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IANR Day

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IANR DAY
THURSDAY, MARCH 8, 2001
EAST UNION
JOHN C. OWENS
NU VICE PRESIDENT AND IANR VICE CHANCELLOR

We are called to great work, you and I.

We are called to fulfill the mission of the land-grant university, and I consider that as much a distinct honor as it is a serious responsibility.

I am so pleased to be able to meet that honor and that responsibility by working with all of you, and I'm delighted to talk with you today. While I haven't had the opportunity to meet everyone in this room, I've certainly been glad for all the opportunities that have arisen to meet *some* of you. And I look forward to getting to know others. I am excited to be here in Nebraska, and I'm enthusiastic about all I think we can do, working together, to advance the mission of the Institute and the University, and to be of service to the citizens of Nebraska.

One of the things you'll soon learn about me as we work together – if you haven't already discovered it – is that I am a true believer in the land-grant university mission. I also am a great admirer of Justin Smith Morrill,

author of the 1862 Morrill Act creating the land-grant universities, and of President Abraham Lincoln, who signed that act into being on July 2, 1862. Someone once asked the late historian James Michener what he thought were the two most significant pieces of legislation ever passed by the U.S. Congress, and he named the Morrill Act and the GI Bill. Both of those, interestingly, placed higher education within reach of people who before had not been likely to obtain it. I see the Morrill Act as the key to democratizing higher education in the United States, and I often marvel at the vision that brought the act into being.

I like to quote the Morrill Act whenever I can, because I think it is good to remind ourselves why we are here. I am particularly fond of the phrase ***"the leading object***," as in: "***the leading object*** *shall be, without excluding other scientific and classical studies and including military tactics, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanic arts, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions of life."*

The leading object of land-grant universities, true when they were first established and just as true today, is to work with the people we serve, and to take the resources, the riches, and the technologies of the University to

the citizens of the state.

I also think it is important to let you know that I am a big believer in service. I see public service as a land-grant university responsibility. I consider both the concept of service and the act of serving as being highly honorable.

Martin Luther King once said, "everyone can be great because everyone can serve."

Well, if Dr. King was correct, it's obvious that you and I are called to greatness.

In fulfilling our land-grant university mission, we also must discover knowledge through research in our IANR focus areas of food, agriculture and agribusiness systems, natural resources, and human resources. Once discovered, we must transfer that new knowledge in our classrooms and our teaching laboratories, along with the learning and living skills that help people apply knowledge and build on it so they can participate in lifelong learning, and so they can be responsible community, state, national, and world citizens. We also must transfer knowledge through our statewide extension education program, a key component of the land-grant university mission and a key component of the University of Nebraska.

I want to talk with you a bit today about the role of teaching on Nebraska's land-grant university campus – our campus – because it is vitally important to us all. Some of you may have heard me say this before, but if you haven't, I want you to know – IANR students and faculty are one of three key reasons I decided to leave a really good job at New Mexico State University to come to the University of Nebraska. I was so impressed with the people I met when I interviewed. Talented, dedicated faculty; bright, inquiring students with a zest for all that lies before them.

William Yeats once said that, "education is not filling a bucket, but lighting a fire," and I was warmed by the fires that I saw in students on this campus.

Students are absolutely vital to the success of the Institute, and I consider it everybody's job – *everybody's*, whether we teach or not – to recruit students to the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and the College of Human Resources and Family Sciences.

In the past few years both colleges have seen their undergraduate enrollments decline, although we've happily seen some graduate student enrollment increases. This morning, I want to focus on the undergraduates, and the role each of us plays in recruiting them. Here are some figures you

need to be aware of:

In the past three years College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources undergraduate enrollment dropped from 1,480 in fall 1998 to 1,408 in fall semester 2,000. Interim CASNR Dean Steve Waller tells me there are signs of increases for CASNR with new admissions in fall 2000 up 11 percent from the previous fall.

College of Human Resources and Family Sciences undergraduate enrollment went from 858 in 1998 to 721 in fall 2000.

In those same years UNL enrollment decreased from 22,408 in 1998 to 22,142 in 1999, then rebounded with a .57 increase in fall 2000, when 22,268 students enrolled in UNL.

We want to see both the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources and the College of Human Resources and Family Sciences begin an upward undergraduate enrollment trend, and as I said a minute ago, I think each of us in this room this morning has a responsibility in making that happen.

Why?

There are many reasons.

First, I think we provide a high quality education that prepares

students well for exciting, productive, ***needed*** careers. Teaching, along with research and extension education, is a vital role of all land-grant universities, and I'd like to use the words of one of our outstanding researchers, Professor Dermot Coyne, who I found quoted in a past copy of the Agricultural Research Division's annual report, to further explain that:

"I think the philosophy of research is transferred across the generations," Dermot said. *"You must constantly remind students that it's an adventure, it's a process of exploration and they need to use as much imagination as they possibly can. They can't have tunnel-vision but must stand back and look at things and see where new opportunities are."*

Learning ***is*** an adventure. Seeing where new opportunities are is vital to human and community growth, and as part of a land-grant university, helping people learn – transferring, as Dermot said, a philosophy across generations – is a key part of our mission.

We need to get the word out so young people – and their parents – and their friends – understand the exciting, fulfilling careers this field-to-table food system we call agriculture, and all our natural resources programs, offer them. We need to make them aware of the exciting career-paths to which the College of Human Resources and Family Sciences can

lead. We need to share the excitement we feel for the adventures that careers in our academic disciplines provide. We need to make clear the value we place on working with young people as they seek their dreams, and as they not only learn how to make their livings, but also as they learn how to live their lives.

Second, we can no more expect one or two people with the designation of "college recruiter" to handle all the recruiting needs and duties of our colleges than we can expect one or two scientists to handle all the research needs of Nebraska. Also, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that legislative bodies, university administrators, and our own colleagues pay a great deal of attention to college enrollment figures. These opinion leaders often make judgments about programs – and the funding for them – based on declining or increasing enrollment in the college to which those programs are attached. Here in the Institute, research, teaching, and extension education are interrelated and interwoven. The success of each builds on – and reflects on – the others.

Third, the areas colleges on this campus represent – food, from start to finish, natural resources, human resources, from individuals to families to communities – need leaders; they need people coming into the field who

care about PEOPLE [redacted] and are seeking solutions to their concerns. They need people with the skills and training necessary to work through all the situations, changes, and challenges life is going to present to them. They need our colleges to help prepare them for that.

This is what we do in land-grant universities. Each of us has a hand in telling the IANR story, of making clear the importance and the excitement of what we do so that future generations also will be lit with the fire – whether each of us has a teaching appointment or not.

And speaking of what we do – I'd also like to talk with you today about our IANR priorities that are part of the UNL campus priorities. How many folks here have read that Academic Program Priorities report on the web? Would you please raise your hands?

How many remember the report's subtitle? Hands again?

For those of you who don't recall, let me highlight that subtitle for you. It is: "A work in Progress."

Like life, determining university priorities is, "a work in progress."

Now, let me acknowledge what you already know. Anytime the word "priorities" is used, it inspires anxiety. It's only natural for each of us to look for our name on the priority list – and we want to be listed by first name, [redacted]

name, and middle initial. If we don't see that listing, too often the mind seems to leap to the conclusion that if "they" – the ominous "they" – didn't list me as a priority, they don't think I'm important.

That is not true. Absolutely not true.

When the entire UNL campus was asked to develop a priority list for the campus, we in IANR worked in good faith to do what was asked of us. The Institute took the request very seriously and developed an elegant set of priorities.

I know this is one of those things it's easy to mutter "yeah, right" to when we hear it, but I need to say this: Listed as a priority does not indicate these program areas are more important than other program areas not listed. The listing suggests IANR desires to enhance these program areas through acquisition of new resources. The priorities listed are those we believe need enhancement to address the needs of stakeholders as identified in the strategic planning process or to address the issues raised in the 2020 Vision, Life Science Task Force, and Extension in the 21st Century reports.

I look at it this way. To list one specific program by name is akin to handing one person in a crowd an umbrella in a rainstorm. That person –

and possibly the person standing next to him or her – stays dry, but everyone else gets rained on.

To list program *areas* – as we did – is more like erecting a tent under which many people can be accommodated. IANR priority areas of the Agricultural Profitability and Community Development Program, Value-added Processing of Agricultural Commodities, the Food Safety Program, Hydrogeology and Water Resource Management, Biotechnology and Molecular Biology, the Ecosystem Science Program and the Service Learning Program in Agriculture and Natural Resources cover about thirty percent of our programs. These priority area listings provide us with needed flexibility to move specific programs in and out as needs arise. They are areas [redacted] identified as being critical to Nebraskans today and for years to come.

In addition, of course, IANR priorities are represented in the College of Human Resources and Family Sciences. We also share other university priorities with city campus colleges such as Arts and Sciences, and Engineering and Technology, working across disciplines to address Nebraska's concerns and to help build Nebraska's dream. Some of those joint priorities include Bioengineering efforts, Functional Genomics, and

Bioinformatics.

I understand that some people have expressed concern that our listing a smaller number of priorities than some colleges did made the Institute and its programs invisible in the University. That is not accurate. We are visible. We are present – both in the university and in Nebraska. We do good work. Needed work. Work done by people called to greatness. It is important that we focus on that work and move it forward, and that we tell our stories of it.

Thomas Edison once said that, "If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astonish ourselves."

In the midst of change – and change is all around us, in the university and in the state, and so it will ever be – we have the abilities within us to be astonishing. Truly astonishing.

It takes working both individually and collectively. It takes supporting each other. It takes focusing on what is important, which sometimes we must differentiate from what gets pushed in our face. It means answering the land-grant university call to greatness, recognition of and passion for our mission, and a real desire to make a difference.

We can. We really can. I know that's true because we already do. Everyday.

As we begin our work together we must seize those opportunities that present themselves, and we must do our very best to make opportunities where we need them. We must constantly scan the horizon for future needs; for new degree programs and new academic offerings; and we must do our best to meet those opportunities that come our way to be of service to this state. We know we cannot and should not do all things, but we can do some things very well – and we can do them with enthusiasm. I look forward to the adventure.