



Annual State of the University Address

West Chester University President Greg R. Weisenstein
Emilie K. Asplundh Concert Hall
Thursday, September 8, 2011

Good afternoon. Welcome, faculty, staff, students, and guests to a new academic year at West Chester University. I would like to acknowledge some of the special guests with us today. Please hold your applause until everyone has been introduced.

Thank you all for joining us this afternoon. We would not be a spectacular university if we did not reside in a spectacular community. *Forbes* magazine, for instance, lists West Chester among its “25 Top Suburbs for Retirement” in the United States,¹ and *Money* magazine names West Goshen in the top 25 among “America’s best small towns.”² We can tell *Forbes* and *Money* readers that the Borough and our townships are also top places for students, employees, and residents of any age!

Like our community, West Chester University has earned a national reputation for excellence, value, and student success. For the fourth year in a row, *Kiplinger’s Personal Finance* has rated WCU among the 100 best values in American public higher education. And our quality programs have drawn the attention of notable people such as T. Boone Pickens, who visited WCU to see our compressed-natural-gas filling station and conduct a question-and-answer session about national energy policy with United States Congressmen Patrick Meehan and Jim Gerlach. In another measure of success, in June, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education formally acted to reaffirm West Chester University’s institutional accreditation, which must be renewed every 10 years. The evaluation report highly praises WCU in several areas and confirms our excellence. Over my 35 years in higher education, I have never seen a more positive institutional report than the one we just received. It takes the entire campus community working together over many years to earn such accolades from our accreditors.

West Chester University is also recognized nationally for service learning and volunteerism. For the 2010-11 academic year, the University’s student volunteer hours reached nearly 300,000—well above the total for most larger universities. For the fifth year in a row, WCU has been named to the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. In addition, we are among the 115 universities and colleges—out of about 4,000—to earn the Carnegie Foundation’s Community Engagement Classification this past year.

On campus, we continue working hard to ensure that West Chester University is a fantastic place to be for our students and for us all. Every member of our campus community is important and essential to our success. The Campus Climate Survey conducted last year helped inform us about the actions we need to take to ensure that WCU is a place where everyone can succeed, feel welcome, and enjoy his or her WCU experience. We are taking the Campus

¹ <http://www.forbes.com/pictures/mjf45ehfj/westchester-pennsylvania>

² <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/bplive/2011/snapshots/PL4283072.html>

Climate Survey results and follow-up actions very seriously. I am extremely proud of the recognition our university and students are earning. I hope all of you—including our neighbors in the Borough, townships, and region—share the growing sense of pride in our University and recognize that our ability to work with and respect each other has helped us become one of the very best public universities in the country.

Our student-athletes are among those reflecting that excellence, academically as well as within their sports. Among our student-athletes, a record 365—including half of the football team—earned a place on this year's WCU Athletic Director's Academic Honor Roll. The teams also make us proud on the field, in the gym, on the courts, or in the pool. Three squads were crowned Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference champions for 2010-11: women's soccer, men's swimming, and women's swimming. Women's lacrosse finished this past season ranked fourth nationally, and from the preseason, women's soccer and field hockey are ranked fourth and fifth respectively. Be sure to support all of our student-athletes by attending their games.

Whatever their interests, WCU students can develop their talents and career readiness through 240 different clubs and organizations, the Career Development Center programs, and Student Affairs leadership training. This past year, leadership programming reached 1,600 students and set records for participation.

As we feel well-earned pride in our university, we also know this is a challenging time for higher education across the country. Most states have significantly reduced their support for public universities. Increasingly, such reductions have placed greater pressure on students to make up the difference in lost state support and on institutions of higher education to cut expenditures to keep college affordable for students.

We also see eroding public understanding of higher education's essential role in the future of our country. Higher education is now perceived by too many as a private—rather than public—good, much like buying a car: if you want one, you should pay for it yourself. The academic world is in part responsible for its current fiscal dilemma because we have not been aggressive enough in conveying the value of education for all of society. We are working to tell this story for West Chester University and for higher education in general. We have also diligently prepared our university to adapt to the apparent new normal in university financing and to avoid any stumbles along our path forward.

BUDGET UPDATE

This new normal requires us to be more responsible for our own finances and to provide greater assistance to the Commonwealth in support of higher education. As a percentage of our total budget, state funding has been declining for 20 years. You all know that in his efforts to balance the state budget, Governor Corbett proposed that state-owned and state-related universities absorb a 50 percent reduction in Commonwealth support. With the loss of federal stimulus dollars, the reduction would actually have been 54 percent.

While the reduction was ultimately lowered to 18 percent, this figure is no cause for celebration. But we do celebrate the enormous effort it took to restore funding to that level. In the effort, all of us played a direct or indirect role—our students, collective-bargaining units,

faculty and staff across campus, our legislative and corporate leaders, alumni, and even the people we've talked to in the grocery or hardware store. I want especially to thank Chancellor John Cavanaugh for his strong advocacy of the entire PASSHE system. All helped in their unique and special ways, and I thank every one of you for your contributions.

If we include the loss of stimulus funding, the gap for WCU between the last fiscal year and the current year is about \$8.5 million in education and general funding. Much of that gap will be filled by the tuition increase approved by the Board of Governors. We appreciate the Board's political courage in setting tuition at a level that helps PASSHE institutions maintain quality, yet is sensitive to our goal of affordable higher education. The end result is a relatively small budget reduction, which has been distributed selectively across our divisions in a way for us to continue our excellence, as well as prepare for an uncertain financial future that may bring even greater challenges.

WCU's budget reduction is very modest compared to those at many other universities; ours has been lowered considerably by revenues from our enrollment growth. And while our enrollments have grown this fall to over 15,000, we are admitting better-prepared students as reflected in such measures as their average SAT scores. Anticipating enrollment growth in many of our departments, we put a policy in place a couple of years ago to ensure that dollars follow students. So if your college or department is absorbing more students, dollars will follow to provide the academic and non-academic resources to maintain the quality of what we do across campus.

As for the financial future, we know that it will likely be volatile and difficult to predict. We do know not to expect the level of state support we enjoyed in 1990, when 60 percent of WCU's budget was met through Commonwealth funding. The variables impacting our financial future will include personnel costs, increases in the cost of operations (including energy and construction), the level of future Commonwealth support (which depends heavily on tax revenues), tuition and fee increases, our enrollments, our entrepreneurial initiatives, and other funding sources, such as grants and gifts.

To summarize our financial situation, WCU will need to make some minor adjustments in spending for fiscal year 2012, but the University is financially sound. Our planning and our ability to control institutional enrollments put us in an enviable position and give us a good margin of control over our own destiny. I am pleased to announce that assuming the state does not need to rescind funding, we will not be furloughing any permanent employees this year for financial reasons. Along with taking advantage of our tremendous enrollment demand, we will develop other sources of revenue for the institution and overall become less reliant on the Commonwealth.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW COLLEAGUES

At West Chester University, the prerequisites to greatness are firmly in place. If anyone has any doubts about the quality of our faculty, staff, and administration, they need look no farther than to those who have just joined our campus community. Let me pause now to introduce them to you as a group.

This year we welcome 42 new faculty members. New faculty, would you please rise for us to welcome you?

I would also like to ask the new administrators who have joined our campus community to stand and be recognized.

Finally I want to welcome all of the new staff members who have joined us since last September and are here this afternoon. Will you all please stand?

Once again: welcome, everyone, to West Chester University!

SHARED VISION UPDATE AND GOALS FOR 2011-12

I'd like to turn now to the *Shared Vision* initiatives that we launched over a year ago and have been advancing through individual and combined efforts. For each initiative, let me summarize our recent progress and outline our focus for the year ahead.

Strategic Planning

First is the development of our new strategic plan, to succeed the *Plan for Excellence*. We have now achieved excellence in much of what we do at West Chester University. Therefore, our new strategic plan has been titled *Building on Excellence*. Strategic Planning Co-chairs Roberta Snow and Dick Swain and their committee have done fine work in preparing for the development of our new plan. As we make decisions about what the next 10 years will look like at West Chester University, we will operate from a data-rich environment. Completion of the Middle States self-study has provided a comprehensive internal scan, and the steering committee devoted the past academic year to an in-depth scan of our external environment.

Our strategic planning co-chairs and their committee will soon provide the campus community with a road map showing how our planning efforts will unfold over the next two semesters. In designing the plan itself, the committee will be working closely with our stakeholders on and off campus to gain broad input into the design. This year promises to be exciting and highly rewarding as we immerse ourselves in the development of our new strategic plan. This is an opportunity for each of us to help define our future. A town hall meeting in the first part of October will give everyone an opportunity to learn more about the process.

Marketing

As we build on excellence, we must let the world know about West Chester University through effective marketing. We are already telling our great story more widely. This past year, for example, 60 percent more stories about WCU appeared in the regional and national media. I hope you all read Monday's feature article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* about West Chester University coming of age and our incredible progress over the last several years.

We will continue to elevate the status and reputation of WCU as the best regional comprehensive university by any conventional measure. A study by the University's Center for Social and Economic Research found that while we are widely viewed as one of the great higher-education values in the region, our quality is less well known and understood. As a result, the marketing campaign we are about to launch focuses on that quality. The result is

our *Learn More* campaign, designed with the help of WCU Council of Trustees member Eli Silberman, one of the country's foremost marketing experts. The campaign invites viewers to learn more *about* WCU and to learn more *at* WCU. With *Learn More*, we have achieved professional-quality advertising on a truly barebones budget.

To launch the campaign, I'd like now to show you some of the ads that will be appearing throughout the region and the five commercials to be aired on television over the coming months. Marketing can only be as good as the work it describes: this is your work and your accomplishments we are illustrating. Since mid-August until this moment, the campaign has been in countdown mode—featuring the question, “Are you ready for the test?” As you will see, the test has one right answer: West Chester University.

Here first are some of the print ads. Two are already on area billboards—one on the Atlantic City Expressway and the other near the Broad Street stadiums.

And now here are the videos—are *you* ready for the test?

As of this moment, the *WCU Learn More* website is live, and you will be able to see the ads and watch the commercials again there.

Distance Education

The third area in our *Shared Vision* is distance education. As you just saw in one of our new commercials, West Chester University is now one of the more difficult universities to be admitted to in this area. While our aim is not to be exclusive, the high demand for WCU admission—about 22,000 undergraduate and graduate applicants a year—means that we obviously cannot take everyone who is qualified to study here. Because we can only accommodate a limited number of additional students on our present site, we have to look at the other alternatives. Off-site locations, co-located programs, and especially distance education will help us accommodate more of the students who want the benefits of a West Chester University education.

We have moved forward in making distance education a more substantial WCU component, and this year the momentum will continue to build. Already the online MBA is attracting strong interest, and several rooms at the Graduate Business Center have been updated to support the new distance-education MBA program. Professors are able to tape their classroom sessions and later publish the course on the Web for the distance-education section.

Among our other accomplishments, the Curriculum and Academic Policies Council has approved the distance-learning Master of Education in Special Education, online courses in music education, and the online Doctor of Nursing Practice, which we are seeking State System approval to offer. Upon that approval, the DNP will be the first doctoral program to be offered at WCU. Congratulations to our faculty and staff in Nursing for pursuing this historic milestone for the University.

To support Arts and Sciences faculty in developing distance-education courses, that college allocated \$38,000 to fund eight proposals for hybrid and online course offerings. In another important step, a draft version of the Student Rating of Instructor Survey instrument

for distance-learning course sections was field tested this summer. Each step represents significant progress, positioning WCU to take its place among the many fine universities across the country that are reaching out to students through technology. Now we need to continue moving forward aggressively to increase access and opportunities through distance education and to become recognized as a strong player in this area.

International Initiatives

International initiatives are another way in which our university is reaching out and expanding its outlook. The goal of advancing international experiences for students, faculty, and staff is moving forward under strong leadership. Through our efforts, particularly those of the WCU Center for International Programs, we are already seeing an increase in enrollments from countries such as Norway and China. We received 28 applications for the fall semester from Norway, and I believe about 15 of these students are starting their degree programs at WCU this semester.

For the second summer in a row, 12 students and a faculty member from Guizhou University, China, visited our campus and took courses as part of an ongoing exchange program between our two institutions. Nine WCU students spent the past winter session in China studying the Chinese language and culture. Other WCU students studied piano, fine arts, and language at Guizhou University in May and June. Such international experiences add tremendously to the diversity of our programs, bringing an international flavor to campus and helping us better prepare our domestic students for global citizenship.

I am also delighted to announce that West Chester University will host the 2012 Knowledge Crossing Borders international conference in May. The conference, co-hosted by WCU and the Universidad Nacional in Costa Rica in 2010, is a biannual conference bringing together highly talented people from around the world to share cutting-edge research and best practices. I signed an agreement in Costa Rica last year that brings the Knowledge Crossing Borders conference back to West Chester University every four years. Committees from Costa Rica and WCU are actively planning the 2012 conference, with John Rhein and Gopal Sankaran chairing our committee. The conference, along with a concurrent Global Presidential Conclave on the Future of Higher Education, promises to be a spectacular event for us and for our communities. Please check out the conference website, which is linked to the WCU homepage, and get involved.

Graduate Programs

I have mentioned the development and local approval for the online Doctor of Nursing Practice curriculum. The DNP is one of several areas of emphasis as we enhance and expand our graduate offerings. We are focusing on recruiting the best graduate students and developing new and innovative programs that align well with current and predicted changes in the workforce. This summer, Associate Provost Darla Coffey added “dean of Graduate Studies” to her title. The restructuring is designed to increase our graduate numbers, build on the good work that has already been done in this area, and provide needed support to our faculty and students.

Another new initiative at the doctoral level explores a Doctor of Science in Biostatistics. A feasibility study has been completed to assess the market for the degree, which supports key positions in pharmaceutical research. The results are very promising, and financial assistance has already been provided by the major pharmaceutical company Endo Pharmaceuticals.

Such new initiatives continue a strong tradition in graduate studies. In fact, 2011 marks the 50th anniversary of the awarding of our first graduate degree. I had the pleasure of meeting that first graduate-degree recipient, Ben Coren, when I was in Florida.

Curricular Initiatives

Other curricular initiatives are planned, are underway, or have been implemented. During winter break last year, the University conducted its inaugural winter session, offering about a dozen courses for students wanting to catch up, get ahead on their timeline for graduation, or take courses that may not be available to them at other times during the year. Under the direction of Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Linda Lamwers, our academic deans, and key faculty members, our first winter session was very successful and set the stage for even greater opportunities for students during subsequent winter breaks.

Among the curricular initiatives with campus-wide impact will be faculty-driven academic planning that is linked to our strategic-planning process. The academic planning will provide opportunities to consider new and creative curricula that are aligned with emerging new occupations in our region, important developments in such areas as sustainability, and advances within the disciplines. A work group has been named to serve in an advisory capacity and to help ensure that voices on the academic side of our house—and others as appropriate—are heard and considered.

Campus Improvements

Campus improvements are part of our *Shared Vision* because the work of a great university such as ours requires us to maintain and develop excellent facilities for students, faculty, and staff. Our master-planning efforts that started last year identified critical space and space-utilization needs and will be aligned with our strategic planning in the near future.

Currently, the Student Recreation Center construction is well underway; we have moved into the newly renovated and expanded E. O. Bull Center, and we anticipate breaking ground for the Business and Public Affairs Center in 2012. In the very near future, we will move ahead with the next phase of student housing on both north and south campus.

Immediate plans include a high-tech visitors' center, partially supported by Aruba Networks, and classrooms of the future located in Mitchell Hall and supported through a groundbreaking agreement between WCU and Microsoft. We are also partnering with Microsoft in a product-development and demonstration center that will bring pre-market hardware and software to our university for testing and training. This center, which will create unique opportunities for our faculty, staff, and students, is the only such center in the Mid-Atlantic Region. Our Division of Information Services has also embarked on a major technology upgrade for all campus general-purpose classrooms. During Phase I, which concludes this fall,

72 classrooms on north and south campus are being upgraded with the latest projection equipment and enhanced audio capabilities.

Next in line for renovation and expansion is the Sturzebecker Health Sciences Center, which has been moved to the top of our capital-improvement needs list submitted to the System and will be part of our next major capital campaign. An expanded and improved facility is needed to support the rapidly growing instructional and research programs in the College of Health Sciences. Sturzebecker was designed for very different uses than are being demanded of the building now.

When completed, our new or expanded facilities across campus will enable the University to address critical overcrowding issues, such as in Main Hall, by increasing considerably our office, classroom, and research space.

Development

All aspects of our development efforts provide essential support for our *Shared Vision* and the University in general. Our campus-wide growth in reputation has led to increased pride in WCU and a desire to invest in a winner with a very bright future—that is, West Chester University. While economic uncertainty continues to affect fundraising outcomes, the number of donors to the WCU Foundation jumped by 20 percent this past year, including an impressive 10 percent increase in alumni donors. I want to commend our Foundation staff for producing such results in a very difficult fundraising environment. The gracious support of our donors is critical to the continued success of West Chester University.

This year we will continue to accelerate our development efforts. Completion of the strategic plan will be the basis for our next capital campaign. We will begin planning that campaign shortly and expect to stretch ourselves in spite of the ongoing slow economic recovery.

Sustainability

Sustainability joins our *Shared Vision* initiatives for economic reasons but also for far more. Our campus commitment to the environment is evident through the geothermal project, my signing of the Presidents' Climate Commitment, and the STARS assessment of our institution's work to protect the environment. Other efforts include the work of the Sustainability Committee on campus and our partnership with the Borough of West Chester. We will also reach out to our other neighbors to leverage our commitment and resources to protect our environment and way of life. The commitment of the entire WCU campus community to a sustainable environment now needs to be reflected equally in our curriculum. Therefore we will continue to exercise leadership in environmental responsibility and build our commitment to the environment into our coursework and strategic planning.

Community Partnerships

Community partnerships are behind a good deal of our success. WCU and the Borough of West Chester have worked hard to develop a mutually beneficial partnership that equally serves our unique interests and our mutual goals. The University has developed activities to increase social, cultural, and entertainment opportunities on campus, and the borough

leadership plays a major part in helping our students develop into the next generation's leaders. Mayor Carolyn Comitta and other council members are active participants on campus and play important roles in student programs such as orientation. We greatly appreciate their involvement and the strong message of support and collaboration that they send to our students and the entire community.

We now need to engage our other municipalities in the same way so they can also be a major part of this great university and we can help them accomplish their vision. At the same time, we want to encourage even greater attendance at university events by our neighbors throughout southeastern Pennsylvania. We already have about 70,000 attending WCU events, from our tremendous visual and performing arts exhibits and programs to our highly competitive athletics. I believe this number can reach 100,000 in the very near future, based on the quality of what we offer.

Sponsored Programs

Sponsored programs are the final element of our *Shared Vision* that I want to address this afternoon. As I have traversed the campus, talked with you, or read about your ideas and accomplishments, I have seen, as many others have, that your work has great merit and is worthy of sponsorship. In response, Presidential Incentive grants last year awarded \$100,000 to 17 WCU faculty members to support the development of major grant proposals.

We can see the power of grants to support outstanding work of many types when we look, for example, at the \$4.7 million U.S. Department of Energy grant that the University has been awarded in support of our geothermal project. Congratulations and thank you to the Facilities Division, and particularly Tom Clark in the Facilities Planning Office, for applying for and receiving this extremely important and impressive award, the largest in WCU history.

Overall, sponsored-program activities resulted in more than \$7 million in new grant awards this past year. Now we need to continue to ramp up our efforts to provide the needed support for our faculty and staff to compete successfully in the highly competitive sponsored-programs enterprise. We have set a goal of \$10 million a year in sponsored programs, which we hope to reach very soon.

WCU PRIDE

Through our major initiatives and through the work each one of you contributes every day, West Chester University serves not only our students but also our community and region, the country as a whole, and our educational partners around the globe. At the same time, ours is always a work in progress. To solicit your suggestions, we will continue with the already highly successful Idea Box—both Ideas Online and the paper version. In the upcoming months, we will begin to see the outline of our next strategic plan, and I ask you to read the information and drafts carefully, to be invested in the process of creating the very best new plan for West Chester University, and to share your feedback, recommendations, and dreams for the future.

Ours is a university that is unequalled in its quality and dedication to students, a university worthy of the highest level of investment, and a university in which alumni, students, neighbors, and employees can take great pride. Working together, we will not only survive the

challenging conditions under which higher education now operates; we will also flourish. We will move ahead with visionary yet practical initiatives that will distinguish us among all universities—public or private. We are *West Chester University*, and as a new lapel pin announces to the world: We are immensely proud to be a part of WCU.

After I have the honor of presenting this year's Civility Award, please be sure to pick up your WCU Pride lapel pin as you exit the auditorium. I ask you to express your pride in our great university and the work that you do by wearing your pin at work and in your community. Now, the Civility Award.

CIVILITY AWARD

For a dozen years, an annual fall tradition has been presenting the WCU Civility Award to honor an individual who has made an especially outstanding contribution to collegiality and community spirit. In that tradition, I am pleased now to be able to announce the 2011-2012 Civility Award winner.

This year's recipient has consistently fostered civility and advanced West Chester University's values. She gives exceptional energy, dedication, and talent on behalf of the whole university. As one nominating letter explains, "She has devoted her professional life to promoting service to the entire community." Another writer adds, "Without her leadership, commitment, dedication, and conscientious efforts, our university would not have risen to be a leader in the areas of service learning and volunteerism."

I can also tell you personally: the recipient is an outstanding university citizen, characterized by integrity, achievement, caring, and the spirit of collaboration. It is with great pleasure that I present the 2011-2012 West Chester University Civility Award to Maggie Tripp. Maggie, please come forward to be recognized and accept your award.

Now please join Sandra and me in the Green Room for conversation and refreshments.