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**The University of Alabama in Huntsville**  
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**Fall Convocation**  
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Ladies and Gentlemen: It's my pleasure to give my first convocation address and officially welcome our new professors who, like me, are starting out at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

I hope you are as excited as I am about the prospects for the future of this institution which, although relatively young in years and small in scale, is well known to the bright young men and women who come here to the university with the most rigorous academic standards in the state. Much of that reputation is due to the leadership and fiscal responsibility under President Frank Franz.

I have been meeting as many faculty, staff, students, and administrators as possible during my first few weeks and I will continue to do this until I have visited every college, department, research center and other key units on campus. I intend to make such visits a regular event: at least once a year throughout my time here. Obviously I cannot meet everyone, but I do read my email (although I don't answer it all). All of you are free to email me at any time.

I suspect that more than a few of you are here because it is customary for the president to deliver the "State of the University" address on these occasions. I also suspect that among the faculty and staff, there are both concerns and hopes as a new administration commences.

Until a short time ago I was a professor of materials science and engineering and a VP of Research. I am an experimental electron microscopist and an administrator who spent more than 30 years at a small private university after moving there from the UK in 1976. My views and my actions are unavoidably influenced by these experiences, and so I ask that you bear with me as both Margie and I adjust to a new home and I come to terms with a new position, a new office with new responsibilities and new staff, a new department, a new university and a new system in a new state. Apart from this not much has changed for us in the last month or so, although I am becoming familiar with hitherto-unknown phrases such as "fried okra", "the Piggly Wiggly" and "the war of northern aggression".

Given my limited time here, any assessment of the "State of the University" is premature. So, instead, let me give you a few of my core values built on my previous experiences, some of which may be relevant as I seek to understand UAHuntsville, and work with you to determine the best direction, mission, vision and goals that we all need to embrace to continue the remarkable trajectory of this remarkable institution.

In the broadest sense, I believe that a university is the intellectual soul of its community. We are part of the extraordinary community of Huntsville and Madison County and many of us live in this community and raise our families here. We must continue to work with all facets of our community to improve our quality of life, our economic growth, our entrepreneurial opportunities, our health system, and our cultural events. I believe that no individual and no community can ever suffer from a surfeit of education.

We serve the UAHuntsville students, their parents, and families. We serve the larger educational community including our neighboring universities, community colleges, and our K-12 system, without which we would be irrelevant. We serve the business community and the political community and The University of Alabama system; in return, they all serve us.

This symbiosis can grow because of the unique situation in which we find ourselves: the forthcoming expansion of our community due to the ongoing NASA ARES program, the BRAC changes at Redstone, and the continued development of Cummings Research Park in areas such as data handling/IT, aerospace/propulsion, defense, earth and space sciences, and related industries.

UAH's research portfolio has grown to impressive proportions. The strength of our research is in the extraordinary partnerships with NASA and the Army. The weakness of our research endeavor is the strong dependence on NASA and the Army.

In our knowledge-based economy, no other university in the USA, and perhaps no other in the world, is as well positioned as UAHuntsville to grow in the quantity and quality of the education we offer – in industrial partnerships for our faculty, staff, and students; in joint research with the Federal Government, the State and industry; in continuing education for our surrounding community; and in unparalleled employment opportunities for all our graduates. We cannot miss this opportunity.

Within the University, I value the concept of the faculty member as a scholar-educator: scholarship and teaching are two sides of the same coin. They are equally important and equally necessary. A professor should be an expert in her/his field of study and communicate that expertise and the excitement of her/his particular discipline in the classroom, the lab, and the library and also while advising, socializing, or simply talking to our students.

I value the concept of responsibility-based budgeting. Individual units are best equipped to handle their own budgets, set their own priorities, keep their surpluses, and cover their deficits. Henceforth, the bank of the president is closed, and you will all have your own checkbooks. Overdrafts will not exist, unless you want to negotiate the interest terms.

Academe is an intellectually elitist system. We select the students best suited to our institution, we seek to attract faculty and staff based on similar criteria, we grade students on their performance in various aspects of their degree programs based on specific criteria. We should live our own careers as faculty, staff, and administrators by the same ethos. We should all be graded on our performance on the basis of well-defined criteria for promotion, tenure, and annual merit pay. Under such a system, we should not be afraid of striving to raise all our standards.

As I said, I'm an experimentalist. Experimentalists learn by trying new approaches. They learn as much from failure as from success. More often than not, new insights come from the unexpected result. So, after due consultation with the appropriate arms of the university, I am prepared to try new experiments in personnel, in academic programs, in athletics, in finance, in student life – in fact in any arm of the university that wants to progress.

The only constancy in academe is change. If we do not change we will not grow intellectually, and we will not progress. Every university is on the same treadmill and we cannot get off. But we do not necessarily have to run faster. Every one of you has been hired because you are very smart. We should use our combined intellects to outwit the competition, not use our stamina to outlast it. If we do not progress, there is absolutely no guarantee that we will be here in the future.

Any organization that takes its existence for granted runs the danger of going the way of Antioch College or Bethlehem Steel. Since we will not take our current *modus operandi* for granted, experiments will be run and I will share in your celebrations of those that succeed, and I will take responsibility for any failures (not that I'm counting on too many).

So be prepared for change. I do not have the answers; I do not have the money. But I can help by questioning the status quo, by encouraging and supporting new ideas from faculty, staff and students. And it is undoubtedly my responsibility to lead efforts to raise more money so we can educate more students, generate more endowment, and build newer and better infrastructure.

A university that grows both the quality and the quantity of the two "E s" – enrollment and endowment – is virtually guaranteed to succeed. As I work with the leadership team here to build the essence of our strategic academic plan for the next five years, we must solve these two problems: a generally static enrollment and an endowment that is a fraction of its potential.

I can only lead if I support you. I can only set new directions if you agree on those directions. I believe that in many cases combined intellectual effort is often geometric (maybe even exponential but usually not arithmetic) in its outcome. Viewing any problem from different backgrounds and through different lenses increases the possible number of creative solutions. In summary, I believe success at a university comes through individual intellectual leadership combined (where appropriate) in creative, interdisciplinary partnerships. I believe in supporting those who demonstrate the ability to lead by their own efforts.

Marvelous opportunities are here but it will take the concerted effort of all of us to grasp these opportunities fully, and I look forward to the opportunity to help make this happen. I hope that's the last time you hear me use the first person singular from this podium (throwing tomatoes is encouraged otherwise). Together we can transform UAHuntsville so that many more places throughout the state, the region, the USA and the world recognize us for what we are: an intellectually confident institution, a technologically proficient and inventive organization, and a university with key faculty who have the reputation to lead national-level scholarly enterprises and others who know when UAH can best grow that same reputation by partnering with better known and more qualified colleagues.

Let me end by encouraging you to let me know your thoughts. Whenever I've met with anyone here on campus I've asked these questions:

What's working well and how can we do it better?

What's not working well and how can we correct it?

What are the three things that we should focus on to improve UAH?

You have the answers to all of these questions. Please let me know them and together we can realize the opportunities that persuaded all of you new faculty and also Margie and me to leave the comforts and familiarities of our former homes to build new lives and productive careers at UAHuntsville.

DBW/mbw