State of the University  
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Utah Valley University  
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“Celebrating 75 Years of Student Success”

Good afternoon everyone. Welcome to our annual State of the University address. Thank you to all students, staff, faculty, university supporters from the community and our various boards, and members of the press who have taken time out of busy schedules to attend this event.

Today marks my seventh State of the University, which I can hardly believe. It is also the launch of our 75th anniversary. Today’s speech does have an elevated sense of celebration and importance for me. As a result, you will see that I will take a little different tack than I have in previous remarks in this setting.

During my time here at UVU, I have spoken often about Wilson Sorensen. It was my privilege to meet Wilson just weeks after I had been appointed president of UVU and just weeks before he passed away. It felt like a meant-to-be moment. I’ll never forget walking into the assisted living facility where he resided and seeing him for the first time. He was seated in a wheelchair and appeared even older and feebler than I was anticipating. Yet instantly his face lit up, a gigantic grin broke across his face, and, without saying a word, he just pointed with a beaming, palpable pride to the brand new UVU swag he was wearing.

President Matthew Holland with Wilson Sorensen, former president of UTC at Provo.
For some time, I sat and listened to him talk with delight and emotion concerning the institution he did so much to create, virtually from scratch, and lead for 37 years! I made him a solemn promise that day that I would do everything I possibly could to preserve and extend his magnificent accomplishments in building up this “Miracle in the Valley” we now call Utah Valley University. I keep that photo of that moment prominently displayed on my credenza and I look at it every single day. It never fails to fill me with a potent sense of responsibility and spirit of work. On any given day or difficult moment, I just keep moving forward—with all the energy I can muster—if for no other reason than to not let that man down!

Of course, there is so much more I could say right now about that man and that moment and what that might mean for us today. But I want to do something different. Today is the major launch of this institution’s 75th anniversary. And if we turn back the clock 75 years, to the year 1941, the focal point of our vision would not be Wilson Sorensen, but rather this institution’s first leader, the too often overlooked and underappreciated Hyrum Johnson. His story also daily fills me with inspiration.

During the 1930’s, as the Great Depression wore on, many individuals who survived on various public works programs became increasingly anxious to upgrade their skills to obtain better jobs. The local school districts were not in a position to provide adequate resources and supervision for such programs. Consequently, on April 5, 1938, Hyrum Johnson was appointed to the new position of coordinator of Trade, Industrial and
Distributive Education of Utah County Schools (Palmer, 1968, p. 17). For the next three years, the son of Swedish immigrants worked as practically a “one man band,” creating classes, developing curriculum, and hiring teachers. It is reported that he “often hired people to start new classes and bought equipment for them with his own money, without knowing whether or when reimbursement or funding would come” (Sorensen, 1985, p. 24). Here was a man with a vital mission, but virtually no staff, no money, and no campus. Cramped in various and random quarters around Utah County and Heber Valley, instructors met with eager—even desperate—students, delivering instruction wherever shared or donated space could be found. Hyrum worked out of a dungeon-like office in the basement of Provo High School, and operated on a meager budget of less than 800 dollars (Utah Technical College at Provo, 1983 Commencement Exercises).

Hyrum had barely been at this heroic effort for a year when, on the morning of September 1, 1939, he, like the rest of the country, was jolted by the news that Adolf Hitler and his Nazi thugs had invaded Poland—an awful omen of the broader and brutal armed conflict that would soon enough engulf much of the world. As the nation began to put itself on war footing, demand for vocational training surged even stronger. Clearly, to meet this demand, a central base of operations was required. But when has it ever been the case in the history of this institution that obvious and critical need translated into immediate and universal support to provide it? By all accounts, many school boards and state and local leaders were either skeptical about such an ambitious new educational project or felt
threatened by the prospect of redirected resources. (My, how constant some things are!) Only on his third try with local authorities was Mr. Johnson successful in securing the old Provo Fairgrounds as home to the school the community so badly needed (Sorensen, pp. 25-26).

The facilities, which included former barracks used by the Civilian Conservation Corps and two brick exhibit halls, were unfit for use and required significant repair. With winter as a deadline, students and instructors were put to work in replacing windows, rewiring buildings, welding stoves, repairing benches and tables, building furniture, even converting a pig-pen into a foundry (Palmer, p. 53). Much of this work was performed as part of course instruction—launching what was, for all intents and purposes, this institution’s first and foundational commitment to engaged learning! In any case, with that can-do, “never-say-die” spirit that has been in our DNA ever since, Hyrum Johnson and that first set of faculty had things far enough along so that by the end of
the summer of 1941, the doors opened for what was called The Central Utah Vocational School (Sorensen, pp. 24, 414).

Since then, the institution has been on a steady—if sometimes breathtaking—climb of dynamic physical and programmatic development. But what I love the most about this institution and its past, as well as its present, and hopefully always its future, is what it does for students. As I have said before, and repeatedly, student success is the core of our core. Yes, we talk and act endlessly around here about being serious, engaged, and inclusive. But the real power of these core themes comes in the fact that they are goods in the service of something else, and that something else is student success. We strive to be serious, engaged, and inclusive because that is what we must do in order to help students from every walk of life in our service region find and develop those competencies that best promote a life of financial stability, social connectedness, individual fulfillment, and civic contribution. Thus, for me, if we are celebrating anything about our 75 years of history, we are celebrating 75 years of helping students improve the quality of their professional, public, and personal lives.

In the late 30’s and 40’s, this institution took a whole generation of mostly older, unemployed men out of economic and professional despair and bolstered a worldwide fight against racial terror and political tyranny (Palmer, p. 19).

In the 50’s and 60’s, a successful nursing program was well underway, providing some of the earliest and most advanced professional opportunities for women in the area. In 1964, thirty-five of our nursing students took the national licensing exam. The lowest score was 425 and the highest was a remarkable 690. Given that it only took a score of 350 to pass, we turned in a 100 percent pass rate that year (“Practical Nurses,” The Daily Herald, 1964). We may not have had a 100 percent passing rate every year since, but I can tell you this: our
regional healthcare leaders tell me constantly that they have more success with UVU trained nurses than any other program around. Our expansion of programs and subsequent student success led to other significant and rapid mission changes. In 1963 we became Utah Trade Technical Institute, only to turn around and become Utah Technical College at Provo in 1967 (Sorensen, pp. 417-418).

By the 1970’s our students were consistently making a name for themselves in competitions sponsored by the Vocational Industrial Clubs of America, a precursor to today’s SkillsUSA organization. In 1975, we made a major splash with 10 first-place winners at the state level and national finalists in sales and food service competitions. Fast-forward to 2015, with UVU’s SkillsUSA team bringing home nothing less than a national title with more gold medal finishes than any other school in the country.

In the 80’s, our students really began to shine in the numerous outstanding business-related programs that had been developed. In 1983, we tied a Wisconsin college as the top winner at the DECA nationals competition, bringing home top finishes in areas ranging from general merchandising, to hotel management, to industrial marketing (Tradewinds, 1983, p. 3). These and other such successes helped clear the path for us to become Utah Valley Community College in 1987.
In the 90’s, UVCC began offering four-year degrees which paved the way for us to become UVSC, or Utah Valley State College, in 1993. As a bona fide four-year institution, we began to see students succeeding in areas beyond the business, trade, and technical sciences that had so long been our institutional focus. Most notable of these might be the record of the students running the campus newspaper, *The College Times*. In 1998, they took first place at a major journalism competition in San Francisco and the year after won the Overall Excellence Award by the Associated Collegiate Press (Bowman, 1999, p. 1).

Of course, the 2000’s ushered in the decade where we became a university, arriving at what I like to refer to as our final acronym—UVU—in 2008. While much was happening on this campus academically, such as our faculty’s earning the famed Hesburgh Award for our ethics program (Blackley, 2001, p. 1), or our foray into graduate education with the launch of our Masters in Education, our students were also making a major mark in a variety of ways, including athletics. It started with the women’s softball team, winning our first national championship at the junior college level in 2000. It was also during this period that a consistent set of remarkable student accomplishments on the field and in the classroom, I stress, powered the fastest-ever transition from junior college to Division I athletics in the country—a seven-year feat likely never to be duplicated in the nation again. One highlight during that process was the effort of Ronnie Price, currently a guard for the Phoenix Suns, in leading his teammates to a stunning upset victory in the Division I Provisional Championship.
Well, this summary of past decades is all too brief of what was actually happening on our campus. My main point is to simply and quickly offer an emblematic student success in each era. Countless other examples could be shared had we the time.

So, what of today? What is the current state of the university? There is so much I could say about various initiatives and the brilliant accomplishments of faculty and staff. Typically that is what I spend a great deal of time doing in this annual address. But, here again, for our 75th, I hope you will indulge me as I focus mostly on our students. I believe that sharing just a handful of more detailed examples of their successes—especially as they are seen standing on the shoulders of earlier faculty, staff, and students—will honor our past and reveal the current health and vitality of our institution as well as anything I could share.

During the 1960’s, UTTI, the Utah Trade Technical Institute, was living up to its name, providing first-rate instruction and opportunity for students in trade and technical education. But this was also a period of change for the institution, as it was broadening its educational mission, hiring faculty and staff with interests and abilities to provide a more holistic, intellectual, and academic experience for students. One such hire during this time was George Tanner. Among other things, George was tasked with organizing and running the library—something that had become key with the school’s expansion of its curricular offerings. By all accounts, George did a terrific job in this role. But, for George, this was not enough.

He recognized that even a school with limited resources and mostly focused on trade and technical education should offer something more. Specifically, he was keen on the role
the arts should play in a well-rounded education. Informally discussing his passion for the arts with colleagues and students uncovered that he was not alone. A whole sub-community of folks on this campus emerged with similar interests and passions. George’s conversations gave those interests and passions life. Soon, people were gathering in the basement of the library to perform short melodramas, recite poetry, and engage in spirited discussions about both the utility and the beauty of the arts in general. In 1969, inspired by the enthusiasm of these informal gatherings and discussions, George produced and directed what would be this institution’s first theatrical performance: a drama by Anita Bell titled, *Egad, What a Cad! Or Virtue Triumphs over Villainy*. Now, this may not have been the world’s best example of the Fine Arts in action, but it launched something important.

In 2013, now with a fully dedicated theater department, UVU stepped into the national spotlight by earning an invitation to the distinguished Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival. Simply earning an invitation was a rather astonishing accomplishment. Upon arrival to Washington, D.C., few anticipated that a group of students from a heretofore-unheard-of regional teaching university out west would stand on par with some of the nation’s top performing arts programs like Yale University’s School of Drama, the famed Juilliard School in New York, and Carnegie Mellon, the first degree-granting drama institution in the United States. Notwithstanding our neophyte status, we took the competition by storm.

Our drama, *Vincent in Brixton*, was honored as the outstanding production of the festival. Numerous student awards buttressed this overall victory, including outstanding performance by an actress, won by Elizabeth Golden for playing Widow Ursula. And this was no one-time fluke. Our students returned to the festival the next year, this time with a
musical called *Next to Normal*, earning similar accolades—including outstanding production, and outstanding performance by an actress by Jacqueline Jones for playing Diana Goodman.

This string of successes is only fostering more exciting energy and accomplishment. Last year, Emma Belnap, a very successful high school student shown here on the screen, was set to attend another university. But then she took a tour of UVU, in her own words, “just for fun.” Instantly, she was struck. “I fell in love,” states Emma. “What stood out to me were the opportunities I could have here, to not only be in shows but design them right off the bat. Now here I am, a college freshman, and I have already been a sound technician, and a lead in a main season show…. I know I made the best possible decision by attending UVU.”

Now I doubt if all those years ago George Tanner fully conceived of just where this institution would go with the theatrical arts, but I do know this: he was the man that planted the seed that has made possible a truly spectacular set of opportunities and accomplishments that students like Elizabeth, Jacqueline, and Emma are enjoying today. We have a few members of George’s family here today, could they stand and be recognized? Someone else with that kind of vision from roughly that same era was Helen Ashton. Helen was one of our very first female department chairs, and her influence was felt all across this campus, but especially in her department called Office Education. Under her leadership, programs were developed to help students prepare for clerical work, accounting, and other business-related functions. What exactly could one achieve with that kind of training? Well, grow up to become a university vice president for starters. To this day, Linda Makin talks about the importance of the training she received in these foundational areas, and the powerful influence of Helen’s example of pragmatic optimism and unceasing
professionalism that are now also hallmarks of Linda’s legendary contribution to this campus.

Helen was also known for cultivating forward-thinking faculty, including folks like Fred Gimon. One day Fred walked into class and dropped a heavy phone book on his desk. He declared to the students that the future of the phone book was limited and would soon cease to exist because of new technology. What was the innovative technology that would replace the phone book? According to Fred, it was the microfiche reader, a new-fangled gadget he predicted would soon be in everyone’s home, making thick, paper-based products obsolete. Well, Fred may not have been quite the visionary he thought he was. Nevertheless, he and Helen and their colleagues put in place not only the kinds of programs that immediately propelled a Linda Makin forward to unique levels of student and professional success, but also the groundwork for a wholly reconceived School of Business that is now leading the way for preparing students today entering a world of business completely transformed.

One such student is Mr. James Grierson. In many respects, James is representative of the students enrolled in our Woodbury School of Business MBA Program. He is married, has
young children, and balances his studies with the rigorous demands of full-time employment. I suppose James is a little different, though, from our standard MBA profile. Not long after starting his MBA program (and I like to suspect because of the extraordinary training he got even in those first few months of his program), James was elevated from COO to CEO of his company. Oh, and did I mention that the company is a high-tech operation worth over a billion dollars doing business and operating all over the world? As the recently appointed CEO of Bluehost, one of the largest and most trusted web hosting services operating today, James is responsible for the satisfaction of hundreds of client companies, thousands of employees, and the quality of experience of millions of end-users likely not even aware of Bluehost’s role in their commercial and online activities. Can you picture our billboards now? Get an MBA at UVU, become CEO of Google in your first semester!

James is here today. James, would you please stand? He is here today with David Rogers, VP of Marketing, who is also in the program with James, and several other of his senior leaders. We’re as proud of James and those faculty and staff responsible for his program today as we are grateful for Helen Ashton and her colleagues responsible for such a long string of student success.

Earlier I showed you the picture of this institution’s first faculty group as hired by Hyrum Johnson. Included in this picture are local tradesman John Lamph who taught welding, Jim Nielsen, a carpenter, and William Snell who offered courses in drafting and design. Hyrum’s final hire of this first wave of faculty was Mrs. Ruth Brown, shown here on your right. She had the distinction of being charged to teach “practical English” to an almost entirely male student population far more interested in working with their hands than with words. As the pioneer female educator for this institution, Ruth brought thoughtfulness and
strength to a daunting task. Convinced that individuals who lacked a basic understanding and mastery of the English language could not fully prosper in even the most industrial of careers, or contribute fully to their community and families, she patiently but firmly persevered in her efforts. Ultimately, her appreciation and fastidious expectation for a well-spoken sentence, a properly written paragraph, and polite manners brought a crucial, if unexpected, set of skills to a group of students who frankly had no idea what was hitting them when they first stepped foot in her class (Palmer, p. 27).

Well, here we are 75 years later, and we are still transforming lives by fostering the fundamentals of basic composition, often to students who do not know how much they need it. Of course, we have also gone well beyond this now. At UVU, we are also giving our students the opportunity and training necessary for contributing to, editing, and publishing first-rate journals like Touchstones and Warp and Weave for various forms of fiction, and Essais for sophisticated work in literary analysis and theory. In the spirit of student success we have been discussing this afternoon, I note that all three journals are comprised entirely
of current UVU student volunteers. Here we might also call attention to the striking national success of our students’ learning about the effective use of language in other disciplines, like public relations. Just a few weeks ago a group of our students participated in the largest gathering of PR professionals in the world at the PRSA International Conference. Of the 334 universities participating, less than 10 percent received the Star Chapter Award for their excellence in the field. Our UVU students walked away for the second consecutive year having earned the recognition.

In so many respects, the courses and programs that drove the creation of this institution and remain vital to its existence are those of the trades and technical education. Again and again, these programs have lifted and transformed the opportunities of citizens who otherwise might have been lost in more traditional programs of public and higher education. In the early 1950’s, Jay McDonald was a young man from the Heber area struggling to find meaning and success in his high school studies. Basic reading, writing, and arithmetic were a nightmare. When Jay would attempt to read, the words would move around the page, creating significant frustration for him. In turn, Jay developed grave uncertainties about what the future was going to look like. Knowing that the traditional high school experience was simply not working for him, he took the dramatic step of enrolling in the vocational school down in Orem, even though he technically was not old enough to apply.

He quickly gravitated to the woodworking program, finding not only a discipline for which he seemed to have some gift, but a caring faculty mentor who helped him settle in. When the faculty member discovered Jay’s true age, he had a significant decision to make—does he keep Jay in the program, or send him back to high school where he was sure to fail? This faculty member followed his intuition and gave Jay an apprenticeship that allowed him
to stay in the school and develop his trade. Jay not only graduated but went on to become one of the most successful builders in northern Utah. When Jay's son was old enough to learn the trade, he mentored him and they started a business together. Today their work is renowned around the state and country. The LDS Church commissioned them to do the woodwork of some of their most visible and artistic new structures including the Ogden and Nauvoo temples. Provo City hired them to design and build the spectacular wooden staircase that currently adorns the main entrance to the refurbished BYU Academy that now serves as part of the Provo City Library. His work is famous for utilizing unique patterns that often require complex and precise mathematical measurements. The young man from Heber Valley who did not fit in the traditional schooling system found a home in Utah Valley. His life was changed here and in turn he has influenced the lives of thousands who marvel at the products of his unique talents discovered and trained at this institution.

Currently, another promising father-son duo connected to our College of Technology and Computing is in the making. Aaron Pyfer is a veteran of the IT industry. A graduate from Utah State, Aaron spent over 20 years at ATK Thiokol and several years beyond that in management positions at related companies. When some other family issues required a move to Salt Lake City, he began investigating employment options in the area. Not enthusiastic about what he was finding, Aaron decided that even at this late stage of life and career, it was time to acquire new knowledge and training to meet the ever-changing demands of tech-related industries in the state. Remembering a fairly recent visit to our campus with his youngest son who was considering post-high school options, Aaron explored our Electronic Automation and Robotics Technology program. Drawn by the artful integration of different skills, the direct application of learning to industry requirements, and
the reality he could complete the training of this two-year program without massive financial costs, Aaron was sold. Not even waiting to see what his son was going to do, Aaron enrolled at UVU to start classes this past fall semester.

After Aaron enrolled in the program, his son Layne quickly followed, beginning his own educational journey side by side with his father. While Layne says this is a blast for the most part, he does indicate it brings a whole new meaning to the phrase “helicopter parent.” Aaron has not helped matters much by insisting his instructors not use his first name but refer to him simply as “Layne’s dad.” While the whole family now is feeling lifted by Aaron and Layne’s present enthusiasm and future earning power, we here at UVU are perfectly content to see the walls of the Pyfer family home gently turn from Aggie Blue to Wolverine Green! I believe we have the Pyfers here, would they please stand?

Well I could go on and on. (Some of you think I already have.) There is on this campus story after story from discipline after discipline in era after era that demonstrate that at UVU we are all about leading our students into phenomenal paths of fulfillment and achievement.
If the main purpose of our institution is student success, then when it comes to the state of the university, I say we that we are, indeed, “75 Years Strong.”

The question then becomes, what is needed in the present to maintain and build on that strength, and where are we headed in the future? Just a few brief thoughts, then, on each of those important topics.

As we move this week into the legislative session, there are numerous issues that have our active interest and concern. But, as I see it, three clear imperatives rise to the top. First, the state must support the request of the Utah System of Higher Education, as prioritized number one by the Council of Presidents, for a three percent increase in our funding for compensation. Just like the private sector, we have labor markets and must stay competitive with other universities around the country and other businesses in our state. Nothing will affect the quality of our teaching and services like hiring and retaining the best personnel. And nothing affects that more than having flexible compensation dollars for a mix of cost of living adjustments and merit and retention pay.

Second, the state must support the Utah System of Higher Education’s request to fund a budget line called “Access and Affordability.” I was so pleased to work with my colleagues in the Council of Presidents in getting this made the number two priority on the System’s budget request. More so than any other school in the system, this funding line and formula is absolutely vital to UVU’s future.

Throughout our history, student enrollment has typically increased during times of economic downturn when state tax funds are very tight or even being slashed. In the past, this pattern, in concert with other things, resulted in significant funding gaps at UVU compared with other institutions in the system. Our percentage of appropriated revenue fell
the furthest, dipping below 40 percent. Thankfully, two years ago, the Regents, legislature, and Governor’s Office provided an unprecedented investment in higher education through the Acute Equity Initiative which increased UVU’s annual tax funds by $21.1 million, sharply increasing our tax fund share of revenue, as the following graph shows. Yet, even as we celebrate and implement programmatic improvements from Acute Equity funds, we must simultaneously provide a cautionary warning that currently the slope is again headed in the wrong direction. A repeat of patterns of the past will leave us ill equipped to serve our students in adequate fashion, the students we enroll today, and the thousands more projected to enroll in the next five to ten years. Or, it will force us to dramatically raise tuition. Either way, our mission is fundamentally compromised. The “Access and Affordability” line in this year’s system request would vitally provide UVU with over $1 million in tax fund support for the increased number of students we accepted this year.

Third, as we have discussed, UVU is in the process of developing one of the best undergraduate arts programs in the nation, yet we are the only school in the state that does not have a physical home for the arts. Even I’m tired of hearing me say that our Steinway pianos are set right next to the hot rod shop. But what I won’t tire of, until it is done, is fighting every single day to make a gleaming new arts building a reality on this campus.

While we are on the cusp of an historic announcement about the amount of private money we have raised to support this project, I, Newell Dayley, Kyle Tresner, and now Scott Cooksey have more work to do today, tomorrow, next week, and beyond to gather every dollar of support we can for this project. Every private dollar raised makes a public victory that much more likely. And we do need a public victory. We are going to have to have the support of the legislature to complete the funding of this critical project. We are not alone in
this assessment. The Regents have ranked it as the number two priority in the state, and the Building Board has it ranked number one. Having recently finished programming and selecting an architect—in acts of faith that we will secure the necessary funding to complete the project—we are well on our way to designing a structure so fantastic that, with all due respect to members of the family present, I believe it will summon the spirit of George Tanner to regularly come and arrange netherworld performances of *Egad, What a Cad!*

What else might we look to as key, immediate projects for the university? We could look no further than the wonderful ribbon-cutting exercise we had last week for our new Veteran Success Center—an inviting and inspiring new home for thousands of our students who have laid their lives on the line for us and our freedoms. This event included an unscripted moment of salute to the institution from a WWII-Iwo Jima vet that was as moving to me as any experience I’ve had on this campus. Soon we will be making announcements about similar events planned around things like a new basketball practice facility and an Autism Center. We are close to making an exciting major announcement about a significant expansion of our graduate programs. And, next fall, after a series of high-profile events celebrating our 75th anniversary, our culminating moment will come in November with the full installment and unveiling of the Holdman windows in the library. This will prove, I am convinced, a work of art for the ages, gorgeously, creatively, and inclusively capturing centuries of human knowledge and expression—a most fitting conclusion to the diamond jubilee of this serious institution of higher learning.

As for the years ahead, well, that might be more profitably discussed in detail next fall and winter as we conclude the intense phase of future planning we are engaged in at this very moment. But, here are some general contours. By 2020, you will see our enrollments
rise to over 40,000 students. By 2025, those enrollments will be over 45,000 (Fact Book, 2014, p. 39). At those points, we will not only be the largest university in the state by far, we will be considered among the largest institutions in the nation.

To meet that growth you will see a coordinated effort, actually already in its initial stages, to secure the resources and support for a new business building and campus front, as well as a technology and business building in the north part of the county. You will also hear about the acquisition of land for a future campus in the south part of the county and view a detailed master plan and the beginning build-out of our 220 acres in Vineyard. I believe you will be able to use a bridge across I-15, better linking our east and west campuses here at Orem main. And, dare I say it, having finally achieved capacity operation at our Heber campus, we will actually be discussing additional structures on that footprint!

I predict you will witness this institution’s first multi-million dollar endowments to attract and retain faculty of immense renown, yet who remain fundamentally committed to our student success mission. And, best of all, you will learn of more and more stories of student success that will simply blow your mind if they don’t positively burst your heart—stories in the direction of Brian Patchett.

As a teenager, Brian was kicked out of Timpview High School for his dramatic lack of academic progress, partly explained by undiagnosed autism. Fortunately, he later got himself in gear and graduated from Independence High School by completing four years of home school packets in two semesters.

He married early and started school at UVU at 20. But not long after starting, he had to drop out for a myriad of reasons. To keep body and soul together, he began working for Best In Music in Provo fixing guitars, amps, and other musical equipment. He developed such
proficiency in fixing guitars that he was hired by a local band—who had just signed a deal with Warner Bros.—to be their equipment manager. After a while, he created his own band and signed his own deal with Warner Bros. When this band broke up, he decided to become a stage manager and began touring with several popular bands all across the US and the UK. With three kids, and a grueling tour schedule, his wife asked him to come home and reconsider careers. At 2:00 am in the airport, just after a long flight home from Moscow where he decided he would need to shift careers, he ran into his old boss who offered him a job on the spot to fix amps and guitars.

In his new job, he connected with a guitar teacher who happened to be a senior physics student at UVU. He so impressed this student with his help on an electronics problem that the student encouraged Brian to return to school and study physics. Brian’s last formal math class was Algebra I, a class he took 15 years earlier as a freshman in high school. If he was going to return to school, he decided that he would want to enter directly into calculus. To achieve his goal, he immersed himself in algebra and trig books and ended up testing into calc.

Brian’s initial plan was to enter UVU and then transfer to the U. (So he wasn’t perfect!) But, after making significant connections with faculty members, advisors, and other support staff here, he decided to stay. He’s formed an especially fruitful connection with Professor Timothy Doyle. Together they have researched acoustic levitation (or acoustic suspension in fluid). This research has produced a device to improve cancer research by enhancing how certain cells are detected and understood.

Brian’s academic accomplishments have recently received international acclaim. The Acoustical Society of America just held its annual international conference. As near as he can
tell, Brian and his team of fellow classmates were the only undergraduate team that presented at the conference. Sandwiched between tenured professors from Oxford and Harvard, Brian stole the show by presenting findings and results that some of the best labs in the world have not been able to achieve in the field of acoustic levitation. After the conference, the ASA released Brian’s presentation as one of only five presentations from the conference submitted to the national press. What is Brian’s next step? Finish his undergrad degree at UVU. Brian, will you take a moment to let us cheer your great accomplishments?

Serious, engaged, inclusive in the service of student success? It’s all right there, in the form of Brian! And if we as staff and faculty members will stay true to these core themes—actively, patiently, and creatively deepening our commitment to them day after day, it will simply, inexorably follow that more and more stories like Brian’s will populate this campus. What greater thing could someone do for a living than be part of that!

Of course, I am not naïve to the fact that some days, as we each settle into the particular role that we play here on campus with all of the challenges that inevitably come with life—especially life in a public institution—it may be difficult to see and be inspired by these singular stories of student success. On those days, my friends and fellow colleagues, join me in remembering Hyrum Johnson.

It’s been said that “Mr. Johnson’s enthusiasm and dedication to vocational education and his ‘never-say-die’ attitude were instrumental in getting the Central Utah Vocational School started. He struggled during his entire administration to keep the school alive. He received rebuffs and witnessed indifference from superintendents of schools and school boards of the area. Many times he would return to the office disheartened because of the lack of support he received from the various school districts and agencies. But he could not
be discouraged or turned away from his charted course. He was a man of vision, who could see what... education could do to change the lives of people and to provide... for present and future needs [for the area]. He was a tireless worker... he believed in... education totally and was disappointed that others did not [always] share his enthusiasm... He became so engrossed [in the development of the school] that his health was in jeopardy toward the end of his administration. He was fighting for a great cause, and this is one of the main reasons the college is where it is today” (Sorensen, p. 24).

Ladies and gentlemen, I am not asking you to break your health in the service of this institution. I believe those kinds of sacrifices are now behind us... if not illegal. But what I am asking you is to catch and keep the spirit of Hyrum Johnson about your work. On those days when things seem to be going so wrong, don’t panic. Keep going, be happy, and work hard. There will be setbacks and problems and challenges. That is true of any work, but it is especially true of great work. Look to the long game. This institution has a trajectory and destiny that is so much greater than any one area, project, or person. Think of where we have come from and where we are today. Now, just imagine where we are going. Our present is so much grander than our past but it is not nearly as grand as our future. Our best days and finest accomplishments are ahead of us, not behind us. And so, day in and day out, let us keep a little bit of Hyrum right by our side, whispering to us, “Keep going, give it your best, do it for the students.” Let us live so that 75 years from now, the future faculty and staff of this institution that will run prominently from one end of the county to the other, and known all around the country and the world, will say, they did it. They put in place the structures, programs, and practices that eventually gave rise to an engine of student success of a size and quality like no other.
References


