

VCSU State of the University Address

October 19, 2009

12 p.m. – Froemke Auditorium in Foss Hall

Dr. Steven W. Shirley, President

Good Afternoon! We are, indeed, in the midst of another exciting academic year at Valley City State University! We have experienced much as a campus since we were last gathered in this room one year ago. Who could have ever imagined the months that lie ahead and the Spring Semester we would encounter as we gathered here back in 2008. To the faculty, staff, and students at VCSU who did so much, contributed to our community in so many ways, and helped us emerge stronger than ever as a campus with a resilient conclusion to our Spring Semester, I say Bravo! On countless occasions last spring, it was reinforced about the kinds of students we have at Valley City State. Through their thousands of hours of critical assistance during the flood – with levee building, sandbagging, volunteering – it was proven to all on our campus and throughout this community of the outstanding young people who comprise the VCSU Student Body. My hats off to this entire campus community for their heroic efforts last Spring!

Other changes have occurred, perhaps not quite as apparent as completing the semester in the midst of an historic flood, but nonetheless they are factors that have made us a different institution today than we were one year ago. In May, VCSU received approval for a fourth Master's concentration, thus, further expanding our graduate education mission. A number of significant physical upgrades have been made to the campus such as a new IT Data Center and new parking lots ensuring the long-term viability of our physical infrastructure. For the 12th consecutive year, VCSU is a US News and World Report Best College. We are about to embark on a comprehensive campus Master Planning process. We received formal continuing accreditation notification this past Spring of our highly successful NCATE visit in 2008. Preparations are well underway in planning for our institutional Higher Learning Commission accreditation visit to take place in 2011. We are in the midst of developing a new five-year Strategic Plan to guide Valley City State as we move forward toward 2015. New developments are being made at VCSU in STEM Education as well as the establishment of our Prairie Waters Education and Research Center. These are but a few of the many achievements and new initiatives underway across this campus. The list is a long one, and I could go on and on about how our campus is now different from how it was a year ago.

Thanks to the VCSU Family – all of our faculty, staff, students, supporters, and alumni who make this such a

special university. Thanks also to the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education, Chancellor Goetz, and the University System office for their continued support of our campus. Thanks also to the North Dakota Legislature for their actions during the 2009 Legislative Session and for supporting and passing Senate Bill 2003 last May – a strong, historic, and important bill in support of higher education throughout North Dakota. Governor Hoeven and his Office along with our entire federal congressional delegation have all been very encouraging and we are thankful for their support. Likewise, VCSU is strengthened by several important organizations – our VCSU Foundation Board of Directors as well as our Alumni Association along with the V-500 and Century Club boards. We are fortunate to have the support and efforts of so many outstanding individuals. Finally, VCSU is fortunate to exist in Valley City and Barnes County surrounded by such strong supporters as well as able to collaborate with such important partners as the Development Corporation and the Chamber of Commerce.

A guiding set of principles for VCSU, and all public institutions of higher education in our state, as we move forward, is the new North Dakota University System Strategic Plan adopted earlier this fall by the State Board of Higher Education. This Plan includes the following four goals for the North Dakota University System: **First)** The North Dakota University System is accessible, a view held by all North Dakotans; **Second)** North Dakotans recognize that the North Dakota University System is affordable at a level that can be sustained; **Third)** The North Dakota University System increases the overall vitality of the state through exceptional education, research, training, and service; and **Finally)** The eleven institutions comprising the North Dakota University System work together to achieve the vision effectively. These four overarching goals of the University System’s new Strategic Plan will be fundamental guiding principles for VCSU as we move forward.

As is appropriate with a State of the University address, let me begin with some observations reflecting upon where we currently are as a campus. Let me say in short, the State of VCSU is very, very good – we are on an excellent foundation – as we meet here today.

This is a campus that maintains active participation in a variety of collaborative efforts. These partnerships are important as we expand the academic reach of VCSU and work to serve a wider base of students. We have completed the first year as a partner in the Dakota Nursing Program, collaborating with Dakota College at Bottineau and local healthcare partners as well as the Development Corporation, to provide nursing opportunities for students in our community. It is exciting to note that the first four nursing students have

completed the program and were recognized in a pinning ceremony this past summer. We continue collaborating with our two-year college partners in delivering elementary education via online and face-to-face methods to students at four community colleges in Wyoming. There is the possibility for further expansion into other academic disciplines as well. We had no students enrolled from these partnerships a year ago, and today we have 24 students from four different Wyoming community colleges enrolled. Faculty in our School of Education have spent the past five months working with colleagues from North Dakota State University and Minnesota State, Moorhead to submit a significant grant proposal to the Bush Foundation in St. Paul. This proposal has been warmly received and, if funded, will provide significant future potential for VCSU education students and could fundamentally transform and markedly strengthen education in our region. We continue to partner with NDSU in delivering our Elementary Education program in Fargo, and are now finalizing new agreements to collaborate in Art. We are now collaborating with the University of North Dakota Graduate School to offer components of their Master's of Business Administration degree to VCSU students, thereby allowing VCSU students to participate in their Bridge to the MBA program.

VCSU continues its work in expanding the reach of our academic programs through development and growth in new technologies. Our faculty continue to explore new teaching technologies with programs such as Wimba, Blackboard, and Panopto to diversify the experiences of our student learners, both in the classroom and those learning from a distance. Additionally, we learned first-hand last spring the value of these technologies in facilitating the completion of a semester under most challenging circumstances. This summer was spent completely rebuilding our IT data center and moving it from the first to the second floor in Rhoades Science Center, ensuring our ability to maintain technology services in future flood-related situations. We are continuing to work with classroom technologies and preparing classes accordingly in the event we may need to once again alter plans due to the rapid spread of the H1N1 influenza virus this fall. I think we are all gaining a new respect for technology and better appreciating the many benefits it can provide during both seen and unforeseen circumstances.

This fall, VCSU enrolled 122 Master's students – the fifth consecutive year of record enrollment of graduate students. In May, we conferred a Master's degree to our very first graduate in the Library and Information Technology M.Ed. concentration. Earlier this year, we received permission from the North Dakota State Board of Higher Education to add our fourth Master's concentration – this in the area of English Language Learners.

We have an outstanding base of graduates and alumni from VCSU who are doing tremendous work in their careers. They are individuals who have made a real impact during both their time on campus as well as during their successful lives upon graduation, and we are so proud to call them VCSU alumni. Earlier this fall we recognized individuals for their accomplishments during separate recognition ceremonies including our VCSU Music Hall of Fame, VCSU Athletic Hall of Fame, as well as our Homecoming Week activities – including the recognition during Homecoming of Mr. Jerry Topp, with VCSU's highest alumni honor, the Distinguished Alumni Award.

VCSU received formal acknowledgment earlier this year of something we already know – we have a world-class teacher education program. At its April national meeting, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, NCATE, formally approved continuing accreditation at VCSU, representing the culmination of a highly successful NCATE visit to our campus last fall. We have additional possibilities before us in providing new opportunities for our students and serving the region in new and exciting ways. We are making new strides in STEM Education with our receipt earlier this year of a congressionally-directed appropriation of \$381,000 to establish the Great Plains STEM Education Center. This Center will be directed by Dr. Don Mугan, and allow us to expand our current efforts as we prepare future generations of teachers to expertly teach in the STEM disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. We are actively working with Senator Dorgan's office to receive a second federal grant in the upcoming fiscal year to expand and prolong our efforts in STEM Education. Likewise, another exciting possibility currently in the works is the Prairie Waters Education and Research Center being proposed by Dr. Andre DeLorme. Assuming funding is secured, this Center will be housed at the Kathryn School and will provide new opportunities for student and faculty research as well as provide a wealth of information and educational opportunities for regional K-12 students to learn about science and water issues. In Business, VCSU is the only university member from the Dakotas or Minnesota participating in the SAP University Alliance. Our participation in this Alliance provides unique opportunities for our students and keeps our faculty connected with important industry partners. In fact, just last week, VCSU students toured SAP companies in Fargo, and today, a group of VCSU students and faculty are in Minneapolis touring SAP companies and attending the Minnesota Chapter of the America's SAP Users Group meeting. These efforts are closely aligned with our new Enterprise Applications certificate. Speaking of Academic Excellence, make no mistake that we have some wonderfully talented and high-achieving students among our ranks. Just last night, during an initiation ceremony, our Alpha Lambda Delta National Honor Society for first-year college students inducted 36 new members from last year's freshman class into the

Chapter. The Alpha Lambda Delta chapter was founded at VCSU in 2005, and I am proud to say that our latest class of inductees is a group of bright, capable, energetic, and intelligent students who represent the very best of our student-scholars at VCSU.

We continue with our commitment to the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, and are proud to have athletic programs and student-athletes who participate in the NAIA Champions of Character program. Our Women's Basketball Team had an overall team GPA of 3.61 and was the fifth highest in the nation among NAIA schools. The Viking Softball Team was recently recognized for also having the fifth-highest team GPA in the nation among NAIA schools with a team GPA of 3.46. Our Volleyball Team was recognized by the American Volleyball Coaches Association for its academic excellence. Clearly, VCSU student-athletes are achieving both on the court and the field as well as in the classroom. We remain committed to providing our student-athletes with the necessary physical facilities they need to succeed. The Osmon Fieldhouse is an integral part of the VCSU campus, and you will soon see tangible work commence as we work to repair that magnificent facility and ensure its ability to serve our needs for another 50 years as it has done so well for the past half-century. We have explored, and we will continue to explore, possibilities for the rest of our athletic facilities ensuring they meet the growing needs of our programs to ensure VCSU remains competitive and successful. VCSU is broadening our attraction to future generations of students by adding new offerings for student athletes. This includes the addition of Men's and Women's intercollegiate golf which began earlier this fall, and the addition of Men's and Women's Track and Field and Cross Country which will come back to the campus beginning in Fall 2010. Later today and tomorrow we will hold press conferences to formally make this announcement and outline our timeline during the next year. Additionally, later today we will have a recognition event to thank all of the contributors who have pledged to support this effort resulting in nearly \$160,000 in new pledges to VCSU. As you know, this plan was announced a year ago during the State of the University address, and I am so pleased with the fundraising efforts that have occurred and all of the contributors who have participated to make this a reality. To all of you who have participated, I say Thank You! This initiative will attract new students to VCSU and provide new opportunities for future generations of our students.

VCSU is committed to providing opportunities for our students to get involved and make a difference in the world around them. Our students on campus are active in such diverse activities as the performing arts, student governance, music, theatre, intramural athletics, community service, volunteerism at the Medicine Wheel Park, service on campus committees, involvement in various clubs and organizations, the North Dakota

Student Association, and a host of other ways for them to grow, develop, and mature. As I mentioned during last month's Inaugural Address – I want our students to Explore, to Reach, and to Achieve. Opportunities such as these are a means to those ends, and these opportunities strengthen and enrich the collegiate experiences of our students. In fact, later this week is the beginning of the 2009-10 VCSU Theatre Season and I encourage you all to support our students and see the play, *The Dining Room*, opening later this week.

VCSU has a significant positive economic impact in our region. In Fiscal Year 2008, VCSU had a nearly \$56 Million economic impact and helped to support the equivalence of over 500 jobs in our region. Direct student expenditures alone are estimated at \$6.5 Million and our total payroll this fiscal year will exceed \$11 Million. VCSU is indeed an economic engine in our region.

As a university, we are in our second full year of marketing and implementing the slogan, "The Difference is ME." This marketing campaign includes a new series of billboards that have just gone up in the past week, as well as a new collection of print media that has been updated around this new marketing theme. In addition, we are finalizing a new interactive virtual tour that you will soon see on our campus homepage. It is a powerful new tool that will give prospective students a better feel for VCSU and our offerings before students visit the campus.

Clearly, this is a campus with a long history of tradition and a strong track record of educating students and serving our region and beyond. We have been recognized for these accomplishments with a host of accolades, including our current #2 ranking in the US News and World Report Best Colleges list for Top Public Midwest Baccalaureate schools, and as you know, this is our twelfth consecutive year on the List. Simply put, every VCSU student, faculty, and staff – past and present – as well as our alumni and supporters have much of which to be proud.

As we all know, however, the world of higher education is a competitive one. For everything we have accomplished in the past, there is an equal amount of work ahead of us. We all know, we cannot sit still and we cannot rest on our laurels. It is simply not possible to have that attitude and be successful in today's society, certainly not in higher education. We are not sitting still. A campus-wide committee chaired by Vice-Presidents Dahlberg and Schmalz is moving forward to develop a new five-year strategic plan titled VCSU

2015. As a campus, we are busily preparing for our Higher Learning Commission accreditation visit in 2011. We are implementing new strategies to increase campus enrollment, and this fall's increase in overall student headcount is a good start. We are continuing to make infrastructure changes and improvements as a result of last spring's flood. We are beginning a comprehensive campus Master Plan and space utilization study. These are all signs of a proactive and forward-thinking environment, and clearly demonstrate that we are not sitting still.

Speaking of enrollment, as you know, we posted Fall enrollment several weeks ago announcing our overall headcount is at 1,083, up 64 students, or 6.3%, over Fall 2008. This is our largest enrollment in nine years. Taken a step further, compared to Fall 2007, we now have 101 more students taking VCSU classes – a gain in excess of 10% in just two years. This represents real, meaningful, and positive back-to-back growth in our student enrollment, and you can clearly see the trend line in our Headcount since 2007 reflected on the chart behind me. Our Freshmen-to-Sophomore retention rate remains stable, and is at 67% this year. We all know that retention and recruitment of students go hand-in-hand – they are two parts of the same overall process.

As mentioned, our graduate enrollment numbers are also positive. As of this fall, there are now 122 students pursuing their Master's degree from VCSU. This represents a record enrollment of graduate students for the fifth consecutive year.

As you know, not everything within our enrollment picture is entirely good news. As a campus, our focus has to remain on the size and renewed growth of our incoming freshmen class. This fall, that number stood at 155 students – the lowest number of freshmen since 2002, and a 3% decrease from a year ago. The good news with this number is that from 2007 to 2008 our freshmen class size decreased by over 13%, this year in 2009 it did again decrease, but from 2008 to '09, by only 3%. Perhaps this is a sign that the decrease has stabilized and plateaued, and we can now renew our efforts to grow the number again in a positive direction. I was so pleased this past weekend to give a Welcome to our Viking Visit Day attendees here on Saturday – this was our largest number of prospective students attending a Viking Visit in a decade. Perhaps we are, indeed, turning the corner with the size of our incoming freshmen class. My thanks to our Enrollment Services personnel and coaching staffs for their ongoing student recruitment efforts. As I stated to you one year ago during this Address, VCSU has not welcomed 200 new freshmen in any given class yet this century – it remains my goal and commitment that we will hit that important benchmark of 200 students in our incoming freshmen class.

Another important student audience for VCSU beyond freshmen, are transfer students. This fall, we have 74 new Transfer students, which is up 15 students or 25% from one year ago, and an increase in transfer students of 21 students or 40% over the Fall 2007 numbers. These are very positive gains during the past two years resulting in more new students on campus. Again, however, we must not be complacent, as a further look at our data reveals that we averaged 95 new transfer students each year during the first half of this decade. We have made progress in growing our transfer student enrollment during the past two years, but there is more work to be done.

I mentioned this last year, and I will reiterate it here today as I am an ardent believer in the importance of this message. Regardless of whether you are a faculty member, staff member, current student, administrator, alumni, a community member, or a general friend of the university - you have a role to play in assisting Valley City State University recruit and retain students. Every person in this room and on this campus must take responsibility and recognize the role they can play in attracting students to VCSU. It is too big of a job and far too important of a task directly connected to our long-term success for any of us to overlook. I challenge each of you to consider your role, your job function, your interaction with current and prospective students, and recognize how you can assist VCSU in recruiting future students as well as retaining the current students we serve. In order for VCSU to create further opportunities for our students, faculty, and staff – we must grow. To expand our opportunities for new initiatives, consider adding new personnel, create new professional development opportunities, provide new student amenities, improve our physical facilities – the list goes on – we need to grow. It truly does take all of us working together as a team. One final thought on this. In order to attract the best and brightest students to VCSU, it increasingly takes our awarding of financial resources and scholarships to recruit those students. The attainment of a university degree is a significant investment, and the more we can support our students with private resources to help fund their education, the better off both the University and the student will be. Everyone on our campus and in this community should be encouraged to participate. I urge all of you, to please think seriously about the role you can play in these efforts, and consider the resources – be it time, treasure, or talent – that you can contribute toward the worthy programs of the VCSU Foundation. No gift is too small or insignificant – every contribution makes a difference. There are few gifts as powerful as the gift of education that any of us can give.

A year ago, I stood before you and spoke of the importance of creating international opportunities for our students and exposing them to new and more diverse ways of thinking. These efforts will ensure a quality

experience for our students and help us attract the very best. In the past twelve months, we have made important strides in this area. Last fall, we held our first-ever Study Abroad fair on the campus. We have signed two new articulation agreements with study abroad providers. Two VCSU students spent this past summer in Honduras on a program coordinated by Spanish instructor Dina Petherbridge. We had another student study abroad last Spring in Italy, and another VCSU student will spend the Spring 2010 semester studying in France. A representative from the organization, International Studies Abroad, visited VCSU earlier this month, and as a result of her visit, there are now three additional VCSU students actively pursuing plans to study abroad next year. We have expanded our outreach and partnership building in China. This has led to our first ever student from China being enrolled this fall at VCSU. This past summer we hosted a group of 11 Chinese faculty on campus in conjunction with NDSU. Earlier this fall, the campus helped to host a group of 16 talented Chinese musicians with a near full-capacity concluding concert in Vangstad Auditorium filled with campus and community members. Next summer we will offer a three-week study abroad opportunity for VCSU students to study on a short-term basis in China. Without question, there is much to be gained by our students in enhancing their educational experience by immersing themselves in another culture. Again, we have much more work ahead of us as we work to broaden the international experiences of our students, but progress has clearly been made during the past twelve months.

A year ago, I noted that our campus must be mindful of its environmental impact and announced the formation of an Environmental Task Force. During the past year there have been some noteworthy advancements in this area of which we can be proud. University officials have worked with City officials, and we are now fully participating in the city's new recycling initiatives including the hosting of large recycling facilities in the Foss Hall west parking lot. In the next few weeks you will see recycling bins going up throughout the campus, in the classroom and office buildings, residence halls, athletic facilities, and so on. I encourage all of you to fully participate in this important initiative and use the bins to recycle office paper, plastic bottles, cardboard, newspapers, and other recyclables. Major improvements have also occurred within our campus cafeteria. Beginning this fall, Sodexo is now incorporating a trayless dining experience for our students. This means there are no more trays being used for any meals resulting in approximately 1,200 trays every single week that no longer need to be washed – further conserving energy and water, and reducing expenditures. This new dining approach can also reduce excess food waste by as much as 60%. Finally, last week, we began the formal process to conduct a comprehensive campus Master Plan. We will spend the next few months undertaking this effort under the direction of JLG Architects. This will provide us further insight into the space utilization across our physical facilities, and our architect is LEED certified – LEED is an acronym

for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. Through this process, we look forward to better understanding how we can most effectively and efficiently fulfill our role as an environmentally responsible campus.

A year ago, I also discussed the need for this campus to initiate a discussion outlining the role of technology at VCSU. My thanks to Joe Tykwinski, Lee Kruger, and Dan Clark for their efforts in leading these conversations during the last academic year. They met with a wide variety of groups across campus, and produced an excellent document summarizing what they heard during their conversations. Thanks to everyone across campus who participated in those discussions and provided your feedback and thoughts. Unfortunately, due to the flood, we were not able to finalize the conversations last spring. Therefore, I am pleased to announce another campus-wide forum will be held on this subject within the next couple of weeks. Watch your emails for further details on the date and location of this Forum on this topic which is so inextricably linked to education at VCSU.

The collective efforts of every single member of our campus community have created the solid foundation upon which we currently stand. VCSU is a special place comprised of dedicated people who are, in turn, dedicated to teaching, research, and service. We will Explore, we will Reach, and we will Achieve together. Our work is certainly not done, but we are well on our way, and the path is becoming more defined everyday. My personal word of Thanks to everyone in this room and throughout the entire VCSU Family for everything you do and all of the efforts you put forth in your dedication and service to our University. It truly is a great time in our history to be a VCSU Viking! Thank you all – have a great week, have a wonderful rest of the fall semester, and have a terrific 2009-10 academic year!