

State of the University
Boise State University
Dr. Robert Kustra
January 5, 2004

Good morning and welcome to Spring Semester 2004. Please join me in thanking Robert Lotvani on piano and Ryan Olsen, Tenor, for performing for us this morning.

I hope that you had a relaxing and enjoyable holiday and that you are as anxious as I am to begin a new year and a new semester.

It was a great year, a perfect beginning for me as a new President. I doubt my wife would be so quick to join in on that unqualified claim, but the good news in the accident department is that Kathy has had her cast removed and the stitches taken out from her latest surgery and the rest of the story is about rehab and regaining the use of her foot. I'm sure that you will be seeing more of her in the coming months. I know that she's anxious for that to happen.

I continue to marvel at the incredible pace at which our university has advanced over the last few years. And it's about so much more than enrollment. It's about the quality of our programs and how we are maturing as a first-class academic institution.

Our essential mission, of course, is to provide a well-educated citizenry for the people of Boise, the region, the State and beyond. Citizens prepared to assume their positions in the workplace and contribute to the economic well being of our communities and state. Citizens prepared to dedicate their lives to careers; citizens who participate in the body politic; citizens who support the arts; citizens who care about their fellow citizens and are tolerant and knowledgeable of other peoples, their cultures, belief systems and values.

A great example of how well our faculty is doing in preparing our students is evidenced by the fact that the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has once again recognized a Boise State professor as Idaho Professor of the Year, this time Dr. Alicia Garza in the Department of Modern Languages. Congratulations to Dr. Garza for keeping the Boise State streak alive. Our faculty has won this honor for six of the last seven years. Quite an accomplishment and quite a statement about our excellence in teaching!

New Developments and Future Plans

The State of the University address is inevitably about progress—that which we have accomplished and that which yet lies before us. Allow me now to review some of the exciting ventures that were jump-started over the last few months and others on the planning board that signal our entry into a category of institutions known as metropolitan, research universities.

A great example was heralded at a press conference a few weeks ago where the FAA announced that our College of Engineering has been invited to join a world class partnership of research universities, including MIT, Stanford and Purdue. The FAA Center of Excellence program will conduct basic research and engineering development to identify solutions for existing and anticipated aircraft noise and emissions-related problems.

This good news followed on the heels of the recent approval given by the State Board of Education for our new Materials Science and Engineering program beginning in Fall 2004. With \$2 million of start-up funding provided by Micron Technology, the new program will be **interdisciplinary**, drawing upon coursework from Physics and Chemistry as well as Engineering in order to provide students with an understanding of the properties, structure, processing, and performance of a variety of materials used in the production process. Needless to say, the program will be highly responsive to Micron and our high tech industries in the Treasure Valley.

Then there was the Memorandum of Agreement that we signed recently with the University of Chicago and our sister institutions in Idaho, opening up collaborative research opportunities for our faculty and students at Argonne National Laboratory. Students in science, engineering, business, public administration and environmental policy will participate in summer internships at Argonne.

In another program area, I also offer congratulations to Elise Blackwell, an Assistant Professor in the English Department, for the recognition of her book Hunger, which was named to the Los Angeles Times list of the 40 best works of fiction for the year. What an honor for Elise and for Boise State.

We will be back before the Board of Education early this year with our proposal to establish the Biomolecular Research Center housed in the College of Arts and Sciences with strong ties to Engineering as well. Funded largely through external grants, the Center will facilitate the development of undergraduate and graduate programs and foster research in biomolecular studies, engineering, physical sciences, biological sciences, biomaterials science and biophysics.

The State Board also gave its approval recently to our proposal for an Institute for Urban and Regional Planning, one of the most obvious manifestations of our metropolitan mission and role in Idaho higher education. Working in collaboration with the Boise Chamber of Commerce, Office of the Mayor and other state and local governments and regional agencies, the Institute will assist in the development, implementation and evaluation of public policies associated with urban and regional planning in southwestern Idaho and other areas of the state. The Institute will focus on public policy issues that demand a coordinated, regional approach to planning, such as crime, economic development, air and water quality, transportation, land use, tax policies, and other issues that impact quality of life.

State of the University

January 4, 2004

Page 3

Speaking of the Office of Mayor, by the way, I look forward to a most productive relationship with Boise's new Mayor, Dave Bieter. He and I met shortly after his election, and I can tell you that he wants Boise State to play an important role in the City's future. Mayor Bieter and his recently announced senior staff—two of whom are BSU graduates—have strong bonds with our university and for that I am grateful.

We have also sought permission from the Board to build a new Student Services facility that will be a one-stop shop for our students transacting business and seeking student services. Although the Board has deferred a final decision on that project until we provide more information, I am hopeful that we will receive permission to move forward early this year.

The Board did approve a new classroom building, appropriately named in this era of online learning and wireless communication, the Interactive Learning Center. This new Center will be Boise State's latest effort to capitalize on technologies that create more flexible and responsive learning environments.

We are in the process of designing the building to accommodate our growing enrollments, and to do so by using new technologies that personalize the learning experience. If you would like to contribute to this discussion, I encourage you to offer any suggestions that you may have to Larry Blake who is working with Academic Technologies and overseeing the design.

This semester, as a follow-up to the State Board's newly adopted policy on Planning and Coordination of Academic Programs and Courses, Boise State will be engaged in a statewide planning effort with our sister institutions. Each of our colleges' plans for new academic programs will be integrated into an institutional plan to guide development of new programs over the next eight years. This plan will be shared with our sister institutions and eventually incorporated into a statewide academic plan that will clarify academic program responsibilities within each region and across the State. The Board's goal is to eliminate unnecessary duplication of effort and maximize collaboration and cooperation among all of Idaho's public colleges and universities.

As President, I can assure you that I intend to provide the leadership that Boise State deserves as this statewide planning process unfolds. I intend to foster cooperation and collaboration with our sister institutions where it is driven by sound state educational policy and where it offers our students the highest quality education. On the other hand, I think it is important that our sister institutions respect Boise State for the institution it is today and recognize the fact that our primary service region is southwestern Idaho and Boise in particular. The Board of Education can count on me to deal with my fellow presidents on these delicate matters of turf in an honest, forthright and professional fashion and I know that our Vice Presidents and Deans will do the same.

Graduate Programs and Research

State of the University

January 4, 2004

Page 4

One of the themes the State Board will see in our plans is an increasing emphasis on new graduate programs. As the Boise economy becomes more sophisticated and the region experiences an increase in the educational level of its citizens, the demand for graduate study will increase and we must provide those educational services. Of course, state funding does not support the creation of as many new programs as are in the planning stages at this time, but I do encourage Deans, Chairs and faculty to experiment with new financial models and to review on a regular basis what resources may be redirected from programs that can no longer justify the investment. I consider new graduate programs to be a high priority of this administration.

I also place heavy emphasis on building research opportunities for our faculty, staff and students. For that reason, I elevated the position of Vice President of Research to a direct report to the President. Dr. Owens will be sitting with the Vice Presidents in our weekly meetings to assure that our research role is integrated into the direction and priorities of the University.

The Role of the Community College in BSU's Plans

With this increased focus on research and graduate programs as part of our vision of becoming a metropolitan, research university, I have spent much of the last six months thinking about Boise State's role as a community and technical college. The Larry Seland College of Technology, under the leadership of Dr. Larry Barnhart and with the support of an outstanding faculty, has done a great job of serving sectors of the Boise and Idaho economy that simply would not have the workforce preparation programs, were it not for its dedicated faculty and staff.

But the time has come for Boise State to do justice both to the Seland College and the potential it has to serve larger and larger numbers of students in southwestern Idaho. In my experience, the Treasure Valley may be the largest population area without a distinct community college to offer the first two years of a university education; to offer associates degrees, adult basic education and workforce preparation programs tailored for specific industries and workplaces in the region.

Our new campus in Canyon County has the potential to accommodate a community college worthy of a dynamic economy such as the Treasure Valley's. But it will require us to adjust our vision a bit and recognize that it makes little sense to duplicate increasing numbers of programs on the Canyon County campus.

If we move toward a more distinctive community college mission for Canyon County, we also clarify our vision as a metropolitan, research university. One thing all metropolitan universities have in common is a need for precious space in a confining urban area. If a community college is developed in Canyon County, valuable land now housing the Seland College would be freed up to deal with what is already a critical shortage of faculty office space, research and lab space, not to mention classroom space for undergraduate and graduate programs.

I have shared my thoughts on the future of our Canyon County campus with key political leaders in Idaho, business and industry leaders and opinion makers in the media. Although I haven't found anyone to disagree with the concept, formalizing a community college and incorporating it into a system of community colleges in the State is a formidable task and will require another financial commitment from taxpayers on top of the current backlog of financial needs in the existing educational community in Idaho.

But every journey begins with small steps and I suggest that as we develop the Canyon County campus, we place a high priority on accommodating the community college function on the Canyon County campus and not attempt to expand upper division programming over there. It makes no sense to make investments today that do not fit in with our long-range plans for this campus and the Canyon County campus.

Improving Persistence at Boise State

Is it possible to discuss the access that students have to postsecondary education without also addressing the companion issue of persistence, how well we are doing at retaining first year students and graduating students in a timely fashion. Our first year to sophomore year retention rate is 60% and our five-year graduation rate is 26%. Neither of those is acceptable for an institution that takes pride in the quality of its academic and student affairs programs.

There are many factors that influence retention and graduation rates. Certainly, our decision to increase admission standards again next fall will help, as will a high-quality orientation program for first year students. Our new Director of Orientation, Rob Dennis, will be working with faculty, staff and students to improve our first year orientation programming. I know that many of you will be called upon to lend a hand with this most important task, but please don't wait to be asked. I know that Rob will be delighted to hear from any of you who would like to help, especially in those critical first few days and weeks of the fall semester.

I've suggested a program that we installed at Eastern Kentucky University. Incoming students are assigned a book to read in preparation for their arrival on campus. During the orientation process, the author of the book will visit the campus, speak to our first year students and share the experiences and lessons of the book. This program, a growing trend in first year orientation programs, not only sends a strong message to our students that we are serious about academic rigor, but it also creates a setting for the newest members of our learning community to become acquainted with each other, and to understand and appreciate how much easier it is to learn with your fellow students if there is a base of friendship and community.

Strengthening the Bonds of Community on Campus

Speaking of community, let me share with you a concern of mine that I believe can be quickly converted to a challenge for all of us to meet. Last semester, our international

programs office kicked off international education week and I attended the opening panel discussion comprised of some very impressive guests to our campus and some of our own faculty. As I feared from earlier experiences, the turnout was dismal and, unfortunately, too many members of our campus community and the community in general missed out on a wonderful opportunity to broaden their appreciation for international experiences.

Of course, I am well aware of the fact that we are a commuting campus to a large extent and so many of our students head for home and work after classes. But I do wonder if there is any more we can do to create a greater sense of community and obligation to each other and to the variety of student and faculty programs that are made available to us every day and night of the week.

Maybe the answer lies in part in better communications across campus, maybe it's the programming itself, maybe it's insufficient linkages to the Boise community or maybe there is a way for our faculty to play a role in the classroom with special announcements of lectures and presentations on campus. I know there is not a simple solution, but in the hope that there is something we can do about this issue, I will convene a committee to discuss how we can strengthen the bonds of community on our campus and how we can better engage our students in the learning process that takes place outside of the classroom. Please contact Randi McDermott in my office if you have any suggestions or would like to serve on the committee.

By the way, since Randi joined us after the start of the fall term, I have not had a chance to introduce her to you. Randi is a BSU alum and just finished the requirements for the MPA degree here at BSU. She has served on the staff at the Idaho Board of Education and will be very valuable to us as we work with the Board on the furtherance of our mission and role.

Citizenship Development at Boise State

In one sense, my concern about participation in campus events is about citizenship, taking responsibility for the common good by participating in the life of the community in some way. To that more specific end, Boise State was invited last semester to participate in the American Democracy Project of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (better known by its acronym, AASCU), which grew out of a study entitled Civic Responsibility and Higher Education. Since Boise State is a member of AASCU, I accepted the challenge on behalf of our campus community and asked Dr. Stephanie Witt to spearhead the task of identifying current programming underway that contributes to the goals of the project. The next step will be to identify new programming that will distinguish Boise State's participation in the program.

If I may, allow me to make an observation at this point, based in part on my own personal experience in public affairs. Just about the time that the authors of Civic Responsibility and Higher Education published their findings--documenting a widespread lack of public interest in civic affairs and general lack of trust in government and an overall decline in

State of the University

January 4, 2004

Page 7

civic and political participation--I was concluding 20 years of elective public office. I witnessed first hand over those years an increasing cynicism on the part of citizens and the media about the role of government in our society.

Now fast forward to my interview in Boise last spring for the presidency and the observation made more than once during those interviews by observers of Idaho politics and government that what was needed now more than ever was for someone to make a convincing case to taxpayers and their representatives about the value and importance of the higher education mission in Idaho.

However, on the receiving end of that convincing case must be a citizenry prepared to take up the challenge and fulfill their obligation to their state and local communities. Whether it's equity funding, additional scholarship assistance, support for graduate education, funding for the community college mission, the case for such important educational goals must fall on the ears of citizens who are ready and willing to make the financial commitment necessary to improve the quality of life in Idaho. And since we are in the business of preparing the next generation of those citizens for careers and lives in Idaho, it must be our responsibility to impart moral and civic values that will produce citizens who will stand up for the higher education mission, among a number of laudable civic goals.

To put it in more practical terms, it's one thing for me to go over to the legislature in the next few weeks and ask for more funding when there may not be the citizen base to support my argument. It's quite another to prepare for a brighter future for higher education by giving some very serious thought now to what we can do to help 18,400 students become better citizens for tomorrow.

You will be hearing more about the American Democracy Project. Perhaps you have some thoughts of your own that will assist us in our goals. Please contact Stephanie Witt if that is the case. We look forward to your participation.

Campaign for Students

Later this month, I will request that the State Board of Education approve an increase in fees to pay for the increasing demand for educational services at Boise State. It is, without a doubt, the most difficult decision a university president must make. I do not take lightly the task of imposing an even greater burden on our students next year. Yet, I am also aware of how we have had to restrict access, limit programming, degrees and services and hold back on important faculty and staff appointments.

As you have heard me say before, now more than ever public universities who are faced with shortfalls in state funding must ratchet up their fundraising from donors. With fewer scholarship dollars available than any of the senior universities in Idaho, Boise State has its work cut out for it. That's why I applauded in my address last fall the new Campaign for Students. Today, I can report that the campaign has been bolstered by print display ads and radio and TV spots. In addition to the original \$1.5 million contribution from the

State of the University

January 4, 2004

Page 8

Boise Industrial Foundation, which was announced last summer, we have raised an additional half a million dollars since then..and counting.

There can be no more important cause than the raising of scholarship dollars. As we point out to prospective donors, we are focused on attracting the best and the brightest students to Boise State and we know that will take a significant increase in scholarship dollars raised from private donors.

Benefiting from Excellence in Athletics

Whether it's the challenge of recruiting top students...or faculty, for that matter, there is no question that a university benefits from "reputational currency." Not much different than the money it takes to buy commercials and sound bite, reputational currency spreads the good word about a university, whether that be its quality teaching, its research and the diversity of its academic programming. There must be programs that we can point to with pride and hold up as the standards of excellence at Boise State.

Once the attention is focused on one aspect of a university that happens to get the recognition, it tends to spread across the campus to other aspects of the university. From personal experience, I can attest to its value in raising funds for scholarships, programs and buildings. Donors do not like to give to mediocrity. They like to reward excellence.

There can be no doubt that our athletic program, and our football program in particular, has cashed in more reputational currency for Boise State this year than at any time in its history. That victory at the Ft. Worth Bowl was the culmination of a great season that

positioned Boise State as a regular on ESPN and a team and university to be reckoned with in higher education circles.

I would like to congratulate Gene Bleymaier, Coach Dan Hawkins and their staffs for spreading such a positive story about Boise State. It was a tale of grit, hard work and determination. It was a story about quietly and professionally getting the job done.

New Year's Resolve

My remarks would not be complete this morning if I did not make some reference to New Year's resolutions, even though I must admit that I'm not very good at keeping the traditional laundry list of resolutions that the popular media tells us we must make. But I do intend to work off a short list of five essential strategies to achieving what I think is within our reach here at Boise State.

First of all, stay focused. I have attempted in these remarks to highlight what is really important to me and, I think, to this university. I intend to focus on these in the coming months. For example, while I appreciate the desire for my presence at university events in the next few weeks and months, my first priority must be the upcoming state legislative session. It is within our power to transform the way that Boise State is

State of the University

January 4, 2004

Page 9

perceived by the citizens of Idaho and their elected representatives, even though it won't be accomplished overnight.

I will be working with a new member of our staff in this capacity. I am pleased to announce that Mark Dunham has joined us as Director of Government Relations. He has an excellent reputation in Idaho state government from his last position as Chief Executive Officer for the Idaho Association of Realtors. Mark is a Boise State alumnus and has been active in the Alumni Association, including a stint as President.

Second, I think there is much to be gained by examining the **best practices** of our sister institutions across the nation. I hope to encourage our staff to spend more time learning about new ideas and approaches to the issues facing universities today.

Third, I do not intend to be intimidated by change and see no reason why we shouldn't think out of the box occasionally. Of course, it is important that we not tread on venerable traditions and practices that deserve their rightful place on our campus, but I also think it is important to experiment with new approaches to problems and, most importantly, to **expedite** the implementation of new policies and practices.

Time is of the essence. The faster we demonstrate to those who fund us and those who wish to donate to us that we are serious about reaching for excellence, the faster we will see a change in funding and contribution patterns.

Fourth, as I have always done, I will take some risks in order to excel and position this university both within Idaho and across the West. Please join me in sticking your neck out every now and then to see if something new will work better than the way we've always done it.

Finally, I will bring with me to work each day a passion and an excitement for the opportunity to work alongside such dedicated and committed colleagues and to be within reach of distinguishing this young university as one of the finest metropolitan, research universities in the nation.

Let me close by asking you to mark your calendars for February 27 when we will celebrate the 30th anniversary of Boise State becoming a state university, an event that will also include my installation as Boise State President.

Have a great semester and thank you once again for all you do.