

Minot State University
President David G. Fuller
Inaugural Address
April 29, 2005

President Christianson, distinguished members of the State Board of Higher Education, Chancellor Potts and representatives from the North Dakota University System, Chief of Staff William Goetz from Governor Hoeven's Office, distinguished legislators and members of the Minot State University Board of Regents and Foundation Board, delegates, representatives, and esteemed colleagues of universities and colleges, distinguished guests from the Minot Air Force Base, representatives of Minot State University and Minot State University-Bottineau faculty, staff, students, and alumni, members of my administrative staff, friends, and, of course, members of my family. Greetings. Thank you all for coming to this celebration of Minot State University.

Thank you, too, to the Inauguration Committee, under the fine leadership and direction of Professor Linda Cresap, for the wonderful job planning and organizing events for these highly exciting and rewarding three days. You have done it in style, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I also want to thank my Executive Assistant Deb Wentz, and the many faculty, staff, students and friends of the university who have contributed in so many ways to this celebration.

To my colleagues and friends—Tom and Sheila, Curt, Carolyn, and Phyllis, and our other dear friends from Nebraska and South Dakota and from former institutions who traveled this long way. I am honored. I am honored, too, by Dr. Gordon Olson's presence and continued support and guidance, and by the many others in our community of Minot, our rural community partners, our Native American partners, and others in our region who have come to celebrate this day with us.

Thanks to Dr. Brad Dean, a friend and associate from the Thoreau Society, who has flown this long distance to speak to our campus about Henry David Thoreau and to bring greetings from the scholarly society of which I have been honored to be a member for many years.

And, finally, I want to thank my family. Bob and Betty Jo Trenchard, my father and mother-in-law, who have stuck by us through the many years of school, deserve a special thank you for your strong support and love. I suspect that Bob, my father-in-law, who asked me when I might finally finish my "paper," as he called it, at the end of my doctoral work at the University of Iowa, is somewhat relieved now and assured that we've done okay. Thank you to my son Jonathan, who has traveled from Chicago to be with us this week. It's great to have you here with us today, Jon. Although my daughter, Anne, and my parents were not able to come, I do want to tell them from a distance how much I have appreciated their support and care.

And, of course, thanks to Nancy, my wife of 34 years, my friend and confidante, my most astute critic, my friend, my partner at all MSU activities and athletic events (the one who leads the cheers from the grandstand and breaks my ear drums in the process) and the person who has spent most of her life making sacrifices to help me. I wouldn't be standing up here today if you were not standing beside me for the past 34 years.

I have in the past 10 months listened carefully to others, read the history of the University and that of our region and state, and have been as active as I could possibly be

in the life of the institution and the community. It has been rewarding for us to meet so many people and to hear what they think about Minot State University. Still a relative newcomer, I believe that within this short time, I have developed a better sense of our place, our university, our relationships, and the prospects for our future. Today I'd like to spend this time sharing with you what I've learned about where we've been and where I believe we're going.

Many of us in higher education are hard pressed to describe this special sense of place, to explain what we do without the help of formal mission and vision statements. Occasionally, we hear educational pundits resort to metaphors for help in capturing the special senses of what we do. For instance, it's common to hear others describe higher education using a business metaphor—referring to our “customer-students,” our measurements and outcomes, our special market niches, our increases and decreases in numbers, our revenue, our costs, our balance sheets, and so on. While I see similarities between Minot State University and commercial enterprises or businesses, such as our responsibility to provide the best service and support to students, to strive to remain financially solvent, and to take care of the upkeep of buildings, I believe, however, that this comparison to a business falls far short of capturing what we do and who we are. If I were pressed to find a more apt metaphor, I'd be inclined to think of our work as more like that of an artist or even a horticulturalist, one who tends to seeds and small plants, nurturing and protecting them as they grow. What I've learned about Minot State University, the art of cultivating flowers or plants helps me better understand and appreciate our special purpose, value, and prospects for the future. It seems to me, that without a deeper knowledge and appreciation of an organization, its people, and its place, and without a faith in its potential, one cannot even pretend to know how to prepare for the future.

No doubt, those who have preceded us at Minot State have planted the seeds and nurtured our growth from a small Normal school of 55 students and 11 staff in September 20, 1913, to the 3,800 plus students and the more than 500 staff today. A 1938 school publication described the first years of the school as that of “strenuous organization and expansion.” This strenuous effort can be recognized in the work of Minot's early settlers, such as Erik Ramstad, whose faith in education led the effort to locate our campus where it is today on the 60 acres he donated to the institution; or our first student, Ms. Harriet Christenson, who had the faith in this young institution to enroll and pursue her studies at this new school; or our first president, A.G. Crane, who possessed the faith in the idea of Minot Normal to take on the giant responsibility of starting an institution basically from scratch. A.G. Crane not only led the “strenuous” expansion of the school, he also defined our basic charge and responsibility. In somewhat flamboyant terms that presidents are sometimes prone to use, Crane exclaimed that the institution was, and I quote, “bigger and more far-reaching than navies, armies, and fortifications, greater than the wealth of our fields, of our mines, or of our banks. For it will keep steadily in view the greater truth that the acquisition of character, not wealth or numbers, is our safest and best American idea.” From the early days until today, faculty and staff have held to that idea that it is not about numbers or wealth; it's about character; it's about the faith in students, the dedication to their growth, and their success that make the difference. The meaning and strength of Minot State comes directly from faculty and staff who nurtured,

supported, guided, and mentored the thousands of students who have attended our institution, from Harriet Christenson in 1913 to our current students in 2005.

Many proud alumni invariably point to the names of influential faculty and staff to describe Minot State and our special sense. Commencement programs, past editions of annuals, and articles from the Minot Daily News include stories, names, and photos of dedicated people focused on student growth and success. A 1933 Commencement program, for example, includes a photograph of approximately 50 faculty and staff, posing on a sunny day, sitting on tiers, with hands clasped, hats on their laps or by their sides, men dressed in suits, some with bow ties, women with Sunday hats, but most with full and proud smiles. In the first row was Elsie J. Cook, and next to her Hazel McCulloch, both with proud tenures as successful teachers and devoted staff members. Near them was President George A. McFarland, the third president of Minot State, and near him Dr. A.G. Crane and his wife, and next to the Cranes, Huldah L. Winsted, the registrar and faculty member of geography, whose verse often appeared in college publications. One such verse appeared in a publication and proclaimed, “‘Service First,’ our Normal School slogan challenging shall ring. To our school, our Minot Normal fame will bring.”

I can’t help but be reminded of the movie The Dead Poet’s Society and the scene in which the character played by Robin Williams implores his students to get up close to the framed picture of a class from years ago and listen to what they have to say. I looked closely and listened to those people in the 1933 photograph, and I could well imagine what they were saying. Now many of those faces are merely names on buildings, but back then they were people who nurtured this place, worked hard on behalf of individual students, and practiced “service first” by contributing to the life of the school and the community.

Two individuals possessing great faith in our institution in its early years are Dr. George McFarland, who served the institution for 22 years from the time he was 64 years of age until his death in 1938, and Brynhild Haugland, a celebrated legislator and alumna of Minot State. Both worked in similar ways to demonstrate their faith in our school and in the growth of our students.

Of all the early-day presidents, Dr. McFarland was highly respected and admired. In the memorial written about Dr. McFarland, he was described as someone possessing “quiet steadfastness which grew out of deep-rooted convictions, a firm belief in God, and a purposeful life dedicated to service.” The memorial went on to explain that “he had inspired the lives of thousands of students.”

Brynhild Haugland, elected to 25 terms and serving 52 years in the North Dakota Legislature, entered our training school on the first day of the college in September 1913, later graduated with an elementary certificate from Minot State Normal School, and devoted most of her life to the growth of the university, supporting it through legislative sessions, and working hard to get authorization for special appropriations for as many as 10 new buildings. She also worked successfully and tirelessly for adequate funding for education at all levels, promoted economic development, supported environmental causes and clean air, and handicapped accessibility in all buildings. The school motto, “service first,” was practiced first hand by this distinguished patron and alum, whose own often-quoted motto shown under her picture in the State Capitol reads, “Most any good thing can be accomplished eventually if you are not particular who gets the credit.” It is fitting

to know that Ms. Haugland was one of the first students on our campus in 1913, and she now rests in peace in the cemetery that adjoins our campus, along with some of the founding fathers and mothers of Minot, such as Erik Ramstad. Each of these fine individuals lived a life of faith in the institution and our students; they walked the talk of “students and service first.” From that dedication to service, their faith in the growth of this institution and its students has contributed immeasurably to who we are and how far we have come.

The multitude of voices and faces over the past 92 years, such as Haugland’s, McFarland’s, and Ramstad’s, contributed to meaningful stories, participated in conversations about new ideas, new directions, and new solutions, all with the purpose of building, strengthening, and sustaining the idea of our institution before the first brick was laid in 1913 until today. A business metaphor doesn’t even come close to capturing that sense. “A great college is built by great people,” Dr. McFarland wrote. “This means great teachers, great students, great patrons.” He expressed what so many of us know: that the strength of the university is its people, particularly people from our past who are still with us in so many ways.

Last week my wife and I attended the Employee Recognition Dinner and had the opportunity to recognize many faculty and staff who have served Minot State University from five years to as many as 35 years. We were honored, too, to see Dr. Gordon Olson there. We see Gordon regularly at our athletic events and other campus functions. Gordon’s life-long dedication to this university continues to be a priority for him even after his remarkably successful 27 years as president of Minot State University. We also had the pleasure of hearing colleagues tell us about Professors Gary Leslie and Audrey Lunday, who were honored at their retirement and for their years of extraordinary service to Minot State. We also heard about the faculty and staff who were nominated by their peers and who received the Minot State University Board of Regents Achievement Awards, such as George Withus from Information Technology, who was recognized for his skills, his sincere dedication to helping others, and his engaging and friendly personality; Melanie Moore from Student Health and Development, who has served Minot State for more than 27 years and was recognized for her active service to the community and to our students; Allen Kihm, professor of geosciences, was honored with this year’s achievement award for scholarship and further recognized by his colleagues for the valued mentoring he provides to his own students in their research; Kevin Neuharth, our theater director and professor of communication arts, was honored with the achievement award in teaching and recognized for his remarkable devotion and care for his students; and Stephen Hayton, professor of mathematics and computer sciences, was the recipient of the achievement award for service, and was recognized for the countless hours he devotes to helping and advising students, talking to prospective students and their parents, and serving the institution in many other ways.

I could go on and on, and I could share stories of faculty and staff I’ve observed working one-on-one with students, knowing them by name, and mentoring and supporting them in their studies and work. Many people on our campus carry on this tradition. The motivation to practice “students first” does not come, I suggest, from copying the often quoted business motto of customers first. No, it comes from our tradition of knowing that for students to succeed and grow, all of us -- faculty, staff, administrators, alumni, and presidents -- must have faith in their potential and must

devote our attention, our time, and our lives to nurturing and mentoring them. These students come to us with a variety of expectations, a variety of skills and backgrounds, and with a common but powerful aspiration to grow and succeed. They are not coming to us to buy a diploma as one would purchase a tube of toothpaste; they are coming to us with a hope and aspiration to learn and grow and succeed. It is up to all of us to keep this tradition going and not to lose sight of the need to keep students, their learning, and their success first and well in mind.

If we continue to keep our focus on that responsibility, and take to heart that tradition and huge responsibility, our students will continue to succeed and come with those high expectations. Just think of those 700 fourth-graders who visited our campus on Wednesday, full of energy and creativity, fun-filled thoughts and hopes and wonder, a love for learning, anticipating only the brightest of futures. I enjoy the prospect of many of them starting school as first-year students at Minot State in 2013, the year of our centennial—many still with high expectations and remarkable wonder for the future.

As I looked at those children on Wednesday, I was reminded again and even more dramatically about the huge responsibility all of us in higher education bear for our community and our future. Our responsibility, more than ever, will be to help them grow and develop, to continue to plant the seeds about the joy and wonder of learning, and to lead them to understanding that all of them can make a difference in our world. One wonders what MSU will be like in 2013. I'm convinced that despite all the changes we'll experience between now and then, that the success of this institution will rest upon its ability to serve individual students, with the same enthusiasm and sacrifice of the people in that 1933 photograph. It will depend on our ability to respond wisely and effectively to the rapid changes in and demands on higher education.

This inauguration is a good time indeed to look into the future. As someone trained in English and fascinated with the meanings and origins of words, I found, to my great surprise and relief in the Oxford English Dictionary, that the term does not imply a coronation. Instead, the term "inauguration" comes from the Latin word "inaugurare," which means to interpret signs and predict the future from the flight, singing, and feeding of birds. Using that etymology as license for me during this inauguration to predict the future, I want to hastily allay the concerns of those of you who might think that my 10 bird feeders and hundreds of pounds of feed this winter helped me identify goals for our strategic plan or future. Rest assured that I didn't rely at all on those flying, singing, and feeding birds for anything more than the simple joy of watching them and marveling at their beauty.

I have relied, instead, on some obvious and not-so-obvious signs all around us. We in higher education are forever trying to interpret signs and predict the future based on data and trends, but not necessarily the flight of birds. Those wonderful fourth-graders are, in my view, a better sign of our good future. Without them and others who aspire to become something important and to live a good life, we wouldn't have a future.

The signs we have seen and recognize and will bear directly on our future are many, and I'll name just a few of special interest.

- Our Native American students and faculty, our international students and faculty, and the many other people who make up our institution are signs indicating our need to celebrate diversity and respect differences in points of view.

- With the need for diversity comes the ever-present sign of our continued need to respect and honor all people, to carry out our work morally and humanely; this sign shows us that we need to, more than ever before, include people meaningfully within our organization, to make sure that our people all across the institution receive respect and support, and that they deserve to be included in deliberations and future planning.
- Our limited natural resources is an ever-increasing sign of our fragile environment and our the subsequent need for our institution in the future to take steps to practice good stewardship of our earth, through recycling and alternative energy, to model good environmental practices, and to encourage students to become environmental citizens.
- The inordinate growth of technology is a monumental sign, some would call it a prodigious black hole; it is giant challenge for all of us to stay current and ahead, and make sense of how advancing technology and human values co-exist.
- The declining financial and moral support for higher education suggests that new forms of revenue must be sought aggressively, and that compelling arguments need to be made to show how critically important higher education and its support are for our future.
- The growing expectation and incredible demand for good communications is a sign that will cause us in higher education to make quantum leaps in curricula that teach effective writing, reading, ethical communications, and critical thinking about what to say and what is said.
- The growing expectation of the business model, for efficiencies, customer satisfaction, accountabilities, convenience in time and location, competitive prices, the urgency to find more students and to deliver what may attract them, and to do it in a mega-retailing sort of way is leading higher education to rethink delivery modes, seat time, life credit, “time to diploma,” and knowledge as if it were a product easily packaged and delivered in the shortest amount of time. The future, though, will depend on how well we are able to resist the temptation to put our heads in the sand and to ignore these changes, while not losing sight of what we’re here for.
- It is a self-evident sign that our world is getting smaller and smaller. How we co-exist and interact with other countries, speak other languages, respect other people, and understand others and their customs will bear directly on our curriculum and our practices. These are signs of our need to nurture, teach, and develop global perspectives, through enhanced international studies, foreign language training, cultural studies, international travel, international faculty and student exchanges and partnerships, and international student recruitment and support.
- The demands for our students to become more civically engaged and involved are intensifying as many students are becoming less and less civically engaged and involved. The future is going to require concerted efforts to give students the experience and the cause for engagement in our civic affairs and for them to make meaningful contributions.

- As competitive as our environment is, the more we can collaborate and work together, the more successes we'll enjoy. Our future will require significantly increased collaboration efforts, between K-12 educators, private business, and government agencies.
- The sign showing that more and more students are taking on-line courses and fewer are participating in campus courses and activities indicates that our efforts at Minot State University to build campus vitality and to balance the delivery methods will need to be intensified in the future.

And finally, one sign is obvious—with increased communication, sophisticated technology, economic development needs, a global and diverse world, and the rapidly expanding role of research and learning, and a rapidly expanding world population—it is our significant responsibility to provide the highest educational and learning environment. We must insist on outstanding education, the most effective forms of learning, marked by rigor, responsiveness, challenge, high standards, effective practices, and experiential, field-based, and service learning. All of these responsibilities and signs lead me back to the essential culture and value apparent in the horticulturalist metaphor I used at the beginning and which are reflected in Henry David Thoreau's lines used as the theme of this celebration.

Brad Dean, whom I am honored to have here as a Thoreau scholar, compiled unpublished essays and writings of Thoreau a few years ago. He published the essays under the title Faith in a Seed, the title which comes from an essay Thoreau read to an agricultural society in Concord, Massachusetts, in 1860. The essay, titled "The Succession of Forest Trees," describes in characteristic Thoreauvian detail the processes squirrels and birds follow in dispersing and dropping seeds, and how the pine trees serve as shelters for the growth of other seeds into young oaks. In it he recounts his own observations and long-term studies of the growth from the buried seeds and the number of years they take to germinate. Thoreau explains that through these processes, nature provides for the growth of these young oak trees. He concludes his essay with this simple but powerful observation: "Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed. . . . Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders." Thoreau's naturalist's inclinations account for his fascination with growth from seeds. More than that, the far-reaching and transcendental meanings provide us with a deeper insight into the growth from seeds. Thoreau was not only a writer, but an educator, and for me this small incident and his line offer a timely message for us in higher education, particularly for me as the relatively new eighth president of Minot State University. It is the extent to which we can help the students grow, not just the extent to which we can help the students know. In a similar way, the 19th Century painter and critic John Ruskin believed that "Education does not mean teaching people what they do not know.... Rather, he maintained, that education "is a painful, continued and difficult work to be done by kindness, by watching, by warning, by precepts, and by praise, but above all -- by example." Our role is much like that of the birds dispersing seeds and the pine trees sheltering the growth of the young oak trees.

My work and our work with students are similar in many ways to the horticulturalist, who plants and tends to seeds—some germinate, some don't, others lay dormant for years. But most germinate and grow if they are nurtured properly and with

care. That is what we do in higher education—nurture, create an environment suitable for growth, and rely on our faith in students’ capacity for growth and success. That faith comes from our inherent belief in the capacity for all to learn and grow and from our understanding that if they are nurtured, supported, protected, and guided appropriately, they have the potential for growth and wonder. If we have that faith in their potential for growth, then we can and should expect wonders. Having faith in our ability to instill within our students a sense of wonder about our world is by itself a “wonderful” goal.

I continue to look at our work and business as mysterious and profound. “Convince me,” as Thoreau said, “that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders.” The themes of faith, growth, and wonder paint a powerful picture of what we do in higher education—indeed, what our responsibilities are as educators. Faith, growth and wonder. These are not words for the inside of brochures; these are not words for a marketing campaign; rather, these words reflect and express the consistent and strong commitment of the early leaders of our community and the college and all of those people currently who believe strongly in our students.

All of you who teach know precisely what I’m talking about. The faculty and staff who look at us from the 1933 photograph and who are now gone, knew what that meant. For Minot State University, our profound goal will be to continue to create an environment in which all of that continues to happen in a context of rapid change. Creating that environment, helping it happen, providing faculty and staff that support, both moral and financial, is basically what I’m going to be doing as president for the next years to and through our centennial in 2013.

Even though our profession is becoming out of necessity more utilitarian, with more external demands and expectations, we shouldn’t lose sight of our learning, our wonder, our ability to reflect, and our freedom to communicate. Emerson said that, “[t]he things taught in schools and colleges are not an education, but the means of education.” We’ll succeed and flourish if we hold true to the substance of what we do, just as so many of those who have come before us at Minot State University, those who are here now, and those who will be coming in the future. I still hold fast to the poet William Butler Yeats’ view that “Education is not filling buckets, but lighting the fire.” I also hold fast to Henry Thoreau’s sound observation that “[t]he highest we can attain to is not knowledge, but sympathy with intelligence.” He suggests that our aim is not to promote knowledge for knowledge sake, but rather for the sake of turning out students who have the commitment to appreciate others, to sympathize, to understand, and to carry out our work intelligently and thoughtfully. Students who come away from Minot State University, who have that ability, will indeed make a positive and meaningful difference in our world.

The important thing to remember, though, is that it is not an individual president, but all of us who can make this happen. As Brynhild Haugland reminded us, “Most any good thing can be accomplished eventually if you are not particular who gets the credit.” It is, too, as George McFarland recognized that a great college is built by great people. In my view, we certainly have what it takes.

I thank you for your kind attention, and my wife Nancy and I thank you for your warm welcome to your community—the community of Minot State University, the community of Minot, the community of our very special region, and this very special and wonderful state. This is our home, one in which we are eager to devote our lives as

citizens, and one in which we are heartened by your support and the honor of my appointment as the university's eighth president. I pledge to work hard to fulfill our notable responsibilities and your high expectations and those expectations of the many who have preceded us, all who held a strong faith in the growth of our students and the faith and wonder all of us hold for Minot State University.

Thank you.