

State of the University – 2008
“Positioning for the Future”
Delivered by:
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Shawnee State University

Thank you everyone for being here today.

Today’s “State of the University” address is intended to focus the university community on the accomplishments of the past year and the opportunities and challenges before us in the coming year.

Shawnee State University is a complex organization that is growing and changing even as I speak. This growth is bringing exciting changes and new opportunities for our students and university.

But it is becoming more difficult for any one person to know everyone on campus or everything that is going on at the campus.

To ensure we keep our special qualities as a university community, each of us must endeavor to learn as much as possible about our environment and to remember that our piece of SSU is just a part of a dynamic and exciting entity.

Today I hope you will learn something new.

Three Possible Students

Let me begin by talking about our reason for being – our students. Shawnee State attracts students from all walks of life, from all sorts of places, and who present an array of dreams. Here are three examples of students considering Shawnee State.

The first is a student from Portsmouth. She’s done well in high school, but no one in her family has ever attended college. The whole college experience, from the application process to selecting a major is completely alien to her. She is near the top of her class, but is not entirely confident she can succeed in college, or that she can afford it.

Another student is from Columbus. He’s interested in video game design, but knows very little about Shawnee State – he’s barely heard of us. He isn’t sure whether he would be comfortable at Shawnee State, or that he would get the preparation he feels he needs to enter the workforce.

The third student is a working mother living in Adams County. She is very interested in a health sciences degree. She has the desire for a better job, but is struggling to manage the prospect of being a mother, full-time employee, and university student.

Each of these students is different, but they all present both opportunities and challenges for us, for our job is to serve these students, and in doing so, serve the region and state.

Student Statistics

Let's take a snapshot of our 3,700 student body:

- The median age of a Shawnee State student is 20. That median age has dropped in the last few years as more traditional students enroll.
- Our student male to female ratio is 40/60, which is the national average.
- 81 percent of Shawnee State students receive some form of financial aid.
- About 91 percent of our students are from Ohio, and, of those, two-thirds are from the region.
- 8.6 percent of Shawnee State students are from out-of-state – that includes the 7.2 percent who are Kentucky residents from counties that qualify for in-state Ohio tuition.
- We have 26 students from 13 countries. That is less than one percent, but the impact of their presence on campus is felt far beyond their numbers. They bring the world to Shawnee State. We need more of them.
- Traditional students now make up about 70 percent of our enrollment.
- About 600 students live on campus. That's nearly 15 percent of our enrollment.

We have worked hard to meet the needs of our ever-diversifying student body, and in the last year there's much to be proud of.

Master Plan

Last June, the Trustees approved a revision to the university's 20-year Master Plan, capping a two year process of review, and campus and community dialogs.

We are very confident the Master Plan provides a vision for university growth that captures the aspirations of students, faculty, staff and the community. The Master Plan envisions expanding our "footprint" in order to create a campus that will be more inviting for us and the surrounding community, and that will provide for new services.

Poised for Tomorrow

In January 2007 Shawnee State University kicked off the public phase of its \$12 million capital campaign, the largest of its kind ever in the region. Poised for Tomorrow will support new programs, increase scholarships, fund faculty research and professional development and make possible the construction of new facilities.

There has been broad community and regional support for Poised for Tomorrow, and nearly 94 percent of faculty and staff made pledges during the campus campaign which totaled over \$500,000.

Today we have pledges and planned gifts totaling 95 percent our goal—more than has ever been raised in a capital campaign in southern Ohio and we are beginning to see changes at SSU supported by these gifts.

We are very proud to have partnered with SOMC to develop a simulation lab that will serve to improve the quality of nursing that our graduates can provide.

The Sim Lab uses high-tech mannequins, although that expression does not do them justice. They breathe, have a heartbeat, manifest symptoms, and will even explain what their discomfort is.

The Sim Lab gives our nursing students the opportunity to gain the valuable experience of training in life or death situations – and not one mannequin has complained yet!

In the next year we will see new tennis courts as the result of a gift from Dr. William Daehler and our expansion of the University Center will include more space for community use with support from our partners, Sodexho and Barnes and Noble.

Semesters

Our conversion to semesters has been a smooth one and is the result of three years of hard work by our faculty and staff.

The semester schedule is helping students by giving them more time to adjust, more time to learn, and more time to succeed.

It will also allow them to enter the workforce sooner upon graduation.

To effect this major change, the faculty performed an incredible amount of work. We are a university that can offer its students new and revised curricula. Every one of the nearly 1,400 courses offered at Shawnee State under the quarter system was reviewed and re-crafted to create more than 1,100 new semester courses.

I know that this first year on semesters has been hard work as we developed new timelines and schedules, both professional and personal, and I thank you for your many efforts.

The work has been hard, the result has been good, and aren't you glad the first year is almost behind us?

Celebration of Scholarship

I so enjoy our annual “Celebration of Scholarship,” which provides students an opportunity to showcase their research. It’s there I see the thinkers and innovators who will become our community’s leaders.

The students are given the opportunity to present research or exhibit work in a range of disciplines.

The Celebration of Scholarship is also an opportunity to recognize the faculty who gave of their time to mentor the conference participants.

Their encouragement and expertise underscores the quality of undergraduate education one can receive at Shawnee State.

Center for International Programs and Activities

In September we celebrated the opening of our new Center for International Programs and Activities. The center is housed in the former Portsmouth Jewish Temple, which was acquired with funds from a bequest to the university by Rose L. and Augusta Jacobs.

The center will help international students attending Shawnee State fully integrate into campus life. It will also sponsor programs and activities that foster the broad perspective necessary for success in the 21st century global economy.

Meeting Needs of the Region

One of the greatest needs of this region is well qualified health care professionals.

This year we added 30 seats in the nursing program. We did so in response to the high number of qualified candidates and the regional demand for nurses.

For similar reasons last year we instituted the MOT program.

The MOT program and expansion of the nursing class highlight our awareness of the central role Shawnee State plays in enhancing the quality of life in the region.

Literacy Council Partnership

It is a simple fact: you cannot learn if you cannot read. Shawnee State, Southern Ohio Medical Center and Portsmouth City Schools partnered to create the Scioto County Literacy Council, headquartered in the Clark Memorial Library.

The Literacy Council will more effectively coordinate the groups promoting literacy in Scioto County, encourage them to identify joint solutions to common problems, and secure new sources of funding.

Excellence of our Graduates

Faculty and staff alike continue to bask in the success of our graduates. Local hospitals, schools, and businesses welcomed our new graduates to their workforces with anticipation as they know Shawnee State University graduates are well-prepared and hard working.

The success of our pre-med program is evidence of the academic quality available to our students. For the past several years, 100 percent of Shawnee State's pre-med students have been accepted into medical school.

We are proud that our pre-med program has developed a reputation for preparing students that excel in medical school.

That reputation was apparent on Pre-med Day. We had high school students from the region and across Ohio on campus. One student came from as far as Maryland.

Soccer Team Saves Family

A moment of particular pride came on October 28, 2007. The Shawnee State Men's Soccer Team was on its way back from a match in Kentucky when the team saw a vehicle in front of them swerve off the road and roll several times down a ravine before landing upside down in a creek.

Team members quickly responded by getting the grandmother, mother, and daughter out of the vehicle and offering treatment before emergency vehicles arrived.

For their quick thinking and selflessness the NAIA recognized the soccer team members as "Champions of Character."

In each State of the University address I have reported much good news, and there is more than I can mention today.

I have also made it clear that change is ahead in our lives. Our response to change in the coming years will need to be deliberate and well planned by the Shawnee State community.

Let me speak to some of the changes we know about now.

The Changing Face of Higher Education

First and foremost, we are operating in a new higher education dynamic in Ohio.

In the General Assembly, higher education is now a top priority. I applaud its commitment of resources in the 2008-2009 Ohio State Budget to help obviate the need for tuition increases our students must shoulder.

At the same time, the governor created the University System of Ohio. To be overseen by a chancellor reporting directly to the governor, the USO possesses the authority to coordinate the provision of higher education in Ohio.

The State Budget also requires the chancellor to develop a 10 year strategic plan for higher education. Chancellor Fingerhut is putting the finishing touches on the draft strategic plan he will present to the governor and legislature.

It contains four goals each of which carries several measures of success:

- Educational attainment
- Quality
- Affordability
- Economic leadership

The strategic plan and the USO will dramatically change higher education in Ohio.

But change is something we're familiar with at Shawnee State. From branch campus, to technical college, to community college, to university, this institution, more so than perhaps any other in the state, has grown and adapted to meet the needs of Ohioans.

Positioning for the future is something we do well.

Several positioning opportunities for change that will benefit our students are presenting themselves, as are the means to achieve them.

The Chancellor's Strategic Plan clearly will put an emphasis on accountability. We are well-positioned to do so at Shawnee State.

We have already made the transition to a continuous improvement accreditation model.

Our AQIP accreditation process already emphasizes establishing clear goals for university improvements with metrics to measure their success.

This November we will undergo our first "System Portfolio" review, a campus-wide and external review of our efforts.

By late spring we will have a better understanding of what the Chancellor's Strategic Plan will mean to Shawnee State, and we will spend the summer preparing to re-start our own "Shawnee 20/20" planning process in the fall.

As the federal Higher Education Reauthorization Act nears passage, it appears we could have as many as 250 new reporting requirements.

These are all new initiatives and we will be learning together the language of continuous improvement and accountability.

There should be a language course in accountability-speak – perhaps "Rosetta Stone" software that will turn the words like baselines, benchmarks, and metrics into the terminology of academia.

For example: “Having established a set of baseline data, metrics will be applied at the end of the week to gauge progress towards benchmarks.” Academia translation: “There will be a test on Friday.”

The presidents of public universities have taken the initiative on accountability. We have communicated to Chancellor Fingerhut our support for use of the Voluntary System of Accountability which was developed through a partnership between the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges.

The VSA communicates information on the undergraduate student experience through an easy-to-understand web page called the College Portrait that allows comparisons of institutions in a way that will make sense to legislators and parents alike.

Opportunities for Collaboration

There is also a statewide emphasis on expanding the opportunities for collaboration that benefit students.

Today I can announce Shawnee State will be a founding member of the Higher Education Consortium of Southern Ohio. HECSO will serve to promote collaboration among universities, community colleges, branch campuses, adult education centers and vocational schools, and high schools in the region.

It will foster postsecondary participation with the goal of increasing the number of southern Ohio residents participating in all types of higher education, boosting the number of citizens completing baccalaureate degrees.

By developing a cooperative network among the member institutions and other educational institutions and state agencies HECSO will maximize the use of existing facilities and services to create a complete continuum of higher education services – from non-credit training to graduate programs – without significant additional resources.

The consortium will cultivate a spirit of openness and cooperation among all institutions and organizations providing postsecondary services in southern Ohio so as to put the needs of citizens above all other considerations.

Opportunities for Ohio’s high school seniors received particular emphasis in Governor Strickland’s State of the State address. He announced the “Seniors to Sophomores” program and received a standing ovation from the legislature.

With that ringing endorsement we are preparing to work closely with the regional school districts to make Seniors to Sophomores available at SSU this fall. The program will permit high school students, free of charge, to attend college and acquire enough credits to enroll in a college as a sophomore. Imagine what slicing 25 percent off the cost of college would do for many families in our area?

Partnerships also will enhance our efforts to increase research opportunities for our faculty, improving the level of scholarship on the campus and our prestige as a university.

We will continue to pursue the Choose Ohio First Scholarships program, having partnered with regional colleges, universities and institutions on two separate grants.

That program will support with scholarships undergraduate and/or graduate education for Ohio residents in the STEM fields.

The Importance of the Liberal Arts

As we look for ways to improve our capacity to deliver a university education, I think it is essential to emphasize the liberal arts at Shawnee State, and their vital importance to the future of our students.

Along with providing career-specific training, we have a responsibility to cultivate the capacity of our students to think analytically – in order to succeed they must possess the intellectual wherewithal to adapt to new circumstances.

I have stated previously that all the programs we offer should be seen as rungs on a ladder leading up to a bachelor's degree. By that I mean all our students should receive some manner of grounding in the liberal arts disciplines.

It is all but impossible to anticipate exactly what students will need after graduation. Many have not decided upon a career, many may change careers, and still others will embark on careers that have yet to be imagined. We need to make sure our students leave Shawnee State with what you could call a “portfolio of ideas and ways of knowing” upon which they can rely regardless of the situation.

Our students also will be more than job holders. They will be citizens and individuals.

As part of their university degree it is incumbent upon us to impart the great ideas – and ideals – that will help them understand human events and inspire them to assume a role in shaping them.

As we position for the future we must also be mindful of our tradition as the campus of southern Ohio. Serving the residents of Appalachian Ohio will always be a central part of our mission.

New Learning Opportunities for Students

Thanks to generous support received as part of the Poised for Tomorrow Campaign, next year we will introduce a mobile health unit that will provide our nursing students with expanded opportunities to work with faculty, while complementing health screening services already available throughout the region. Instead of asking residents to come to Shawnee State, we will bring our health sciences staff and students to them.

We at Shawnee State are working to contribute to a high-tech future for the region. Our video game design programs are very much a part of that effort. So are plans to build an Interactive Digital Technology Center, at the heart of which will be a motion capture lab.

We are not just looking to build a facility, however. We want to enable local high school students to explore the possibilities of a high-tech career.

We are partners with Ohio University and Kent State – Tuscarawas in a multi-million dollar federal grant to generate interest in high-tech fields and improve our capacity to prepare students for them. That grant will fund the creation of “cyber clubs” at local high schools as well as “cyber-centers” on the college campuses.

Our value to the region will also grow as we offer more graduate programs.

Our MOT program has proven highly successful.

Now, we are looking to create a master’s degree in education, which like the MOT, will help us serve the region by providing the graduate-level education teachers need.

The responsibility for achieving a mandate in the state budget to increase enrollment will fall on all campuses. Again, we are well positioned at Shawnee State, having already taken steps to increase the number of students who pursue a university education here.

Key to this effort is developing our campus in a manner that will make it even more attractive to prospective students.

Just last month we held a groundbreaking ceremony for the expansion and renovation of the University Center.

In the last 20 years, Shawnee State has gone from a handful of buildings to a campus with over 30 structures and 600 resident students.

The expanded University Center will double the size of our dining facilities, provide meeting space for organizations and offer a host of activities and services upon which our students depend while on campus.

It will be a home-away-from home for our students and a gateway welcoming those considering Shawnee State.

We will also soon be breaking ground on the new tennis facility that is scheduled to open this fall and we hope to have the multi-purpose field open by fall of 2009

The university is also making investments to improve the level of safety on campus. I know our hearts reach out to the students, faculty and staff at Northern Illinois University, and other campuses touched by tragedy.

Every situation is different, but getting information to as many people as possible as quickly as possible is essential in responding to emergencies.

We are moving ahead with plans to install a public-address system to complement our SSUAlert electronic notification system.

We know that we offer solid academics, and as I just mentioned we are working hard to upgrade our facilities. But will there be students to enjoy them all?

Perhaps the greatest challenge we face as a university is a demographic one.

Throughout Ohio, fewer students will be graduating from high schools for the next several years.

That means fewer students from our region and greater competition for students across the state.

Four Steps to Increase Enrollment

How do we grow when there are fewer students coming out of high school?

First, we must develop new, exciting academic programming that will capture the imagination of prospective students. By doing so we send the message that we care about their future and will help them prepare for it.

New programming will have a prominent place in our planning.

Second, we must continue to pursue ways of making Shawnee State attractive to the non-traditional students in our region.

Our experience differs from other campuses in that non-traditional students provided the enrollment base for many years. Now, as our campus has begun to look more typical with younger faces, we cannot forget that Shawnee State is a vital source of higher education services for individuals well into their careers or looking to begin new ones.

Third, we must more actively recruit beyond our region.

We will remain deeply committed to providing opportunities to students from southern Ohio, but we must start to think of ourselves as a statewide university.

We know that if prospective students visit Shawnee State, they are very likely to enroll. The task before us is getting the word out, and getting them to campus.

We already know that our residences, all apartment-style, are proving a powerful attraction. I am pleased there will be housing available this fall for an additional 48 students.

I must not forget about prospective students from across the river. We now offer Ohio in-state tuition to residents of nine Kentucky counties.

As incentive for high-achieving students we have established the Merit Based Scholarship Awards, which are based on ACT score and high school average. These range from a full-tuition scholarship for the very finest students down to \$500.

Once the USO and university planning processes are complete we will embark the university on an extensive marketing campaign designed to increase the number of applications we receive and enhance the statewide prestige of Shawnee State.

This campaign will be built upon data and strategies that we will develop with the assistance of an outside consultant.

Fourth, we must be more successful at keeping students in school through to graduation. The best way to increase enrollment is to hold on to the students we already have.

The fact is retention has been a persistent challenge at Shawnee State. About half the new students enrolled in the fall are not with us the next fall.

Our current retention rates reflect our culture which is committed to meeting students where they are and moving them forward to succeed.

This culture will have to accommodate changing views of the roles of universities in the state and the expectation that state and federal funding will be linked to retention and graduation rates.

We can do this!

There is a tremendous return on successful efforts to increase retention.

For example, even allowing for current retention rates in junior and senior years, improving freshman to sophomore retention by just three percent, will in four years result in about 130 more students.

Each of you will be asked to help with this effort.

Each office within the university will be asked to identify efforts they can make to help improve our retention rate. Increased retention and graduation rates are everyone's job.

Conclusion

In closing, I'd like to return to those three students I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks.

They face a world that has changed dramatically in the last 15 years (Do you remember life before the Internet? They don't.) and one in which the pace of change will only increase.

Nevertheless, their need for a quality university education remains constant.

As we move forward, as we face change, our commitment to providing a university education worthy of the dreams of our students will not waver.

I look forward to working with all of you to ensure Shawnee State University is positioned for the future and remains the pride of southern Ohio.

Thank you.