

Reflections from the Year 2001

**A State of the University Address
Delivered by President J.L. Ozbun
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North Dakota State University Fargo**

Back in 1968 when the science fiction film "2001" first hit the streets, the idea of people cruising around in space matching wits with a supercomputer that had taken on human-old characteristics seemed a bit farfetched.

It seems less so now.

The distant future—turn of a new century and the start of a new millenium—is just around the corner. There's a message in that for us. Today's science fiction becomes tomorrow's history.

As we prepare to take off on a new academic year it occurred to me that it might be interesting to spend a few moments speculating on what NDSU might be like ten, twelve or fifteen years down the road.

More importantly, what would we as an academic community like it to be like, and what will it take to get us there?

So let us imagine for a moment that we're aboard a hovercraft, homing in on the north-west corner of NDSU campus It is the year 2001, a decade from now. The new millenium is under way. What are some of the things we'll see?

Off to our right, that tractor crossing sign that used to greet people coming in from the west has been replaced by a new entrance, welcoming people to the campus.

Off to the right, we come upon a beautifully landscaped tract that contains the new Faculty, Alumni and Visitor's Center, where we can stop for a cup of coffee, obtain a campus map and view a quick audio-visual introduction to the campus.

Our campus-wide signage and identity program is now in place, making it easy and convenient for people to find their way around. As visitors to the campus, we feel welcome.

On our left is the new Statewide Center for Lifelong Learning, headquarters for all of our extension and continuing education programs, complete with ancillary facilities for housing and food services.

Just a few blocks further east, the FargoDome has been up and running for nearly a decade now, and has given rise to an assortment of businesses and industrial campus.

the Industrial Agriculture and Communications Center has now been in operation so long that its hardware collection is ready for replacement. Personal computers and RISC stations form a network across the campus and the state, and have long since replaced the mainframe computer.

Other new and modernized facilities include a Day Care Center located conveniently on campus for the children of faculty, staff and students. A Fine Arts Gallery complements the excellent facilities for music and drama. The Student Health Center has been expanded and modernized, providing professional services and care.

Our Native American students now feel at home at NDSU, with several of their former colleagues now on the faculty, and a center of their own.

Thanks to a lively and comprehensive statewide interactive television network, centered in the Industrial Agriculture and Communications Center, all of our academic colleges now offer classes through the use of this medium. NDSU has become a nerve center for communication with schools, businesses and governmental agencies throughout the state, region, nation and world. We are a vital link in a global network for the dissemination of information and technology.

By now, NDSU is recognized throughout the state as a leader in economic development, well beyond its traditional fields of agriculture and home economics. This has resulted from our work with the Institute of Business and Industry Development, the Perkins Center, and the contributions of the College of Business. A reader board out front of the college's newly expanded facilities announces that the Business Program has been re-accredited with flying colors.

Aero-manufacturing Engineering Technology, initiated in the Fall of 1991 has continued to grow, with more than 800 students from around the world. It, too, has new facilities, allowing its continued growth and development.

Farfetched? Perhaps. Nine or ten years is a very short time. Some of these objectives may take longer to accomplish. Some will be adapted with the advent of new technologies, economic shifts or other world events. There will be ideas we have yet to conceive. Contemplating the implications of it all makes your head spin a little. But it's going to happen. It's only a question of when.

Much more important than purely physical surroundings, however, will be the social, intellectual and cultural climate of this academic community—the quality of thinking, teaching and learning that takes place here.

Three years ago, soon after I arrived at NDSU, I was invited to speak to a faculty workshop on collegiality. It's one of those concepts that sounds wonderful to the Utopians among us. But, human nature being what it apparently is, collegiality is much easier to talk about than it is to achieve.

Yet ideally, the most productive atmosphere among faculty, staff and administrators would be one of genuine collegiality. We pay a high price for turf wars, subterfuges, and professional jealousies in quality and productivity. An atmosphere of open, honest discussion, and a collective mindset to do what it takes to make the organization function

at the peak of its potential remains a goal worthy of continual pursuit.

Honest disagreements among thoughtful people are the wellspring of intellectual vitality. We have no intention of trying to stifle such debates. But I'm convinced there is a growing acknowledgment abroad in the land that Americans need to do a better job of "hanging together" in the words of Benjamin Franklin, in solving the country's problems, to avoid "hanging separately."

The economy, environment, education, all are going to take positive cooperation rather than destructive conflict to achieve workable solutions. Daily, in higher education we observe this more and more, within and among institutions and between the public and private sectors.

In this regard, North Dakota's new statewide university system will have a profound effect on the quality of education in the future.

If NDSU is to achieve the goals and objectives stated in the Strategic Plan by the year 2001, our relations with students, our decision making and programs must become student-centered. In terms of Total Quality Improvement, they are our primary customers.

By that time NDSU will have significantly improved student retention. Students will remain because they are challenged and excited about learning in a supportive and caring atmosphere, and the services provided will make them feel important and wanted. Retention of our students will be viewed as a campus-wide concern and will be a byproduct of improved programs and services. To that end, I have created a task force on retention, with Vice Presidents Sharon Wallace and George Wallman involved in coordinating its efforts.

Does that mean there will be less emphasis placed on research, scholarship and creative activity on the part of faculty? No, it definitely does not. Harvard sociologist David Riesman asked the question: "Do we want our students taught by someone who has not continued to learn?" It is acknowledged that learning works best in a context where those who teach, and those who come to learn, engage in the pursuit of knowledge together. The expectation of strong scholarship by our faculty will continue, with the administration doing everything it can to support and encourage such activity.

Related to that expectation is the need to gain greater support for scholarly and creative pursuits. Currently, 50 percent of the research grant proposals leaving the campus are now funded—an excellent record that speaks well for our faculty. Research funding has grown from just over three million dollars, less than a decade ago, to more than fourteen million today. If new construction for research is included, the figure grows to more than nineteen million dollars.

NDSU currently receives nearly 60 percent of its total support from sources other than direct appropriations from the state's general fund. I predict that will increase to 70 percent by the turn of the century. Substantial state assistance will remain vital to NDSU. But we will continue in the direction we've been going for the past several decades. The proportion of our total budget coming from tuition, fees, grants, contracts and the private sector must continue to grow. That being the case, although fundraising is

primarily an administrative responsibility, it behooves each of us to consider our personal role in strengthening those sources of support.

This university derives its major support from the citizens of North Dakota, and our prime mission is, and should continue to be, the education of North Dakotans. But the world has changed much since 1890. In fact, it's changed much in the past month. Recent events in the Persian Gulf, what used to be the Soviet Union, China and elsewhere make it very clear that we can't build a Great Wall around North Dakota. Our students can't be educated in a vacuum. Even those who remain in North Dakota will be operating in a global economy.

We hear and read a lot about multi-culturalism in higher education these days. It's a controversial topic. Yet it's a reality of lives in our time. If we are to continue to produce educated, enlightened citizens, able to function effectively in this global society, NDSU's curricula must reflect a multi-cultural approach.

One of my personal goals is that, by the year 2001 all of our students will have gained an international perspective during their experience at NDSU. Twenty-five percent of them will have experience overseas. Ten percent of our enrollment will consist of minority and international students.

One of the important ways in which we hope to pursue the goals I have just outlined is through implementing the concept of Total Quality Improvement. It is essential for an organization as large and complex as NDSU to exist in a perpetual state of self-questioning and self-examination with an eye toward bringing all of its systems and processes to the highest possible level of efficiency and effectiveness. I don't see this as an exercise in fault-finding. We know that we do a lot of things exceptionally well at NDSU. We take justifiable pride that. But there must be a commitment to bring all facets of our operations to an acknowledged level of efficiency and excellence, with an emphasis on gradual, but continual improvement in quality.

Earlier I talked about retention as a campus-wide concern and that it should be a byproduct of improved programs and services. Total Quality Improvement, involving the people who deliver the product, is the vehicle that can bring about that result.

With its emphasis on people, programs, values and resources, our strategic plan, formulated three years ago, provides a framework within which all of these goals may be pursued, and against which progress can be measured. Reports from the college deans reflect considerable progress, but there is much yet to be done.

We're moving into the semester system a year from now. The statewide university system is just beginning to be implemented. Both offer NDSU invaluable opportunities to more clearly define its role and bring its mission into sharper focus.

One day last summer, people who are preparing a publication for the Fargo Chamber of Commerce dropped by Dr. Lewis' office, asking NDSU to underwrite one of its pages. We decided the most dramatic way to illustrate NDSU's impact on the community would be to identify people in the community— alumni, faculty, staff and students—who have NDSU connections, and take their picture for the publication.

The response from those contacted—from the business community, banking, medicine, governmental agencies, the military, the arts and education—was overwhelming and very heartening to me. They were pleased and proud to be asked to represent NDSU.

That experience brought home an important point: that this institution plays a profound role in people's personal lives, but, in a broader sense, it's a tremendous presence in Fargo, the state, region and nation. Over time, NDSU and other colleges and universities worldwide carry a heavy responsibility for the direction of civilization.

In any given class we touch the lives of our students for only a few hours. By the time we get them, most of them have spent 18 or more years somewhere else. Once they leave the university most will go on to lead long, fulfilling lives. Yet, throughout the rest of their lives, they will identify themselves and will be identified with this university. Cumulatively, the hours in our classrooms, laboratories, residence halls and other aspects of student life may well be among the most formative hours in an individual's life. It behooves us to continue to take what we do very seriously.

I realize some of these thoughts are not new to you. Yet, in the interests of crystallizing our vision of the future, I felt this need to review them. I want to end by repeating the invitation with which I began. We are all in this together. Let us continue to work together over the year and years ahead to make this fine university the institution all of us know that it can be. Then make it happen.

Thank you very much.