

WELCOME BACK RECEPTION
President Cheryl J. Norton
September 11, 2009

Good afternoon, everyone.

Welcome to the fall semester and to our annual Fall University Convocation, which this year we've given a new name and a new theme: identifying this gathering as a Welcome Back Reception because it is appropriate that we welcome you to the start of a new academic year.

Indeed, the beginning of the fall semester provides a wonderful opportunity to come together as a community.

It's a time to renew our commitment to student success, to refresh our working relationships with our colleagues and to look forward to another year of high achievement, educational excellence and outstanding performances.

Obviously, the last 12 months have been a time of challenge and of opportunity and this year promises more of the same.

The state's budget continues to be restrained and, as a result, so does ours.

But, the good news is – there is a budget!

And this fact allows us to plan and utilize our resources in a way that maximizes our educational mission.

This year's state allocation will be much the same as last year's – with \$28,000 more to spend which translates into an increase of .00004% (four hundred thousandths of a percent).

In addition, the budget requires that the system provide \$1 Million from its reserves to the state this year and \$3 Million next year.

As always, there is a potential for further rescission from this budget, at the Governor's discretion, of potentially 5% of our state allocation.

However, our vacancy savings and restraints in expenditures, coupled with the more efficient use of current resources, should allow us to stay in the black moving forward.

And, while a state-wide hiring freeze continues, along with travel restrictions and other cutbacks, we do anticipate the ability to hire several critical operational positions such as deans, IT, safety and maintenance personnel as well as a number of tenure track faculty

lines. However, the majority of our almost 150 vacancies will remain unfilled with permanent hires.

And this scenario will likely continue for some time.

Indeed, fiscal projections suggest continued budgetary constraints will exist through 2011 and 2012.

This is due in part to the fact that in FY 11 and 12 the state will no longer have the buffer of federal stimulus dollars to rely on.

The university will also have to absorb the cost of employee salary increases each year without the state covering this cost, as has occurred in the past.

More significantly, however, while we may save some budget dollars because of vacancies, we have lost the talent and energy of those individuals who have retired – the names of whom were displayed on the screen as you entered the theater.

As you know, 85 employees left the university during the summer under the state's retirement incentive program.

A number of these faculty, administrators and staff members had served Southern for many years.

With their departure, they carry with them valuable experience and skills and leave behind a legacy of dedicated service to Southern and its students.

Although all our retirees are missed today, we wish everyone a healthy and happy retirement in the tomorrows still to come.

As a result, in anticipation of beginning this academic year with a slimmed down, trimmer institution, a great deal of planning took place during the summer to ensure that classes would have adequate coverage and that our general operations could continue with minimal disruption.

I have already informed you in my June 30th campus e-mail of some of the personnel and operational changes that have taken effect, particularly in areas performing essential business functions. I won't revisit them now, but please go to Southern's website to review this information.

During this semester, we will continue to implement plans to help us enhance our operations. It is not a matter of doing more with less, but rather working to do better with what we have! My sincere appreciation to everyone who is helping to find new ways to address our continuing operational needs!

Of course, budgetary constraints have not stopped all progress on our campus!

Our campuswide revitalization program continues, although the building changes are not as dramatic as in past years.

Currently, we are ready to go to bid for a 1,200-space parking garage in Lot 7 to be located near the Energy Center. Construction is projected for 2010.

Design for the mechanical and electrical upgrades for Earl and Jennings Halls is close to completion and we are beginning the design for health and safety improvements in Moore Fieldhouse.

An architect has been selected to begin the design for the new science lab building on Fitch Street and the design phase is also near completion for the new home of the School of Business in the former student center – I wanted to mention this before Bob Eldridge asked!

Regarding Buley Library – at this point we are waiting to hear from the state Department of Public Works about the work that is left to complete and the money needed to finish the project.

In essence, we are on hold until that information is provided.

While this process is continuing, I did not want to lose the opportunity to utilize the unused construction space for parking – since this is always in demand.

So we have reclaimed some of the construction site for faculty/staff use.

Finally, many of you know that this summer, the Department of Information Technology moved from its temporary quarters on Fitch Street to a new home in Office Building One, next to the Granoff Health Center, on Wintergreen Avenue.

But, this is not the only new development in IT

Under Wendy Chang's leadership, a range of enhancements to campus services have been introduced, including four technology support centers – with expanded hours – an online course evaluation system and digital mentors, a tool that will help faculty build their online portfolios.

The Faculty Technology Center, complete with new videoconferencing equipment, will move to the basement of Engleman Hall this semester and the Office of Information Technology is currently preparing a new MySCSU campus portal and an upgrade to the new BANNER 8 system.

You can learn more about all of this on the OIT website which, of course, is also new!

We're also continuing to test and make improvements to our Emergency Management Plan and procedures.

We learned about the effectiveness – some might say over-effectiveness in this case – of our SCSU Alert text-messaging system during this summer's tornado alert.

We now know more than ever that in an immediate emergency – when time is of the essence – text-messaging is the fastest form of communication.

In fact it's much faster than a phone call.

We just don't need three alerts!

More importantly, to add to our instant communication capabilities, a siren and public address system is scheduled to be installed on the campus this year.

This system, to be placed atop five campus buildings, will enable the university to send out an audible tone, a live message or a digital recorded message to provide you the information you need in a time of emergency.

Unfortunately, one potential test for our emergency management plan this semester may be the projected outbreak of H1N1 flu. As you know, we have had one confirmed case of H1N1 flu, a student who is now recuperating at home.

Guided by advisories for higher education institutions issued by the Centers for Disease Control, we have a number of strategies available to us if incidences of H1N1 escalate on our campus.

We are also working closely with the health departments of the State of Connecticut and City of New Haven to monitor flu conditions and make decisions about the best steps to take to deal with this illness.

Provost Selase Williams has already sent out a memo to faculty and other academic personnel about the university's specific strategies for handling classes and student absences due to illness from the H1N1 flu. And we will be tracking cases of the flu on campus to better understand the level of illness we are exposed to.

But we are still in the early stages of the disease in the East and our campus focus remains on preventative measures. Fortunately, this appears to be a strain of flu to be respected rather than feared.

So at this stage, the best advice I can give you is: wash your hands, use the sanitizing liquid dispensers available in each building, sneeze into your sleeve – and hope for the best.

Part of the reason for our concern about the potential spread of H1N1 is that our residence halls are filled to capacity.

And that fact is a reflection of the strength of our enrollment this year.

Folks, the public's belief in our campus remains strong.

And the confidence in our educational programs is secure.

For evidence, look no further than the 8,161 fulltime students who are attending our classes this semester – an all-time high. Included in this group is a record number of transfer students and an increase of 2.5% in full-time graduate student enrollment.

SAT scores and class percentile have also shown improvement, underlining yet again that Southern is now both a university of opportunity and a university of choice.

These students are here because of the strength of our programs, the excellence of our faculty and the dedicated support of our administrators and staff.

Even more notably, however, is not just that students are coming to campus, but that our numbers of continuing students are increasing.

We are 5 percent ahead of previous years in terms of returning upperclassmen and have made particularly good strides in our retention of minority students.

Undoubtedly, this is a reflection on the success of the First Year Experience Program, the freshman and sophomore success programs, along with other support services that we have provided.

This improvement underscores the positive results that we can achieve through strategic planning and the collaborative work of academic affairs and student affairs.

Congratulations to all of you involved in achieving these results – in particular, the student affairs staff, along with the First Year Experience faculty and program director Nicole Henderson for their wonderful work with our incoming students.

And, if you need more proof that our commitment to student success is succeeding, look no further than our graduation rate.

This year, for the first time, our 6-year graduation rate has exceeded 40 percent increasing to 42.3%.

While we still must continue to improve in this area – in fact, our immediate goal is 52 percent – this number does represent a 4 percent increase over last year's graduation rate and places us within striking distance of our peer institutions.

Indeed, this is an increase that we can be proud of and share in, but we cannot rest on this year's improvement.

We must continue to work to be creative and innovative in meeting the needs of students who are seeking an affordable education that allows them to live and learn, to be a member of the off-campus community and a member of our educational community....

Of students who often are seeking a degree while working for tuition.

And, this is becoming more the norm, even for our full-time students. In fact, 80% of our seniors work in addition to taking courses.

How do we know what our students need to stay in school, to graduate? Frankly, we ask. In a variety of surveys, most recently in 2008, students indicated that they come to Southern because of its excellent academic programs complimented by its location and affordability.

However, they also identified their barriers to completing their education. Notably, these included time constraints and the scheduling of classes which often conflicted with family and work needs.

This is particularly evident in our graduate population, where the majority of our students are women over 25, who work full-time, are married and typically have children – these are 21st Century, adult students.

And these students help make us the system leader in graduate studies.

So...while we have worked to continue to increase our number of fulltime graduate and undergraduate students, our success cannot and should not be measured simply by the number of students enrolled, but rather by the number of students that graduate. And, frankly we limit the opportunity for success of these 21st century students if we continue to follow in the footsteps of the past to address the changing needs of the future.

We know that access to education is not just about financial resources, although that is important.

It is about creating in-time, on-time opportunities that allow education to compliment the character of our lives.

So we will need to work creatively to break down the barriers students have identified to enrolling in our academic programs, whether it be financial support, the scheduling of classes, the rotation of courses, the application process, whatever the barrier – it must be broken. Being student friendly is not in conflict with educational excellence.

Other institutions in our region understand this. And frankly, they have been very good at taking advantage of weekend courses, five week classes, hybrid programs and convenient time blocks that reduce the conflict between work and class.

We must respect the character of the environment in which the students that we educate live.

This year, I challenge each department to review your curriculum, assess your students' needs and plan a schedule that takes advantage of time and space to allow for educational opportunities that put students first!

I know that we can address the interests of the student body at Southern, for throughout its long history, this has been a hallmark of our institutional character –

it's a tradition that we have inherited, it's what we know how to do, and it's what we value and take pride in – being student centered.

The willingness to provide our students with the best educational opportunity possible was demonstrated once again last spring with the passage of the new Liberal Education Program.

Undoubtedly, this program will have far-reaching effects on our students: their understanding of the world, their ability to critically assess ideas and respond to a changing environment.

Congratulations to Jim Tait and the Liberal Education Program committee for their leadership in this area and I am pleased to acknowledge Dr. Polly Beals, who has been appointed by the Provost to lead the development of the program this year.

It is exactly this kind of innovative thinking and willingness to create new solutions for educational needs that will continue to ensure Southern's students will be successful in the generations to come.

And as I mentioned earlier, the public support for our mission of higher education is strong and getting stronger.

Witness the willingness of our alumni and the community to provide financial assistance for our students.

Despite the struggling economy, we had a successful fundraising year - across the board.

Led by Vice President for Institutional Advancement Megan Rock, giving for the last academic year in support of current operations and programs was up 27% to \$1.45 million.

Overall, receipts of cash and multi-year pledges totaled \$1.86 million, and alumni giving has grown 35 percent over the last five years.

But, as they say the best is yet to come and indeed that is true.

Sometimes as educators we don't know how you will touch a student or influence a career.

Sometimes, you never know what a difference you have made in a life, although you hope that you have.

And if you evaluate an institution not only by the number of students walking the halls, but how many of them you have inspired to follow in your footsteps and give back to the community, then Southern has also been successful.

As you know, this university is the leader in the state in recommending students for educational licensure.

We are indeed building a generation of faculty to succeed us.

But, giving back in education is not only about passing on knowledge, it is also about providing educational opportunity.

And today, I have the pleasure of announcing that one of our alums, Mrs. Dorothy Goodwin, Class of 1939, a teacher for her entire career, a woman who understood how education can transform a life, a woman who believed in the value of a Southern education has left \$1.2 million to Southern from her estate.

This is the largest gift ever received by our university.

Given her background, it is fitting that Mrs. Goodwin has requested that \$1 million of her gift be used to fund and support the university's first endowed chair, to be located in the School of Education.

In accordance with her wishes and following CSUS Board of Trustees policies and procedures, I will present to Chancellor Carter and the Board a request to approve the establishment of this position.

As you reach out to our students, you can never predict who you touch, you may never know how you changed a life or the difference that you made, but you know that it happens.

Obviously, the faculty that touched the life of Dorothy Goodwin and encouraged her to teach not only made a difference in her life, but in the lives of both the students she taught and potentially, generations of students in future years.

In closing, I thank all of you for your outstanding contributions during the last year.

You are continuing to make Southern Connecticut State University a place where students can grow, can transform, can excel.

And as we move forward, let us be guided by our belief that the best is yet to come!

Thank you, and welcome to the fall semester!