State of the University

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February 17, 2011
We all know the news from Egypt has filled our lives during the last three weeks. As I consider Egypt, my thoughts, and my heart, are with the people of that historic nation.

We have seen peaceful street protests.  
We have sadly seen violence in the streets.  
We have, through it all, seen the faces of a proud people.

We are all touched by what we are witnessing.  
We all hope peace will result.

I was affected by one news story from Egypt. I was captivated to learn that individual citizens formed human chains around their museums. They formed barricades to protect their antiquities. They were protecting treasures from the time of the pharaohs.

It is a lesson for all of us.

Our past is so fragile.  
We must become guardians of the heritage left for us.  
How persistently we must act to protect what is ours.

We can all turn to ancient Egypt for inspiration.

No I am not an Egyptologist.  
No I am not an ancient.  
Well, not too much of an ancient …

Today I will talk about two lessons for us from those treasures of the Egyptian past.

First consider the temple complex of Karnak near the Egyptian city of Luxor. Some historians say the temple required 1,000 years to complete. Perhaps 40 generations worked on the temple. Think of the work done with primitive tools. Consider the size of the building blocks of this temple and of the pyramids.

Consider the needed foresight. We live in the age of instant gratification. Can you imagine anyone today beginning a project that would require 1,000 years to complete?

Consider the needed fortitude. Consider the personal and mental strength needed to make progress on this project?

Consider the needed faith. Could any of us believe that what we started would be finished 1,000 years in the future?
Building the future requires foresight.
Building the future requires fortitude.
Building the future requires faith.

My second lesson from Egypt comes from poetry. Look at the poem “Ozymandias” by Percy Shelley. Part of that short poem appears on the slide.

From a great civilization almost nothing remains. Its lesson is the decline, perhaps inevitable, perhaps not, of a civilization.

How do these lessons inform Gallaudet University today?

As I consider our future we too work with building blocks. Our building blocks are not as glamorous as the enormous stones used in the temples or the pyramids. We will put together our future from our planning documents.
You are familiar with the Gallaudet Strategic Plan, the PPTF and the APSRC.

You are probably less familiar with the Clerc Center Strategic Plan. The Clerc Center is a jewel on the Gallaudet campus. It will become an integral part of the university. Not only does it serve its current students but it also serves as an excellent lab environment for so many others locally, nationally and internationally. We are delighted it is a part of the Gallaudet University.

You may not be aware of number 5 on the slide – our master plan. Every ten years Washington DC requires us to prepare a master plan. It establishes a framework for the development of capital projects on campus. We have begun work on our next plan which is due in 2012.

Our planning documents talk of the future in general terms. But the processes that created them were not designed to generate innovative ideas to carry us strongly into the future.

Let me provide examples. Consider the Gallaudet Strategic Plan. One strategy says: “decide on majors, programs, or departments to grow …” Another strategy says: “identify student-specific auxiliary enterprises …”

The GSP does not provide the innovation for either strategy. The responsibility for original, innovative thinking is our separate responsibility.

You notice a blank line on the slide. Let me fill in that blank line which is number 4 on the slide.
We are announcing the formation of an “Innovation” group. We will ask that new group to collect innovative ideas to transform the campus. The abbreviated charge to the group is shown in the slide.

We will ask this small group to complete this work in several months. Their report will form another critical building block to move the University forward.
Consider our age. We are approaching our 150 anniversary. No, we are not thousands of years old like the Temple at Karnak or the pyramids. But, yes, almost 150 years later we are still here.

Consider the pride and the joy our founders would feel. Was our survival imagined by our founders? Did they consider we would be here 150 years later? Would they be startled we are here? There is no easy way to answer those questions.

I always consider our future. But my perspective is not 1,000 years into our future. And my perspective is not on tomorrow. I try to envision a horizon a generation into the future. Yes, my job is to ensure we are here tomorrow and the next day. AND yes, my job is also to ensure we are here for the next 20 to 25 years, and beyond.

Our projects are not 1,000 years long. Instead they are the realities of the near future. They are the realities of the GSP, the Clerc Center plan, the PPTF, the APSRC, the master plan, and the Innovation report.

They will take us forward. They will prepare us for another generation. They will change our future.

How do we build the future?  
How do we find the inspiration?  
How do we bring forth the will to change?
To build the future we must believe in what we do.

I believe our strengths will carry us forward.
I believe in each of you.
I believe you will fulfill our destiny.

We are not the remnant of a giant.
We are not like Ozymandias.

I believe we are a sleeping giant.
I say “watch out as we awake.”

First we must believe in ourselves to take us into our future.

Second, to build our future, we must convince future students of our strengths.

Look at our total enrollment of undergraduates and graduates.
We must ensure the enrollment increases of recent years become trends.

We must embrace all new students.
We must embrace non-traditional students.
We must embrace all students who arrive on our campus.

We cannot allow one student to tell another he or she does not fit here.
We cannot allow that to happen.
We will not allow that to happen.

Instead, our environment must welcome all students who come here.

Let us recommit to accepting differences.
Let us recommit to welcoming all students.
Let us recommit to embracing all students.

Third, to build our future, we must ensure that Congress and the U.S. Department of Education are aware of our strengths. They start with a strong belief in our work with deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

They want us to be well managed.
They want us to succeed.
They want to believe the best of us.

But they are also looking for results. They insist we measure our activities. We measure enrollment. We measure persistence and graduation rates. We measure post-university outcomes. We measure cost-per-graduate. The University and the Clerc Center measure 30 variables for the Federal government every year.

You know the climate of the country. Everyone receiving Federal funds faces demands for less, less, less. Our “story,” is that the number of employees has gone down while the number of students has gone up. We are doing more with less.

Last year was a period of intense resource management. These slides list actions to control costs.
These were difficult decisions. They affect the finances of employees and of students and of their families.

And fourth, we must also convince the outside world of our strength.

How do we do that? One major way we communicate with the outside world is through my travels. The map tells the story of my last 14 months. Each of the thirty-nine stars is a city I visited.
Here more details of those trips during the last few months and the coming months. These slides show the cities visited and the purposes of those trips.
All of my trips have multiple purposes. In a sentence, I am building support for Gallaudet.

I travel to discuss gifts with potential donors.
I travel to communicate with alumni.
I travel to speak at conferences.

I travel to bring attention to the wonders of Gallaudet.

We live in a time of change.
We do not have the same project to work on for 1,000 years.
Instead we must build and rebuild Gallaudet.

It is our destiny to survive.
It is our destiny to build and rebuild.
It is our destiny to change.

Come with me into the future.
Come with me in the excitement as we shape our future.
Come with me as we fulfill our destiny.

Thank you.