



Welcome to the State of the University Address. It's hard to believe that it has been almost two years since you welcomed me as Plymouth State University's fourteenth president and a year since we gathered for the investiture. Thank you for attending this afternoon.

During the investiture, I told you that I wanted to introduce a State of the University Address as part of my being accountable to each of you, as we are accountable to the wider world, about Plymouth State's progress toward our goals. The occasion is an opportunity to celebrate some of the past year's successes, to highlight what you and our students have accomplished; and also to delineate the challenges we face as we move forward and the issues on which we must work together. A university has many departments. Today we bring together our varied voices and constituencies to examine Plymouth State University as a whole.

The mid-March date was chosen for a reason. I could plausibly claim that this is the academic version of a town meeting; and, according to Fritz Wetherbee in this month's *New Hampshire Magazine*, early March became the time for town meetings because winter had been long and cold and people were ready for a chance to "see . . . neighbors and hash out the coming year." By that reasoning, we are part of a New Hampshire tradition extending back nearly four centuries.

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The actual reason is our history. On March 15th of 1871, defying superstition about the doom predicted for actions taken on the Ides of March, the first New Hampshire normal

school, at Plymouth, opened the doors for its first term, with 80 students and two buildings. The school was to have a trial period of five years. What a transformation has occurred over 137 years, from that hopeful beginning to today's vibrant regional comprehensive university of almost 7,000 students—4,300 undergraduates and 2,600 graduate students—with courses from archaeology to women's studies, and artists, scholars, and researchers mentoring students and performing amazing work across the region and around the globe.

Any discussion of the University begins with its mission. As Chancellor Reno said last year in a phrase that resonated with many, we strive to "make mission statement an active verb"; and our mission emphasizes excellent undergraduate and graduate teaching informed by research, scholarship, and creativity; and active engagement with the region through providing artistic and cultural resources, research to solve real-world problems, and support for workforce and professional and economic development.

In fulfilling our mission, the University is strong and becoming stronger.

Being president means that many people tell me how we're doing; happily, those conversations are nearly always joyous. We continue to be seen, correctly, as student-centered, and, increasingly, as responsive to regional needs. Students, alumni, and parents speak of faculty who are inspiring, coaches who articulate and exemplify the ideals of athletics, and staff in admissions, financial aid, the HUB, health

services, the physical plant, the University police, or other divisions who extend themselves for students and whose work, done well and without widespread recognition, underlies our institutional success. I receive positive comments nearly every day. That is a very high standard.

Citizens from surrounding communities praise the Silver Center for the Arts programming and the performances of our Music, Theatre, and Dance students. Community members discuss our students' participation in community service and their value as interns. Business leaders, legislators, and educational and scientific collaborators speak of the importance of our research and outreach to the Lakes Region, North Country, New Hampshire, and New England. Our partnerships are increasing.

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We are developing a significant role in the cultural, scientific, and economic life of the region, as we should. And these partnerships create opportunities for students; the relationship is reciprocal.

In sum, the campus is intellectually vital, an exciting place to be. Let me mention a few highlights of this year's many achievements:

- The Karl Drerup Gallery's exhibit *Enchanted Garden: Enamels by an American Master* enhanced appreciation for Drerup, a gifted artist and educator. PSU is beginning a Karl Drerup collection to honor the man whose legacy is both in his pieces and, as founder of the PSU Art Department, in his students.
- Langdon Woods residence hall, a \$29 million project on which many on campus worked in teams led by Vice President Bill Crangle, is NH's first residence hall to earn LEED Gold certification and one of a handful of such projects in the United States. This achievement establishes PSU as a national leader in environmental construction.
- Four undergraduate meteorology students again this year achieved recognition. These students earned four of 21 American Meteorological Society scholarships. Think of that. The students are engaged in undergraduate research here in New Hampshire, at NASA Kennedy Space Center, and at labs across the country.
- Football coach Paul Castonia was named the New England Football Conference Boyd Division Coach of the Year after PSU this year won the ECAC title in a remarkable season; and ski coach Kim Bownes, an internationally known ski professional and newly named Associate Director of Athletics, received the Walter A. Smith Coaches Award at the NH Parade of Champions.
- For the tenth consecutive year, Master of Business Administration students have won awards in the National Small Business Institute Case of the Year Competition. Our students accomplished another first in taking three top awards, one in each category for which they were eligible.
- *Local Democracy Under Siege*, co-authored by Thad Gulbrandsen (Center for Rural Partnerships), will receive next month the Delmos Jones and Jagna Sharff Memorial Prize from the Society for the Anthropology of North America. This prize, awarded every two years, honors the book that best deals with a major issue and has significant implications for society. Gulbrandsen also was named to the *Union Leader's* 40 Under 40 list of young professionals making a difference in New Hampshire—as were a number of our graduates.
- An original musical version of *Pollyanna*, by Trish Lindberg (Education), based on the novel by Littleton, NH's Eleanor Porter, premiered here in January, featuring a cast of 55 children and adults, with professional, community, and University players.
- Steve Barba, Executive Director of University Relations, was named one of the 25 citizens who have shaped New Hampshire over the past 25 years of NH Public Radio and should now be speaking to the state's future, as he does, on our behalf.

By such measures, and these are only samples of the first-rate work being done across campus, the people of PSU are accomplishing our mission with energy, commitment, and entrepreneurialism. Let us look to other signs of the state of the University. First, our undergraduates, our core responsibility.

Our students come from New Hampshire, or over half of them do—and from 29 other states and 16 countries, suggesting that PSU is recognized as having, as we do, attractive programs, a wonderful location, and a friendly and supportive environment for learning.

Forty percent of our incoming students in 2007 were first-generation college students, when nationally only 16 percent of new college students are first generation. As a first-generation college student myself, as many of you are, I know that education transforms lives, and we want to support students whose families have less experience with higher education so that student **access** can become **success**. We want to set the bar high **and** help students achieve it.

How are we doing? Retention rates are strong and improving. Faculty members have focused on active learning and student engagement; 91 percent of seniors in 2007 described their learning experience as good or excellent. Faculty also in recent years have developed a general education program with a “first-year” experience, established a College of University Studies for “deciding” students who are choosing an appropriate major, and now offer regular seminars through the Frost Faculty Center for Learning and Teaching Excellence. Staff in IT and the library have created, with support services, an integrated Learning Commons that is a model visited regularly by administrators from other universities.



Our students are graduating in higher numbers, a 12 percent increase over five years in the graduation rate, in part due to the work of the office of undergraduate advising and the introduction of the junior audit so that students know the courses they need. The Frost School of Continuing and Professional Studies offers courses during the winterim and summer semester, in the evenings, and online so that our facilities are more fully used and students have additional opportunities to stay on target for their degrees.

PSU graduates are attractive to employers. Eighty-four percent of those seeking positions were employed either before graduation or within six months. Integration of the undergraduate career placement services in Bagley Center with the new Alumni Association program for ongoing career support now makes the transition from undergraduate to alum virtually seamless.

Graduate programs are thriving. We have new certificates that are significant for our region, such as Historic Preservation, and the state-of-the-art teaching facility established last year in Concord with the NH Association of School Principals has been expanded. This year marks PSU’s sixtieth anniversary of graduate education; the first programs were begun just after World War II.

We have a number of other large-scale accomplishments of which to be proud.

One is strategic planning. Last year, I asked people to talk about their dreams; and the campus began a conversation about mission and goals under the leadership of Provost Julie Bernier and with Associate Dean of Institutional Research Scott Mantie. A year and a half later, PSU has an exciting, coherent, and integrated five-year plan that articulates our mission, values, and guiding principles. It establishes goals for excellence, student success, faculty and staff support, partnerships and engagement, and physical, technological, and financial resources, and does so in the understanding, first, that all goals are the responsibility of the full community and, second, that this plan is a dynamic document, to be implemented through ongoing planning and shared governance that links planning and budgeting—not a

detailed tome to sit on a shelf, but a well-used roadmap to an envisioned destination. If you haven't read the final draft, please do; it is available on the president's office Web page.

At the same time, the campus developed complementary communications, alumni association, and fundraising plans so that the community advances together. Emergency plans for campus and with our host towns and region have been regularly reviewed and expanded. Last autumn PSU added the PSUAlert text messaging system to our array of communication systems to enable the campus to respond quickly in a crisis. If you haven't signed up, please consider doing so. In cooperation with the towns of Plymouth and Holderness, we are making long-range plans for buildings that are part of a phased project involving health, teaching, research, athletics, and recreation that is temporarily entitled ALLWell. In this work, people have participated with enthusiasm. Thank you.

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The campus is committed to diversity and to the internationalization that prepares students for a global workplace. The Freshman Year Abroad at the University of Limerick, Ireland, has attracted national publicity; there are major-specific programs in Spain, Australia, and England; students engage in study abroad, in course-related travel to Tanzania, Puerto

Rico, Peru, the Galapagos, or China, and in service projects in the Dominican Republic or Nicaragua. Faculty collaborate with colleagues from Brazil to Turkey to Malaysia. This year three graduate student and faculty Fulbrighters traveled to Japan and Jamaica. The Pakistani Educational Leadership Institute, funded by the U.S. State Department, brings master teachers and administrators here and has had a ripple effect that has reached over 10,000 Pakistani teachers. Through the Arts and Culture Institute, graduate students and NH children worked with children in South Africa. Dan Perkins (Music, Theatre, and Dance) and 18 student Chamber Singers recently returned from a tour, “Singing for Friendship and Peace,” that offered students an opportunity to perform with the chorus and orchestra of the Vietnam National Opera and Ballet in the Hanoi Opera House. All of this requires strong campus planning and support, from Bagley Center, the business office, and others. Provost Bernier has established an internationalization task force to expand this programming and the student opportunities it provides.

The campus also is committed to sustainability. In addition to the LEED Gold certification of our newest residence hall, Langdon Woods, our oldest residence hall, Mary Lyon, re-opened last autumn after a \$15 million remodel in which attention was paid to environmental sustainability, making the historic building not only beautiful again, but also 40–50 percent more energy efficient. A President's Commission on Environmental Sustainability, co-chaired by Brian Eisenhauer (Social Science) and Vice President Crangle, is guiding the campus to carbon neutrality. A new undergraduate program in environmental science and policy has been approved, and nine students have just returned from a field study with Steve Whitman (Social Science) exploring sustainability practices in southeastern India. An energy conservation competition among residence halls encouraged a commitment to saving energy; the current competition is *RecycleMania*. The Center for Rural Partnerships has secured funding from the U.S. Forest Service to conduct a feasibility study for converting PSU's existing co-generation plant from fossil fuels to sustainably-harvested woody biomass from local forests. Sodexo has introduced a “trayless cafeteria” to reduce water usage, food waste, and electricity, and the physical plant has introduced an ice-removing substance that is cost effective and environmentally friendly. (Given the length of this winter, I'd like to have a round of applause for Ellen Shippee and the Physical Plant Department). Most recently, through a USNH initiative on innovation and entrepreneurialism, PSU has received funding for a proposal to create an ecohouse, a hands-on environmental laboratory where students design and incorporate sustainable practices and educate the public.

PSU also lives its motto, *Ut prosim* (That I may serve), and recently was named to the President's Honor Roll through the federal Learn and Serve America program, which encourages service learn-

ing throughout the United States. PSU was recognized for Community Service Orientation, Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Events, and PSU Volunteers and Alternative Weekends. For example, the baseball team collected more than a ton of food for the Community Closet Food Pantry. PSU's Community Service Learning Center submitted over 165,000 hours of service. Our Special Focus Area was the Pemi Youth Center, which provides over 70 PSU students each year with practical experience serving a younger population. The student chapter of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development created for the Center a homework café, complete with computers and, in partnership with teachers in the Plymouth schools, academic support and tutoring.



PSU is located in two vibrant towns; and upon my arrival at PSU, I asked people on and beyond campus for suggestions on how to enhance relationships with our host communities of Plymouth and Holderness, because those connections must be strong for all of us to succeed. You offered ideas, as did others, with the result that our interactions are, as they should be, mutually supportive and healthy, and I am grateful for everyone's contributions. This is an effort that will continue; any relationship requires ongoing commitment. Traditional first- and second-year students now live on campus, and off-campus rentals house upper-division students. People from Plymouth and Holderness serve on campus committees, lending us their valuable expertise and experience, and vice versa. Host community members mentor and guide our student interns and volunteers, serving an important teaching role. PSU art students create floats for Plymouth holiday parades; we offer the town selectboards scholarships to allow town employees to take occasional classes for professional advancement.

In this effort, PSU students have been active participants. They, too, want good relationships with our host communities, and the student leadership has created programs and task forces to that end. This student leadership, by the way,

is the best I've ever seen, our student governance the most professional; and students, as well as Vice President Dick Hage and the Student Affairs team, especially advisors Terri Potter and Jennifer White, deserve much credit.

Supporting the region is part of a university's role, and PSU has a special responsibility to the Lakes Region and North Country. The North Country Teacher Certification Program, in partnership with White Mountain Community College and Granite State College, allows residents to work as they achieve their degrees and certification; earlier this year we honored the first graduates and their supervising teachers at a wonderful ceremony. The Center for Rural Partnerships has collaborated on the Beyond Brown Paper Project and the Berlin master plan, hosted the E4 Coalition on Energy, Ecology, Economy, and Entrepreneurship, and co-convened the Coos County Symposium. The Center for the Environment has studied water quality and acid rain and is developing with others a watershed plan for Newfound Lake. The Center has established partnerships with groups such as the Squam Lakes Association and the Hubbard Brook Research Foundation, where Mary Ann McGarry (Environmental Science and Policy) is education coordinator. With Hubbard Brook, PSU has been funded by the National Science Foundation to offer a summer Research Experience for Undergraduates in environmental studies. PSU next month will host the Congressional Art Competition for NH high school art students. The Business Liaison program, the Small Business Institute, the Institute for NH Studies, the NH Writing Project, Mindflight, the NH-Impact Center, the TIGER program for the schools—the list goes on.

Let us now shift focus. The University is doing well, but we also face challenges.

As a public university, we believe in access and affordability, and affordability is an issue in the current economy. The rising costs of education make many students and families fear that higher education is out of reach. Our annual tuition and fees are approximately \$8,000 for NH students and \$15,000 for non-resident students; with room-and-board, that is \$16,000 for residents and \$23,000 for non-residents. While these figures are lower than the much-publicized rates of many schools, they represent a huge commitment on the part of students and families. That commitment is a trust we take seriously.

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To support students, an estimated \$48 million of scholarships, grants, and loans will be processed through our Financial Aid office this year.

The Financial Aid team has created

the \$SMART program, to offer a percentage of students personalized financial advising; and financial education programs are being conducted in the residence halls this spring. But students graduate with an average debt of \$25,000, and the figures are similar across NH’s public colleges and universities. The difficulties are increased in the current economy, because market fluctuations and the resulting uncertainties are reducing the non-federal loans available. I used to be pleased when students wanted to stay an extra semester or two because of their excitement about courses and opportunities; now I worry and remind them of the additional debt they might incur if they take longer to complete their degrees. The time taken to earn a degree matters in a different way than it once did.

Caring about affordability means that we must be conscious of containing costs, whether that means thinking of new and efficient methods of accomplishing tasks, employing new course technologies effectively, using our facilities to their fullest, or reducing energy consumption, the last a significant driver of increased costs. We have done much and must continue our efforts.

We also must enhance revenue from non-tuition sources. We will work with the legislature to increase the level of state funding for public higher education, but the legislature, too, has legitimate competing demands, and New Hampshire is a small state. State support alone will not address the problem.

We will look to sponsored programs. Faculty members and the Office of Sponsored Programs have doubled external funding over four years, but that rate of increase is unlikely to continue. Still, in areas for which federal and agency funding is available, we must seek it. A number of the programs described earlier, and others, are funded from such dollars, projects in sustainable rural economics, weather technologies, the PASS office for student support—programs that are consistent with our mission and benefit undergraduate and graduate students, the state, and the region.

We must expand partnerships to achieve goals cost-effectively and through collaboration to extend what can be accomplished. And we have a fundraising campaign under way, about which I will speak more in a few minutes.

A related challenge is the changing demographic profile of New England and New Hampshire. Recent studies show the NH population aging, with an increase in retirees moving to the state and a decline in families with children, and thus a decline in high school graduates. The state’s college graduates also leave the state in high numbers, believing that career opportunities are better elsewhere, and hoping to return later. They often do. Thus we must look to new audiences, offering increased educational access to groups that have had fewer opportunities, and we are participating in projects such as the Chancellor’s 55 % *Initiative*, to encourage NH’s college graduates to stay in New Hampshire and contribute to its vitality. Plymouth State recently began a campus series entitled “Live, Work, and Innovate in Rural New Hampshire,” inviting executives of NH companies, such as Garnet Hill in Franconia, to describe their career opportunities.

Another challenge is to provide competitive salaries and benefits for employees. I want PSU to be the employer of choice in this region, both because what we do is meaningful and because we treat people

honestly and fairly. In addition to the compensation plan developed by the Board of Trustees, Plymouth State last year began an internal multi-year plan to provide market equity and to mitigate increased costs in health expenses. We introduced a transition to retirement plan that allows senior faculty to continue as tenured employees at a reduced level and allows the institution to increase the number of faculty; and this year we received a national Alfred P. Sloan Award for Faculty Career Flexibility for leadership in effective use of health and family leaves. The Provost made adjunct faculty compensation a priority this year, and adjunct faculty members received a much-needed increase; that rate must be increased on a regular basis. But we have more to do.



A university is, or should be, about people, and investments in people and programs are critical to the institution's future. As faculty members engage in the next stage of planning, with discussions of departmental reorganization, credit-hour models and their effect on students and faculty, and workload, we will be working collaboratively to connect plans with budgets. We cannot be everything to everyone, but we will advance our mission and do well what we do. Supporting colleagues also includes professional development, so that they succeed at the highest levels, and they should be recognized for their achievements. To that end, we have added a program for faculty grants for research and creativity and introduced a teaching award for distinguished adjunct faculty, awards for outstanding scholarship and service, and additional awards for extraordinary operating staff and for professional, administrative, and technical staff. Thanks to the generosity of donors, we have two new endowed professorships, the Stevens-Bristow and the Wixson professorships, and we plan to add others. The award-winning *Excellence* publication available at the auditorium doors reflects the high quality of PSU's people.

We also are investing in our future with a fundraising campaign, one way to address some of the challenges cited above. We are fortunate in having a wonderful and supportive Board of Trustees and PSU President's Council, both committed to helping us raise funds and develop a culture of philanthropy. Taking charge of one's future through charitable giving can be powerful. We will increase scholarships for students and support their research and international travel; provide funds for faculty and staff and

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add endowed professorships; and meet some of our capital projects needs. Fundraising takes time, and we won't see instant results, but fundraising is important to our long-term success. Building on the theme of the investiture, which raised money for student scholarships, I will be asking many people to *Imagine A Way*.

Finally, a different challenge. As a university—and a society—we must provide for the safety and security of those who are here while we maintain the openness inherent in what we are: a place that welcomes diverse ideas and encourages debate. Whether you use the phrase *culture of peace* or *civil discourse* or *respectful dialogue*, it must be preserved and extended.

To close. A team of national higher education consultants was on campus several weeks ago and held meetings with students, faculty, staff, and administration. Mine was one of the final meetings. The consultants reported that, of the many colleges and universities they had visited across the country, the people of Plymouth State seemed most able to articulate their shared values and goals. The consultants were unused to such consistency. I'd like to say that is one outcome of a year and a half's hard work on a strategic plan, but it's more. When they asked what was core to PSU, the same messages emerged, con-

versation after conversation, person after person: engagement, commitment to students and learning, a sense of community. The students were the ones who coined the phrase “respectful dialogue” to describe how campus constituencies interact.

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Something similar occurred last year. I was standing in line to buy a morning bagel in a shop on Main Street and overheard a conversation between an alum- nus returned after 20 years and a current student, neither of whom noticed me. The alum wanted to know what Plymouth State was

like now. The student was a political science major and thought her classes were spectacular, rigorous and relevant. She could have gone anywhere, she said, but she had loved Plymouth State from the time she had first set foot on campus and realized what a friendly environment it offered. It’s a place, she said, where “people care about each other.” That’s a quality that is hard to create or assess, but wonderful to have and important to hold onto.

If I had been able to videotape the scene and put it onscreen for you today, no one would have believed it: too scripted, too perfect, couldn’t be real. But it wasn’t scripted, though it was perfect. Thank you for what you do to make such an exchange possible and for allowing me to be part of the enterprise with you.

Sara Jayne Steen
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