Welcome to another academic year and new beginning at Valley City State University! A special welcome also today to those of you tuning into the stream via the Internet. Much has changed on this campus during the past year, and the future looks bright with a number of new initiatives and collaborations underway. As you are aware, VCSU welcomed 30 new faculty and staff, including a new president, who have joined the campus during the past year. Physical infrastructure has been transformed during the past six months with a number of improvements and renovations throughout including a much-needed $2.2 million steamline overhaul. The campus underwent a Master Planning process this past year identifying future infrastructure priorities. A new Master’s concentration was added during the past year. A brand new marketing campaign and website have been launched. Students are studying in new academic fields previously not available at VCSU. Expanded programs and new partners at both the undergraduate and graduate level represent exciting developments transforming the landscape and educational setting at Valley City State.

A very sincere thanks to everyone at VCSU – all of our faculty, staff, and students who make this such a special university. Thanks also to the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education, the Chancellor, and the University System office for their ongoing support of this campus. We had a successful meeting last month hosting the State Board of Higher Education and appreciate their interest and support of our current initiatives. Thanks to the legislators and policy makers across the state, local economic development leaders and community members, as well as the Governor and our three federal representatives for the support and trust they have shown in our campus. Activities such as the Roundtable, the Center of Excellence program, and support for our STEM initiatives at both the state and federal levels have certainly been appreciated.

Speaking of the Roundtable, that is a process that was initiated at the beginning of this decade, and
was re-ignited just last week, outlining specific goals for the University System focused on flexibility with accountability. This process included input from Business and Industry leaders, legislators, University representatives, and other state leaders. VCSU responded well to that process and continues to respond to the needs of our state to this day. The Roundtable established six Cornerstones that have served to guide much of our decision-making in recent years, and will continue to do so as we strategically plan and grow for the future. The Roundtable process is one that garnered national attention serving as a model demonstrating the ways higher education, government, and the private sector can work together. Please bear in mind the six Cornerstones established by the Roundtable as they will continue guiding our planning: 1) A connection to Economic Development; 2) A commitment to Educational Excellence; 3) Ensuring a Flexible and Responsive System; 4) Ensuring an Accessible System; 5) A Focus on the Funding and Reward Structure; and 6) Sustaining the Vision. Higher Education is inextricably linked to economic development and the growth of our state – the Roundtable highlighted that connection and continues serving as an important compass for us to this day.

In putting together this address, I have given considerable thought reflecting on where we are at as a campus today coupled with the challenges and opportunities ahead of us along with the vision I have for where to lead this campus. Let me start out by highlighting some of the facts describing VCSU today.

This is a campus engaged in numerous important collaborations. These partnerships are important as we work to expand the academic reach of our institution, and they also demonstrate great confidence in our institution as external entities seek to work with us. Long-standing partnerships such as that with the delivery of our Elementary Education program to North Dakota State University as well as new partnerships such as the relationship we now have with the Boston Museum of Science allows our campus to provide expertise in various markets. We participate in the Dakota Nursing Program, collaborating with Minot State University-Bottineau and local healthcare partners along with economic development to provide nursing programs in Valley City and Barnes County. Enterprise University, our Center of Excellence, entered into an agreement earlier this year to partner with the
NDSU Research and Technology Park to provide Microsoft Sharepoint training and utilize Virtual Incubator technologies. We have new collaborations to deliver elementary education via online and hybrid distance delivery to students at Northwest College in Powell, Wyoming and beyond. We have faculty and staff members actively working with colleagues at several tribal colleges in North Dakota. New regional partnerships in further disciplines such as art education and business are being explored. All of these relationships demonstrate our ability to serve unmet needs in markets both near and far.

This is a campus focused on the expansion of academic programs through new technologies. VCSU currently offers the only online distance delivery program in the United States preparing students for the Music Teachers National Association certification. New steps are being taken in more academic areas across campus to provide online and distance course and degree program availability in a wider array of academic areas. VCSU faculty are exploring new teaching technologies to enhance the experience of student learners, both in-person and those at a distance.

This is a university that is expanding its boundaries in new and exciting directions with new academic programs and new majors. VCSU has grown from zero graduate students enrolled in zero graduate programs to 119 Master’s level students studying in three different graduate concentrations – all in the span of just three short years. New programs recently added and re-tooled in areas such as Fisheries and Wildlife, Human Services, Professional Communications, Enterprise Applications, Health Sciences, and Library & Information Technologies have broadened the overall academic portfolio of our university.

Valley City State is a campus with a proud heritage back to its original founding in 1890 as a State Normal School fulfilling the important mission of graduating teachers to educate the growing population as the United States expanded westward. This university has long had a tremendous reputation as one of the preeminent teacher education institutions, and we continue fulfilling that important role today with our work in educating teachers.
This is a campus with highly satisfied students – students who report being satisfied and challenged at VCSU after the end of both their first and fourth years of college. With the most recent data, VCSU students (both freshmen and seniors) reported higher levels of satisfaction on all five areas reported in the Accountability Measures report compared to the rest of the North Dakota University System students. The five areas as measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement are: academic challenge, active & collaborative learning, student/faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences, and a supportive campus environment. Our students reported higher levels in all five areas compared to our ND peers and were generally higher than national benchmarks as well. Clearly, our students are satisfied with their education at VCSU and feel challenged, supported, and enriched with their experiences.

VCSU is a university that is broadening our offerings for student athletes with the addition of Men’s and Women’s intercollegiate golf beginning next fall. Recent major improvements to the running track provide new opportunities for our current and future student athletes. This is a university that participates in the NAIA Champions of Character program and enrolls student athletes who engage in public and community service.

This is a campus that takes seriously its responsibility to provide opportunities for our students to get involved and make a difference. There are dedicated staff and faculty serving as advisors to a wide variety of student clubs and organizations. Our students have great opportunities to excel and participate in the performing arts, music, theatre, intramural athletics, community involvement, and a host of other ways to grow and develop. In fact, tonight is the opening night of the 2008-09 Theatre Season at VCSU and I encourage you to see the play, The Foreigner, during one of the next four nights. What a terrific way to see the outstanding efforts of our students and staff come alive.

VCSU is a campus that has a major economic impact within our region. The most recently available data show that VCSU had a nearly $49 Million economic impact during Fiscal Year 2006. Additionally, our University helps to support over 500 indirect jobs in the community associated with that impact,
and that is in addition to the 340 full-time and student workers on campus. Student spending alone was nearly $7 Million in the Valley City region during the ‘05-'06 academic year.

This is a university that recently launched a brand new marketing campaign with the theme, “The Difference is ME.” This integrated marketing communication effort incorporates a new series of billboards, representing the first time in many years VCSU has used outdoor media. Additionally, a new collection of print media has been created around the new marketing theme.

Our University also completed a Web re-design and launched a new homepage this summer. This new web presence features state-of-the-art technologies with new interactive search capabilities specially suited for prospective students seeking information on academic majors and programs based on their specific personal profiles.

This campus partners with an active and dedicated Foundation whose mission is to raise scholarships for student success. During the past couple of years, a record amount of financial gifts have been raised by the Foundation, and appropriately, a record amount of scholarship dollars are being awarded during this very academic year. An active alumni organization helped the university recently complete a very successful 2008 Homecoming, and has assisted with the growth of new social and networking opportunities for our alumni.

The bottom line is that this is a dynamic environment for teaching, for research, for service, and most importantly for student learning. Everyone, past and present, has much to be proud of for all of their contributions to these important campus milestones in shaping Valley City State University into the progressive and dynamic campus that it is today. VCSU has been recognized at both the state and national levels for various innovations – those commendations are well-deserved and serve as a source of great pride for our campus.
But, now is not the time for us to be complacent or content. Quite to the contrary, we are at a crossroads in our state and region as we face some important challenges. There are demographic and political issues ahead of us that can and do pose challenges. Yet, with challenges come great opportunity. This is an important time for us to work together in creative and thoughtful ways to move our campus forward in serving our students and competing in the marketplace. Enrollment at Valley City State is the responsibility of every single person in this room. Everyone on our campus can and should take some accountability for our enrollment.

As you are aware, we posted Fall enrollment about three weeks ago announcing our overall headcount is at 1019, up 37 students or 3.8% over Fall 2007 enrollment. Our Full-time equivalency increased 2% or 16 equivalent students from 807 last year to 823 this fall. Other highlights from our enrollment numbers include the fact, as mentioned, that we now have 119 students enrolled in our Master’s programs – again quite a feat considering these programs simply did not even exist just a few short years ago. Our Freshmen-to-Sophomore retention rate was 68% this year, which is the highest that figure has been since 2002. As we all know, recruiting students to enroll at VCSU is often the most difficult part of the recruitment process, once they are here, maintaining a high retention rate essentially acts as a built-in form of upper-level student recruitment. Of course, a key part of retention is recruiting and enrolling students that have the academic skills and aptitudes necessary to succeed at the university level – but more about the issue of quality in a few minutes.

Within the enrollment numbers, everything is not entirely good news. We have some issues that represent major challenges for VCSU if we want to successfully move ahead and grow this campus. Namely, is our population of new freshmen. This fall, that number stood at just 161 students – the lowest number of freshmen since 2002, and a 13.5% decrease from the 186 new freshmen we welcomed a year ago. That means we have 25 fewer Freshmen on campus this fall. For an institution of our size, those 25 students have a huge impact as they ultimately become our sophomores, juniors, seniors, and alumni. We simply need to turn this around. We have not had 200 new freshmen in any given class yet this century – it is my goal, and my commitment to you, that we will hit that magical benchmark of 200 freshmen. In order for us to modernize our residence halls, similar to what was
done in Kolstoe a few years ago, and upgrade our Student Center, Athletic Facilities, and enhance student services – we need on-campus students paying student fees to help support those upgrades. All of those amenities play a major part in the decision-making process used by prospective students and their families in selecting a university. Other campuses in the region have recently made significant upgrades to their student facilities, and we need to plan for the same. It is a very competitive marketplace as we seek to recruit the best and brightest students from our region and beyond.

This year we had 59 new Transfer students, which is up 6 students or 11% from one year ago. That is good news. However, in looking a bit more closely at the data, we had 116 new transfer students, or roughly double this year’s transfer student number, just a few short years ago back in 2003. The total number of new students (that is new freshmen and new transfers combined) averaged 263 per year from 2000-2004; from 2005-2008 the number has averaged 234 per year. That is an 11% drop in our average incoming new student class in the second half of this decade. Put another way, we have had a decrease of 29 new students per average incoming class each year over the past four years – that means 116 total fewer new students enrolled at VCSU in just the past four years compared to the average numbers during the first half of the decade. Think of the impact 116 additional students would have meant to our campus during the past four years. Think of the talent, the creativity, and the ingenuity that surely would have been among those 116 students. This is a serious challenge we need to face and overcome in order to have the students on campus allowing us to add programs, amenities, new initiatives, new staff, in order to benefit from the gains and fuel further campus growth. Enrollment is not strictly the job of a handful of individuals on this campus that work in one or two departments, but rather it is the job of every single person in this room and across this campus. Regardless of whether you are a faculty member, staff member, current student, administrator, alumni, or general friend of the university - you have a role to play in assisting our university recruit students. Every single one of us can have responsibility in recruiting students based on the role we play on campus. It is too big of a job and too important of a function for any of us to overlook. I challenge each of you to think about your role and how you can assist VCSU in recruiting students. In order for VCSU to create further opportunities for our students, faculty, and staff – we need to grow. To expand our budgets allowing for new initiatives, additional personnel, enhanced
salaries, new professional development opportunities, student affordability, enhanced student amenities, improved physical structures – we need to grow. So, yes, there is a natural connection between everyone in this room and our responsibility in growing our campus.

So, that is an overview of where we are at measured by enrollment. However, as important as enrollment is, it alone does not define our university. Let’s look at some other indicators reflecting where VCSU is currently making and can continue making strides.

Enrollment initiatives at VCSU are not just about quantity, but also about the quality of students we attract. Just today, we completed an NCATE review with strong indications that we again successfully fulfilled the expectations of accreditation. This speaks volumes about the quality of our educational programs, faculty, and students. A special thanks to Dean Gary Thompson, Professor Olson, and everyone within the Education area who have worked so hard and put forth so much effort ensuring a highly successful accreditation visit.

We have put additional emphasis on working with employers and ensuring our students have access to internship opportunities, further ensuring a quality educational experience. Earlier this fall, special emphasis was placed on student advising – this will remain a focus to maintain quality service to our students. Expanding endeavors to ensure our students have access to and are exposed to diverse ways of thinking, more emphasis will be placed on international initiatives. Again, this will provide a quality experience for our students and attract the very best.

We are going to spend more time and effort on international education opportunities for our students and staff. On Thursday, October 30 VCSU is hosting its first-ever Study Abroad fair in the Student Center. We will have organizations on-campus to provide information and opportunities for our students to study abroad. I urge you to encourage your students to stop by – it would be a good opportunity for faculty and staff to stop by and learn more as well. We are also having conversations right now to re-ignite our relationships with sister universities in Mexico. There is much to be gained
by our students in enhancing and growing their educational experience by immersing themselves in another culture and studying in another country. Those opportunities also attract some of the best and brightest high school students. We can use these offerings to attract those prospective students to VCSU.

International education is also a two-way street. Beyond North Dakota and regional students having the opportunity to study abroad, we also need to focus on attracting a larger number of international students. This fall, VCSU has 44 international students on campus. These students represent 11 different countries, which is the most country representation we have had in at least the past 13 years. Some of the largest growing education markets in the world reside in Asia, and that is an area in which we need to put additional emphasis. I have been invited and will travel later this fall to visit two universities in China to explore the potential to recruit Chinese students to our campus. I will also be exploring possible opportunities for faculty and staff exchanges. Additional international students comprising the VCSU student population assist with both our enrollment growth objectives as well as adding an important diverse element to our campus and community. There is much our students, faculty, and staff can learn from having increased numbers of international students on campus. When our international student numbers grow, it will also cause a demand for further services at VCSU allowing us to best serve those students and their unique needs. Upon increased international enrollment, we will then create a full-time Office of International and Multicultural affairs. The services of this office will also assist as we expand the diversity of our campus. As we work to expand the diversity on our campus and welcome more foreign students to VCSU, it also highlights our need to continue pursuing programs related to Teaching English Language Learners. As our nation becomes more diverse with more individuals speaking languages other than English in their homes and in the workplace, the need for VCSU graduates with these ELL and ESL skills will only continue to grow.

This campus needs to continue expanding our efforts to provide undergraduate research opportunities for our students. Students at VCSU have had opportunities in recent years for research in our Macroinvertabrate and Toxicology Labs, and we need to continue ensuring the infrastructure is
in place to support those important initiatives. VCSU is on the major capital project list for an $11.2 million expansion and renovation to Rhoades Science Center that was approved by the State Board of Higher Education in June. That list is now in the hands of the Governor and we are hopeful the Science Center remains in the budget submitted to the Legislature later this year.

An updated Science Center would not only allow for further advancements in providing research opportunities for attracting the best and brightest students and faculty to VCSU, but it would also allow us to continue expansion in STEM education. STEM – the fields comprised of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics – will continue to play a prominent role in the focus of VCSU expansion. With our long-standing mission as a preeminent K-12 teacher education institution – the role that we can play in educating America’s future teachers with a solid grounding in the STEM fields cannot be overstated. It is our role, and our responsibility, to help this country get back to one of global leadership in the STEM fields, and that growth begins with our K-12 teachers. VCSU has been working to secure funding at both the state and national levels to assist in growing our STEM initiatives in teacher education. We have partnered with world-class entities such as the Center for Technological Literacy at the Boston Museum of Science. Clearly, this campus can, and will, play a vital role in our country’s renewed efforts in these important areas.

The condition of our campus physical plant has a huge impact on our ability to continue attracting new students. The average age of our university’s academic and administrative buildings is 68 years. Think about that for a minute, the average age of the buildings where we have classrooms and offices is 68 years. That means we have a lot of physical structures throughout our campus that have a tremendous amount in the way of deferred maintenance priorities. Members of our facilities services have done and continue to do a great job in keeping our campus modern and useful, however, that job becomes more and more difficult with each passing year with our aging buildings. We will continue to seek funds as available to address these issues. The physical beauty of our campus also plays a key role in attracting and retaining students. As the saying goes, “You only get one chance to make a first impression.” That is certainly true when a prospective student and their family visit VCSU. Not only does the information they hear and the people they speak with make a big impact on
their visit, but so too does the physical condition and appearance of our campus. Please keep that in mind and do your part to help keep our campus and buildings appealing for our visitors. This campus and community also needs to be mindful of its environmental impact, and consider the activities and ways in which we expend our resources. We cannot idly stand by on the sideline with these issues, but rather we must give more consideration to the topics of sustainability and the impact our university has on the climate. There is very little to no recycling occurring across campus, and that is simply not appropriate for a college campus. Today’s student, today’s facilities, and today’s world demand better, and we must respond appropriately. We need to make wise decisions going forward regarding the way we conserve, recycle, sustain, and generally impact the environment around us – it is a fundamental responsibility we have as an institution of higher education. I am going to form a task force to study these issues and make recommendations as we map out our future in this area.

The quality of the education we deliver and the quality of the students we attract to VCSU are both fundamental points we must continue addressing. Undergraduate research has played and must continue to play a prominent role in the education of our students. A transformative educational experience grounded in the liberal arts with a basic scientific application is important, further highlighting the importance of the Science Center renovation proposal. So, too, are the opportunities for faculty and staff to engage in academic discourse and exploration. I propose the creation of a monthly academic colloquium, enabling faculty members to share their research and scholarly activities with the campus. This would also allow students to participate and be actively exposed to fundamental research. In discussing a quality academic experience, I also think it wise for this campus to initiate a discussion outlining the role of technology both with our classroom learners as well as our learners at a distance. As a laptop campus, we have a basic responsibility to regularly visit the role of technology in the classroom and have open and honest pedagogical discussions focused on effective uses of technology. Our students pay a fee to support the laptop environment, and it is our role to ensure they are obtaining maximum educational benefit from the technology they are supporting. When was the last time such a campus-wide discussion occurred? I challenge you to think about this and engage in some honest and open dialogue on this very important issue. I am going to create a
working group to explore these issues and initiate a campus-wide dialogue on this important topic. As one of the original laptop universities in the nation, it is the least we can do.

According to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, North Dakota will experience a 17.5% drop in the number of high school graduates from 2008 to 2018. Therefore, another important student segment in our region is the adult learner. As North Dakota continues to age as a state, the proportion of adult learners who may be looking for an opportunity to seek higher education will only continue to grow. We must be prepared to serve this unique market. In many situations, these students will be place-bound due to their life, career, or family circumstances. We must be prepared to bring education to them. Collaborating with other university partners is only going to increase in importance going forward. We simply cannot operate as an island. We will rely on the support of others, and others will rely on our support, for growing and expanding programs.

During last year’s discussions for the 2008-2010 VCSU Growth Plan, Intercollegiate Athletics was highlighted as a fundamental component of this university’s growth. To highlight the importance of Athletics to our campus, note that nearly 40% of our 2008 Freshmen are student-athletes. Our coaches work extremely hard throughout the year recruiting and enrolling student-athletes at VCSU. Clearly, Athletics has and will continue to play a fundamentally critical role in the support and growth of our institution. VCSU has already made a significant commitment with the addition of Men’s & Women’s Golf set to begin competing in Fall 2009. Earlier this summer, I formed a task force to look at the viability of re-instating Track & Field and Cross-Country. After much research, discussion, and consideration, I am pleased to announce today that a plan is in place to add Men’s & Women’s Track & Field and Cross-Country to VCSU in Fall 2010. This decision is contingent upon our university raising new, external private dollars to successfully launch this program. These start-up dollars will support scholarship and operational funds to successfully launch the program without taking scarce resources from any other athletic program or other department currently existing at VCSU. The addition of these sports fit directly with our Campus Growth Plan utilizing Men’s & Women’s sports to assist with on-campus student enrollment objectives.
We will continue collaborating with partners both within the state and beyond. Recent discussions and new partnerships in such areas as Nursing, Fisheries & Wildlife, Art Education, new business articulations, are all positive steps we will continue. Further opportunities within the North Dakota four-year colleges, tribal institutions, two-year colleges, out-of-state articulations, and international universities must continue to be pursued. There are states filled to current capacity in higher education. We are in the unique position with the capacity and room to enroll more students. This gives us an inherent advantage over others in the marketplace – we have the physical room to grow immediately. We also recognize, that not every situation will allow for students to come to us, and that is why flexibility and accessibility is so important as we must be prepared to go to the students. Again, further highlighting the importance of technology in our curricular delivery methods.

This campus is nearing its 120th Birthday and has never in its history undergone a capital or comprehensive campaign. Despite the current economic situation facing our nation, now may be the time for this campus and our Foundation to give considerable thought toward launching a campaign. However, before any such decision can be made, we as a University must be positioned appropriately to support such an effort. We must be clicking on all cylinders, so to speak, so that our alumni and friends of the university are excited and inspired to help take us to the next level. This requires a university being perfectly positioned in such a manner to justify such investments. We will continue exploring this topic in the days and months ahead.

As we come to a conclusion here, a bit of additional news I’d like to share with you. I am pleased to announce a date has been set for a VCSU Presidential Inauguration to install the 12th President – it will be on Friday, April 3, 2009. I look forward to the rest of the academic year ahead and a terrific celebration for our University on April 3.

No doubt we are at a very exciting time in the history of North Dakota, the history of Higher Education, and the history of Valley City State University. This campus stands on a firm foundation thanks to the extraordinary efforts of so many individuals over the past years. Your efforts, hard
work, dedication, and diligence have created a terrific institution of learning, service, and research. We are fortunate to have such talented and hard-working students calling this special place “home.” There are so many tremendous opportunities in front of us that it truly makes coming to work every day a joy. We have unique and inherent advantages that a lot of universities would be envious of due to our history, our flexibility, our technology, our solid foundation, and our outstanding personnel. The opportunities ahead of us to grow with technology, with new collaborations and partnerships, with new and expanded programs, are vast and exciting, and I am so pleased to be here and ready to push ahead. It truly is great to be at VCSU and great to be a Valley City State Viking! THANKS for everything that you all do day in and day out in making this such a terrific University. Thanks and have a Wonderful day!