

University of Minnesota Crookston
Campus Assembly
Dr. Charles H. Casey, Chancellor
April 21, 2006

The end of the academic year is a very special and rewarding time as we recognize the accomplishments of our 150 plus graduates. The May 6 commencement ceremony is a proud occasion for graduates, their families, friends, and communities. It's also a proud day for each of us who works here at the University of Minnesota, Crookston. It's why we are here. It's what UMC is all about. The occasion provides the testimony of our commitment to add value to the University of Minnesota and at the same time add value to the region.

This will be my first commencement as your Chancellor, which for me is a time to express my gratitude to all who have helped move the campus forward this past year. When I arrived in the fall, there was a lot of uncertainty about the future of UMC. Today, the uncertainty is diminished, and in its place there is a renewed sense of optimism. That's the message I hear from people in the community, leaders across the region, colleagues across the University of Minnesota system, and most important of all, I hear a message of optimism from students, faculty, and staff here on campus.

Of course, we are all aware that the message of optimism is not unanimous. In any organization there are always some people who are hard to persuade, slow to change, and quick to criticize. I'm realistic and pragmatic enough to recognize that UMC has people who fit that description. And, I'm human enough to admit that I'm disappointed when I witness or hear about people who are offering unconstructive criticism, or standing in the way of our moving forward. I also am well aware that negative behavior on the part of few can weigh heavy on colleagues who are working hard to make UMC the vital place it can be in the future.

To say that this situation fits a typical pattern for organizational behavior, while true, doesn't make it any easier. But, understanding that change impacts people differently does provide context for the collegial relationships we have, and must have, as we move forward.

I want to make crystal clear that we are moving forward toward a better future for UMC. There is no going back. To quote from Winston Churchill as I did in my inauguration speech, "Of this I am quite sure, that if we open a quarrel between the past and present, we shall find we have lost our future." My focus is on the future.

Change at UMC actually means many changes over time – changes that will make steady progress toward excellence, changes that will affect everyone here, and changes that require everyone's cooperation.

Full accreditation from the Higher Learning Commission is our most immediate goal. It's a goal that is hugely important to our future, and I can't imagine there is anyone here who doesn't share our goal of full accreditation.

The Higher Learning Commission campus visit begins this Sunday (April 23) and continues through Wednesday. I am confident we are ready. The steering committee has done a truly extraordinary job of assembling a lot of persuasive information. The self-study document is impressive – both in content and presentation. It looks good and it is good. A lot of people have worked on our preparations, and they say they owe their accomplishment to the good work of countless others – good work across campus. Our gratitude is deep, sincere, and heartfelt for all the effort.

The preparation is complete. Now, I ask all of you to be mindful that the accreditation visit is happening April 23-26. Let's be intentional as we make a good first, and lasting, impression. UMC is known across the state, and beyond, as a friendly, helpful place with friendly, helpful people. This is a time to let that reputation shine. We have reason to be proud, reason to be confident, and reason to be optimistic.

Let me also take this opportunity to provide an update on strategic planning. Barely two weeks after I started my job as Chancellor, we launched a planning effort consistent with expectations set forth by the Board of Regents, President Bruininks, and his leadership team. A Task Force of 15 people, both internal and external to UMC, has spent more than 60 hours reviewing materials, listening to presentations, asking questions, and discussing the future of UMC. I believe the recommendations they have forwarded offer us assurance that the campus can look forward to a vital future. The recommendations are realistic, we can implement them, and the result will be positive. Again, let me emphasize that moving forward with the plan requires support and cooperation from everyone.

We must move forward with the kind of can-do spirit that has long been associated with the UMC campus. This means that questions, debate, and constructive ideas are welcomed and encouraged. Again, there will be people who resist change of any kind. The challenge to the rest of us is to persuade them, and if that doesn't work, we must find ways to respectfully confront and dispel resistance to ensure that we move forward.

Many positive things have happened over the past year. Our efforts to improve our enrollment situation are showing promise, and we were reminded how important this is when Senior Vice President Jones visited here on Wednesday (April 19).

We are encouraged by the scholarship support we have received from central administration and have made a good start on raising funds for more scholarship support, including efforts to raise funds from faculty and staff on campus. On Tuesday (April 18), Susan Hagstrum, wife of University President Robert Bruininks, was on campus for various fundraising activities including the Centennial Tea that attracted more than 100 women from across the region. A lunch meeting with students provided a venue to plant the idea of giving back, and I was heartened to hear a UMC student talk about his

intention to become a donor to UMC. His pride and gratitude were obvious, and an obvious testimony to the value he has for the education he is receiving here at UMC.

At year's end, we also reflect on the good work of our many clubs and organizations that provide outstanding leadership development opportunity for students. The awards program Wednesday night (April 19) recognized many of those achievements, and the importance of faculty advisors for those programs.

Looking ahead, we have a full agenda to fill a number of key administrative positions over the next few months, including the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs position. We are pleased to have support from central administration to hire a search firm for this position. We are doing this with the full consultation and support from the members of the search committee. I want you to know that we will take the time we need to make sure we make the best possible hire for this key position and others that are open.

All things considered, it's been a good year for UMC. Much has been accomplished, and we have the opportunity to build on those accomplishments as we move forward. We are in a good position to help the University achieve its aspiration to be among the top three public research universities, and at the same time add value to the region.

The campus is a good place to work and we have important work to do. How we do the work is as important as what we do. My experience has helped me understand that supporting each other makes work easier, and respecting each other makes the work more satisfying. I wish you all the best as we work together over these remaining weeks of the school year.

Finally, let me thank you again for your help. I appreciate your commitment and hard work.