly, we must look to handle our growth by taking UVU out rather than bringing more students in. The fact of the matter is that we are already providing many courses and services at locations at Thanksgiving Point, Spanish Fork, Wasatch campus, Westlake, Culinary Arts Institute, Emergency Services building, and the Aviation complex. How we might expand our capacities at these or other satellite locations is a key question moving forward. At this point, I have no preconceived plans as to what programs and course offerings will populate such campuses. The conversation is open, and it must begin.

Fourth, to reach our fullest potential, we must begin now to identify some long-term academic excellence projects [Presidential priorities slide with fourth bullet point] laying the groundwork to find and solicit the private funding for such goals. At this point, our biggest fundraising pushes—with the major exception of our effort to support the acquisition and equipping of the science building—have primarily addressed our mission relative to inclusive themes (scholarships, day care, multicultural initiatives, etc). We’ll continue to galvanize support for these critical areas and others where students have need but it is time now to think about the personnel, programmatic, and instrumentation needs we have to move our academic programs forward across the board. Since these things can be very expensive and nearly exhaustive, proper planning and prioritizing up front is as critical as the asking. So, this becomes the year to ask for smaller, short-term gifts and plan and prepare for larger, long-term gifts.

Fifth, UVU sits in one of the most vibrant, high tech. corridors in the nation, second, only, I’ve been told, to Silicon Valley in Palo Alto [Presidential priorities slide with fifth bullet point]. This location provides a unique set of collaborative opportunities between UVU and business enterprises. We need to take advantage of the potential for internships, job placement, inventions, funding, sponsorships, and a myriad of other engaged learning opportunities. Nearly two years ago, we launched a Business Engagement Strategy born out of discussions with local business, community and educational leaders regarding UVU’s economic development footprint. I would like to continue to leverage the President’s office to meet with CEOs, especially in tech related areas, to forge even greater connections for our university that I believe will have long-term impact.

Sixth, a key to the success of any organization, but especially a large and complex organization like UVU, is its ability to foster strong and effective leadership across the board. Our key vehicle, so far, for leadership development has been the UVSELF program (Utah Valley Senior Executive Leadership Forum). This program, launched eight years ago by Vice President of Student Affairs, Cory Duckworth, provided over 100 UVU employees with highly creative and cost effective opportunities for mentoring, networking, and
assessment of personal leadership styles. It has been a marvelous success and I applaud Cory for his typically creative and thoughtful effort in getting such a program underway. But, like all programs, it must adapt to changing times and circumstances of this institution. This last year, we began making certain adjustments to the program, including shifting responsibility of the program to joint ownership between my office and Human Resources. In doing so, we hope some of these instituted changes will specifically have a greater reach for and impact on more mid-level and senior executives looking to strengthen their core leadership competencies, as well as faculty looking for chances to further academic administration opportunities. Beyond these general revisions to UVSELF, I am especially concerned about and interested in making progress on what we can do to facilitate leadership preparation for opportunities for underrepresented populations including women and persons of color who currently need more voice at every level of leadership in the university. You will see in the coming year formal efforts to help address that glaring need.

Seventh, I will continue to make every effort I can to get UVU accepted into a regional, and more respected athletic conference and do so with our current configuration of teams. Not only would a transition like this improve UVU’s exposure but, more importantly, it would benefit out student athletes who currently have to travel extensively across the country to play their games. Such a change would also likely make us part of automatic NCAA tournament bids that have eluded us even in times of demonstrable, national success. (Of course I’m referring to the recent NCAA omission to include our baseball team, even though we had the very best record in the country…not that I’m bitter or anything). I’m in regular contact with fellow presidents and conference commissioners, but beyond that, I do not have more to report. I wish I did.

Finally, in light of continued campus dangers in an ever more volatile and tense world, I would like to continue an emphasis on emergency preparedness. This was on my priority list last year and while we made progress, I think there still exists too much room for improvement to let it slip off this year. It is critical that we continue to our aim to foster a greater culture of safety and emergency preparedness and response. Along these lines, I am most pleased to note that just last week we hired Robin Ebmeyer as our new Emergency Preparedness Director. With 27 years of responsibility in this area for a large, multi-facility hospital complex in the IHC system, Robin brings with her a wealth of training, experience, and substantive knowledge that I believe will prove immensely beneficial to our campus and our efforts to keep ourselves and our students out of harm’s way.

Well, that may be more than any of you wanted to know. But I do feel a sense of accountability to you, to keep you informed and invite your on going input on my efforts on your behalf. As always, I remain open to direct messages and messages on up through your various college leaders about where I, and the other leaders, are trying to spend our best efforts.

Let me move now to other matters, namely you, the faculty, and your role here at UVU. There are a number of thoughts that have come to my mind lately on this topic, most of which can be categorized under three, interconnected points.

First, the faculty role is central. I made this point in my very first faculty convocation with the now almost famous Hannah Montanna bike simile. (For new or forgetful faculty I am happy to repeat that story afterwards if you like).

To make the point in a slightly different way, let me say this: it is at least conceivable to think of an educational institution without administrators, support staff, and ancillary activities outside of the classroom. It is not conceivable to think of an educational institution without faculty. When a teacher introduces an intelligent book that would not otherwise be read, when a teacher poses a question or problem that would not otherwise be considered, when a teacher requires a sterling performance that would not otherwise be reached or when a teacher delights in a field of study that would not otherwise be investigated, that is when education begins. And, education is fundamentally what we are about at UVU. Naturally, one need not be a faculty member to be a teacher per se—a message I gave last week at our new, annual staff forum, where I instructed all of the staff that, regardless of their primary responsibility, they too have a role to play in directly encouraging and sustaining a robust student learning environment. Nevertheless, being a teacher is your primary responsibility and production of student learning and success is the core aspiration of this institution. The role of the faculty member at Utah Valley University is absolutely and critically central.
I know you know that.
I want you to know that I know that . . . and, that I honor you for that.
Your efforts, more than any other on campus, including my own, determine the quality and success of the institution. As your teaching talents, intellectual energies and artistic or entrepreneurial creativities rise and fall, so goes this university. It is just that simple. And, so, with no small amount of pride and appreciation, I rise on this occasion to pay tribute to each of you and the countless hours of effort you put into this, your pivotal role here on campus.

Second, the role of a faculty member is to help shape and be shaped by our institutional mission. As to the initial point here, I am reminded of the old university saw that, the faculty's role is to think for the college, the president's role is to speak for the college, and the dean's role is to keep the faculty from speaking and the president from thinking.

As you know, for the past two years, our institution has engaged in a campus-wide conversation regarding the vision, mission, and role of Utah Valley University within our community and larger landscape of higher education. An important part of this effort has been to clarify our university's role in the Utah system of higher education and to align our priorities, teaching practices, programming, leadership, and resources to fit this model.

As we have proceeded, I hope it has been clear that faculty play a key and meaningful role in the direction and development of this institution. You may recall that this process of mission refinement and articulation first began as a dialogue coming out of faculty convocation. I took the opportunity of my very first session with you to lay out a handful of themes that mostly reflected what I considered a synthesis of numerous ideas previously developed by the institution. The invited and extensive feedback—generated through hundreds of faculty response cards and email exchanges, as well as a series of college levels meetings—brought both substantive change and further refinement that significantly altered and improved the final conclusions, which we now call our core themes and administrative imperatives.

These core themes and imperatives then became the grist for further discussion across campus. Three committees consisting of a broad cross section of faculty, staff, and administration were commissioned to examine key questions about how to practically address the directions and tensions embedded in these core themes and imperatives. The reports of these three committees served as the basis for a white paper that was further vetted with the Faculty Senate and Academic Affairs council, where important questions and several objections were raised and continue to be worked on in concert with those bodies. Other elements, enjoying broader support, including structured enrollment, have moved forward expeditiously.

Finally, the university planning committee, made up heavily of faculty, was tasked with helping formulate the concrete objectives and indicators to direct and assess progress in these agreed upon core themes and administrative imperatives. On your tables, there is a copy of a brochure that summarizes the fine work done on this front, minus the lengthy indicators which can be accessed online. I hope you will take a moment to review that document and use it in your own individual, departmental and college planning processes.

As noted previously, we must continue to delineate the conceptual framework and implement the concrete actions needed to realize our Unique Educational Mission. As we do so, active and thoughtful voice from the faculty is essential. My ambition—as it has been from the start—is to do this in as collaborative a fashion as possible. I hope that you, too, will see it as your responsibility to give input, guidance, and support to the visioning process of the institution. And please recognize here that perhaps the best and most lasting way faculty can give shape to the direction of the institution is not just to respond to the occasional high level call from me or Ian or your dean, it is to dive in and do more than the bare minimum of university service. Take some individual initiative on a matter in counsel with your Chair and Dean. Run for faculty senate. Accept department, college or university committee assignments and actually throw yourself into the work. Now, I'll be the first to admit that one of the more nauseating aspects of academic life is our tendency to work by committee. But, in a world of shared governance and collaborative effort, which I believe in, I see no better way. And, it is in these organic processes, where active and thoughtful faculty can really help mold and improve the institution.
Now, even with the core themes brochure before you and dozens of campus conversations and documents about their meaning and implication under our belt, it is still worth asking what kind of university are we? How do we fit within the broader landscape of higher education? And, how do the answers to those questions have day-to-day bearing on the nature of the faculty role here at UVU. What follows is hardly an exhaustive and definitive statement about such things, but perhaps it will be useful in addressing some lingering issues.

First and foremost, we are a teaching university committed to “student success,” the core theme that stands as the nucleus of all the other core themes and the driving force of our administrative imperatives. Said differently, the ordinal priority we put on “student success” by definition launches teaching to the forefront of our institutional mission. This becomes clearer when we take a moment to partially unpack the meaning we have imputed to the concept of “student success.” As objective #1 highlights, student success begins with a commitment to fostering “academic achievement”—formal teaching and learning in credit bearing courses that stretch and advance our students in all the ways appropriate for an institution bearing that venerable title “university.” Guiding students to, and through, a series of courses that provide general education and an appropriate level of technical or disciplinary training is the quintessence of the UVU experience, all of which makes teaching more than first among equals in our responsibilities, it simply makes it first.

At UVU, this aim is also deeply intertwined with a profound commitment to inclusivity. As the very title and focus of this convocation underscores, and as has been so powerfully and articulately conveyed by our inspiring guest speaker, we enthusiastically embrace the challenge of providing open access, fair opportunity, and intelligent support for a students from a wide variety of backgrounds and dispositions and with a wide variety of educational and professional goals. The latter—the determination to continue to provide robust community college offerings in the form of trade, technical, and general education that so many students in our service region need, and only need, even as we expand and mature four year programs and a smattering of master’s degrees that sufficiently address the growing student demands for entrées into graduate school and the most demanding echelons of business, law, education, medicine and public service—remains at the center of our highly unique and efficient educational mission. A story for another day is how this mission is increasingly attracting the gaze and approbation of other schools and systems who continue down paths that, in an increasingly obvious and painful way, cannot adequately meet the needs of their region. For today, the story is that this unique blend is proving immensely popular with our primary constituents, the students, who are enrolling and staying in record numbers across programs. As a result, teaching becomes primary both out of aspiration and necessity. To keep pace with the real demand for educational services tied to our mission, we must teach well and, frankly, teach a lot.

In recognition of these considerations, and others, state leaders in the legislature and regents have stipulated that UVU must maintain a 12-hour teaching average per semester per faculty. Two things are worth noting here. First, this is a reminder that while faculty must help shape institutional mission, vision, and values, there are an array of legislators, regents, trustees, and advisory board members who all, in different degrees and ways, stand as representatives of the taxpayers who fund this public institution and therefore also have a claim on giving shape and direction to the institution. Second, the 12-hour teaching average forms a considerable part of what we mean by the term “teaching university,” and this is not something likely to change soon. Candidly, those who are here assuming this requirement will soon change and clear the way for considerably reduced teaching loads in order to pursue individual research are, I am afraid, mistaken. I do not mean that in any demeaning way. I have been both educated and employed by institutions defined by their willingness to reduce teaching obligations in order to facilitate a prolific research agenda by individual faculty members. There is both power in and a great national need for such institutions. So, it is with a spirit of genuine and honest respect, then, that if an R1 research institution is the kind of institution you wish to work for, you would be better served moving to such an institution than spend a frustrating career here trying to turn UVU into one. Whatever any of us individually may want, there is simply not a need in this state right now—given the mix of student needs and existing institutions—for UVU to become such an institution at this time. To the contrary, there is an immense need for UVU to stay on the path it is on.

Here it should also be noted that the specific way we have chosen to execute this teaching mission is to focus on engaged and experiential learning. Among other things, this means that our academic
programs, student support services, facilities, and community outreach should all be oriented toward providing a first rate education for our students that has a clear eye toward practically addressing real world challenges and preparing our students for professional and civic life. Given the particular theme of our conference today, I will not dwell as much on the implications of this particular core theme. But this does not mean it is not important. Again and again we hear from students and area employers across the spectrum that UVU’s commitment to engaged learning forms a pedagogical strategy key in stimulating student passion for the subject matter at hand, as well as a providing a noticeable competitive edge in terms of the industry readiness of our graduates. This is to say nothing of the great and memorable good that has been accomplished around the region, nation, and world by smart, well trained UVU students carrying out class projects and individual activities that are, indeed, making a positive and practical difference.

I will acknowledge this, though, that questions have been asked as to whether our focus on teaching, and teaching through the engaged learning model, is done at the cost of a solid general liberal arts education as well as serious academic scholarship. I believe the answer to this is a firm “no.”

As to the first issue of a traditional liberal arts education, all I can say is that you have a president who did not exactly devote roughly 8 arduous years of his life training in political philosophy because he saw it as a growth industry. I remain, and I hope the institution remains, committed to fostering what I consider a true university education. At the four and even the two-year level, a UVU education can never just be entirely about job training.

As part of my journeying this summer, I had the chance to visit Prague in the Republic of Czech. Among the many treasures this city holds there is a wonderful sense of memory and appreciation for Vaclav Havel who passed away this year. Havel was a sparkling intellectual and playwright who turned the power of his pen against the moral absurdities of Soviet Union’s rule of Eastern block countries. In doing so, he led what later became known as the velvet revolution for the peaceful way it dismantled the totalitarian grip of Stalin’s heirs in that part of the world. Among the many wise and witty things Havel has written, he said of education in the post-Soviet world,

“Schools will have to be humanised, both in the sense that their basic component must be the human personalities of the teachers, creating around them a “force field” of inspiration and example, and in the sense that technical and other specialized education will be balanced by a general education in the humanities. The role of the schools is not … [just to] fill the special needs of different sectors of the national economy, but to develop the individual capabilities of the students in a purposeful way, and to send out into life thoughtful people capable of thinking about the wider social, historical, and philosophical implications of their specialties.”

Like so much of what he wrote, I am in full agreement.

As for scholarship, when it comes to best practices in higher education, we are witnessing a tectonic shift in the way colleges and universities (and most especially state institutions) understand their mission in relation to the communities they serve. Most institutions are placing greater emphasis on assisting their faculty to be outstanding teachers . . . though not at the exclusion of scholarship. At UVU, given our focus on teaching it cannot be the case—as it is in many places—that stacks of peer reviewed research will cover for a weak performance in the classroom. A strong performance in the classroom must be the aim and expectation of every faculty member at this institution. That said, in our commitment to being a serious university, being a great teacher is not enough. You need to stay active in your disciplines, if for no other reason, this is key to remaining a great teacher. Thus, we do look to certain current trends where there is greater emphasis on integrating teaching and scholarship by involving students in faculty research and other forms of scholarly and creative work. If performed correctly, this integrative model of teaching and learning can be the catalyst that transforms the way in which our students approach their education. Admittedly, some disciplines more naturally lend themselves to experimentation, lab and field work, creative performance, entrepreneurial

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activity, and community or commercial projects that provide a relatively easy and excellent platform for faculty and students to pursue engaged learning opportunities together. Such activity should be encouraged and rewarded, counted as valid contributions toward the earning of tenure and advancement of faculty rank. For those disciplines that don’t lend themselves as easily to such things, the university is working exceptionally hard to provide the tools faculty need to perform at the cutting edge levels of their profession as teaching scholars. More specifically, we are working with the Faculty Development Committee and others to realign programs to provide the best support possible for faculty to engage their disciplines while including students in this process. To reiterate things Ian and I have said before, we encourage you take advantage of these resources and we call upon all departments and schools to think about, and demonstrate, ways in which engaged learning scholarship can best be part of the faculty evaluation process given the particular norms of your discipline.

In conclusion, the role of the faculty is to take all of these elements discussed here, teaching, service and scholarship, and do them with a seriousness of purpose that leaves no one—be that students, parents, tax payers or ourselves—in question that we understand the deep civic importance and broad human nobility of what we are doing. On this note, I would just like to mention that it is unbecoming, dare I say, unacceptable for a UVU faculty member to cancel class without advance warning or supplying a substitute, to fail to give a final exam, to take a university holiday and extend it by cancelling class on the back end or front end (even if the students cheer you for doing so), to use their asymmetrical relationship of power with students to exact personal advantage from them or to marginalize them because they do not share your views, right or left, secular or religious. Alternatively, it is incumbent upon the UVU faculty member to keep lecture notes fresh, to set course standards high and then work like mad to help most students succeed, to take on real university service from the start and even more over time as teaching plans and a scholarly pipeline develop and, to do scholarly work with a professionalism and thoroughness that makes a practical difference, or impresses peers, or, perhaps ideally, does both. And it is crucial that all faculty members, especially those serving as department chairs and RTP committee members, have the courage and conviction to thoroughly assess and hold their colleagues fully accountable for maintaining the high standards of the faculty role here at UVU. To reiterate something I said earlier, I paraphrase the great master of modern American English, “In your hands . . . and not mine [my dear UVU colleagues] is the momentous issue” of just what kind of an institution will UVU be. What you choose to do or not do, what you choose to approve or not approve, will have a far greater impact on the immediate and future destiny of this school than any “poor power I have to add or detract.”

Last week I addressed the staff and quoted to them the following lines from Martin Luther King Jr, who said that if it falls upon you to be a street cleaner, “sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music, sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry, sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say, ‘here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well.”’ The theological roots of Martin Luther King Jr.’s sense of calling associated with whatever our chosen form of employment is may be more compelling to some than others. But one need not rely solely upon a religious tradition to get to a very similar place. It is a philosophical tradition as old as Aristotle that excellence is and ought to be the aim of every person in their particular human pursuit. Be your conviction sacred or secular, I hope you will have a conviction that in your role at UVU you should give your very best. And if you can’t find your way to do this in the name of personal integrity or self-satisfaction, I appeal to you to do it for the person that matters the very most on this campus, that person is certainly not me, and it is not even you, despite my now hour long protestations of your central role. That most important person is the student that will walk into your classroom in the next few days and will be be looking to you, whether they know it or not, to open up to them a world of opportunity and ideas that will transform their life. He or she will be coming with any one of a number of situations…some comfortable and complacent,

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others in rather dire straights. Perhaps it will be an older student in mid-life crisis. Whatever their circumstances, give them your very best.