



The Closing Window: Have We Waited Too Long?

1996 President's Address to the University

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Good afternoon and welcome back! Last year, I got about half-way through my Fall Address, looked at the stack of pages still in front of me, and thought, "Good God! When will this end?" This year, I intend to end before either of us gets too uncomfortable. My further intention is to be briefer, less formal and more direct.

Several people have asked me what I plan to say today – what grand pronouncements I might make about the state of our University and the direction we're headed. What I have to say alters only slightly from year to year; the central theme is always the same: How can we best fulfill the academic mission of the University and remain useful and responsive to those who support us? But this year, I've struggled with other, perhaps more pressing questions: Are we losing the opportunity to shape our future? Have we waited too long to reinvent ourselves? Are we unknowingly engulfed in crisis?

In spite of our substantial progress in recent years, these questions nag – and I found myself this fall, more than in past years, searching for language a bit more persuasive, more inspiring, to convey thoughts that might help to motivate and mobilize us for the coming year but, most important, to convince us of the urgency of the challenges we face.

And so this year, I set aside all the studies and reports and notes that so often inform my writing, and I sat down instead to engage in conversation with a hypothetical member of our own general faculty. Let's say this faculty member is a respected scholar and teacher, a leader in our campus community – a person whose student evaluations are consistently high, who continues to draw generous support

from major funding agencies, and whose lab is buzzing along quite successfully. This professor sees our campus becoming more attractive – with new buildings, a new library, lots of new trees and shrubbery. This professor even has read a few studies that indicate higher education remains among the most trusted and respected of public institutions.

And this professor has been coming to listen to me speak each fall – has heard me make the case for change and our need to remain competitive and accountable – and leaves each year with just one question in mind: "Why? Why must we change when things are going so well? Our planning processes appear to be working. I just got a good salary increase. The University's relationship with the General Assembly is strong and improving. The students in my classes are clearly well-served. Why should I pretend to worry about this vague need to change merely for its own sake?"

To some degree, my hypothetical colleague is correct in noting that, in many ways, we're doing well as an institution. Our successes this year came close to matching those of the year before, and there is much of which we can be proud:

- If there were an Olympic gold medal for research breakthroughs, our University would have been a strong contender this summer:

- Ed Squires and George Seidel heralded the birth of the nation's first test-tube horse;
- Jorge Rocca continued his breakthrough work on X-ray lasers, this time teaming with Elliott Bernstein to develop a soft X-ray laser;
- Ian Orme's research team developed a breakthrough tuberculosis vaccine;
- Ramesh Akkina's new gene-transfer technique promises important progress in AIDS therapy;

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- Carol Blair and Barry Beaty proved it is possible to genetically alter mosquitoes to prevent them spreading certain viruses – critical to the prevention of mosquito-borne illness;
- Jim Quick and fellow researchers developed and marketed a Russian wheat aphid-resistant variety of wheat, HALT.

And the list goes on.

- We also gave substance to our rhetoric around supporting K-12 education, most notably through the work of the College of Applied Human Sciences and the Center for Science, Mathematics, and Technology Education.

- Our physical plant is, indeed, undergoing significant improvements – the restoration of the Statistics Building being one example and the continuing work on the Library being another.

- We continue to enjoy good legislative relations, notable this year in strong general fund support – the best in nearly a decade.

- Also this year, the University received a record level of private and corporate funds in support of academic and athletic programs;

- And our athletics programs – particularly women's athletics – have experienced their greatest success in the history of CSU, generating attention and support from alumni and friends.

There have been many other important achievements as well, and we can feel good about our status as an institution and the reputation we enjoy. Our campus is made up of bright, creative people who work very hard in their fields of study.

As well – I would concede to my hypothetical faculty member – there has been quite a bit of activity over the last half a decade in a wide range of other areas, from diversity planning to curricular reform. And the sheer breadth and volume of this activity cannot fail to impress. We have retreated and studied and debated and talked – again, perhaps at record levels. We have created magnificent and elaborate planning processes, and then we have revised those processes, and then we have revised the revisions on those processes. On paper, it all looks pretty impressive. But, I would have to add, when we distill the beautifully structured reports and the reams of supporting documentation, we find our major success has been in prolonging the debate about change, avoiding change. We have grown remarkably good at talking about and

analyzing critical issues, but we remain reluctant to disturb the seeming comfort of our habits. Must crisis always precede change? Can crisis be avoided through change?

Someone once said: "Paperwork is the embalming fluid of bureaucracy, maintaining an appearance of life where none exists." And despite all our activity and the appearance that all is well, the pressure to change is increasing and our claims to having embraced change are beginning to look like little more than hollow words. My hypothetical friend may perhaps have been shielded from such pressure – may, perhaps, been spared the anguish of students and parents who find that higher education is increasingly indispensable for lifetime success but increasingly difficult to afford. Perhaps this colleague has not come face to face with legislators demanding to know why students are graduating without the fundamentals needed to be competitive in the job market and demanding to know why we seem to feel we should be spared the economic realities that have hammered every other industry in the country. This fictional professor is certainly correct that we don't want to chase the banner of change if all we are doing is pursuing the latest best-selling trend – but few can look at the realities before us and honestly believe we have no cause to do better than we have done.

There was a "Dilbert" cartoon a few years ago, in which the staff of Dilbert's company is sent to an outdoor management team-building course. The class instructor points first to a plate stacked with donuts, and then off into the distance, where one of the employees is tied to a tree, hanging upside down just inches away from the mouth of a hungry bear.

The instructor tells the staff: "This is a trust-building exercise. You have one minute to decide to eat the donuts or to save your co-worker from the bear."

One staff member turns to another and says, "OK, who wants to be on the Donut Option Working Committee?"

And another staff member responds: "Oops . . . problem solved."

Like Dilbert's unfortunate co-worker, we don't have time to continue asking for proof that the status quo isn't the ideal. We can't continue to rearrange priorities on paper and somehow claim our work is done.

And still, in this conversation with my hypothetical friend, I was asked, continuously, what real evidence do I have to support this call for change – and especially now, when

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Fair enough. And so in response, I offer just a few observations:

- A few years ago, we predicted a big boom in our college enrollment and began to plan accordingly. That boom hasn't occurred, but the high-school graduating classes are just as large as we predicted they would be. The fact is, those students just aren't coming to Colorado State and other four-year schools. They're taking advantage of lower-cost community colleges and smaller institutions where they can get more personal attention. The risks of such a trend continuing are obvious.

- Across the country, state legislators, often frustrated in their efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of higher education, succumb to the temptation to impose ever more restrictive process regulations. Recent legislative targets – in our own state – have included admissions standards, teaching loads, availability of courses, time to graduation, tenure restrictions, use of part-time faculty, faculty productivity, student achievement, employer satisfaction and more. Our own General Assembly took great pains this year to express its dissatisfaction and frustration with higher education by cutting a token amount out of every institution's travel budget. Even more telling was the action of several key representatives at the end of the session, who wanted to move a significant amount of money out of higher education's base funding and into funding for legislative areas of priority: undergraduate education, workforce preparation/training, productivity improvements, K-12 linkages, and effective use of technology. While the effort was not successful – this time – the point was clear: Our state's leaders expect us to change, and they expect us to change by emphasizing those issues identified as public priorities.

- And there's more. A bill passed in the last session, HB 1219 – the Higher Education Quality Assurance Act – establishes performance goals for higher education, creates a corresponding methodology for measuring the achievement of such goals, imposes penalties for failure, and mandates a review of the funding and practices of research and graduate education.

- Still another legislative proposal, thus far unsuccessful, advocated the creation of a voucher system for funding higher education. This proposal was introduced by language that read, in part, as follows:

"The General Assembly . . . finds that establishing a mechanism to ensure greater competition among institutions of higher education in attracting and retaining students will lead to the development by these institutions of more efficient and effective practices."

- And the 1996 Long Bill includes a footnote directing the Colorado Commission on Higher Education to undertake a study of the appropriate role of faculty, including "the appropriateness of tenure, . . . the current types of post-tenure review, the proper balance between full-time and part-time faculty, and the proper balance between research and teaching."

- And there's more still. In the current year, we've received one of the best operating budgets ever from the state – but our capital budget isn't nearly so impressive, falling prey to intense competition for state dollars. The construction and maintenance needs of highways and other parts of state government took precedence over colleges and universities in the year's capital budget decisions – needs that will persist in the years ahead. Yet, with more than \$87 million in outstanding deferred maintenance projects, the renewal of our campus physical plant must remain a high priority.

- We all read newspapers and listen to TV news reports. We know that negative news coverage of higher education is intense and unrelenting. Small, often trivial issues seem increasingly to command banner headlines – headlines that influence public opinions of higher education.

There's still more I should say to my hypothetical friend and colleague:

- Financial support for higher education reached a peak in the late '60s and early '70s and has been declining ever since. Doomsayers predict federal support of university research will decline by as much as 20 percent in the next seven years. We can be pleased and proud that Colorado State has enjoyed real and significant growth in its research support for more than a decade. But now that growth has slowed and threatens to reverse itself.

- The virtual university, supported strongly by our state's governor, is destined to become reality and has its genesis in the failure of higher education to address the needs of placebound populations – needs for easy access and affordability. Higher education's response has been rather curious.

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We need to rededicate ourselves to making vital connections to all who might benefit from our work, to say again that service is not a dirty word but a high calling, to recognize that what we need is not more and better public relations but real and fundamental change in the way we educate and serve our students and others . . .

We say simply, "We need not worry about such developments because we own the credentials." No doubt you recall my address of a year ago, when I reminded us of the comments of Governor Romer, who noted: "Unless political leaders, educators and the public accept (the) challenge (to be responsive and adaptable), higher education may soon be a worn-out system that has seen its best days."

Such observations have persuaded many of us to conclude that higher education is already in crisis and that the window of opportunity to shape our future to our own design is rapidly closing. So, how are we to respond?

Colorado State faculty member David Vest conducted a survey this past year of public opinion about our University. Much of it was good news: The survey found that over the last three to four years, significantly more people in our state have become aware of Colorado State University. The percentage of people who recognize and have good feelings about our University more than doubled since a previous survey a few years ago. But when those same people were asked what, specifically, they know and value about Colorado State, they didn't have much to say.

Again, how do we respond? What would we like those people in Professor Vest's survey to say about our University? What, in their words, should be our distinguishing characteristics? I wish for a time when all who know us will say these things about us:

1. We are an institution that is concerned about students, that offers high-quality undergraduate programs that are unique and relevant, that prepares all graduates to live fulfilling and prosperous lives, accepting and understanding the obligations of life in a social and political democracy.
2. We are viewed as a University that conducts state-of-the-art research in the context of public priorities, a University that invests wisely in areas offering the prospect or reality of international eminence or those areas that can make significant contributions to problems of social and economic importance.
3. We are recognized as an institution with strong outreach programs that capture our strengths in teaching and research and are closely linked with the problems and priorities of the people of our state and nation – an institution that can quickly

mobilize people and resources to benefit the greater population of our state.

4. We are a place that stands for something, a place that pursues excellence, a place that believes in and respects all people and strives to realize the ideal of a great society, a place that seeks always to be a good steward of the public trust. We are a place where our courses of instruction and our day-to-day decisions and operations are manifestations of the things we value – such as academic freedom, pursuit of truth, integrity, compassion and community.

Even my hypothetical faculty member would have to admit that not all we would want to have said about us can be said just yet. Writer Doris Lessing has advised there is only one real sin: "to persuade oneself that second-best is anything but second-best." If these four, simple statements reflect what we want our University to be, then our challenge, clearly, is to start doing what we've always just talked about. We need to rededicate ourselves to making vital connections to all who might benefit from our work, to say again that service is not a dirty word but a high calling, to recognize that what we need is not more and better public relations but real and fundamental change in the way we educate and serve our students and others, in the way we allocate and account for our time and in the way we define our relationship to the University and to one another.

And so, I would invite this skeptical faculty member – and all of you – to begin to think of our University as a great house that has been standing proudly for many years. It was a grand house in its design, but now we find that the roof leaks on occasion, the paint has started to chip, and cracks have started to appear in the foundation. Clearly, there is a need for immediate repair – and these repairs represent a concrete work plan for us in the coming year. For even as time has taken its toll, the house has stood there, strong, in the summer sun, its windows open to the clean air – and the sweet breeze of opportunity has kept us feeling fresh and renewed. But now that air is turning cold, and those windows through which so much of our good fortune has come are starting to close against the chill. So today, I'd like to walk us through the house, look at those parts most in need of restoration, and, in doing so, define our course for the year ahead.

We enter through the Great Room, the residence of our undergraduate program – a program that has benefitted over time from the caring spirit of our faculty and the willingness of Colorado families to pay the ever-increasing cost of a college education. Of late, we have paid token attention to this part of our house: rearranging courses, shaving down the core curriculum, adding a bit of technology. But we have been strangely reluctant to break down any walls, to tear through the plaster and see what we might find if we just experiment and risk a little. If we were willing to do so, we might be able to lead the state and the nation in setting the standard for general education in a large public university.

My hope is that by semester's end, we will complete the design of a general education program consisting of a Universitywide core curriculum that expresses the rigor and coherence demanded by our faculty and a delivery structure that ensures the quality of our course offerings and efficiency in the use of resources. The recently proposed Arts and Sciences Common Core, with some refinements in course options, promises to be a critical foundation in the development of a Universitywide curriculum. As well, the organizational structure for implementation of this newly designed general education program offers the possibility of significant institutional distinction. Imagine a "New College," focusing on the first two years of teaching and learning – such could signal our intention to put our students first and create a true learning community. And in our actions to improve efficiency, we must be careful to eliminate inappropriate uses of seminar, independent study and faculty specialty courses.

A true restructuring of the undergraduate experience will require courage and faith, a determination to break worn-out patterns; but the rewards, by almost any measure, can be extraordinary. Yet with all its promise, the window in this great room is closing. Unless we act now, we will soon become just one more institution that toyed with curricular reform but could not summon the will to do it.

Adjacent to this room is another, with a window we have managed to wedge open despite the intense pressure exerted to close it. Our research programs are healthy, responsive and growing in stature. To maintain our competitive posture in an atmosphere of declining federal support, we've focused upon strategic investments in Programs of Research and Scholarly Excellence, a reconception of

the DA/RSP program, use of the Research Building Revolving Fund to strengthen our research infrastructure, and overhauling our federal relations programs. Still, vigilance in this critical piece of our mission is needed. Our ongoing efforts must include the development of a more encouraging environment for multidisciplinary research; exploration of bridge funding to assist researchers in lean times; diversification of our base of research support; and greater institutional support of faculty who wish to renew research skills or change specialties.

Just down the hall and up a flight of stairs is another room, where our outreach programs reside. Here, the window of opportunity is closing fast – others are quickly moving into territory we've long claimed as our own. Community colleges, non-land-grant research universities and others have recognized the benefits of serving the needs of a broadened array of increasingly influential and vocal populations.

We know what makes an effective outreach program. It must draw on disciplinary faculty from throughout the University; be flexible, able to adapt to rapid changes in populations served; address broad societal problems; be designed as a partnership between the University and a range of external constituencies; have its basis in problems outside the institution; be of sufficient importance and effectiveness that external sponsors are willing to pay; effectively be an information- or technology-transfer program, with well-defined objectives and endpoints. We have programs – Occupational Therapy, Human Development and Education in the College of Applied Human Sciences; CSMATE; the Manufacturing Excellence Center; the Center for Educational Access and Outreach – that function in precisely this way and have achieved great success. But we also know that, increasingly, the public is turning to other organizations, particularly proprietary institutions, to address many of its critical needs.

Two years ago, we noted a modest dose of imagination could propel us to become the state's leader in distance education, using technology in new and innovative ways and reaching needy populations through a unique alliance among community colleges, Continuing Education and Cooperative Extension. Is it now too late? Have we waited too long to earn a distinction that ought to be a hallmark of the land-grant university?

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We talk a lot about outreach, we write a lot of documents about it. Cooperative Extension recently issued an implementation plan for its reinvention strategy. It's a thoughtful plan – with much promise – but its success is seriously limited without the embrace and support of disciplines across the University.

Again, our work ahead is clear. I challenge us, in the weeks ahead, to define our constituencies and their needs, to determine our related areas of expertise, set priorities, inventory and publicize our current efforts, and, in the end, to create a structure for success.

The corridors and hallways of our great house are the community and diversity that connect room to room, drawing the whole place together, giving strength through the interplay of differences in people, cultures, ideas, perspectives, and more. These are the arterials so necessary for vitality and the regeneration of spirit – and the light of opportunity from every room spills over into these areas. The corridors have served us well, but are now time-worn, in need of replacement or overhaul. So, too, has our world changed. We now know that true community must be inclusive, that a community without diversity cannot long survive.

Diversity is an issue we've talked about at different times with varying degrees of passion – an issue that continues to disappoint. We cannot claim to have achieved the levels of sensitivity to student differences or the diversity of workforce that ought to characterize a premier research University like this one. We know that the survival of our state and nation depend on our ability to bring greater numbers of people into the mainstream of society – and we must also recognize that we will not survive as an institution unless we can make ourselves more attractive to the diverse populations that compose an ever greater proportion of the general public.

A few years ago, we created the President's Minority Student Advisory Committee as a way to be informed directly by students about their experiences on our campus. We meet several times a year for open discussions, and I always ask them, as I ask others: "How well are we doing in meeting your needs, and how can we do better?" And invariably, these students respond with comments and stories reflecting a lack of real awareness among some faculty of the different cultures and experiences of students of color. These students speak of feeling singled out, of enduring insensitive comments that are

certainly unintentional, but hurtful just the same.

At one of these gatherings, a young black woman explained how she often felt it was her responsibility to approach these professors after class and explain why their remarks were so damaging, so hurtful.

While I applauded this young woman's willingness to take responsibility for educating people on campus, I also was saddened by her remarks. This one student, and perhaps many others like her, excused the University and accepted the burden for something that actually is the responsibility of the University itself. We cannot fulfill our mission of preparing students – all students – to function effectively in the world as it is today, and as we expect it to be tomorrow, if we, ourselves, are not aware of and in touch with today's realities. We have a window of opportunity that must not be allowed to close – a window in which we can make ourselves a genuinely warm and understanding campus for all people.

Let us move quickly in the next few weeks to extend the successful Multicultural Infusion Program to all parts of our University – not as an effort at mind control or some misguided attempt at "political correctness," but simply to ensure that each of us is aware of the impact of his or her words and actions on others and of what we expect one of another. As well, we must act this fall to implement the major recommendations of the Task Force on the Status of Women and continue to strengthen our support of students, alumni, and others in our extended community in building *esprit de corps* and sustaining our traditions.

These rooms and corridors I've been describing are tended by caring stewards who – confident the house would always remain solid, comfortable, and warm – long ago turned inward, grew disconnected and isolated from the changing world outside. And so, too, many of our faculty have lost their connection to the needs and expectations of those we serve. I know such comments might be received as an act of heresy or simply fall on unbelieving ears because an overwhelming majority of faculty and staff within our University work hard – with dedication, skill, and good intentions. Consequently, the news that our efforts do not enjoy the praise and support of an earlier time is difficult to digest. William Plater of Indiana University, as I noted a year ago, warned his colleagues and others this way:

"I worry that most of us within the academy do not appreciate just how

precarious our institutional life really is. As faculty, we have come to accept our tenure-privileged position as a social certainty, but few people outside the academy understand or accept that premise. In its current form, our work cannot long endure."

Like us, he advocates putting our students and other constituencies first, and he continues:

"... As we return clients and mission to the fore in assigning priority for our work and use of time, we must find a new balance between the independence that led many of us into academic life and the responsibility to serve a purpose that transcends self-interest, no matter how enlightened..."

By now, most of us have recognized this imbalance between individual autonomy and personal accountability. Nowhere is our need greater than to restore that lost balance and transform our thinking, to create an environment that places at its center the needs of our students and others we serve. But nowhere are the opportunities to reform ourselves slipping away so fast – evidenced by the students who are voting with their feet and the push by our legislators for visible change. If we do not transform our mindset and our culture, such change will be imposed upon us from outside – and it is likely to occur in ways that are disagreeable to most of us in this room.

And so, our work as stewards of this institution must now begin in earnest. A year ago our Change and Reform subcommittees broached the important issues of a faculty workload policy, a strengthened and uniform annual review process, post-tenure review, and a general system of incentives and rewards that reflect institutional priorities. So far, the resulting recommendations have generated little interest and attention. Consequently, I have asked Provost Young, working in partnership with the Faculty Council and the Council of Deans, to give highest priority to these most critical issues. My hope is by early spring we will be able to recommend a comprehensive and defensible set of performance and evaluation policies to the State Board of Agriculture.

Most of us, myself included, complain increasingly about the amount of time – too often unproductive time – we spend in committee meetings. This year, let us resolve to reduce our committee time by a minimum of one-third. But to do so will require we place greater faith in deans, academic department

chairs, and others and trust they will represent us well. Shared governance and effective consultation should not have to mean that everyone is involved in every detail of every decision. They should, however, mean better communication and greater accountability by those in whom we place our trust.

In a few paragraphs, I've tried to propose our work plan on this great house for the coming weeks and months. It's all old and familiar, summarized in four priorities, areas most in need of repair: core curriculum and its delivery; outreach; community and diversity; and the dilemma posed by autonomy versus accountability. Many may take from these comments a general sense of frustration, a sense of much criticism and little praise – perhaps even the accusation that we're insensitive to the needs of students and not amenable to change. Certainly, that's not true, and that's not my intent in speaking today. Our impact is well-known, well-respected and improving. And yet I'm reminded always that the purpose of any organization must lie outside itself. I'm reminded we live in a time of unprecedented complexity, marked by challenges that at times seem overwhelming.

Some years ago a friend sent me a collection of essays by A. Bartlett Giamatti, entitled "A Free and Ordered Space." One of his essays described the dramatically changing needs of our society juxtaposed against an increasingly distant, isolated, and disconnected ivory tower. Soon after my reading, I began to interpret the mission of our University through the use of the phrase, "making vital connections." In other words, I believed then, as now, our success or failure will rest on our ability to forge meaningful alliances and partnerships with those we serve and expect to support us. Such is a philosophy of cooperation and service – a philosophy that worries more about getting the job done than assigning blame or taking credit, a philosophy that returns us full-circle to the founding precepts of the land-grant university.

And so, once more, we gather here inside this great house. We can work together to keep the windows of opportunity open – or we can wait inside, rearrange the furniture, and allow the windows to be closed, locked, and shuttered from the outside. I would suggest – to my hypothetical professor and to everyone in this room – that the choice is clear. The time for talking about change is over. The bear is getting hungry. It's time to act.

Thank you and Godspeed!

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Colorado State University's land-grant mission is to forge links with people worldwide – through teaching, research, and service. In turn, these vital connections help stimulate cultural growth, economic development, and intellectual achievements for generations to come.



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