

WELCOME ADDRESS  
METROPOLITAN STATE COLLEGE OF DENVER  
September 7, 2005

“Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood ... Make big plans, aim high in hope and work.”

Daniel Burnham

We gather here today in celebration of our 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, on this site, itself the embodiment of a bold plan 40 years ago to transform this plot of ground to create the largest public campus in the State of Colorado. Our Board of Trustees has given us a big vision; a vision which calls for big plans; a vision which should “stir our blood to action”; a vision of Metropolitan State College of Denver as the preeminent urban public baccalaureate college in the country. I want to spend a few minutes with you today talking about that vision and our shared efforts toward its achievement.

It is important for you to know that Ruthie and I are truly happy to be a part of Metropolitan State College and appreciate the opportunity to work with all of you. In the few weeks that we have been here, we have been warmly welcomed to this community. Thank you so much for your kindness.

I’ve read and reviewed the survey I generated that so many of you completed. I’ve spent a lot of time listening and learning about our strengths and needed areas of improvement. I promise to continue to listen and learn and work hard for you. I am excited for our future and here is why.

I believe that the “metropolitan” student and faculty of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and in the future will be persons who do not merely reside in a geographical area designated as metropolitan Denver, or metropolitan Chicago, or any other metropolis. Indeed, the metropolitan student and faculty members will be engaged in a host of issues and problems, which cut across municipal and county boundaries, states and even nations. The problems and issues of a region will continue to be multi-dimensional and complex and those who are being educated will need to be able to live and work within increasingly interconnected and complex environments.

It will become increasingly apparent that metropolitan higher education institutions, their students and their faculties will need to initiate and implement engagement relationships with the various publics and communities in a metropolitan setting, assisting each other in problem solving and creating timely strategies for future growth and sustainability of the urban setting. Therefore, the new “metropolitan” college will incorporate an extended and applied service mission, while it is constructed upon mutually beneficial partnerships. It is grounded in the arts and sciences, but it is informed by the professions. It is entrepreneurial, while it serves a wide spectrum of student constituencies through multiple pedagogies and modalities.

To those in the business community who have made time today to attend, I welcome you and ask that you come to us with your needs as an industry, as a business, as an employer of our students. Your needs will help us shape the curriculum and course of work for our faculty and students.

We sit in the middle of a large city. We want to be a resource for your business and your needs. Let us know how we can work with you.

This is the same request I would extend to the neighborhoods surrounding our campus. We have much to offer and many willing hands. How can we help you?

How will we approach this future of working together? I would like to suggest that we borrow from the 1862 Morrill Act which led to the establishment of land-grant institutions, changing the course of higher education. Focusing on more applied studies, the land-grant institutions were to prepare students for the world that they would face in a predominantly rural America once leaving the classroom. One doesn't have to be a rocket scientist to recognize that since 1862 we have definitely become an urbanized nation with all of the problems which accompany urbanized life. But I would suggest that the analogy is solid.

The Morrill Act essentially provided for a working relationship between those who faced problems and those who were involved in finding solutions to problems. County agents in agricultural extension centers were available to work directly with farmers and ranchers in problem solving and in so doing they relied heavily upon the knowledge and expertise of those on the faculties of the land-grant colleges and universities. Students at land-grant institutions were afforded the opportunities to learn theories and practices which would be of value as they entered the work force. This applied learning is often referred to as "service learning" and it means our faculty

and students put theory into practice so the education attained is relevant and up to date with industry.

Why shouldn't Metropolitan State College of Denver have as its core something similar to the underlying principles established by the Morrill Act? Our faculty and students would be similar to county agents of extension units but with a focus on business, schools, health care, social programs and the like which are endemic to urban life. We can build shared mission elements so that our teaching mission simultaneously promotes economic development, fosters social cohesion with individuals and groups and provides a locus for cultural vitality.

However, in today's environment, students must be given not only the skills to live and work in metropolitan life but they must also be educated in the arts and sciences, the utilization of technology, a sensitivity to cultural and trans-cultural diversity, and an appreciation of "civic-ness." To achieve this core will necessarily involve various partnerships and alliances with institutions within the greater community, public schools, other institutions of higher education, and the professional development of the faculty.

How do we go about achieving this new urban "land-grant" college that will serve as a tremendous resource for the Denver community? First, we must conceptualize our efforts into a reasonable time dimension, which I suggest consist of three phases over ten years. The three phases are: (1) stabilization; (2) growth and investment; and (3) assessment.

In Phase 1, which I believe will last two years, we will stabilize the institution both academically and financially while we prepare ourselves for the future. We will demonstrate our ability to solve problems through shared governance and open processes. We will achieve success through open communication and trust. We will align our college to be in the best position to achieve our mission. And, we will constantly remind ourselves that we are working for a greater good – unbounded by territory, location and personal interest.

In Phase 2, which I estimate will last the next six years; we will simultaneously grow and invest in the college. By “grow” I mean more than grow in enrollment, I mean grow in quality, in reputation, in commitment to our communities and in collective intellectual capacity. Our students will recognize Metro State as a great place for undergraduate education: small class sizes, contact with full-time faculty in lower and upper division classes, strong faculty-student interaction as a core value for the college. At the same time, business and government will recognize us as a willing and able partner.

We will take the resources that we have from the state and invest them wisely, and then leverage them with government grants and contracts and private philanthropic giving.

We will take the intellectual capacity of our faculty and students and engage with our various communities to help them solve their economic, social and civic problems. And, we will broaden our physical presence to embrace the entire metropolitan region.

In Phase 3, lasting two years, we will assess our efforts. Our primary focus will be to ask ourselves whether all the work of the previous eight years made any difference to our students and their ability to be successful in the urban environment and whether the communities that we serve are better than before because of our efforts. We will adjust our plans accordingly, and we will continue our journey.

I would like to spend a few moments on some of the key components to Phase 1, stabilizing the institution. It is no secret that over the past several years the college has endured a number of difficulties that, in many other institutions, would have created a culture of hopelessness. Significant budget reductions, decline in the core teaching faculty, lack of stable administrative leadership and stress between the governing body and those it governs are only a few of the ills that you have endured. And yet, there is a remarkable resiliency, dedication and commitment to our historic mission as an institution of opportunity and a real sense of optimism throughout this college. Building upon this foundation, it is now time to declare that this period is past us. We are now focused on our goal of building the preeminent public urban baccalaureate college and we will not be deterred.

So, let us begin the journey.

I have authorized the vice president for academic affairs to begin the recruitment process for 60 new tenure-tenure track faculty for fall of next year.

This step will be the first of several toward a goal to restore the total number of student credit hours generated by our full-time tenure-tenure track faculty from its current 38 percent to a more acceptable 60 to 65 percent.

In so doing, we also have an unprecedented opportunity to change the face of our faculty to more closely mirror that of our student body. If we do not take advantage of this opportunity, then we have, in my view, failed both our students and our community. I urge all faculty to actively engage in these recruitments and to exert themselves to make a concerted effort to recruit and consider faculty of color in this new faculty cohort.

Second, as we move to rebuild our complement of permanent full-time faculty we must also address the status and working conditions of our adjunct faculty. While we have increasingly relied on our adjunct faculty to teach a majority of the total credit hours generated at the college we have largely ignored their working conditions. While we pay them rates well below that of our sister universities, UCD and UNC, we often fail to engage them in the activities of our individual academic units or provide them with professional development.

To begin the process of addressing these issues, I am recommending that the Board of Trustees authorize an immediate budget adjustment which would increase the average credit hour salary rate from \$788 to \$960 per credit hour. This change, if approved, will take effect in the Spring Semester.

I am also appointing a Task Force on the Condition of Adjunct Faculty to be chaired jointly by a senior academic officer of the college and an adjunct

faculty member and which will include representation from adjunct faculty, tenure track faculty and administrators. This task force will be charged with examining a broad range of issues from orientation as a new faculty member, to space, to participation in the governance structure of the college.

Third, there can be no doubt that there is an expectation by employers that our graduates should be capable of working on the latest technology within their respective disciplines. Sadly, much of the equipment our students and faculty use today is well past its expected lifetime. While we will not be able to solve this problem immediately, we can take steps to begin to improve the situation. I am recommending that the Board of Trustees authorize an adjustment to the budget to permit the acquisition of \$3.0 million of equipment and technology for academic programs and \$.5 million of equipment and technology for administrative departments. In addition, I am further recommending that that Board authorize \$1.0 million for renovation and remodeling needs in academic departments with the first priority going to any necessary renovations to accommodate the new equipment that will be ordered.

I am also recommending that an additional \$.5 million be allocated to complete the remodeling of the first floor of the Central Classroom Building which houses our admissions and financial aid offices. These critical functions are frequently the first place prospective students and their parents or family members interact with the college.

The key indicator to our completing the stabilization phase successfully will be the continuation of our accreditation by The Higher Learning

Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. This visit which will take place in a year and a half will serve as an important indicator as to whether our collective efforts during the stabilization phase have been successful. While there are numerous elements which will go into our accreditation decision, I would like to spend a few moments on one in particular, the need to complete an academic strategic plan during this academic year to guide our evolution toward the preeminent public urban baccalaureate college, the land-grant college of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

There are two reasons we need to engage in this critical direction setting process. The first is because we have to do it for accreditation. It is one of the key indicators that the accrediting body requires. But more importantly, we need to complete an academic strategic plan so that we can take control of our own destiny. We can certainly leave our future to chance, but the achievement of becoming the preeminent public urban baccalaureate college will not come by accident. It will come by determined effort toward a set of common objectives which we deliberately determine and consciously strive for through our collective actions. Accordingly, I have asked Vice President, Dr. Joan Foster, and the President of the Faculty Senate, Dr. Hal Nees, to lead an effort to complete our academic strategic plan by the end of the academic year. I believe that this is an effort in which the faculty in particular, but all members of our college community, must be willing to give your effort.

There are several elements which I would ask be included in the plan which all of you must ultimately determine. First, it must set as its vision, a Metropolitan State College which aspires to be the preeminent public urban

baccalaureate college in the country. By setting this goal we are clearly adhering to Burnham's admonition to "Make big plans, aim high in hope and work" but more importantly, we are saying to the metropolitan Denver communities we intend to be a place of hope, pride and accomplishment.

Second, I would ask that you give focus to four areas in particular: (1) A continued concerted effort to uniformly develop a faculty cadre that are widely acknowledged as individuals who demonstrate through their actions their commitment to teaching; (2) A critical analytical review of what it means to be a modified-open admissions institution and to affirmatively assert what our collective and individual responsibilities should be to the students we admit; (3) A commitment to actively engage with our communities with a particular emphasis on partnerships with the Denver Public Schools and the metropolitan area community colleges; and (4) provide service learning initiatives and opportunities in an interdisciplinary environment so that our various departments work together to provide our students tools and experience so they are well prepared to enter the work force when they graduate.

In the process of developing the strategic plan it will be critical that we address relevant questions across our college community and not simply within traditional "silos" of academe, such as faculty discussing solely faculty related topics, students discussing only student issues, and on and on.

Indeed, for us to establish a set of shared core values that have real impact the cross-fertilization of views on important problems must be achieved and

consensus must be reached. I would urge all of you to engage in questions such as:

What does the 21<sup>st</sup> Century urban college look like?

What are the necessary 21<sup>st</sup> Century attributes required of our faculty?

What are our needs for professional development?

What will distinguish our classroom learning experiences from all others?

How will we engage with our communities?

What should Metropolitan State College of Denver look like in two years, five years, 10 years, including what shouldn't be there that is currently there?

How will we know success?

As we address these questions, it is imperative that we fully understand the nature of the students we serve. A recent study by the Equity Scorecard Task Force benchmarked the performance of our ethnic minority students against the performance of our white students. Across an array of benchmarks ethnic minority students performed below white students. There are some particularly disturbing benchmarks with respect to required remediation, often multiple remediations. When the data is examined against our current practices, particularly the lack of availability of

continuing advising and support from Metro State while taking remediation at the Community College of Denver, it raises grave concerns about how we have evolved our historic modified open admissions mission and our beliefs about Metropolitan State College being the four-year institution of opportunity. I urge all of us to hold a mirror up to ourselves as an institution and ask are we doing all we can to further true opportunity and student success not student failure?

Related to this issue is the ongoing work to change conditions within the Denver Public Schools system. With our joint \$9.5 million TQE grant with DPS from the federal Department of Education, we are a critical partner working with them to improve professional development for their faculty and curriculum for their students while simultaneously better preparing our students for work in a large urban minority serving district. We have much to gain from the Denver Public Schools' success; for their students are eventually our students. Building upon the TQE grant as a core, I encourage the entire college to assess how our programs can supplement and enhance the efforts of the TQE grant while enhancing our own applied research and our students' experiential learning.

I am surprised by the lack of partnerships between the four-year public colleges and universities and community colleges in Colorado. There is a great opportunity for Metropolitan State College to truly be "metropolitan" by partnering with community colleges throughout the metropolitan area through the delivery of our upper division degree programs on their campuses. We have the capacity to deliver our degree programs through a combination of face-to-face instruction, multiple site classes delivered

through fiber by the existing network linking our campuses and by furthering our current efforts to use web-based and other mediated instruction.

There is no reason that place bound students who receive an Associates degree at a community college campus near their home or workplace should have to commute downtown for their bachelor's degree. We have the capability to deliver high quality programs in partnership with the faculty of the community colleges. Such an effort has the additional benefit of helping to reduce future facilities needs at the Auraria campus while spreading enrollments among multiple partnered campuses. I encourage the faculty and student services staff in particular to work cooperatively with our community college colleagues to identify both the programs and support service facilities necessary to initiate an initial set of programs within the next two years.

Our academic strategic plan with all its components will serve as our guide for the growth and investment phase. It must identify our strengths and build upon them. It must identify opportunities to leverage our state resources, with federal grants and contracts and with private philanthropy. It must establish the necessary conditions for our efforts to become the preeminent public urban baccalaureate college.

Before I close, I want to spend one short moment on the one clear potential imminent threat to our moving the college forward. On November 1<sup>st</sup>, there will be two ballot initiatives, Initiatives C and D, which propose to modify

the conditions of the current TABOR expenditure limitations and to propose areas to receive capital support through a series of revenue bonds.

At the Board of Trustees meeting today we will discuss the potential implications of a failure of these initiatives to pass and they are significant. The specific budget allocations and adjustments which I am asking the Board to approve today are conditioned upon the passage of these initiatives. If they fail, we as a community will still need to do all the work I have discussed today. But, we will need to plan for a very different fiscal environment and, in my view, a much smaller institution. I urge every person here to understand the implications of this election and to exercise your vote. Students, faculty and staff of Metro State ---this means you, too! Register to vote and exercise your right to vote. These initiatives directly affect you.

I ask you to join me in making “big plans” in “aiming high” and in “[stirring]” our community’s blood. Let Metropolitan State College meet its immense potential to be a valuable resource for our urban region. We are on our way. Together, we can do this.