

Chancellor Casey's Address to the Campus Assembly

November 18, 2005

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to the campus assembly today. I'm well into my third month as Chancellor at UMC, and I want you to know that I appreciate every occasion, and every audience, that allows me a forum to talk about the future of this campus.

I want to begin by saying thank you. Thank you to everyone in this room for being here today. Thank you for making me feel welcome. Thank you for helping me get acquainted. And, thank you for supporting me as we work together to move this campus forward. Because to move forward we will need to work together.

As you might imagine, a lot of people ask me how I like my job. It's a question I like to answer because I like this job a lot. I like the people here at UMC – the students, faculty, staff, and volunteers. To paraphrase Garrison Keillor, the people at UMC are strong, good looking, and certainly above average. And, I like working in the Crookston community and the region. I like it because this is home.

I especially like my job here at UMC because we have tremendous opportunity to succeed. The time is right to move forward, and we have the support from across the University and across region to do so.

The challenge before us is to move forward in the direction that will ensure a vital future for the campus, our students, and for all of us who choose to work here. Finding that direction commands our full attention, and while there is a sense of urgency, we are not in crisis.

Finding direction reminds me of a story, which you have perhaps heard, but is one I like. The story is about a man who loses his keys in a large parking lot. A friend comes along and asks if he can help. The man explains that he lost his keys and his friend watches him look for the keys under a lamp post. The friend asks if this is where he remembers last having his keys, and the man replies, "well no, but this is where the light is."

The point of this story is that it's easy to search where there is light. And, sometimes – maybe - we're lucky enough to find our keys under the lamp post. It's more likely, however, that we will need to explore further - to look in dark places, or find ways to turn on more lights.

In a way, that's what we are doing right now as we plan for the future of UMC. A strategic positioning task force, co-chaired by Dr. Charles Muscoplat and Dr. Joe Massey is helping UMC move forward – helping us find our keys to the future. I know Dr. Muscoplat. I respect his intellect and commitment, and I know he is using his tremendous

leadership talent to help us plan for our future. I know Joe cares deeply about this campus and wants it to be successful.

The planning at UMC is part of a major strategic positioning planning effort across the University. You've heard and read about the University's ambitious goal to become one of the top three public research universities in the world. And, by now you've heard me say that UMC is in a good position to help the University achieve that goal. I have no doubt about this. UMC can and will help the University achieve its aspirations.

At the same time, and just as important, the strategies we identify and implement will add value to the community and the region. I have no doubt about this either. UMC can and will add real value to the community and the region.

How we frame the future of UMC is so very important. To many people, the frame or the perception is the reality. If we imagine UMC to be a vital place, a place where people can aim higher and reach further, then we stand a much better chance of achieving that goal.

That vision is what gets me up everyday, and it's that vision that I ask each of you to help bring into focus. We have a lot of work to do. And, when faced with a lot of work, my approach is to ask people for help and to set priorities. Soon after taking this job, I did ask a lot of people what they thought should take priority for my time. And, I received a lot of very good advice. Plus, I met with many individuals and groups with a goal of gathering as much information as I could, as quickly as I could.

I have identified three major priorities for the next several months. All three are equally important, and all interconnected. All help move us forward.

One is to provide the best possible learning environment for students. A second priority is to strengthen the quality of the teaching and learning. And, a third priority is to work toward stability, both internal and external, so that UMC will be here well into the future. I discussed these priorities at the convocation a couple of weeks ago, and I welcome your feedback as I say a little more about them now.

Providing the best possible learning environment for our students has to be a high priority. It's what will fulfill the promise of the University of Minnesota brand. It's what will establish UMC as a school of choice for students across the region and beyond.

The best possible learning environment starts with quality courses and programs taught by faculty who bring knowledge, experience, and passion to the classroom. Students and their families have high expectations and we must deliver. Top quality student services are an important piece of the learning experience. Every process related to recruiting and retaining students has to be excellent. Advising has to be excellent to ensure that students stay focused on their goals. And, student activities have to be excellent so that they provide students with opportunities for personal enrichment.

As I said at the convocation, my goal is for UMC to impress students with a learning experience that exceeds expectations -- a student experience that provides our students good jobs, successful careers, and lives that are full of opportunity to contribute as engaged citizens -- a student experience that is so good that students, their families, and their employers will be good-will ambassadors for UMC.

Since speaking at the convocation, some have suggested to me that UMC is already pretty good at providing a quality student experience. I agree. However, I don't accept the idea that "pretty good" is good enough. It's not. No matter how good we are, we can be better. It's why I will continue to use the line you may have seen me use in the television ads for UMC. We must aim higher, reach further, and dream big dreams. I invite all of you to start saying those words too. Say them to yourself, to our students, to people in the broader community. The words are powerful.

Talking to alumni and friends of UMC, I am reminded over and over again how important relationships are to a good experience. People form their opinions about our campus based on the experience they have. If that experience is positive, they like us. If the experience is not positive, that may be our last chance to make a good impression. I subscribe to the old line that you only get one chance to make a first impression. Each of us contributes in one way or another to the student experience here at UMC. My goal is for every student to have a positive story to tell about their experience at UMC.

Now let me say a little more about the priority related to strengthening the quality of teaching and learning at UMC. Our surveys tell us that students choose UMC because of the programs we offer. So, in order for us to be successful, we must do more to ensure that our faculty are supported and recognized for the leadership they provide for our programs. I recognize that this is easier to say than to do. That doesn't make saying it unimportant. Supporting faculty is something I've been saying since I took this job, and I am committed to making a difference.

One important dimension of faculty leadership that I am especially interested in supporting is in the area of research. Our research base at the University of Minnesota is a quality advantage. It's what enriches the learning experience for students on campus, adds value to the region, and sells the University of Minnesota brand.

My third priority is to work toward stability, both internal and external, so that UMC will be here in the future. Some tell me this is the only thing I should worry about, but I'm confident that I can handle the other two priorities and this one too.

That said; let me be clear that there is a sense of urgency. The UMC that we knew 5 years ago, the UMC we know today, is not the UMC we will need to be five to ten years from now. The University's strategic positioning process includes an expectation for change from all of the coordinate campuses, including UMC. As I indicated earlier, we have a task force working hard, and quickly, on a plan for the future of our campus. Feedback from students, faculty, staff, and the community is important to shaping the recommendations that will have tremendous impact on the people who come here to learn

and to work. Please take this process seriously, because it is serious work, and the outcomes will have substantial impact on our future.

We must also work to ensure a successful accreditation visit on April 26-28. That process isn't just important to our stability, it's vital to the future of UMC. All of our good work will be negated if we aren't successful with this visit. I do want to acknowledge the many individuals that are working to complete the materials for the accreditation visit.

I'd like to close with a quick review of some of the things that are happening at UMC. I do this because it helps remind us that we are moving forward. There is momentum. We have reason to be optimistic.

We've hired a new natural resource aviation faculty member and have a search for a position in equine industries. Dr. Svedarsky is engaged in an exciting partnership with the NRCS that will provide 50% funding for 2 years for a restoration ecology position plus \$15,000 in support dollars for each year.

Rick Eber has started as the new admissions director. We're well along with the search process for directors of development and communications. These are incredibly important positions, and I'm pleased that we have a quality pool of applicants.

We have received new money from central administration to help with scholarships -- \$112,000 recurring dollars and \$60,000 one time dollars to use for recruiting. In addition, Dr. Massey and I are providing \$15,000 between us as a challenge to the campus to match our commitment, which we hope will provide 30 new \$1,000 scholarships.

The legislature has provided nearly \$5,500,000 for repairs and replacement of facilities on campus. \$5,000,000 will be for upgrading our heating plant. That work will take place during the summer of 2006.

It's old news to most of us, but let me say again that the new student center continues to generate tremendous excitement. We're working on resolving a few glitches, and as we do, we continue to hear people tell us that the building is beautiful, functional, and a solid message about UMC's commitment to students. I also appreciate that we have a place to get a really good cup of coffee.

The bookstore has hosted events that have brought the community to campus to meet authors and buy autographed books. This is just what a University bookstore should be doing.

We've remodeled the fitness center and the new equipment should be here soon.

Work on the Centennial Hall is progressing on schedule.

Other events and conferences have focused public attention on important issues of the day, and at the same time generated business for the campus enterprise.

We have had visits from several legislators and other policy makers that have provided us the opportunity to make the positive impression that I was talking about earlier. We're not lobbying for any new investment at UMC, which in a way is good, because we can focus on a broader message.

I'm sure there are other examples to add to this list of what's happening. And, I'm always interested in knowing more. Let me know when our students, faculty and staff excel in their work.

Again, I want to express to you my appreciation for all the good work you all are doing to make UMC a better place.