



Welcome to the State of the University Address. Thank you for attending this afternoon. This is a time for us to gather to discuss Plymouth State University's progress toward our goals, to explore our successes and our challenges. It is part of my being accountable to you as we are accountable to our wider public. As I speak of challenges, I will focus today on how the recession is affecting PSU and what we are doing to protect and advance the University, and I will speak on these issues at some length. Before I do so, however, let me speak of what it is we are protecting.

Plymouth State University is an extraordinary place: an excellent regional comprehensive university with a mission to offer first-rate undergraduate and graduate teaching informed by research, scholarship, and creativity; and to actively engage with our region, for which we provide artistic and cultural opportunities, solutions to real-world problems, and support for workforce and economic development. Together we are advancing that mission on many fronts with enthusiasm and intellectual vitality.

Our location in the Lakes Region and White Mountains of New Hampshire also provides us a glorious setting for living and learning—*National Geographic Adventure* magazine recently named Plymouth one of the 50 next great towns in the United States in which to live—and we enjoy strong partnerships in our community. This past year we celebrated 1808, the date of the founding of the Holmes Plymouth Academy, the lands and buildings of which eventually became the Normal School, and thus the town of Plymouth's 200-year commitment to education, with collaborative ceremonies including historical research, reenactments, musical interludes, t-shirts, and more. We have strong partnerships as well across the state and region, partnerships that create wonderful learning opportunities for our students.

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Plymouth State's foremost strength is its people, who are innovative, entrepreneurial, collaborative, and committed to student success. I see the results on a daily basis in students who are succeeding beyond their dreams and who regularly credit the faculty and staff members in departments across the campus, from academics and athletics to residence life and the bursar's office, with providing guidance, support, and inspiration.

Let us look to a few samples of the many achievements of this year:

- Nick Stevenson, a graduate student in the Center for the Environment working with faculty member Brian Eisenhauer (Social Science) on a funded project to protect water quality by reducing homeowners' overfertilization of lawns, won the 2009 student poster competition for his research at the USDA National Water Conference in St. Louis, a meeting of 500 of the nation's top water scientists.

- The Educational Theatre Collaborative, a partnership with the Plymouth Schools and Friends of the Arts led by Trish Lindberg (Education), celebrated its 15th anniversary of community theater with a 125-member-cast production of *The Wizard of Oz* in the Silver Center's Hanaway Theatre and Concord's Center for the Arts. The production received the *Hippo Press* Award "Best of the Best" in New Hampshire in the category of Live Art Performance.
- The football team enjoyed success, winning the New England Football Conference Championship and participating in the NCAA Division III playoffs. Jeff Mack, among the top 10 in the nation in rushing, was named the Robert A. "Red" Rolfe New Hampshire Male Athlete of the Year, the first time a PSU athlete has been so honored. Head coach Paul Castonia was selected New England Coach of the Year for Divisions II/III by the New England Football Writers' Association, also a PSU first. This semester, the men's ski team under head coach Topher Harlow captured the national championship in slalom in Winter Park, Colorado. And men's rugby, a club sport, won the national title.
- Faculty member Eric MacLeish (Criminal Justice) was honored with the Frank Carrington "Champion of Justice" Award for outstanding advocacy from the National Crime Victims Bar Association. The award recognizes his long-term work as a top trial lawyer advocating on behalf of crime victims.
- Liz Ahl (English) won the 2008 Slapering Hol Prize in Poetry for her collection titled *A Thirst That's Partly Mine*, and was invited to speak on her teaching of poetry at a national conference on best practices. Joe Monninger (English) also received honors: *Baby* was selected as one of 2009's best novels by the Young Adult Library Services Association and *Hippie Chick* as one of 2008's Most Distinguished Books by the Center for Children's Books.
- Crystal Finefrock, Associate Director of Financial Aid, will be honored later this month by the New England Educational Opportunity Association with the Champion of Educational Opportunity Award for her work in helping first-generation and low-income students to acquire and maintain scholarships and loans.
- Dick Hage, Vice President for Student Affairs, received an honorary degree, a Doctor of Philosophy in Education, from Houdegbe North American University in Benin, Africa, a special honor for a leader who over three decades has promoted a culture of caring at PSU.
- Langdon Woods Residential Complex has been named the Judges' Choice recipient in the Building as Teaching Tool category in *College Planning and Management* magazine's 2008 Green Education Design Showcase, and as one of the nation's top 10 Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold projects by *Interiors and Sources* magazine, one of only two university buildings to be chosen.

Although this may seem a lengthy list, it highlights only a small sample of the work we could celebrate from our students, staff, and faculty. In addition, from the PSU community, we have alums like Laura Brusseau, a member of the Alumni Association Board of Directors, who has just been honored as one of the *Union Leader's* "Forty Under 40," young leaders who are transforming New Hampshire; retirees like Dot Diehl, recently recognized with the John R. Clark Officials Award; and



parents like AnnMarie Morse, whose commitment to PSU student Michelle Morse led her to transform state and federal law in order to improve the health insurance regulations for other students who may become seriously ill, as Michelle did. Through Michelle's Law, AnnMarie demonstrates that individuals can make a difference, and I am pleased to announce that AnnMarie Morse will give the charge to the

graduates at this spring's undergraduate commencement. The ceremony will be emotionally complex for some people, both a celebration of new beginnings and an evocation of loss, that of Michelle in 2005 and of senior John Dagher this year.



At a recent academic excellence ceremony honoring students with an overall grade point average of 3.5 and above, a student spoke to me of having learned to love learning. After his first semester at PSU, he said, he knew that he and his life were changed because he had discovered what happens when you commit to exploring ideas. PSU is a place where values are discussed and debated with civility, where ideas and plans are created, where students find the wonder of the world and begin to believe in themselves and their possibilities.

A corollary is that PSU's motto, *Ut prosim* (That I may serve), is lived here, not merely spoken. Perhaps service is so fundamental to PSU because of our heritage in teacher education; the commitment runs deep in the community. In Washington, DC, a few weeks ago, PSU was named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Roll with Distinction, one of only 83 institutions so recognized across the country. PSU students committed hundreds of thousands of hours to service learning and civic engagement, traveling to Texas and Louisiana to work with Habitat for Humanity, and to Chicago

to work with the Union League Boys and Girls Club, and to Newfound Regional High School to mentor high school students and prepare them for college. PSU students also work with the Pemi Youth Center, clean up area streets, and read to elementary students. We respect and admire their dedication.

One significant change this year occurred quietly during the summer. The state legislature amended the charter of the University System of New Hampshire to provide PSU with doctoral authority; Governor Lynch signed the bill in June. In this change, PSU was supported by our Board of Trustees and Chancellor, the New Hampshire Department of Education, the New Hampshire College and University Council, the Community College System of New Hampshire, and more. Our local representatives sponsored the bill, appeared at hearings, and testified on the importance of PSU's contributions. The result was unanimous support, and the College of Graduate Studies this summer welcomes the first cohort of students to our Doctor of Education in Learning, Leadership, and Community, an exciting program developed in cooperation with the state's educational community to advance opportunities for working professionals. Within weeks of approval, the College of Graduate Studies had received 93 inquiries about the initial 12 positions. Here I acknowledge the many contributions of former Associate Vice President Dennise Maslakowski, who led PSU's graduate programs for more than two decades. Provost Julie Bernier and I presented Dennise with the Harold E. Hyde Award for Educational Leadership in December. Before her death, she spoke of her pride in the new doctoral program.

There are other measures of the state of the University. The interim report documenting PSU's advances in many areas over the last five years, including a substantial change in governance, was approved by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) this autumn. I appreciate the dedication of those who worked on the changes and those who prepared the report, a team led by Bob Fitzpatrick (Lamson Library).

Recently PSU chose to measure indicators that seem especially relevant to us as a regional comprehensive university. One of them was student engagement, and first-year and senior students were surveyed about factors such as level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, and supportive campus environment. In each of these areas, PSU's results were strong and exceeded those of our national comparators, indicating a high level of active, engaged learning.

Another indicator was partnership, the degree to which we serve our region through collaborations that make New Hampshire a better place to live and work while providing additional opportunities for students to participate in that active, hands-on learning. The Center for Rural Partnerships, for example, received funds from the Neil and Louise Tillotson Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation to create North Country partnerships. As a result, Dan Perkins (Music, Theatre, and Dance) brought the Hanover Chamber Orchestra to Lancaster and, with PSU students, provided educational programming for public schools; Catherine Amidon (Art), director of the Karl Drerup Gallery, is working with a Berlin community art center on an exhibit of the historical photo collection *Beyond Brown Paper*; Mark Okrant (Social Science), director of the Institute for New Hampshire Studies, and a team of tourism management students are crafting a marketing plan with a North Stratford inn and related area businesses; and more. Similarly, the Center for Active Living and Healthy Communities, with PSU students, is collaborating with Plymouth residents on a pilot research study to determine the opportunities for and obstacles to healthy outdoor living in the community.

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By other important measures such as first- to second-year retention, now 81 percent, and enrolled student satisfaction—91 percent of seniors rated their educational experience as good or excellent—PSU continues to earn high marks. PSU graduates consistently have been attractive to employers; in our most recent survey, over three-quarters of undergraduates had positions either before graduation or within the first six months after graduation. Knowing, however, that these are not normal times, PSU's Career Services at the Bagley Center this year created “Realistic Strategies in a Tough Economy,”

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a series of workshops addressing topics such as cost-of-living considerations, proactive job-search tactics, and networking methods. The undergraduate online career system now also interfaces with that developed in Alumni Relations, so that students have a seamless

transition between their undergraduate job searches and ongoing career development. Finally, in a recent economic analysis, PSU was estimated to contribute \$148 million in economic impact annually to the state and over \$150 million to the workforce, for a total of nearly \$300 million per year. PSU is a good investment on many counts.

How are we doing then? Wonderfully in the sense of accomplishing our goals and strategic plan, but these are challenging times. The global economic turmoil means that this is not a normal year, not business as usual for any institution of higher education, though the specific issues may vary. And so today I want to talk with you about how we are managing the strategies that will allow us to move through the recession and emerge an even stronger university.

The challenges of these economic times are based in uncertainties.

PSU's allocation from the State of New Hampshire is approximately 15 percent of our budget, and we use it to lower tuition for New Hampshire residents. Last autumn, as I told you, PSU returned 7 percent of our 2009 allocation to the state in response to its deficit, something for which we had prepared, and

we placed students' educations and employees' security first. We held selected positions vacant, delayed reclassifications, and postponed some scheduled renovations.

For the next biennium, the Governor's budget proposed that the University System of New Hampshire receive 97 percent of its current allocation in fiscal year 2010 and 100 percent in year 2011, a most positive recognition of USNH's importance to the future of New Hampshire. On Monday, the Governor announced that he will use \$3 million of New Hampshire's federal stimulus funding to supplement USNH's reduced operating dollars for 2010, again a positive sign. We hope that additional federal stimulus dollars coming to New Hampshire for economic recovery, for which we have submitted proposals, will allow us to begin shovel-ready projects that can stimulate the economy and relieve our operating budget. We expect to know the Governor's decisions on that within a few weeks, but we are unlikely to know our final appropriation until the Legislature completes its decision-making in June. In consultation with our Board of Trustees and USNH leadership, final decisions on tuition will be made later this spring or early summer.

Because approximately 70 percent of PSU's budget is student tuition, we monitor enrollment patterns carefully and earlier created a formal enrollment management team. Over recent weeks, and like most institutions somewhat later than usual this year because of shifts in federal guidelines, we have sent our financial aid offers to students and families. In determining those amounts, we have emphasized access and affordability, keeping suggested tuition increases to 5 percent and fees as low as possible, knowing that some increases are driven by factors such as utility or health care costs. Moreover, we have invested nearly \$700,000 in additional institutional financial aid this year to discount students' cost of attendance and, on the recommendation of the Office of Financial Aid, moved to the federal direct lending program, which offers advantages to students and their families in terms of cost, repayment, and security. Both decisions we believe to be in the best interests of students, our core mission.

Still, it is hard to predict how the recession will affect prospective and current students' and their families' choices. Graduate applications are up, as one would anticipate, as undergraduates and mid-career professionals consider advancing their credentials now in preparation for better positions in their fields later. Some people may seize the opportunity to return to school or complete degrees at a faster rate. We are receiving slightly more applications from students who are choosing to attend a public university rather than a private school. And we expect that some students may choose to stay in state, somewhat shifting our balance of nonresident-to-resident undergraduates. Forty-one percent of our current undergraduates, however, are first-generation college students, and their families well may be disproportionately impacted by the recession and the timing of the subsequent recovery. We simply do not know the effect on those students and their families and will not for some time, hence the uncertainty for all of us.

Because PSU is a rural campus, and a welcoming and beautiful one thanks in part to a committed physical plant

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team, prospective students' visits are particularly important in helping students choose their campus. As a result of untimely snowstorms, our visits were slightly down in December, and we have added admissions days this spring, introduced additional e-mails to students, accompanied by a video about the campus, and offered opportunities for prospective students and families to network and to talk with current students—a high touch as well as high tech approach—and I thank Admissions, Public Relations, Alumni Relations, and Information Technology staff for their innovative and responsive work.

Plymouth State's budget is and has been lean and prudently managed. We have for some years emphasized sustainability and energy efficiency in our new construction and remodels; we have a co-generation plant to reduce energy use and have worked to upgrade our infrastructure, a process not

yet completed; and we have stressed accountability and cost containment. But we will need to do more as we move forward on our budget for fiscal year 2010.

Work on that budget has been underway for some time, and because of the uncertainties, we are proceeding with caution and carefully reviewing all budget decisions, focusing on deferring or reducing expenditures now rather than facing surprises later. We already had been responding to predicted changes in New England demographics by recruiting students in areas with demographics the reverse of ours and enhancing our international recruiting; those investments will continue, as they must. Two years ago we developed the Planning and Budgeting Leadership Group (PBLG) to bring together institutional planning and budgeting, make recommendations to the cabinet, and create over time a core of faculty and staff with a deep understanding of the way the University's budget and strategic plan intersect. That group, led by Scott Mantie and Linda Dauer, soon will be bringing forward its recommendations on cost-effective ways to move PSU forward on its mission. Vice President of Finance and Administration Steve Taksar and other members of the cabinet will be gathering information from you about ways to reduce or postpone expenses in your departments. At the same time, the leadership team, starting with the extended cabinet, is exploring revenue enhancement, and will be looking to the best use of our facilities, expanded Winterim and summer offerings, increased online or multimedia courses, and other initiatives. Enhancing revenues will not be easy, and we welcome your thoughts and suggestions, even beyond those that already have gone to the PBLG. We are creating a site where suggestions can be collected and considered. Please know that I do not foresee layoffs. No one can promise that layoffs will never occur, but they are not a choice that would be anything but a last resort.

At the same time that we recognize that PSU's people are our most important resource, we also must recognize that salaries and benefits are huge as costs. Given the state and national deficits and PSU's focus on financial aid and strategic investments, we cannot expect next year the level of salary increases we have seen in the recent past. We are currently modeling smaller increases and assuming that we may defer them, implementing them after we have a more clear sense of our appropriation and enrollment, and we will continue to work with the system, the Governor, and the Legislature. In the meantime, you have my commitment to move us forward together, and I ask that you monitor your budgets with an enhanced awareness that each of us is responsible for what happens on this campus.

In addition to financial aid and recruiting, we are making another critical investment in advancement, with designated funds earlier allocated to us beyond PSU's budget by the USNH Board of Trustees. Over the past two and a half years, we have moved toward, and now have in place, an advancement division that incorporates alumni relations, advancement data services, and development, and will involve a new area—parental relations. Executive Director of University Relations Steve Barba chaired the committee that conducted a national search for an Executive Director of University Advancement, a cabinet position, and I am pleased to introduce to you today Sylvia Bryant, who is here on the first of her transition visits. She holds a doctorate from the University of Washington and for two more weeks is the Associate Vice President for Individual Giving at Alfred University in Alfred, NY, where she has directed a \$155 million comprehensive campaign, secured significant naming gifts, developed international educational partnerships, and managed corporate and foundation fundraising. Sylvia will begin at the end of May. I also want to recognize Joe Long, who is now serving as the interim Director of Development as well as Director of Alumni Relations. Joe, thank you for your leadership and commitment.

Gifts are and have been important to Plymouth State. They are significant to our students in the form of scholarships and stipends. This autumn we held our first Evening of Connections to bring our endowed scholarship donors together for dinner with the students whose lives they are impacting. It was a wonderful event. Recently, national headlines have featured prominent, heavily endowed private institutions making cuts because of huge investment losses. Their budget structures differ from those of most public institutions. Although we at PSU have seen losses on our endowments this year, we have not funded ongoing operating expenses from those investments, and our investments are well managed through USNH. We expect accounts to recover. As our upcoming campaign moves forward—and the initial stage

has been going very well—we will be raising additional endowment dollars for student support and for faculty and staff development. We are creating scholarships regularly—please encourage students to be proactive in applying for them; we have added staff awards; and our new named professorships, the Stevens-Bristow Professorship for those who educate the educators and the Wixson Professorship of Mathematics, will be, we hope, the first two of many.

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The cabinet and I also continue to move forward on the ice arena, the first phase of PSU’s long-term plan for ALLWell, the Center for Active Living, Learning, and Wellness. This, too, is a strategic investment in our future. As Professor Richard Sparks noted in his recent economic update to the Planning and Budgeting Leadership Group, ours is a rural

campus, for which facilities are hugely important, and we attract students who love sports and healthy outdoor activities. One of the fastest growing sports in New England is hockey, and the ice arena will be important to future students, allowing for new classes and academic options as well as for sports and recreational skating. We also plan community programming. Our host communities of Holderness and Plymouth, as well as surrounding towns throughout much of the Lakes Region and North Country, will benefit, and they will contribute to the arena’s success. We already have received strong support on the fundraising segment of the project from donors in gifts and pledges, including naming gifts for the ice sheet and the welcome center; from vendors and businesses; and most recently from New Hampshire. Because of the economic impact of the arena, the New Hampshire Community Development Finance Authority has granted \$600,000 in tax credits to encourage private businesses to partner with us. I will work with Executive Director Bryant and the members of the President’s Council to complete the fundraising.

As we move forward then, we will continue to focus on mission. We have engaged in discussions of what it means to be a regional comprehensive university and have developed a strategic plan that will guide us. We will not be all things to all people, but what we do we will do well indeed. Initiatives such as internationalization will be advanced; the English Language Services Center, the only such full-range language institute for international students north of Boston, will open in September on the garden level of Mary Lyon Hall. Sustainability also matters to us: we would not have predicted a year ago when Sodexo announced plans for a pilot project to eliminate trays in the dining hall that a year later the tray-less program would have saved the campus \$160,000 and 35 tons of food.

I remain confident about Plymouth State’s short- and long-term future. The uncertainties are affecting colleges and universities across the country. We at PSU have weathered difficult times before and will emerge from this one.

As we look especially to the next year or two, there will be hard decisions. In making them, we will focus on our values, our priorities, and our mission. We will emphasize the core of what we do and who we are in our teaching, scholarship, and creativity, and engagement with the region. We will work to offer a good, stable environment for the faculty and staff members whose effort advances this University and our students every day. Decisions offer opportunities. If we make decisions wisely, and strategically, both about what we cannot fund and what we should fund, we will emerge from this a stronger and even more well-focused regional comprehensive university, serving our students and our region with distinction.

As uncertainties resolve over the coming months, I will communicate with you. Last semester and this, I have met with all campus constituency groups and updated you as well through a campus message and today’s address. I will continue to update you, and I hope to receive your advice and recommendations. We are all partners in this together.

Last year I talked of the wonderful letters I receive every week about the people on this campus. I would like to quote from the conclusion of one two-page single-spaced letter, from the parent of a recent graduate:

I realize that Plymouth State has thousands and thousands of students, yet [she] always made time for my one [child]. . . . It brings tears to my eyes every time I think what [she] has done for my family. . . . My heart feels so much gratitude, yet I just can't find the words to express all that I feel for such a special person. So I wanted to write to you, to let you know what an amazing and valuable employee you have. . . . I only know that everyone has that one special person in their lives who was their mentor, their believer, their angel, and for [my child], that person is Deb Tobine."

Deb Tobine is with the Undergraduate Advising Center. Thank you, Deb.

Such letters are a meaningful part of my world, and you should hear them on occasion, because we are fortunate to have good, dedicated, and caring people here. I am fortunate to be here, and grateful to you for all you do to keep PSU—as our students phrased it—a “simply amazing” place. Thank you.

Sara Jayne Steen
President