



NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY FARGO N.D.

## Acting Strategically Through a Culture of Achievement

### State of the University Address

Thomas R. Plough

September 3, 1997

The University is based not only on  
the transmission of knowledge, but  
on the human experience of  
learning: it is about more than  
simply what we know virtually,  
but who we are really.

Colorado Daily

Good afternoon colleagues and friends. It is again my good fortune to reflect aloud on your many accomplishments during the last year, and to suggest some agenda items for the current academic year that you and others have brought to my attention. I certainly hope that the last year was unique in its combination of challenges. It sorely tested us all. As usual, you came through for our students, our community and our state. Let's see - we had nine blizzards (always featured on network television), a 500 year flood (viewed by folks throughout the world), a movie garnering academy award attention, and a legislative session (with no national coverage but a lot of statewide editorials, cafe conversations and energizing hearings). It was quite a year - you betcha!

There is no way I could capture any inclusive summary of the good will, volunteerism, neighborliness, ingenuity, common-sense, and flexibility displayed by the NDSU students, faculty and staff this past year. If there was any doubt that the folks of this land-grant university share a culture and tradition of civility, good collegueship, hard work, sense of community and depth of good judgement, you certainly put it to rest through your collective behavior. From the wonderful flood page, to garbage university and volunteers reporting to the union at all hours of the day and night, NDSU has demonstrated its citizenship in North Dakota. I'm fairly certain that our dress down policy that included reporting to work in hip waders was unusual. You were all great.

Let me comment further on the recently completed legislative session, which was my first exposure to this phenomenon. I had heard many horror stories about legislative hearings, but I have to tell you that I found the legislature to be civil. While there were some assertions made outside of committee sessions that were indeed puzzling to me and a couple of outcomes that seem to lack a rational basis, by and large, I felt we were treated fairly and that the work of NDSU was appreciated. Given the workload which is heaped upon our legislators in a very short period of time, I was encouraged by our access to them and by the time they took to listen to our story. Last year I asked for a fair share allocation of state revenues to higher education. Based on the revenues available, I believe that the governor and the legislature did provide a fair share allocation for higher education as a system and NDSU as a university. While our funding levels still represent a revenue diet, we can make modest progress with the funds we have been awarded. Since salary improvements were our top priority, the 4.75 percent average salary increase at NDSU means that many of our faculty and staff will see meaningful increases in their take-home pay this year. While we had to take some of this salary money out of our own hide, and while we may or may not make significant progress in our regional salary rankings, we are better off than we were last year. Perhaps we should worry less about regional salary rankings and focus more on achieving average annual salary increments that exceed inflation by a percent or more.

My experiences during this past legislative session brought home to me the public policy challenge that the state of North Dakota faces in coming to terms with infrastructure investments of all kinds in the future. In a state with 9 people per square mile and only 170 urbanized square miles out of 70,000, even a high per capita investment in infrastructure may be a very poor indicator of competitive levels of investment for us. In North Dakota, whether you address k-12 education, higher education, water delivery and quality, roads and bridges, telecommunication, human services or prisons and law enforcement, per capita costs will have to be among the highest in the nation if we are to remain competitive as a state in economic development and quality of life. For example, we were pleased to receive an increase in our repairs and maintenance budgets, but we also recognize that this increase puts our funding level at about 1/3 of 1% of NDSU plant value, a rate well below the 2% industry experts consider adequate. It really means that our deferred maintenance backlog is increasing but at a slightly slower rate. Still, based on available state revenues, our budget represents a good faith effort by the governor and the legislature to acknowledge and help with our problems. Clearly, the state of North Dakota must address revenue generation for investments in the public sector; cost containment as a single strategy will doom us to a non-competitive posture in the United States.

In addition to progress on the salary front, increases in repairs and maintenance and somewhat better operating budgets, we were also allocated additional dollars for both agriculture initiatives and our Skills & Technology Training Center initiative. I believe these initiatives will

produce an excellent return on the investment of the state and I am encouraged that both the executive and legislative branch saw value in our proposed initiatives.

We will continue to match every taxpayer dollar with two dollars from other sources. Indeed, my longer term objective is to find three dollars to match every taxpayer dollar invested in NDSU. I think that is the only strategy which will allow us to provide student access to our programs and to maintain quality in the comprehensive portfolio of academic programs and services which students and their families will demand if they are to pursue their degrees at NDSU. Over 83% of our students indicate that we are their first choice college. The top reasons, by far, for their choice of NDSU are our excellent academic reputation and our good job placement record. Both of these perceived attributes are made possible by our broad array of quality academic options which are attractive to both today's students and to the marketplace. Students choose us because we are large enough to offer many academic options and small enough to personalize our delivery of the support they need to master the options they choose and to accommodate changes in those options as they progress towards graduation. Remember more than 1000 of our students change their majors and move among the seven colleges of NDSU every year.

To maintain this university as the attractive choice it has become for students will require attention to our cost structure, but more importantly, we must cultivate our five major revenue streams. They include general fund appropriations, student tuition and fees, grants and contracts, positive operation of our auxiliary enterprises (bookstore, residence halls, etc.), and fund raising.

NDSU has achieved an enviable record of fiscal stewardship during tight times which postures us well to take advantage of any opportunity that emerges from our principal revenue streams. We have just closed the books on the 1995-97 biennium with a modest carry-over and without any fund deficits of concern. This achievement reflects fiscal discipline on the part of many individuals here on campus. It means that a lot of you pay careful attention to budget matters, since a small change in the order of \_ of 1% in over-expenditures or loss of income can mean a \$1,000,000 difference over the biennium. The fact that we must project our expenditures and income fully three years before we know what will actually happen means that any shortfall in enrollment, any steep increase in utility costs, any unfunded mandate that comes from the federal government, state government or State Board of Higher Education must be accommodated from already determined budget allocations. Given these fiscal realities, your management of funds is truly remarkable and responsible. If we are to be successful in the future, we must continue to press the need within the public sector, especially in higher education, for both enterprise and executive flexibility to manage funds, to move monies around where they are needed, to maximize returns on any invested funds, and to seek other fiscal partnerships. This should be combined

with modern notions of professional accountability which feature outcome assessment rather than continuous reporting on inputs.

As I have stated repeatedly, the major difference between leadership and management in the public sector of higher education compared to the private sector is the burden of ongoing and repeated reporting on what we plan to do, and how we are going about it, rather than a full accounting once a year on what we have accomplished. This appears to be a product of a cumbersome policy and regulatory environment, reinforced by a lack of trust here in North Dakota that we all must turn around. The ball is in our court and we simply have to win the trust of our citizens, the State Board of Higher Education and public servants to allow us the freedom to do business in a dynamic and rapidly changing environment without everyone looking over our shoulders all the time. I am cautiously optimistic that this can be accomplished.

When I reflect on the past year, I continue to speak with confidence about the productivity and activity levels of this university. I suspect, if every organization in North Dakota kept a guest book, the number of our guests annually would easily place us in the 10 top attractions in North Dakota. Let me share just a few statistics with you that bear out this assertion. Last year we enrolled over 9600 students. Besides their use of many establishments throughout the Fargo area, their families and friends visit here. Our students completed 263,729 credit hours of instruction. NDSU granted 1711 degrees. We wrote 570 grant proposals. We delivered 270,387 participant hours of non-credit instruction and training. We hosted 220,763 individuals for NDSU cultural and athletic events. We provided camps and conferences for 16,000 individuals. We exceeded our goal of a \$20,000,000 capital campaign by 25% over a year in advance. We have been and are a busy place.

During the legislative session I shared some information on the workload of our faculty. On average, our faculty work 55 hours per week to accomplish their multiple responsibilities. These include instruction, advising, preparing lectures, setting up laboratory experiments, writing letters of recommendation for students, working on course and curriculum design, integrating technology into the classroom and laboratory, visiting with perspective students, doing research, writing grant proposals, attending committee meetings, carrying on their scholarship, producing creative works of art, hosting and presenting at conferences and building their own telecommunications literacy levels. Our workload at this land-grant university could not possibly be accomplished if our faculty worked only 40 hours per week. I remind various people that evaluating our faculty only on the time they spend in the classroom makes no more sense than evaluating attorneys only on the time they spend in the court room, farmers only on the time they spend in the field, or legislators only on the time they spend on the floor of the house or senate. Our work-ethic here at NDSU is sound - it is more than nationally competitive - whether you consider students, faculty, or staff. This current academic year promises just as heavy a workload and we

will continue to shoulder the full continuum of knowledge transfer activities.

Every six years the State Board of Higher Education is required by law to produce a strategic plan. The State Board of Higher Education is fully engaged in that process right now as you have read in recent news coverage, and we will be providing our campus strategies to match up with the board's goals. The plan will project activities from 1998-2004. The stated intent of the board is to recognize, build upon and take maximum advantage of the uniqueness and specific strengths each institution has to offer. It is the vision of the board that North Dakota must maintain a high access, high quality higher education system. Further, the position of the board is that, should general fund appropriations and approved tuition and fees fall short of funding such a vision, it will take action to limit access rather than quality as a strategic choice. I fully support its position. The seven goals put forward by the State Board of Higher Education are (in abbreviated form)

1. Education excellence
2. Technology and access
3. Relevant programs
4. Leadership in research
5. Learning environment
6. Documented performance
7. Collaboration

These goals appear realistic and reasonable to me. While we cannot forecast the environment NDSU will face in six years, we can match up a variety of our campus strategies with these goals and project some other initiatives we anticipate attempting over the next two to six years. Our campus strategies must be approved by the State Board of Higher Education just as our campus master plan for buildings and grounds now requires. While the time-line for our campus response to the State Board of Higher Education strategic plan doesn't allow for the normal process of consultation we would follow at NDSU, I think we can prepare responses which our academic community can embrace. The "distractions" of the flood and its aftermath put this agenda item behind schedule for the board and brought it forward during a fast tract summer period when many on our campus were away or not available according to their normal schedules. Regardless, we need the best summary of campus strategies now underway, proposed or anticipated that complement the seven goals of the State Board of Higher Education. The vice presidents, deans, directors and presidents of our governance groups all have copies of the plan and will be working with all of you to provide

the inventory of strategies we intend to use to meet these goals. We must submit our strategies by October 1, 1997, to the chancellor. So, please write strategy in big block letters at the top of your September calendars and consult with these individuals as soon as you can. I appreciate the fact that we are all very, very busy at this time of the year, but this is a priority assignment which cannot be delayed. Fortunately much of the thinking about the future is ongoing here so we simply have to more formally organize our thoughts, put some time-lines on them and suggest some appropriate indicators of success as our portion of this planning process.

A recent report by the Kellogg Commission provides a useful context as we go forward with our work here at NDSU.

The success of the land-grant tradition lies in its combination of high quality, affordable education, world-class research, and public service; in its practical real-life orientation; and in its deep sense of responsibility for the society that supports it.

I want to support the work you have underway to keep NDSU a national model of a land-grant university which features a mission made up of six integrated components, which together help us to be a leader in the knowledge transfer business.

1. A value-added and career oriented approach to student academic and social development.
2. Aggressive outreach programming directed at
  - quality of life improvement
  - economic development
  - manpower training
  - continuing education
3. Focus on knowledge and technology transfer.
4. A diversified portfolio of academic programs.
5. Policies and practices which promote development and create a culture of civility and collegueship.
6. Expanded civic and regional partnerships.

Our top priority will continue to be the preparation of our graduates for technological professionalism and leadership rather than technological vocationalism. We intend to send our graduates away from this campus with three educational outcomes. A set of applications skills which make them productive the first day on the job. A set of transferable intellectual and communication competencies that will serve them well throughout their careers. These competencies include the ability to write, speak and listen effectively, to use the computer as a tool, and to be oriented

towards team problem-solving. Our graduates should also have a taste for leadership which includes the knowledge that all technology has both intended and unintended consequences, an awareness that all of life's choices require ethical considerations, a sense of craftsmanship or pride in the quality of their work, a commitment to wellness activities, and a positive orientation to a pluralistic society. To achieve these kinds of educational outcomes requires learning opportunities both in and out of the classroom where theory and practice come together. I will be asking deans and directors of both academic and support service units to include in their annual evaluation materials how their departments have expanded opportunities for experiential learning on the part of our students. These experiential components should be built into the normal requirements for the degree at NDSU and include such activities as internships, cooperative work-study placement, study abroad, clinical rotations, juried shows, undergraduate participation in faculty research projects, and community service assignments. Keeping students as our number one priority means continuing to have tenured senior professors interacting with our newest students. It means advisors have to stay in touch with our students about both their academic progress and their daily lives. Nationally only about 35% of students complete a degree in four years or less. NDSU's recent survey of our students suggests a similar pattern of program completion. Many students, two-thirds of them, work many hours at part-time employment while attending college. They are more prone to get off track, have course sequence difficulties, and need encouragement during the five to six years that tend to characterize the current pattern of completing a degree. As we design our curricula and deliver our instruction we need also to keep in mind the primary learning style of this "digital generation." They have experienced a "robust visual electronics media" environment when they come to us and tend to learn best through "participation and experimentation." We will continue to be challenged to match the technological level of our delivery with the technological literacy of each student generation. We will need to do so without losing the human touch, the interaction of professors and students, face to face, both in and out of the classroom. As someone has said, "connectivity is not the same as community." Both are required in an effective and efficient learning environment. Our technology can handle connectivity; other methodologies are required to develop student ability and understanding of increasingly pluralistic communities and work settings. This means that we need to think about the educational issues of pluralism with the same intensity we now apply to technology. Curricula which do not enhance both technological literacy and an appreciation for pluralistic settings including a global perspective are increasingly irrelevant in today's world. On this campus, where academic affairs and student affairs personnel have a strong affinity to collaborate on programming, we have an unusual opportunity to achieve the objectives of sophisticated technological literacy and interpersonal competence in dealing with difference. The learning agenda articulated by student affairs includes objectives that fit well with our intended academic outcomes. A variety of activities called signature programs are designed to teach students:

To lead  
To serve

To negotiate and resolve conflict  
To execute tasks to completion  
To function collaboratively  
To participate as committed citizens of a community

One of our top quality indicators as a university is how many of our students achieve these outcomes and successfully graduate. We oppose every notion that suggests that our agenda is to weed out as many students from the campus as possible. Most students who leave college, NDSU included, do not leave for academic reasons, they leave because they don't get the attention and advice they need, when they need it. Students withdraw from the campus when meaningful relationships have not been established with peers, faculty, and staff. Retention of students correlates with responsiveness to students. We are good at this and we need to get better. Retention of students is both an educational obligation and a fiscal asset.

Responsiveness to students springs naturally out of a campus climate that features good collegueship. Our continuing goal is to foster a civil and friendly campus and avoid the "in your face" corrosive life style now featured in so much of our media. To maintain a non-adversarial atmosphere takes hard work especially during times of revenue diets, but it should be a non-negotiable value that we all work to support. I appreciate the culture of NDSU which does not suffer elitist notions very well, nor appreciate arrogance or lack of common sense. This welcoming culture, in which we host so well is true to the land-grant ethic. This fact is appreciated well beyond our campus boundaries.

I continue to believe that our three campus priorities focus our attention on the right things. These priorities are:

1. Improved relationships between people on campus and their off-campus constituencies.
2. Enhanced quality of student, faculty and staff interaction.
3. Changes in pedagogy and uses of technology to fashion this university.

I want to briefly address priority number one which addresses outreach in all its forms. One of the things I have learned since coming to North Dakota two years ago, is the value of having NDSU personnel getting off-campus to bring programs directly to citizens and organizations. That is one reason I value the opportunity to be a member of the new State Board of Agricultural Research. We have a renewed opportunity to interact with the farmers and ranchers we serve, to more fully disclose to



them the depth and breadth of NDSU, both in agriculture and the other colleges, and to hear directly from them how our programs match up against the problems producers face in North Dakota. This board, like the others we have attached to our various colleges and support service units, provides a terrific feedback loop and potential advocacy network for us. Other examples include our national advisory board in Polymers and Coatings, our library advisory board, and our advisory board in Cooperative Education. We will continue to encourage external advisory boards to all of our units at NDSU.

This year my office will accept proposals from faculty and staff, departments and colleges to take programs on the road in North Dakota. Some evidence of citizen interest will be the only qualifying criterion. I am establishing a \$100,000 on the road fund to allocate to qualified proposals. You will receive further details on this fund from my office later this month.

The Skills & Technology Training Center is an outreach project that focuses on the need for better trained workers as part of the economic development of North Dakota. The North Dakota State College of Science in Wahpeton is our partner in this public-private enterprise that is solidly backed by the legislature and private industry. A combination of start-up funds from the legislature, investments from the private sector, and training revenue will allow this new entrepreneurial outreach venture to succeed. This project is fully consistent with our land-grant heritage and the new State Board of Higher Education Strategic Plan.

I believe we need to accelerate and better coordinate our government relations at the federal level. While funds may be tight in Washington, DC, there are substantial sums being directed at quality proposals from universities. We need to do better in this arena. I will be establishing a federal relations team to draft for consideration an annual listing of priority projects for our congressional delegation, to keep track of all proposals sent to the federal government, to coordinate calls on officials in Washington, to recommend the best targets for NDSU to pursue at the federal level, and to recommend the most effective use of our federal consultants in Washington.

This year I will also expand my "horizontal" orientation to the campus. That is, I will attempt to participate in some activity that is off-line from my normal reporting relationships. It is my personal outreach to my own campus. This year I would like to visit classes, both undergraduate and graduate to build my IQ of what is happening at NDSU. These would be by invitation from the faculty teaching the courses, and I will ask deans to provide me with courses that I would be welcome to visit at an agreed upon time. I look forward to it.

As I begin the final year in my three year contract with the State Board of Higher Education and review the future with the chancellor later this academic year, I would appreciate your evaluation of my work. Do you

feel that NDSU has made progress as a university since our start date together in July of 1995? Where do you think I have been of some help? What areas or activities require more of my attention? What significant opportunities or vulnerabilities do you foresee? If I am asked to continue at NDSU next year, I need to know what issues you feel must be on our agenda. I will remind you of this request early in the second semester and will look forward to your candid appraisal and advice. Of course, your responses can be anonymous or can be sent to me via traditional mail or e-mail. Feel free to send copies to the chancellor if you wish. I also plan to ask our students who will be completing their course of study with us this academic year to give me some feedback on their ideas about improving our learning environment, both in class and out of class. I would like to know specifically whether there were courses they wished to take but were unable to get due to schedule or their prescribed curriculum. Were there particular courses in general education or in their major that really helped them gain new perspectives? Have they found technology expanded and friendly in any of their classes, either in instructional delivery by professors or in their own use for completing projects and papers? I will ask them about any specific or general suggestions of ways we can improve our learning environment. This student feedback, along with a faculty and staff critique of my leadership, will assist me greatly in a self-analysis of my first three years at NDSU, and how the potential future agenda here matches up to my own skills as a sitting president. In this regard, I share with you my 1997-98 academic year objectives which have been approved by the chancellor.

1. To continue a leadership presence both inside and outside the university which is viewed as credible, honest, thoughtful, and collaborative.
2. To provide oversight for new facilities approved for NDSU and to update significant features of the NDSU Master Plan.
3. To assist in the successful wrap-up of the five year NDSU \$20,000,000 capital campaign and to participate in several "mini" campaigns related to the Skills and Technology Training Center, Animal Research Facility, and Engineering and Architecture addition.
4. To establish a program/activity review process which identifies centers of demand validated by student enrollments and/or employment opportunities and centers of excellence validated by third party funding and/or partnering which focus our resource allocation decisions and our strategic directions.
5. To forge an effective partnership with the State Board of Agricultural Research.
6. To press the need within the North Dakota public sector for both enterprise and executive flexibility (freedom to manage) combined

with professional accountability (outcome assessment rather than reporting obligations for inputs).

I am reminded by conversations off-campus on a regular basis that NDSU is still a rather well kept secret. We intend to change that through some of the activities I have already detailed but also through some additional thoughtful marketing. You will begin to hear and see more about NDSU. I hope you like it. If you have ideas about how to tell our story more effectively, please let me know. I am eager and proud to communicate about this university.

I look forward to 1997-98 and to your good work. I hope you can come over to the house after this presentation to chat with Monty and me and your colleagues.

Thank you.

As we continue our work, lets remember the words of Bob Newhart, "I'd like to make the motion that we face reality."

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Prospective students may schedule a visit by calling 1-800-488-NDSU.

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*NDSU Webmaster*

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