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Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to address your annual convocation.

At UNO, I had the pleasure and privilege of working with your Chancellor, Karen White, witnessing not only her skill as an administrator, but also her deep commitment to the mission and goals of urban and metropolitan universities.

Indeed, Karen was among the early architects of the metropolitan construct, providing the foundation for the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU).
Today, the Coalition's 80-member institutions are changing the way communities partner with those in their midst to create stronger, more viable urban centers. Indeed, metropolitan universities' contributions compare with the impact land-grant institutions have made in rural America, over the past 142 years.

We are riding and more importantly, guiding the wave of educational change sweeping America. There has never been a more exciting or challenging time to be associated with metropolitan universities.

Nor has there been a more opportune time to spread the word about the good works on our campuses. Your university is fortunate to be in a community with a great location, dynamic economic development, and warm friendliness -- attributes common to my own community, lacking an ocean, of course!

In the heartland of America, Omaha is a modern, vibrant, ethnically and economically diverse community. The largest city in the state, its population is about three-quarters of a million, with a cost-of-living lower than many U.S. cities.
It is also home to the "Oracle of Omaha," Warren Buffett, the second wealthiest person in the world!

Joining him is a relatively large number of other wealthy Omahans who are a combination of both old money -- earned from railroads, livestock, banking and insurance; and new wealth -- generated by technology, entrepreneurial activities, land development and telemarketing.

UNO is fortunate to be in a community whose people contribute generously to many projects and initiatives -- including those of our university. Omahans are deeply committed to improving the quality of life in their community and see UNO as a key partner in progress.

Five Fortune 500 corporations have headquarters in Omaha, while 35 other Fortune 500's have a presence there. We are home to
Strategic Command, a major U.S. military installation, which is in charge of world-wide military communications and space strategies. And, we're proud of the University of Nebraska's

Peter Kiewit Institute (PKI) of Information Science, Technology and Engineering -- an example of a public/private partnership changing the way we grow new businesses and apply technology.

Created in the mid-90's, with a national reputation for excellence, PKI is an example of a "best-practice" that attracts world-class business partners.

This past year, Omaha celebrated its 150th anniversary with all the pomp and circumstance one might expect for such a milestone event. But, as we
reveled proudly in our past, civic leaders pondered the essential question about our future:

what kind of city do we want to become in the next 25, 50 and even 150 years? This is a question asked by communities across America, and around the world.

And, as profound as the question might be, the answers are relatively simple, and applicable to communities everywhere.

We all want cities with:

--great schools for our children;
--livable neighborhoods, with social services that meet the needs of diverse and changing populations;

--we want communities where "no citizen is left behind;" where all have access to technology, mentoring and continuing education;

--we want robust, diversified economies; attractive to new business and industry;

--we want to attract business start-ups to our communities, so they can work with our faculty and students, to get the help they all need to be successful;
--we want a skilled workforce to meet the needs of new and existing employers;

--and we want connectivity: with dynamic partnerships among education, business, the arts, social services and government to collectively foster innovation, and make the most of our financial and human capital. Increasingly, it's institutions of higher education, with a strong commitment to civic engagement, that are making these visions a reality.

We offer what I call the "metropolitan advantage," a term nearly synonymous with opportunity, innovation, and strong community/university partnerships.

Located in large, urban communities, metropolitan universities serve diverse populations of students, most of whom commute to, rather than reside on, campus.
Currently, about 1200 of UNO's nearly 15,000 students live on-campus -- in one of three housing communities -- located on our north, and south campuses.

Housing has brought a vital new dimension to our metropolitan campus. It allows students from throughout the state and region who want a metropolitan experience and the academic programs we offer, to live and study on campus with ready access to library, computing labs, and recreational facilities. Housing has transformed UNO into a 24-hour learning environment, with a great sense of community among residents.

And, I've told our regents, we need to double housing capacity to meet current and future needs. Metropolitan campuses require residential housing for many of the same reasons land-grant or other traditional universities do -- to promote a sense of community, to offer those outside the metro area an opportunity to live and study on campus, and to make expanded use of facilities beyond the normal 7 am to 10 pm day.

And because of our "metropolitan advantage," we can offer students, both those living on or off campus, opportunities for dynamic internships -- which lead to great jobs with top employers. And, for-credit internships typically move to for-pay internships, and ultimately, students receive job offers after graduation....helping to keep the best and brightest in their home state.
But, we do more than just educate local and regional students. CUMU institutions also seize opportunities to develop knowledge linkages, and unique partnerships far and wide.

Metropolitan communities are living, breathing, learning laboratories -- where our teaching and research collaborators are government and business leaders, public educators, industrial magnates, and those on the front lines of social service.

These connections forge a strong sense of civic responsibility, and motivate our campuses to be "of the community," not simply "in," it.

Focusing on this evolving synergism, let's expand on the definition of an urban/metropolitan university by talking about what today's literature calls "regional stewards"-- a term redefining the rules of civic engagement.

The Alliance for Regional Stewardship describes regional stewards as: "Leaders who are committed to the long-term well-being of places....integrators who cross boundaries of jurisdiction, sector and discipline; who address complex regional issues...and who combine 360-degree vision with the ability to mobilize diverse coalitions for action."
In 2002, a task force formed by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), examined "stewards of place," and reported: "Everyday, the nation's state colleges and universities demonstrate, in ways large and small, the linkages with their communities and with the world at large.

This "public engagement" is essential -- embracing outreach, applied research, service learning and more. These linkages reflect a constant challenge for institutions to serve as 'stewards of place' -- to function as learners, as well as teachers, in tackling issues facing our communities and regions."

Quite simply, "the great cities of the future will be those where great universities reside, dedicated to being "stewards of place."

This is indeed demonstrated by the following statistics:

--In the U.S., the most important factor influencing a state's per capita income, is the percentage of college graduates living in it; and

-- on average,
a one-year increase in a metro area's average educational level raises wages by three to five percent.

Clearly, a strong university contributes greatly to a community's overall quality of life.

Cities, no matter where their location, are blessed or cursed with what Doug Henton, president of Collaborative Economics, calls unchanging "inherited assets" -- geography, climate and population.

"Created assets," he claims, are those that can be nurtured, to become important sources of prosperity for a community.

Created assets include having a top university with research centers, an entrepreneurial culture, talented people, vibrant downtowns or city centers; and an active system of networking in the community. Henton sees our new century as a highly competitive one, where cities and regions realize that these key features are
"buildable," and can be located virtually anywhere. Cities and regions must be willing to build an environment conducive to nurturing assets. Quality of place advantages, Henton says, do not occur accidentally, but result from combined strategic, and sustained, civic efforts.

A university that is truly a steward of place is a catalyst for creating a great and strong community. That's stewardship of place in action. Henton put it another way when he said, "It's at the intersection of disciplines and interests, where sparks fly."

For a moment, consider Silicon Valley, which is synonymous with success and innovation. According to The Valley Edge, "what distinguishes Silicon Valley are not its scientific advances or technological breakthroughs. Its edge is derived from an environment tuned to turning ideas into products, and taking them rapidly to market, by creating new firms."
No matter how far technology may take society, it will still require the capacity of people -- both inside the university and throughout the community -- to effect change. Although many think universities move with the speed of a glacier, they are nonetheless the stewards of place that can best serve to:

- identify common interests among diverse constituencies;
- bring people to the table for productive dialogue;
- apply knowledge and expertise to problems; and
- develop curricula to meet identified needs.

Futurist Alvin Toffler was on target when he said, "The illiterate of the 21st century, will not be those who cannot read and write; but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn."

We want our regions, communities, and nations to continue to increase their vitality, livability, cultural awareness, and competitiveness.
So how can our universities, as stewards of place, contribute to, and lead the process? To be successful, institutions must have community engagement as a core value and strategic goal. This commitment is the result of both top-down support and resource allocation; and from grassroots, department-level innovation.

At UNO, community engagement is one of our three strategic goals. By elevating it to institutional goal status, it has become a fundamental part of the heart and soul of UNO.

And, if we are to "talk the talk" of engagement, we must also be willing to "walk the walk," meaning that community engagement must also permeate the academic core of our institutions.

We must be willing to enhance classroom learning with opportunities for service learning.
For example, at UNO, it is not uncommon for faculty members to partner with social service agencies, community organizations or non-profits, to provide opportunities for students to engage in meaningful on-site projects. These experiences may be anything from doing a feasibility study, assessing consumer demand -- to writing grants and funding proposals.

Service learning students provide businesses and agencies, with skill sets and knowledge they might not otherwise be able to afford; while offering 'real world' experience, applying theory to practice.

Quite simply, it takes the right faculty to lead these community initiatives. Institutions seeking partnerships must attract, recruit, help develop, and retain faculty embodying the metropolitan mission, and who believe deeply in the metropolitan advantage concept.

Such faculty can ignite a firestorm of interest, lead by example, and serve as "rainmakers" on our campuses. Simply, if we want to foster partnerships, we must bring individuals to our campuses who either have relevant and significant track records or are instinctively motivated in this direction. At UNO, we are blessed with a solid core of faculty who are effective community engagement specialists, and mentors to their faculty colleagues.
Many have a special interest in, or affinity for, minority groups in our diverse community. That's why we are able to sponsor programs—like mentoring Hispanic families and Native American students in south Omaha, and providing a community computing lab to African Americans in north Omaha. In order to keep this momentum and level of enthusiasm, resources must be available to departments and colleges to support community partnership projects.

Annual budgeting should reflect the importance of community engagement to the centrality of institutional priorities. Faculty ought to be rewarded for the important work they do on the university's behalf. And, scholarships can be made available for students to take part in service learning and internships that complement classroom instruction.

Just as we value teaching and research as important components of the educational triad, the service/engagement piece cannot be viewed as any less important. To do otherwise is to send the wrong message within the university, and to community constituencies as well.
So, we need buy-in at all levels of the organization, with faculty and administrators motivated to lead our community-based activities. Opportunities for engagement also have to be embedded in our curricula. Financial incentives should be created that place real dollar value on partnership initiatives. And, resources must follow institutional priorities.

Now what? Communicate, communicate, communicate.

Publications, website presence, marketing and communication elements, must reflect the institution's commitment to public engagement. In the public's mind, we have to be the "go to" resource to solve problems, create opportunities, bring the right people to the table, and offer the expertise needed to move our communities forward.

Documenting activities via a web-based portfolio archives and benchmarks forward movement. It communicates institutional strengths. It directs citizens to appropriate units that address their particular concerns.

An e-portfolio can make a powerful statement about the depth and breadth of institutional involvement. And it can document accountability -- citizen tax dollars in action.
Indeed, one of the greatest challenges facing metropolitan universities is the lack of widespread understanding of their unique mission, service area, research agenda, and student outcomes. Metropolitan universities, by their very nature, are vastly different institutions than their Research or Land Grant counterparts. This orientation requires evaluation by a separate set of criteria, one that appreciates the unique metropolitan approaches to research, scholarly collaboration, and student expectations.

Let me give you a very specific example: In the U.S. News and World Report rankings, metropolitan universities are disadvantaged by their six-year graduation rates, which typically lag behind those at research or Land Grant institutions. This does not mean our institutions are any less committed to student success; it merely reflects that our students must balance many competing responsibilities: school, work, family, including children and parents; as well as internships, service learning and professional obligations.

As administrators and faculty, we play an important role in communicating these differences and in building strong bridges from the institution to our multiple constituencies. In the Midwest, we have a saying to not to "hide our light under a bushel basket." In this case, it refers to making the community aware of the expertise available at the institution; but also our willingness to work in, with and for the community.

As chancellors, vice chancellors, deans, chairs, and faculty, we are our institutions' most visible public liaisons. As such, we can serve as a conduit for bringing together departments and agencies, professors and policy makers, students and businesses -- to make great things happen.
These outreaches can include formal activities, such as regular meetings with:

- city government and policy makers,
- local school superintendents,
- social service agencies,
- business leaders,
- neighborhood organizations, and economic development councils.

Outreach also can be as informal as mentioning initiatives at board meetings, publicizing your institution's willingness to partner with organizations, or, perhaps volunteering your institution to host town hall meetings to discuss local issues and concerns. Of course, it's important that faculty with expertise be on hand to identify problems, as well as suggest solutions.

And, just as we reach out to our communities, community leaders must be encouraged to actively embrace our universities as valued partners in the enterprise.

For all of this to work, the engaged university must be a part of community visioning. Civic leaders must view the university as a powerful resource to help move the community agenda forward.

And, there must be unquestionable confidence in our ability to deliver.
There is much we can do to help determine community goals and directions, conduct research, create data bases, develop public policy, and stimulate economic development. Clearly, institutions should be pro-active in offering expertise and serving as a resource. But, trust and awareness develop over time -- they are created as a result of positive "word of mouth" among community leaders and other constituency groups. Our reputation is built, one successful partnership on another.

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It's also worthwhile in conversations and through publications to position the university as the common thread which runs among and between government, education, arts, social services, business and industry.

We play a key role in weaving the fabric that forms our service region. A quick example of this "stewardship in action:"

In 2003, Kalamazoo, home of Western Michigan University, was in trouble. The region's largest employer, Pfizer Pharmaceuticals, announced a layoff of 1,500 -- a big impact on a town of 77,000. "One of the most
devastating job losses in local history," according to the *Kalamazoo Gazette*, the layoff affected primarily senior scientists who made up a large segment of the area's intellectual capital. It also jeopardized plans for remaking the region into a "new economy" powerhouse. This plan depended on a having a significant talent pool in the life sciences to support Kalamazoo's Innovation Center with its Business Technology and Research Park. The news came during WMU President Judi Bailey's first week on campus. How did she and WMU respond? It was almost textbook metropolitan university/community engagement. Bailey and top administrators rallied the community and pushed forward ideas for economic development, including incentives to keep the scientists in Kalamazoo. They made university resources available to stimulate and nurture new businesses. WMU joined civic leaders in lobbying state legislators for additional dollars.
This was successful, despite the fact that lawmakers were already dealing with a large budget shortfall. And, they backstopped these efforts by creating new enterprises, including a center to provide financial support to start-up technology companies.

As one official described it, "Bailey dove in head first...investing her political capital for the community."

Today, over 100 former Pfizer scientists are still in Kalamazoo, having starting new companies or working for start-up companies housed in the research park. One of the Innovation Center's earliest clients, which developed the first drug to reduce cholesterol, was sold to Pfizer for $1.3 billion dollars! The center has awarded $2 million in seed money, and sees each dollar it invests, return $3 to the community for new investments.

Catalyst, innovator, instigator, collaborator, and partner....these are the attributes of today's urban/metropolitan university and steward of place. All of us can be exceptionally proud of the progress our institutions have made toward community engagement. And, I challenge you to discover even more ways to foster partnerships and linkages. As outstanding "stewards of place," our goal to create stronger communities through engaged universities is within our grasp.
Ernest Lynton and Sandra Elman, architects of the metropolitan university construct, wrote: "The existing, narrowly defined mold into which almost all universities have tried to cast themselves, is inadequate to meet the expanding needs of our contemporary, knowledge-based society. A metropolitan university is an agent of change, a transformer of the society in which it is a part, and that is itself transformed by the experience."

On behalf of UNO and the 80 U.S. and international universities, which comprise the Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities; our best wishes for your continued success in this transformative process. Together we are improving America, community by community. Thank you....