

Inauguration Address

By University of Minnesota Rochester Chancellor

Stephen Lehmkuhle

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Members of the Board of Regents, President Bruininks, President Floyd, governmental leaders, community leaders, educational leaders, UMR leadership team and coworkers, my friends and colleagues, and especially Cindy, my wife, and our family - what a wonderful event for our new University and for the Rochester community.

As I prepared my remarks today, I reflected back on how and why I am here. This new adventure started only a year ago when a search firm contacted me and asked if I would be interested in a Chancellor position in Rochester. I didn't know about the campus so I asked him to describe the institution. He told me that the campus is in a shopping mall. I said "oh". I then asked how many students, and he said about 400. I again said "oh" – knowing that our current enrollment at the University of Missouri is in excess of 60,000 students. I asked about degree programs. He said that the campus does not have its own programs, but there were 20 some programs being offered by other campuses of the University of Minnesota. I ended the phone conversation with polite thanks - but a shopping mall, 400 students, and no programs - I really have something else in mind. Over the next month, the search consultant was persistent; I did apply, and became a finalist.

The finalists' interviews were both in the Twin Cities and Rochester. During the interviews in the Twin Cities, I remember listening to polar opposite conversations. I was asked repeatedly in some groups to justify why the University of Minnesota was starting a new campus, and didn't I know that I was taking precious resources away from other colleges and schools. I remember thinking to myself during this questioning – I really have something else in mind.

But then there were other conversations, one being with President Bruininks, talking about innovation and partnerships, the importance of making an investment in Rochester, and its return to the University of Minnesota and to the state's economy. These conversations perked my interest, and without them, I don't think that I would have continued the interview in Rochester.

When in Rochester, I have to be honest, the shopping mall concept for a university still didn't grab me, particularly since during the tour my hard hat and safety glasses obscured my view; I inhaled drywall dust; and I couldn't hear over the construction noise. But, I was very impressed by the community during my public presentation - their enthusiasm and commitment to this new campus was front and center.

On the return flight home, I contemplated the interviews and the position. My first thoughts were - I really have something else in mind. Cindy and I expected at some point to lead a moderate size university, probably south of Missouri.

But as my mind wandered, I began to reflect about my career over the past eleven years working with five different presidents at a large, established institution. It occurred to me that I was spending all my time managing change, and if I accepted a leadership position at another established institution, I would continue managing change.

But in Rochester, I would be leading a new institution. Here I would be creating change, not managing change. I always knew that as a leader, I wanted to be a position where I would have an impact, and without question, the inaugural Chancellor of a new campus would have a major impact. These insights perked my interest even more.

So I began to realize that Rochester could be a place where I could tap into my intuition about higher education; a place where I would have an impact; and a place where I could possibly create the future university today – one that has a sustainable cost structure, shaped by a new approach to learning that prepares all students for the future, and values

partnerships in the creation of new knowledge. At some point during this musing, my thoughts changed from this *being* about a job to *being* about leadership; from “I really have something else in mind” to a real opportunity to make a positive difference.

Well here we are nine months later, and thank you for inviting me to work with you to make a real difference. And yes, I am **now** fond of being in a shopping mall, not because it has a Barnes Noble and Starbucks downstairs, but because of its proximity, and connection (literally) with our partners.

My office has a great view of the city, where I continually say to myself – there is the rest of the campus. When we give campus tours, we are giving tours of Rochester. Our student housing, student health services, student recreation, student food services, and much of the problem based learning experiences for students, will be done in partnership with our community. You will see a little of us here, a little of us over there. Our students will be roaming and learning here in Mayo, at IBM, in the bank offices, in the small businesses, at the Civic center, and in the arts community. I hope that you will find it difficult to delineate our campus borders because this means that we are integrated into the community. This will be our signature.

Another part of our signature is to be distinctive. In five to ten years, when someone mentions University of Minnesota Rochester, I hope that you hear – “it is a great place to learn;” and, I hope you hear, “it is a great place to prepare for a health career.” “How do we make UMR a great place to learn?” – by simply focusing on student learning, not on teaching. Let me briefly describe two trends that, I believe, require us in higher education to reconsider our approach to educating students.

The first trend is that higher education is increasingly preparing students for careers that don’t yet exist, and more and more often, the content that we present our freshmen is outdated before they graduate.

If our educational approaches force students to memorize, we are not equipping them for this uncertain future where new knowledge will bombard them at an increasing rate. Rather, they must be armed with a capacity to learn if they are to thrive in the future. They must learn with understanding. Our new academic rigor must be defined by the depth of understanding and not by the thickness of the textbook.

The second trend is that our students are changing - our students in the future will be *all comers* – they will come from different backgrounds, come from different cultures, and come with different levels of preparation. According to the Minnesota Office of Higher Education, over the next eight years, there will be a 10% decrease in high school seniors. But when you break this number apart, there is a 17% *decrease* in white students, and a 40% *increase* in minority students, mainly African American and Latino students. The complexion of our campuses is changing.

And with the decrease in the overall number of students, we cannot meet our future workforce needs by just skimming off the very top high school students. We need to create learning models that empower many more students to achieve high academic goals.

I have this expression, measure us by our outputs, not by our inputs

I also use another expression - college begins in kindergarten. It is not that some students chose college; rather for many students we lose them before they finish college. I truly believe this. So our new student body is already here in our elementary schools, and this makes our school superintendents critical UMR partners. Listen to them; they make this case about the importance for all our students to succeed much better than I do.

Now, let me connect these two trends that are driving new approaches to student learning. If students are to learn with understanding, cognitive experts say that you must build that understanding by connecting a concept or principle with the student's pre-existing knowledge of the world - otherwise students are forced to memorize. Since our "all comer" students will arrive having very different experiences and very different

representations of the world, it follows that we can't use our current *cookie cutter* educational approaches and achieve learning with understanding. Our approach to learning must be more personalized, like the personalized approaches now emerging in medicine and health care for similar reasons.

We are designing at UMR a personalized educational experience that promotes learning with understanding for all students. A special feature of our approach is to gather more information about what students know, what are the gaps in what they know, and how are they approaching problems. We want a student record to emulate a medical record, so our faculty can be diagnostic and strategic in their teaching and transform the students' pre-existing knowledge in ways that help them organize new knowledge and learn with understanding.

This creates a new role for faculty – cognitive guides rather than dispensers of information. Our core faculty at UMR will be cognitive learning experts in a new Center for Learning Innovation. This faculty will use data-driven research on learning to create a learner centered, competency-based approach in which ongoing assessment personalizes the student's learning. They will design a curriculum enriched by integrated learning experiences so, for example, students learn the math, biology, chemistry, and physics in a health-related laboratory exercise or students connect health, humanities and the sciences in ways that deepen their understanding of each and their interconnection.

You just heard me integrate health into our academic curriculum, which is because our innovative learning platform will *also* make UMR a great place to prepare for a health profession, our second distinctive feature. Our workhorse undergraduate degree will be new multi-purpose program in the Health Sciences.

In this program, we will not ask our new students when they arrive if they want to become a physician, dentist, occupational therapist, or health researcher. Instead, our program will

build a common base of knowledge in the health sciences and serve as a springboard for our students to focus on and pursue careers in a variety of health fields toward the end of the curriculum. It is at this point in their educational journey that the student will be in a much better position to decide if they want to go, as examples, to a medical, physical therapy, or optometric program; or pursue a certification in clinical lab science, respiratory care, or radiography; or enter an accelerated master program in biomedical informatics, public health, health journalism, or health-based entrepreneurship. And don't forget those health-related jobs that don't yet exist.

Student interest in the health sciences is burgeoning, and shortages in the health-based workforce will be ongoing. Our distinctive undergraduate program in the health sciences will serve a fertile market niche well into the foreseeable future. We will launch the program and admit our first freshmen class in fall, 2009.

Until then, our new faculty need to complete the innovative learning platform; further refine the learning outcomes with our customers in the health profession and graduate programs; and locate or build e-learning tools that are aligned with the learning outcomes. Also, during this time we will be recruiting our first class. There is much to do before fall, 2009. Once we have established our distinctiveness in the market, which will take some time, and given our current facilities, we plan to admit around 250 freshmen annually. "How many students will UMR have 20 years from now?" It is fun to speculate about our future size, but remember that bigger doesn't make you better. I must confess that I do have this tunnel vision right now on being better. If we take care of *the better*, other issues, like our size, will no longer be speculation but under our control.

It is also fun to speculate about our future research programs at UMR. I have already mentioned our plans to build a nationally recognized Center for Learning Innovation. These faculty will conduct research on student learning that will shape our innovative undergraduate learning platform in the health sciences.

But what about other research programs at UMR. It is difficult to speculate about how best to create new knowledge when the research world is changing so rapidly. But we do know that research is a social enterprise, and recent trends indicate that new knowledge is being generated much more rapidly at the intersections of different disciplines.

This is why I believe that the best research strategy for UMR is to develop research partnerships and not target specific research programs, and build eminence and competitiveness by creating and nurturing research teams. It is a proven strategy – just look at the success of the University and Mayo Genomics partnership or the Biomedical Informatics and Computational Biology program.

But I also believe that for UMR to foster the development of other research teams, we need to be a contributing member. So we will plan to build or lease *a* flexible research infrastructure - both wet and dry varieties - to support initially about 10 to 20 million dollars of funded research. This investment will return many fold to our partners. Much has happened in the past nine months. I am confident in our emerging plan for a distinctive UMR - it is informed by the changing landscape in higher education, and it adds through partnership to the tremendous assets of the region. So when I trace back about how and why I am here today, and sense our collective excitement about the future of Rochester, I can no longer say that “I really have something else in mind.”

I want to make a final point. It is linked with my hope to have a positive impact as a leader. During my postdoctoral fellowship in neuroscience, we studied critical periods of development. There is a critical period in the development of the brain when the experiences of the organism within a limited time frame have a long lasting, if not permanent, impact on how the brain is organized and how it functions. In a similar way, I believe that the University of Minnesota Rochester is in a critical period of development. And what we do now will have a long lasting impact on the institution.

This is why during these formative years; we must be relentless in our focus on quality, so that a culture of improvement and innovation is hardwired into the developing nervous system of the campus. My most important legacy will be to make *being* innovative and *being* better immutable institutional traits that will enable University of Minnesota Rochester to grow into the leader in higher education that we all want. I need to protect that reason why I came to an institution located in a shopping mall, with 400 students, and no programs – its capacity to “create change.” This is what I have in mind. Thank you.