



2020



State of the College Address

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“We are Not Civic Ostriches!”

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What a fabulous beginning to our 54th academic year. Convocation was splendid and there is positive energy among our students, even feistiness if the first edition of *The Tangerine* is any indication. Undoubtedly good weather has helped all of our spirits. It was two short weeks ago that I was terrified that we would need to stop construction on our new stadium and begin construction on a Pioneer ark. My thanks to everyone for making this an excellent beginning to a new year. And as we greet old friends and colleagues, and as we welcome the new members of our college community this evening, let’s give thanks for the exceptional community that we call Utica College.

My task this evening is to talk about the state of Utica College and to share my perspectives about our health, wealth, challenges, and achievements as a community. This is also my opportunity to outline important goals and to express my hopes for the coming year. While preparing this address, I was reminded of how a colleague described the job of a college president. She said that the presidency is a whole lot like working in a graveyard. Everybody is below us but nobody is listening. Of course, I’m not suggesting that my colleagues are deadbeats, but I hope you will give the message, if not the gravedigger your attention.

We had a great year in 1999-2000. We began the journey to transform UC—to make it an institution that educates new generations of leaders, thinkers, and entrepreneurs—and new generations of public servants, health practitioners, teachers, and business people. We are making a Utica College that will have a greater capacity to respond to the social and economic needs of our region and our nation—and to contribute to the revitalization of Utica and the Mohawk Valley. Our new master’s degrees in Education, Physical Therapy and Economic Crime Management and our on-line Gerontology program exemplify our response to regional and national needs. And our various institutes, centers, and programs contribute to the building of knowl-

edge in our society and address social and educational requirements of the future.

We have a long journey ahead of us. In many ways, we are the new generation of Utica College Pioneers. We have every reason to be proud of our heritage as a part of Syracuse University and our future as one of this country’s finest small universities whose mission is to integrate liberal and professional learning for the benefit of the individual and society.

This State of the College address focuses primarily on a characteristic of Utica College about which I am extremely proud. I have titled tonight’s talk “We are Not Civic Ostriches!” The reason for the title should be obvious to those of us here who have been part of this campus community for sometime.

One of the major topics of conversation among higher education leaders, and one of the major themes in higher education journals today, is the decline in civic spirit and civic involvement in America. Evidence points to a growing disengagement from democratic responsibilities. Low voter turnout, expressions of powerlessness, distrust of political processes and leaders, and cynicism about government are

all symptoms of disengagement. And the students of America's colleges are not immune. Recent studies have shown that today's college student, like the general public, is increasingly disconnected from the ideals and workings of democracy. The irony here is that students are volunteering in increasing numbers and colleges are placing greater emphasis on service learning in their general education curricula, their majors, and their cocurricular programs.

National efforts like Campus Compact have focused our attention on the importance of volunteer service, and we in the academy have responded. Yet, as the recent Presidents' Leadership Colloquium notes in its 4th of July Declaration on Civic Responsibility of Higher Education, volunteer service "is not leading students to embrace the duties of active citizenship and civic participation." There is rapidly growing concern that the volunteerism so eagerly pursued by high school and college students does not find the same expression in the exercise of democratic duty and deeper engagement in civic organizations.

Robert D. Putnam, director of the Center for International Affairs at Harvard University and Dillon Professor of International Affairs, describes the phenomenon of disengagement through the metaphor of "bowling alone." His work and subsequent research strongly suggest that civic life in America is becoming more solitary.

He cites the seemingly unimportant statistic that league bowling decreased by 40 percent during the period of 1980-1993 even as the number of bowlers in America was increasing by 10 percent. While the diehard bowlers among us may find this statistic disturbing (or not, depending upon whether one is a league or non-league bowler), the more disturbing statistic is that the number of people who bowled in 1993 (80 million) outnumbered the number of people who voted in the 1994 Congressional elections by nearly one-third. And trends haven't improved appreciably in the last six years.

The trend in high school student voting patterns has not fared any better. For example, in 1999, 20 percent of entering college freshmen reported that they had voted in a student election during their senior year in high school, compared to 67 percent in 1966 (Astin 1987, 38; 1999, 19).

Putnam points to the very troubling fact that, "By almost every measure, American's direct engagement in politics and government has fallen steadily and sharply over the last generation, despite the fact that average levels of education...have risen sharply throughout this period" (Putnam 68). He also notes that involvement in civic organizations and civic activity has plummeted. The postulated reasons are many: TV, the common villain, and the newer villain,

the personal computer; a more transient population; "suburbanization;" increased leisure and recreational activity; "purchased involvement" through membership in large national organizations; and the changing nature of involvement itself.

Whatever the reason, the National Commission on Civic Renewal has concluded that, "Too many of us have become passive and disengaged. Too many of us lack confidence in our capacity to make basic moral and civic judgments, to join with our neighbors to do the work of community."

Now the question we must ask ourselves is this: Are we, as a campus community, part of this national trend? We must also ask whether we have done enough to instill in our students a commitment to civic involvement? Have we given our students opportunities to put this commitment into action? Are we setting an example ourselves? Can we describe our campus community as an engaged group of citizens? Do we have reason to be concerned?

The title of this talk, "We are Not Civic Ostriches!", suggests two answers. The first is an entreaty: "We are not civic ostriches, but let's be sure we aren't!" We owe it to our students—current and future—that UC's curricular and cocurricular programs present myriad encouragements and opportunities to engage in the workings of our democracy. I also challenge our student leaders, current and future—and I am presently looking to our two experienced leaders, Damien Morvidelli and James Barricelli, presidents of the Student Senate and Senior Class who are with us this evening—to challenge this College, in general, and their constituents, in particular, to commit themselves to civic involvement. Our student leadership should also demand that the College never forget its civic obligations, and you should remind fellow students that their rights and liberties as citizens ultimately rest upon their involvement as citizens.

The second answer is a declaration, "We indeed are not civic ostriches!" We are a campus community—and we are individuals within this community—who have a long history of civic involvement. Not too long after this College's founding, and about the time the campus was preparing to move to its new Burrstone Road location, American higher education was engaged in a lively debate about the public service role of the college and university. In response to arguments that the university would lose its objectivity and would succumb to pragmatism and application, Clark Kerr, president of the University of California, argued that,

"Today the campus is being drawn to the city hall and the state capitol as never before. The politicians need new ideas to meet the new problems; the agencies need expert advice on how to handle the old. The professor

can supply both....The university must range itself on the side of intelligent solutions to sometimes unintelligent questions.”

He went on to say that there is no need to fear the loss of freedom and objectivity, nor the drift from basic to applied research and even application. Colleges and universities can maintain their equilibrium in the face of social and political demands given their objectivity and given the fact that the lines between theory and practice have never been entirely clear (Kerr 116-117).

This College has never hesitated in its civic involvement, and when I look over a list of examples of faculty, staff and student activity in the civic arena, I am amazed at the extent of commitment and the breadth of involvement.

Last year, for example, our Student Senate, trustees, faculty, and staff generated over 800 messages to state legislators and the governor in support of the Senate-sponsored legislation to strengthen the New York State Tuition Assistance Program for students attending New York colleges and universities. Moreover, the Student Senate has regularly conducted voter registration drives as part of an ongoing statewide effort to enlist the vote of the college population. And one of our students, Jayme Brown, was recently active in Senator John McCain’s presidential primary campaign.

Our faculty and staff also commit their time and talent at extraordinary levels. For instance, two of our campus community members, Associate Professor of Occupational Therapy Sandy Dimeo and Vice President for Institutional Research and Planning Carol Mackintosh serve as school board members (a particularly arduous civic service), and Associate Professor of Government and Politics Dick Emmert is currently running a local political campaign (and has managed many others in the past). Professor Emeritus of Economics Virgil Crisafulli has a long history of civic involvement, having championed regional government and consolidation of local services and having run for Congress, to name just a few of his commitments. Economics Professor Bill Blanchfield has served the civic interest as Chair of the Oneida County Board of Ethics and as a member of the Financial Partnership Board that grappled with the financial crisis in the City of Utica, and Professor of Government and Politics Nate Richmond has given his time to the Government Committee of the New Hartford Town Board.

And there are other numerous examples. Associate Professor of Therapeutic Recreation Joan Kay has long served as the director of the Master’s Division of the Empire State Games, Vice President for Student Affairs Rob Woods has served on the board of the Oneida County Community

Action Agency, Director of Student Development Steve Pattarini is serving on the Parent Task Force for the Whitsboro School District, and Professor Bill Pfeiffer has been active on a community advisory committee for environmental issues. Librarian Patricia Burchard serves as president of the board of the Camden Public Library, Interlibrary Loan staff member Rosemary Anguish serves as election inspector, and Librarian Elizabeth Pattengill holds a seat on the League of Women Voters board. And most of us know about Professor Ted Orlin (Criminal Justice/Government and Politics), whose human rights work in Albania and Kosovo and involvement in the creation of the Consortium for Human Rights Education illustrates the importance of civic engagement in national and international affairs.

I must likewise mention that our trustees also reflect the College’s civic commitment. For example, one serves as a U.S Congressman, two are members of the Oneida County Legislature, one serves on the Board of Directors of the Upper Mohawk Valley Regional Water Authority, two serve on the regional economic development agency, one is a justice of the New York State Court of Claims, one is president of the Mohawk Valley Chamber of Commerce, and the list continues.

I won’t even attempt to describe the civic involvement by our alumni in their various communities. The list is simply too long for the time that I have.

You will notice that this impressive list includes service to mostly governmental and quasi-governmental bodies. If I were to extend the definition of civic engagement to other types of nonprofit boards, such as Habit for Humanity, Planned Parenthood, Sculpture Space, Utica Symphony, Central New York Community Arts Council, hospitals, and other health organizations, we would be here until Professor Cartwright decided to enjoy a good Porterhouse steak. (For those persons who do not know Dr. Cartwright, one of our most distinguished professors, he is a dedicated vegetarian.)

Various College programs have also contributed to the area’s civic life, either directly or indirectly. In addition to Professor Orlin’s Human Rights Advocacy Program, there is the recently established Educational Consortium at Utica College, which has been created to provide exemplary and cost-effective educational opportunities to meet the professional development, certification and educational needs of teachers, administrators, and other employees of consortium members. To date, 12 area school districts have joined the Consortium. Our expectations are high that this new initiative, coupled with our education masters programs, will contribute in significant ways to one of New York’s

most pressing social needs—the education of new teachers and administrators.

Other examples of UC's civic commitment include: the Mohawk Valley History Project initiated by Assistant Professor of History John Swanson; the Center for Economic Education at Utica College now being developed by Associate Professor of Economics Rick Fenner; and various forums, public lectures, and symposia. The Economic Crime Investigation Institute, for example, has just established a new series of lectures and for ten years has sponsored a national conference on cybercrime topics.

This past year, our James Sherman Society organized a forum on tuition tax credits. The event featured Congressman Sherwood Boehlert, U.S. Senator Charles Schumer, State Senator Raymond Meier, and State Assembly Member RoAnn Destito.

UC also hosted a meeting of the New York Board of Regents, New York Education Commissioner Mills, SUNY Chancellor Hayden, and university and college officials from north central New York to discuss pressing higher education issues. And our Psychology-Child Life program has annually sponsored an annual conference on health issues related to children and youth.

Before I move on to a brief review of last year's achievements and what lies ahead for the 2000-2001 academic year, it is worth recalling the remarks of Dean Ralph F. Strebel on the occasion of the College's first fund raising campaign in 1957. Dean Strebel observed that, "The philosophy of Utica College is, and will continue to be, one based on the promise that the College belongs to the community, and the community belongs to the College" (in Crisafulli 136). And while he would probably admit that we could always find better ways to educate students in the aspirations and ways of a democracy and to inspire civic action, Utica College and its people have proven time and again that we certainly are not civic ostriches.

Memorable Events and Campus Achievements of 1999-2000

Our 53rd year was memorable in many ways. While we did not attain divine enlightenment with the coming of the new millennium (at least I didn't, although some might say that I moved us toward the dark side with the introduction of football), we did survive the Y2K scare, thanks in large part to the hard work of our information technology staff. And we approved a long-range, Strategic Plan that will guide the College for the next decade. Over the past year we have begun to address the Plan's seven major ini-

tiatives that focus on 1) distinctiveness; 2) learning community; 3) educational quality and accountability; 4) innovation in teaching and curricula; 5) communications and reputation building; 6) building of a stronger financial foundation; and 7) enhancement of our resources and investment in our faculty and staff.

During 1999-2000, we initiated master's programs in education and physical therapy and established a minor in Human Rights Advocacy, one of the few programs of its kind anywhere. And we began the process of developing other master degrees that will address regional or national labor force needs. With funding from the U.S. Air Force and National Institute of Justice, Utica College founded the Computer Forensic Research and Development Center and joined with the Air Force Rome Research Site; WetStone Technologies, Inc.; local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies; and other public and private entities to create the Northeast virtual cybercrime laboratory. UC also found itself hosting a delegation from the Romanian transportation ministry for an intensive week of training in the principles and practices of management within a free enterprise economy and worked with representatives from the Soros Foundation to begin developing a proposal for decentralizing and democratizing public education in Albania.

Additionally, we extended our human rights commitment to Project Concern, a program that has helped place over forty Kosovar refugees in twenty-two colleges around the country. Mjellma Toci, a student from the war-torn Balkans, began her education in America as the result of UC's commitment to this humanitarian program. As I mentioned previously, our History program launched its Mohawk Valley History Project and the Economics program made substantial progress toward establishing a Center for Economic Education at UC. And we made significant progress in improving UC's transfer friendliness by revising policies, establishing a full set of articulation agreements with one community college, and beginning agreements with another. And we adopted an entirely new campus governance system that recognizes the special responsibilities of each constituency and provides broader voice and input into planning and decision making.

The College's Strategic Initiatives also commit us to making a stronger investment in our people. This will mean finding more funds for ongoing professional development and providing for more competitive compensation packages in the coming years. Over the past year, we were able to make improvements in professional development funds and will be looking to build endowment for this purpose in the future.

We have also begun to address the challenge of improving total compensation and salary for faculty and staff. Based upon compensation studies, we have instituted a four-year improvement program. About one-fourth of the administrative staff received equity increases last year and one-third this year, and nearly 60 percent of our classified staff received increases ranging from 5 to 8 percent. Presently, the college administration and AAUP Chapter are working hard to develop an improved compensation program for faculty. While UC is fortunate to rank 10th from the top out of 22 comparison schools in total faculty compensation (that is, at or below the 59th percentile), we must ensure that our compensation packages remain competitive and we must work to improve the salary portion of that compensation.

This past year was memorable in other ways as well. I joked a little earlier about going over to the dark side with the introduction of football. In actuality, this couldn't be further from the truth. Recruitment in our new sports has been successful, and the new programs are already exemplifying the highest purposes of Division III athletics, that is, the development of the individual and good healthy competition.

We have also kept our commitment to students by moving ahead with the construction of our new multi-sport stadium and men's and women's team facility, for which we have already received gifts and pledges totaling more than \$600,000. Construction will be completed next summer, although our lacrosse teams will be able to play their spring seasons on the new field.

Our Professional Education programs also had an excellent year under the leadership of Dean Jim Pula and Director Joni Pulliam. The number of programs offered to the business community increased noticeably.

Similarly, we saw increased activity in our alumni program and we enjoyed a 10 percent increase in giving, with a total of \$1,340,000 received. We also saw an increase in our grant activity. Under the leadership of Dean Seibert and Vice President Fraboni, we submitted 24 corporate, foundation and government grant applications totaling \$2.04 million; as of July, 10 grants had been funded for \$608,000, two had been rejected, and 12 were pending. We also made substantial progress in planning for a new science and technology center and developing a campus master plan that will guide our physical development for the foreseeable future.

I have not mentioned here the numerous individual achievements of our faculty, students, and staff—books published, papers delivered, presentations made; and awards received. I cover some of these in the published

President's Annual Report that will be out shortly. It has been a very productive year, and I thank all of you for your untiring efforts and dedication.

Outlook for 2000-2001

The outlook for 2000-2001 is very bright. We are enjoying a record-setting entering class that brings considerable talent to our community. With 457 freshman and 238 transfer students at last count, it is apparent that word is out about UC's exciting academic and cocurricular developments.

This entering class continues to build upon one of UC's very distinctive characteristics—our ethnic, national, and religious diversity. Twenty-four percent of the entering freshman class comes from underrepresented groups, compared to 10.7 percent nationally for private 4-year institutions and 8.2 percent for public 4-year institutions. Women comprise 58 percent of the freshman class, down from 60 percent last year and about 64 percent the year before. This compares to 55.5 percent nationally. Although the vast majority of our freshmen hail from New York, fourteen states and four countries are represented in this class. Interestingly, our international student population is about 3.5 percent overall, compared to a national average of 2.4 percent. Last spring students from thirty-one countries were enrolled at UC.

Not surprisingly, the students in the incoming class have a wide range of academic interests, and this includes our student-athletes. For example, of the 76 students participating in the football program, 22 have not yet declared majors and the other 54 have selected 18 different majors. This breadth of interest is reflected in the other sports as well. Various majors have seen a healthy increase in enrollment as a result, including: Biology, Computer Science, Communication Arts, Criminal Justice and Economic Crime Investigation, History, Journalism, and Psychology.

Leslie North, Bob Croot, Liz Wilson, and the staffs of Admission and Financial Aid are due our thanks for their excellent work. And I thank all of you who have contributed to the improvements and developments that are making UC increasingly attractive to students.

Over the next nine months our college community has several major priorities to address. First, it is important that we adopt a general education program that reflects our mission and core values, as well as some of the creative thinking that has occurred in the academy over the past ten years. Adoption of a new program will require courage and careful compromise, lest the result be a program that lacks focus, coherence, and a balance between relevance and more traditional canon.

Second, we need to complete the implementation of the College's new governance system. The College Council voted last May to dissolve itself and institute a new governance system. Elements of the new system will be voted on by our AAUP Chapter this fall, and implementation of all-college bodies is already underway. I ask all of our constituencies to do their part to make our new governance structure as participatory and effective as it must be. And I re-invite our student leaders to be integral parts of planning. Your participation on such bodies as the Strategic Planning Committee and the All-College Council will be essential if students are to have a sustained and meaningful role in governance.

Third, we must assist our new chief technology officer, Steve Chen, as he begins the process of planning for information technology services, instructional delivery systems, and infrastructure. He will also need the cooperation and support of the entire community as he undertakes an evaluation of new administrative systems, which our consultant, Dr. Martin Ringle listed as the highest priority. Our new Faculty Technology and Administrative Computing committees have a full agenda for the coming two years.

Fourth, the College needs to forge ahead with the development of new programs that will address national and regional needs and that will bolster enrollment. Additional graduate programs in education, accounting/management, OT, and possibly liberal studies are in demand, and others will emerge through the strategic planning process and faculty initiative. If all goes as expected, we should have two additional masters ready for implementation by next fall.

Fifth, our residential population is growing and planning is underway for a second new residence hall. Our projections indicate a need for 130 to 150 additional beds by the fall of 2002, and this does not include the beds needed to replace Burrstone House. If approved by the Board of Trustees, construction needs to begin by late-spring or early summer.

Sixth, we are on track in our planning for a new science and technology center. Once constructed, this new facility will serve as a center of learning with technology for all disciplines; will provide an environment for the integration of programs and the spawning of interdisciplinary study; and will become UC's signature academic building for years to come. Detailed design work is underway for parts of the building, and I have asked Dean Seibert to lead the science faculty in an examination of the relationship between trends in science curricula and the types of space that will enable and encourage teaching, learning, and interdisciplinary endeavors.

Seventh, our architects are nearing the first draft of a campus master plan that they will share with the campus and

invite broad comment and input. This plan will reflect our collective vision of how this campus should look and what it should include in the coming two decades. We expect to present a progress report to the Board at its October meeting and complete the plan by December.

Eighth, we must continue our efforts to recruit and retain well-qualified, talented and diverse freshman and transfer classes, with planned incremental increases. Campus climate, excellent teaching, a caring faculty, new ideas, innovative programs, and high quality in all that we do are the biggest factors in attracting and retaining students. We have no choice but to continue the successes that we have had in the past two years.

Ninth, we must complete the implementation of fair and equitable compensation improvement programs for all of our employees, within the limits of our resources. In addition to salary, we must continue to study the options for improving benefits like life and health insurance, we must do everything we can to prevent dramatically increasing costs from eroding our health insurance benefits, and we must explore new possibilities like cafeteria plans.

Last, we must continue to strengthen the financial foundation of the College and enhance its resources. This will be a recurring goal over the next decade. While we have seen a noticeable increase in enrollment, new revenue available for ongoing and fixed costs has only increased incrementally. Strengthening the financial foundation is a long-term process that will require reduced discount rates, increased graduate enrollment, increased unrestricted annual giving, increased endowment and careful stewardship of our monetary resources. The goal this year is to increase annual giving, successful grants for programs, giving for capital projects, and to achieve endowment growth. Our highest fundraising priority is the new science and technology center—a three year effort—but the other goals are nearly as vital given our aspirations and needs.

Having worked in institutions with more robust financial resources, I am still amazed that we are able to do so much with so little. It is a telling fact that UC ranks in the bottom four of our comparison group in size of endowment (\$13 million compared to an average of \$39 million for the other institutions), in addition to having the next to the highest percentage of high-need students. We also are among the top six in percentage of students receiving institutional aid. Serving students of modest means has been part of this institution's purpose since its beginning. Our challenge is to find creative ways to sustain this commitment while pursuing our initiatives to transform UC and build a secure financial future.

In spite of these financial obstacles, UC is moving forward with a very bold Strategic Plan and has embarked on a path that makes each of us in this room Pioneers once again. We will achieve such goals as developing new programs, constructing a new science and technology center, improving faculty and staff compensation, supporting educational centers of excellence, and building a reputation as an independent college in partnership with Syracuse University only if we husband our resources exceedingly well and develop new sources of support.

In his newly published book, *Reflections: The Early Years of Utica College*, Dr. Virgil Crisafulli reviewed the achievements of this College to the present and declared that,

“...the establishment of UC for the Utica-Rome area was one of the best deals in local history. All these numbers [about UC’s outcomes] send one general message to the world, namely, that Utica College (and the other new, post-World War II local colleges) has transformed a whole local society. It has lifted the hopes and achievements of thousands of people who...could at best hope to earn a living as blue-collar workers and suffer through lives of limited quality” (Crisafulli 138).

I couldn’t agree more with Dr. Cris; our success as a college of opportunity is unsurpassed. And while one of our imperatives is to sustain this purpose, our future must be something more. We must now become an institution with an

expanded mission, one that still embraces our local community but accepts the challenge of regional, national and even international demands. If Utica and this part of central New York is to grow and prosper, so must UC. If UC is to fulfill its promise, it must see unprecedented support from its alumni, trustees, and others who believe in its vision and its possibilities. And it must work harder than ever to pursue its goals. We have a daunting road ahead, but one that we must take. And it is one that we can enjoy because of the creative possibilities.

Once again, you have my deepest gratitude for your commitment to Utica College, your extraordinary efforts over the past two years, and for your unswerving dedication to making this institution a very special place to learn, teach, create, and grow.

In closing, I return to the theme of this talk and leave you with a thought from the 1999 Presidents’ Leadership Colloquium:

“This country cannot afford to educate a generation that acquires knowledge without ever understanding how that knowledge can benefit society or how to influence democratic decision making. We must teach the skills and values of democracy, creating innumerable opportunities for our students to practice and reap the results of the real, hard work of citizenship.” (Presidents’ 4th of July Declaration, 1)

Notes

“Presidents’ 4th of July Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education, drafted by Thomas Ehrlich and Elizabeth Hollander, endorsed by the Presidents’ Leadership Colloquium, convened by the American Council on Education and Campus Compact, Aspen Institute, June 28-July 1, 1999.

Robert D. Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” *Journal of Democracy* 6:1, January 1995, 65-78.

Alexander Astin, et.al., *The American Freshman: Twenty Year Trends* (Cooperative Institutional Research Program, American Council on Education, and University of California, Los Angeles, January 1987), and *The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1999* (Cooperative Institutional Research Program, American Council on Education, and University of California, Los Angeles, December 1999).

The National Commission on Civic Renewal, *A Nation of Spectators: How Civic Disengagement Weakens America and What We Can Do About It*, University of Maryland, 1998.

Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 116-117 (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

Virgil C. Crisafulli, *Reflections: The Early Years of Utica College* (Utica, NY: Devon Press, 2000).

