Welcome Remarks
August 15, 2011

When we have a clear sense of identity and purpose, we are more resilient, because we can hold fast to our vision of a better future. From Wisdom Commons

One of the delights of being a member of our community of learners is that every year we get to enjoy a fresh start. We can draw upon the lessons we learned last year and try out some new ideas as we think back over the academic year just completed and prepare ourselves for the new academic year just beginning. With these remarks I intend to do just that—look back and gaze forward.

The news is good! We are starting this new academic year in very good shape. We have a freshly revised mission statement, the strongest enrollment picture in the history of our university, a workable budget and a remarkable record of accomplishments in a year when all of us were beset by worries about our budget and about the condition of the economy. The progress we have made in the past year reinforces my conviction that the best strategy to adopt in a time of uncertainty is to focus our efforts, take some calculated risks and trust in each other. The success of this strategy is visible and compelling.

We have a fresh MISSION STATEMENT and reaffirmation of our values and purpose.

The mission of Winona State University is to enhance the intellectual, social, cultural and economic vitality of the people and communities we serve. We offer undergraduate programs based on the traditions and values of the arts and sciences and an array of graduate and professional programs that are especially responsive to the needs of the Upper Midwest. We prepare our graduates to serve generously, lead responsibly and respond imaginatively and creatively to the challenges of their work, their lives and their communities.

Winona State University is a community of learners improving our world.

Our mission was reaffirmed in March by the MnSCU Board of Trustees. It was developed as an integral component of our Self-Study process as we prepared for our next institutional accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission, a process that will culminate in the submission of our Self-Study to HLC in December and a campus visit in March 2012. We formed a Task Force that created and presented a draft vision and mission statement for discussion by the campus community. The Task Force held four open forums, three in Winona and one in Rochester. More than 3,000 students responded to a request for comments during our annual institution-wide Assessment Day in spring 2010. As a last step, in the fall of 2010, a web-based Campus Climate Survey that included questions on the mission and vision statement and how it was developed was distributed to all faculty and staff. The Board of Trustees reaffirmed our mission in March 2011. Both the way we approached the task of assessing our mission and the resulting product capture an important theme—this institution is built upon a sense of community and a habit of collaboration.

Our UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT is at an all-time high.

We continue to be attractive to potential students, and we are serving our current students extremely well. Although we won’t have final figures until after the second week of classes, right now we are projecting a bumper crop of new students with 1,805 new freshmen, 541 transfer students and a strong cohort of international students. During Welcome Week last year, we asked everyone to help us during the year to attract and recruit new students. We all can play a role in attracting students to our institution, whether it is students who tell engaging stories about their experiences or an employee who takes time to talk with a prospective student and her family or a groundskeeper who stops to help someone find his way across campus. The new college visitations were a smashing success with contributions from Deans, faculty and panels of students. Every year we enhance our approach to helping students be successful in their academic pursuits. These strategies are paying off. We are seeing fewer and fewer students on academic probation and suspension, and we are enjoying a steadily improving retention rate. I attribute this to a healthy blend of faculty, staff and peer student support for our students.

We have a workable BUDGET OUTCOME.

Despite deep and painful cuts, we have emerged from the latest round of budget challenges with our core capabilities intact. We all wish we had more support and that the leadership of our state could see clearly how important investment in our public educational system will be to our shared future. That said, when the dust finally settled on the state budget for FY 12 in the aftermath of a remarkable state shutdown, we were relieved to have navigated our way
through the turbulence with remarkable skill. We launch our 2011 fall semester with an 8.3 percent reduction in our state general fund support that we managed in large part by maintaining a healthy fall enrollment and by reducing our annual expenditure through a variety of strategies. For more information about how we reduced our expenditures by $2.5 million, explore our Budget Planning site here. Students now are contributing 68 percent of our general fund budget through their tuition and the state is providing 32 percent by way of state appropriations.

During the past year, we planned for a possible reduction in state support of $2.5 million to $3.8 million. We all were relieved when budget negotiations were completed to learn that the shortfall in our share of the state appropriation to MnSCU ended up close to our lower figure of $2.5 million per annum. We remain concerned that the number of uncertainties that persist could cause further challenges down the road. As a result, we are approaching this year cautiously and will continue to maintain a close watch on our expenditures, do our best to contain the cost of delivering our programs, focus intently on continuing to enhance the student experience and promote student success, and look for additional opportunities to maintain a balanced enrollment of well-prepared students whom we will serve in a variety of meaningful ways. We have a number of promising projects underway and many accomplishments to celebrate. I know that in listing them I will miss something really important to somebody in the audience today. If that happens, please let me know. Many of you have been active members of design and implementation teams for such important advances as:

- The Math Achievement Center (MAC) that opens this fall;
- The updating of University Studies and the creation of a transfer-friendly general education curriculum that will be launched this fall along with the 120-credit-hour undergraduate degree requirements that were mandated by the Minnesota legislature. I appreciate the ways that our faculty made these changes while maintaining and enhancing the integrity and clarity of purpose of our academic programs.
- The Core Commitments project that emphasizes taking seriously the perspectives of others: recognizing and acting on the obligation to inform one’s own judgment; and engaging diverse and competing perspectives as a resource for learning, citizenship, and work;
- The selection of our new common theme and a common book that captures the theme. This year’s theme is Home and Place and this year’s common book is Packinghouse Daughter, by Cheri Register. This book, winner of both the Minnesota Book Award and the American Book Award, will shed some special light on the theme of Home and Place through its focus on upbringing and community.
• The expansion of our American Democracy Project, which emphasizes the development of civic intelligence and the skills and experiences that prepare our students to exercise civic and social responsibility;
• A package of adult degree-completion programs in the health sciences that will expand our repertoire of academic programs, deepen our capacity to partner with other institutions to address the workforce needs of Minnesota and build new capacity to enrich the student experience for all of our students, whatever their educational goals.
• The Stage One entrepreneurship program that offers opportunities for our students to learn the skills of entrepreneurship and assist a group of investors in selecting projects for support at an early developmental stage.
• The achievement of Accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business for our College of Business.
• The exciting progress we have made in rethinking how we recruit, prepare, place and support a new generation of teachers through our Bush Foundation-funded project—now called Teach21.
• The completion in 2010 of our Technology Master Plan 2010 – 2013. This plan provides a framework for integrating and prioritizing technology related needs and supplies a guide for future technology exploration and implementation at WSU. Fruits of that plan can be seen in the extensive work done this past year to evaluate and assess technology holistically to improve our understanding of the impact of the e-Warrior: Digital Life and Learning Program on faculty and students. A cornerstone of the technology plan was sustainability, addressed through the print management portion of the plan. In the first year of this plan printing dropped from 11 million to five million pages, saving the university more than $100,000 each and every year.
• The design and introduction of some very cool apps for iPhone, iPad and Droid—the Winona State Mobile App that lets you track the location of campus buses, take a campus photo tour, consult a campus map and access the faculty/staff directory. Another app provides a tour of Winona’s historical buildings.
• A $1.7 million Guaranteed Energy Savings Agreement that improves energy efficiency across the entire campus through a series of facility improvements. This project utilizes a unique financing arrangement whereby the dollars saved by increased energy efficiency are used to pay for the facilities improvements. This work began in June and will be finished in December. The various upgrades, which include new boilers and water heaters at Lourdes and Maria Halls, also eliminate more than $1 million in deferred maintenance throughout our campus.
• The MnSCU Board of Trustees approved a $5.8 million capital bonding project request for renovation work at Somsen and Wabasha Halls. This constitutes the first phase of a much bigger project to renovate large portions of Somsen and Wabasha Halls to
accommodate the College of Business, flexible classrooms, OCED and graduate programs. The project now becomes part of a $277.7 million capital bonding request MnSCU will forward to the state legislature for FY12 funding.

- WSU received $1.9 million in FY11 Higher Education Asset Preservation and Replacement (HEAPR) funding to replace roofs on Memorial and Stark Halls.
- And last, but definitely not least, the university advancement team and WSU Foundation had a spectacular year. Total giving for the past fiscal year increased by 33 percent over the previous year. Bucking the national trend, Winona State has expanded its giving base to 5,458 people, an increase of five percent over the previous year. At its heart, our work in philanthropy isn’t about money. It is about inviting our alumni and friends to join us in improving our world by investing with us to make a difference. Because of the Light the Way campaign, 183 new scholarships have been created, our Integrated Wellness Complex is helping students make healthy decisions about health and fitness, and the National Child Protection Training Center trained more than 17,000 working professionals in the last year alone. More importantly, our campaign has shined a light on opportunity.

Although there are many reasons why we have come through this latest budget round with our essential core intact, I would highlight the importance of our willingness to work together and to steer our way with a common set of clear budget guidelines and goals. To this, I would add the importance of a set of shared values and expectations that shaped our choices and our willingness to think and act in new and productive ways. The most important lesson is that we are all in this together, through thick and thin, and things turn out better when we share responsibility and support each other.

At every step along the way, we have held to the Guidelines that we adopted in 2008. The two basic principles are still in place today.

- Winona State University will be guided by its mission statement and look at the good of the whole.
- Budget decisions will be based on a consistent set of data and communication will be transparent and inclusive.

To act upon these core concepts, we have asked ourselves the same set of five questions whenever we have had to make critical choices.

a. Will this choice help us remain attractive to potential students?
b. Will this contribute to the success of our current students?
c. Will this protect and enhance the quality and integrity of our academic core?
d. Will this allow us to generate additional revenue for investing in our future?
e. If we should do this, have we found the best way to do so or should we look for other ways to accomplish our goals?

By consistently applying these concepts, we have held together our sense of common purpose, our commitment to our mission and our faithfulness to the underlying values that define the Winona State experience.

**We share a set of COMMON VALUES AND EXPERIENCES.**

During the spring, Professor Bruce Svingen and I undertook a listening tour to hear from faculty across all of our academic programs, in both Winona and Rochester. That experience was a rewarding one and afforded us an opportunity to hear in direct and very personal terms, the story of how we have developed as an institution in recent years and what the path ahead may hold for us.

During these conversations, I was deeply impressed by and inspired by the messages that these conversations contained. I will share a few of those impressions with you today.

- Our faculty care deeply about our students, their intellectual and personal development and how we are preparing our students for life and a meaningful career.
- Most of our faculty members are continuously adjusting the content and design of the curriculum to reflect advances in their disciplines as well as changes in the nature and environment of professional practice.
- WSU generates many inspiring stories. It is important to recognize and celebrate the very real accomplishments of our faculty and our academic programs; e.g., we successfully place students; members of our faculty are recognized for their scholarly achievements outside the institution but are not acknowledged consistently internally. We need to know our own story better and then tell it well. I shall return to that point shortly.
- Faculty members are working together across departmental and disciplinary lines to explore both scholarly interests and curricular connections that can strengthen the design and delivery of integrated and collaborative approaches to learning and scholarship.
- Over the past two decades, as information has gone online, libraries have shifted to embrace a more active teaching function while maintaining their repository role. Our own Library is closely integrated into the academic departments through liaisons and through joint ventures that support not only collection development but also effective
use of both our collections and the information available on the web. Information literacy in its broadest sense is an on-going concern.

• Our faculty members are deeply committed to their students and are proud of the personal and professional growth that they see as their students gain experience in their chosen course of study. They model the ways of thinking, values and behaviors that members of a particular discipline or profession value, embrace and express. They encourage their students to engage in undergraduate research and they take their advanced students to conferences so they can gain experience in the field.

• Throughout these listening sessions, we heard examples of ways in which faculty members are preparing their students to adapt to rapidly changing environments of practice and the corresponding changes in the character of the professions. Bringing theory and practice more closely together and closing the gap between the classroom and the environment of practice can take time and special effort.

• Rochester offers a different context for our programs and we are adapting our offerings there to reflect the students we serve, the context of a larger community and a different blend of instructional delivery options (online, blended courses, study embedded in the environment of practice).

It is time to shift gears from thinking about budgets to thinking about our future.

For more than twenty years, we have seen a steady erosion of state support for higher education. We have no reason to think that this inexorable trend line will turn around, that the Minnesota economy will magically heal itself and rebound into healthy growth any time soon, or that we will miraculously become a target of major investment by the state. In my opinion, in times like these, our best response is to look ahead and take charge of our own future.

We have questions about that future and concerns about what lies ahead that we must address. The preparation of our Self-study for the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) for our ten-year reaccreditation process affords us a welcome opportunity to learn from our experiences in the past decade and to plan for the future.

In addition, in anticipation of a new era of leadership in MnSCU with the arrival of Chancellor Steven Rosenstone, it is important to capture as accurately as possible a portrait of WSU today and how we are adapting to the changing environment in which we live and work. To welcome new senior leadership, both to the system as a whole and to our own institution in the years ahead, as well as to facilitate learning from our own recent experience, it is important to create a “family portrait” that captures the character and essential values of our university. Over the past three years, we have assembled a detailed description of our academic programs and our
support units. As we review the details of our family album this fall and prepare to submit our Self-Study in December, we will start with the picture of who we are today and consider where we are headed. These reflections on our future, tentatively to be called “WSU-The Next Chapter,” will become the final chapter of our HLC Self-Study Report and, simultaneously, the first chapter of the work we do over the next decade as we enter a new phase—the proposed Open Pathway to Continued Accreditation being designed by HLC.

We need to articulate (a) who we are and what we know about ourselves; (b) how we are responding to the changing world around us and what we are learning from those experiences; (c) what we see in the road ahead and what that means for how we prepare our graduates to travel that road; and (d) what we need to know to help guide us over the next few years as we continue to respond to a challenging environment in Minnesota, in our nation and around the globe.

“WSU-The Next Chapter” will serve several purposes.

We will use the information that we have compiled for our HLC Institutional Self-Study in order to understand how we are responding to the changes we are experiencing and to explore what those changes mean for us and for our students. The context of change has itself changed. We have new realities to understand and new demands to address. A portrait of WSU today captures only a portion of the changes that are taking place in the environment in which we seek to achieve our mission. The process that will produce the final chapter of our Self-Study will help us anticipate, as best we can as a community of learners, what lies ahead.

- “WSU-The Next Chapter” will be our record of what we have learned from our own HLC Self-Study and will represent a transition from the completion of the Self-Study to an on-going reflection on our shared experiences and accomplishments. In the past two years, we have restructured our Office of Institutional Research into an Office of Institutional Planning, Assessment and Research (IPAR). Using the support structure that IPAR makes available, we have begun to experiment with a habit of reflective practice and we have gained so much from this effort that the HLC Team has encouraged us to continue in this mode after we complete the reaccreditation process.

- We can learn a lot from what we are already doing about where we are headed and what influences and patterns are shaping the character of the path ahead of us and giving rise to the choices that we will be required to make.

- The “WSU-The Next Chapter” model will be used (a) to guide further responses to the erosion of state general fund support as we move into the next two to three biennia; (b) to create an investment plan that will guide the use of our on-going innovation funds and any one-time funds or additional base funding that we can generate each year; and (c) to guide further redesign and development of our academic portfolio, our
educational environment and the support services we provide for our faculty and students.

• “WSU-The Next Chapter” will be a record of the reflections that are generated through the process of completing, reviewing and drawing meaning from the Self-Study and its accompanying materials. The Self-Study is being prepared in support of our ten-year reaccreditation process and will be submitted to the Higher Learning Commission in December 2011.

• “WSU-The Next Chapter” will also serve as a response and reflection on the findings of the faculty/staff survey that was conducted by the HLC Steering committee as part of our Self-Study process.

• Our conversations during the fall should also generate a set of research projects that can guide our further accomplishment of our mission. This approach is consistent with the changes that are being planned for the reaccreditation process that will be launched by HLC in the next round of reviews. We hope to be assigned to the Open Pathway or, in our language, the “healthy track.” That track emphasizes a focus genuinely on institutional innovation and improvement. If we are on that path, we will be expected to identify a small number of projects that will enhance our ability to accomplish our mission that will unfold one after the other over a ten-year period. We will be required to report on our progress at regular intervals. The “WSU-The Next Chapter” discussions should yield both a tentative set of questions and a portfolio of suitable projects that can be undertaken during our next accreditation interval.

It is time for new leadership.

After five years of service to the students, faculty and staff of Winona State University, our Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dr. Sally Johnstone, will take a senior post at Western Governors University. Her last day at WSU will be Sept. 9, 2011. As Vice President for Academic Advancement at Western Governors University, Dr. Johnstone will be returning to the Rocky Mountain West and joining an institution that she helped create more than a decade before coming to WSU. She takes with her a deep appreciation for our dedication to the success of students and a rich understanding of the ways that educators are responding to the changing nature of the world in which we live. We have enjoyed her presence, and we have benefitted in many ways from her insights, leadership and deep love of learning.

I have appointed a small search and screening committee consisting of Professor Darrell Downs, Vice President of our Faculty Association; Jill Quandt, President of ASF; Alexandra Griffin, Vice President of our Student Association; Dr. William McBreen, Dean of Nursing and Health Sciences; and Dr. Connie Gores, Vice President for Student Life and Development. They will
assist me in identifying an interim Provost. I hope to have the position filled by the beginning of October.

Finally, I want to let you know that this will be my final year at Winona State University. I am confident that we are well-prepared to move forward, to accomplish our mission and to make our world a better place. It is time for me to explore new horizons, find new ways to contribute on a broader basis in those arenas where my own passions reside—science, technology, engineering and mathematics education; the management of change, citizenship and social responsibility in a democratic society; and the development of effective responses to the pressing realities of climate change. It is likely that the search for my successor will begin early this fall and you will hear more from the Office of the Chancellor as that process gets underway. In the meantime, we are seeking to attract a strong candidate to serve as an interim Provost during this period of leadership transition.

I have been grateful for the opportunity to work with the people of Winona State over the past six years and to live and learn from the communities that we serve. Winona and Rochester are wonderful places. It is much too soon to say goodbye or to find words to express my deep affection and appreciation for you, this place and the importance of our work together. There will be time for that later. For now, please know that I will do my very best to prepare the way for a smooth transition, that I care deeply about this fine institution, and that I will be engaged and involved until the day I drive away from Minnesota to explore the world in new ways.

As we prepare for these transitions, I want to remind us all that our greatest strength is RESILIENCE. We have a remarkable ability to read the changes in the environment around us and to respond in a thoughtful and effective way to both the expected and the unexpected. In a world where even the environment of change is changing, we will continue to work together, learn in new ways and share the results of our effort with others.