

INAUGURAL ADDRESS
President Greg R. Weisenstein
Emilie K. Asplundh Concert Hall
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Proud of Our Past, Prepared for the Future

Good morning. This inauguration is highly meaningful for Sandra and me—and also humbling, I might add. Sandra has been a very instrumental part of the journey that has brought us to West Chester University. In June, she and I celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary. Coming here to West Chester University and Chester County is an exceptional way to celebrate that very meaningful milestone. We could not have chosen better than to be here.

Sandra is an integral part of this occasion, and I'd like to ask her to stand. We are both delighted that Dad and Mom DeBlasio are here all the way from Hawaii. They have made such a great impact on my life. I'd like to ask them and all of our family members to stand—I am proud of them all. Having so many family members and friends here with us to help celebrate is deeply gratifying.

I am honored by your presence, everyone. While our ceremony today is a presidential inauguration, it is more importantly a celebration of the entire University—of WCU's remarkable record of achievements past and present and, above all, of the future we will build together on that foundation.

Like other areas of life, higher education has no status quo: Either we are moving forward or we are slipping behind. The inauspicious global financial picture cannot be far from our minds, yet we cannot let challenges deter us from protecting, strengthening, and developing the core of who we are and what we do. True, we will find some projects we cannot undertake at the present time and confront other tasks reluctantly, but we are going to move forward and achieve great things. In doing so, we will overcome our challenges and exploit our opportunities enabling WCU to thrive and emerge as a still stronger university—poised to take advantage of returning economic optimism.

As writer and activist Gloria Steinem said in a *Time* magazine interview, "The

future depends entirely on what each of us does every day.”¹ West Chester University’s future is squarely in our hands. It will also be determined by the optimism with which we approach the tasks ahead. With the unlimited talent in action every day at West Chester University and with the University’s powerful base of accomplishments, our institution is poised to embrace its potential, to move forward with confidence, vision, and purpose. The opportunities that the future holds for our students, for each of us, and for the region are exceptional.

Beginning even before I took office last March, I have been meeting with groups throughout the campus community. At these meetings, in informal discussions, and through our new electronic suggestion box, many of you here have already shared your dreams and ideas for WCU’s future. Another source of insight has been the visioning exercises we have conducted with some of our constituency groups, such as our Council of Trustees, President’s Council, and Foundation Board, and with the participants at a summer Budget Summit. In my conversations with students, faculty, staff, alumni, neighbors, and other campus friends, strong recommendations have emerged for expanding still further the excellence of what we do. I have been finding significant consensus among you and have also learned that my own observations, beliefs, and interests are well aligned with yours.

We will need to continue to listen to each other as we develop WCU’s path into the future. Listening is not a onetime event but represents a way of doing business that is already established at West Chester University. Of course, listening must translate into action. As your 14th president, my role is to enable our faculty, staff, and students to do their best work—to remove the obstacles in the way of achieving that outcome for each of us.

Your ideas will not languish or be packed away to wait for a more prosperous time. With the most promising of these ideas, we will move forward to their fruition because they offer strong benefit for those we serve and for the institution itself. In accordance with the University’s distributed-leadership approach, we will continue to hold mutual ownership of our strategies, goals, and outcomes, and I will turn to many of

¹ Nancy Gibbs, Jeanne McCowell Berkeley, Susan Faludi, and Gloria Steinem, “How to Revive a Revolution,” *Time*, 9 March 1992, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,975028,00.html>.

you for your expertise and hard work.

Understanding how the University reached the high level of excellence we now enjoy will help us fulfill our enormous potential. Leadership and action must be from our strengths—and we have a multitude of strengths on this campus. Like composers developing themes in a symphony, adding richer harmonies and exploring new keys, we will make the very most of the possibilities that our traditional strengths and current excellence inspire.

We have already begun preliminary activity toward a new strategic plan to guide West Chester University's future. The *Plan for Excellence* has served the University with notable effectiveness since 2001. But now many voices, including our Strategic Planning Resource Council, have recommended we develop a new institutional strategic plan, a recommendation with which I concur.

As many of you know, the campus-wide self-study process is underway for our decennial reaccreditation review by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. In establishing our strategic-planning timeline, we are sensitive to these preparations for the Middle States site visit in the spring of 2011. In fact, these activities will strongly support and reinforce one another. The Middle States self-study process and the feedback we receive from Middle States will prepare us to complete our strategic planning with shared and in-depth knowledge, vision, and understanding. Over the next year and a half, we will finish the self-study and help the visiting Middle States team recognize the superior university we have become. The actual drafting of our new strategic plan will parallel this work. Both our preparation for planning and the planning itself will be highly inclusive, grounded in the experiences, insights, and ideas of our faculty, students, staff, alumni, and numerous off-campus constituencies.

Certainly some parts of the new document will be a continuation of the *Plan for Excellence*. In everything we do, we will reinforce our commitment to excellence; that focus will not change. Likewise we will reiterate our dedication to ensuring that WCU is—and is known as—a place where all members of our community can be successful, are appreciated for their differences, and find enjoyment and satisfaction. We will continue to foster a climate of access, civility, trust, and respect that reflects and promotes the University's strong Values Statement. And we will continue on our

trajectory of creating greater diversity across our campus community, as reflected in our new faculty hires this year, who are over 40 percent persons of color—a notable accomplishment toward our goal of social equity.

Other parts of the next strategic plan will be new and will grow out of the ideas emerging on and off campus. From listening to you, I recognize that elements of what we must do are already clear, and some of your many good ideas need our immediate attention. I would like to mention a few pivotal areas that will demand our energy this year, be reflected in the University's new strategic plan, and resonate in our work throughout the decade ahead.

Conversations on and off campus are suggesting new and exciting curricula. Based on these conversations and others yet to take place, we will establish new instructional programs and alternative instructional delivery venues that are responsive to emerging workforce needs and reflect the interests of current and future WCU students. Where faculty innovation and enrollment demand intersect, we will need to dedicate the necessary resources to ensure success. Of course, our commitment of resources to all of our programs and services must be guided by logic, be consistently applied, and reinforce the goals of our institution. We have constituted a task force to review our funding models to ensure that we are distributing our scarce resources in a way that rewards hard work and effective management and encourages creativity and innovation.

In his book *Future Shock*, Alvin Toffler talks about essential skills and knowledge for our era. He writes that “By instructing students how to learn, unlearn, and relearn, a powerful new dimension can be added to education.”² In reality, such agility is essential at all levels—from the individual to institutions such as West Chester University.

As Toffler suggests, we are preparing students for jobs and a future that do not yet exist. We must look out over the long horizon to determine what careers will be available to our students into the next decade, and we must continually review and build on our already powerful curricula. We will, for example, begin a conversation about how to respond to business and industry needs for on-time and just-in-time training—to

² *Future Shock* (1970), p. 211 in <http://www.scribd.com/doc/13671345/Future-Shock-Alvin-Toffler>.

deliver creatively the skill and knowledge sets that will enable our industries to compete globally. Such a function would, of course, need to be overseen by the faculty to ensure the same academic integrity as in our credit-bearing curricula. At the same time, our campus is ready for doctoral-level education. You have told me that you are ready for doctoral programs; they are an expectation of our constituencies and need to be part of our immediate future.

It is also crucial to note our recent growth in current graduate programs at WCU. Expanding our graduate-program enrollments reflects positively on the depth of our faculty and is necessary to keep up with the increasing demand for advanced education across many disciplines. A commitment to continued expansion will need to be carefully considered in our strategic planning efforts so that we can approach this opportunity with the same commitment to excellence that has been such a signature of West Chester University.

Pedagogy is a key University strength on which we will build. Out of this strength will grow new and expanded applications of technology for teaching and learning in campus programs and distance education. Our current and prospective students acquire information differently than most of us did in high school and college. Today's young people learn and expect to be taught with today's technologies, and this fact has inevitable implications for us.

Technology also means that education is now an exportable product. Distance education will allow us to extend the benefits of higher education to people who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to join our campus community. We want to be able to reach a larger number of the more than 17,000 annual applicants and others who would like to benefit from a WCU education. A task force on distance education is already in place, and this group will recommend strategies for serving additional students and giving greater economic benefit to the University. I might add that two excellent graduate programs are being offered online for the first time this semester as models for other parts of our campus.

Another point in clear focus is our need to consider the global community, our place within it, and our contributions to the Commonwealth, country, and world. The West Chester University Global Development Collaborative has recommended

expanding our emphasis on attracting international students and providing opportunities for WCU students and faculty to access global experiences. The importance of hosting more international students goes well beyond the tuition benefits for us. The greatest benefits are in giving our domestic students an opportunity to get to know people from other cultures who may have ideas and practices that differ from their own. Our international emphasis is important for expanding our diversity and preparing our students to understand different philosophies and backgrounds, compete in the global economy, and participate fully as citizens of the world community.

In a second area of current and future importance, we will enable WCU to achieve national and global recognition as a leader in the implementation of green technologies, sustainable energy, and the reduction of our carbon footprint.

It has been said that “We are the first generation to recognize our influence on the environment and the last to escape the consequences.”³ West Chester University is committed to taking our share of responsibility for our planet’s wellbeing. Across the campus, the University is already setting the standard. For example, we are doing so in the application of renewable energy, and we are incorporating significant energy-saving features in our new and renovated facilities. The size of WCU’s completed and projected geothermal system places it among just a handful in the world. When the University completes the transition for much of the campus from heating and cooling with coal and oil to using geothermal energy, we expect significant additional annual emissions reductions, including about 40 tons of particulates.

These very notable accomplishments, along with the commitment of our faculty and staff to the environment, will enable WCU to become identified as a leading university in which the environmental theme permeates all of what we do—throughout our curriculum and in our everyday actions. Regardless of our students’ choice of major, upon graduation from West Chester University, they should be clearly identifiable as champions of the environment.

A third area of fundamental importance is expanding and developing resources in support of WCU's mission and service to the community and Commonwealth.

³ J.R. Pegg, “The Earth is Melting, Arctic Native Leader Warns,” Environment News Service, 16 September 2004, <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/sep2004/2004-09-16-10.asp>.

Let me be clear from the outset that generating revenues for WCU is not in itself an end goal. Instead, doing so is an enabling objective that will allow us to reach some of the University's most important goals. We are currently challenged by insufficient resources to actualize many valuable ideas and initiatives—to support those in our campus community who can lead their programs and disciplines to new levels. Enhancing our resource base will be a multidimensional effort that includes recognizing and responding to emerging opportunities. We will look closely at how we do business so that we can remove the obstacles to embracing such opportunities.

Part of our many-faceted effort will be creating and expanding partnerships that leverage our fiscal and intellectual resources for mutual benefit. Similarly, we will explore partnering with others to build or use facilities that not only serve our respective needs but also have revenue potential—our work with privatized student housing is a good example of this approach. A picture of the future that is coming into focus shows us building and enhancing our institution both within our campus borders and off campus. We are already exploring the possibility of education centers in population areas where we need to provide service—and investigating partnerships that will allow us to leverage our talents with other institutions of higher education. In every case, the goal will remain creating greater access to higher education's benefits.

In short, because old financial models no longer work, our vision for the future includes diversifying the University's resources. The University will need to be more aggressive in finding new resources, including expanded funding from the private sector. We already have a strong base of alumni and friends who want to invest in our future. We are already impressive in our entrepreneurial endeavors and our grants and contracts. In all of these, however, we will reach for and realize more.

An increasing number of faculty have expressed to me their interest in external sponsorship of research, scholarship, innovation in teaching, and service. Support of these growing interests will require us to build out our pre- and post-application services and provide increased opportunities for faculty to pursue their interests in advancing their disciplines and improving professional practice. While we have enjoyed notable successes in this area, annual award levels do not match the talent and creativeness of our faculty. We can stretch ourselves while at the same time protecting our superb

reputation for teaching excellence and student centeredness.

The fourth area we need to consider among our top initiatives is continuing to improve our relationships with our neighbors in the borough and townships of which we are a part.

We will need to explore new avenues to reach out to the community, as well as to the larger region—to corporations, government, and the nonprofit sector—to meet needs and support an even higher quality of life. We will continue to work with area schools to improve teaching and learning; we will contribute to our community's lifestyle by expanding our leadership in the arts, and we will further use our vast intellectual talents to address issues of importance to our neighbors. Such partnerships create synergies whose influence extends well beyond our ability when working alone.

The final area I would like to address is elevating the visibility and image of West Chester University as a world-class, top-of-mind, first-choice university that attracts and retains top faculty, staff, and students.

We do not have to create the story of West Chester University's greatness—ours is already a fabulous story. As one proverb puts it, "There are those who make things happen; there are those who watch things happen, and there are those who wonder what happened." We sit firmly in the first of these groups, and we plan to do much more to get the word out about that fact.

As we promote WCU more aggressively, we will stress our strengths across the curricula and the recognition our faculty are earning as top-level teacher-scholars. We have, for instance, internationally known faculty biologists, physicists, and astronomers doing cutting-edge research. We provide national leadership in integrative healthcare. Our visual and performing arts programs have long held world-class status. For 50 years, we have been setting the standard for women's opportunities in intercollegiate athletics and watching our men and women excel in competition and the classroom. We are likewise setting the standard for entrepreneurship in higher education, from the College of Business and Public Affairs partnerships with business and industry to the Pharmaceutical Product Development and Applied Statistics programs. WCU's Pre-medical Program is among the very best in the country, and the College of Education is strengthening and transforming schools throughout the region.

West Chester University is setting the bar for an unrelenting focus on student success. In fact, West Chester University has earned prominent national respect. Particularly impressive is *Kiplinger's* ranking WCU nationally among the top 60 “best buys” in American public higher education and calling these best buys “noteworthy for their combination of top-flight academics and affordable costs.”

The University has just completed a branding study that will guide our investment in an elevated marketing campaign. The more aggressive campaign will further elevate the degree value for our current students and alumni, and it will increase opportunities for our faculty and staff. With still greater national and international recognition, we will inspire stronger alumni loyalty and even more effectively attract students, faculty, funding, and facilities to support and extend the institution-wide excellence of West Chester University.

This morning and throughout my months in the president's office, I have been feeling enormous gratitude for the people who have come before—for the administrators, faculty, staff, and students from the first days of West Chester Normal School and the 138 years since then and for the 13 past presidents of this marvelous institution. Not only were these presidents good stewards; they also positioned West Chester University to be one of the top regional comprehensive public universities in the country. My thanks to our predecessors and to all who are still working hard to ensure the success of WCU and those we serve.

Sandra and I look forward to growing old here at WCU—although she reminds me that I'll be there before her. Young and old, from today forward, you and I will use our determination, commitment, and knowhow to build on our university's traditional strengths and current excellence. Let our celebration today ignite a commitment to moving West Chester University to its next level over the coming years. Let us also focus on the growing clarity of our vision, the path we will chart to even greater excellence, and the surefooted steps we will take along the way. Instead of discouraging or defeating us, challenges will spur us to unprecedented creativity and results. Each of us in our academic community will thrive in an atmosphere of excitement, powerful ideas, and vigorous collaboration that transforms vision to reality.

I believe that within the next 10 years, we will all look back on our individual and collective accomplishments with a deep sense of pride and satisfaction. I thank all of you for your support and confidence in me to help our great university achieve a very, very bright future.