

Dean's Opening Day Talk
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Good morning! It's my pleasure to welcome you to the College's Opening Day meeting for the 2007-08 academic year—a year that promises to be full of exciting changes under the leadership of our new provost, Dr. Shirley Baugher. Shirley brings outstanding experience in leadership and higher education to BGSU as well as candor, decisiveness, and a sharp sense of humor. I look forward to working with her as we address challenges and strive to seize opportunities.

Rituals are important. They bring us together with others whose values and purpose we share, giving us the opportunity to reaffirm common commitments and celebrate recent successes. When I first attended Opening Day in 1994, I found it to be a remarkable ritual—unlike anything I had seen at the four other universities where I had been a faculty member. People came together, met new colleagues, caught up with those they had not seen over the summer, and considered University, college, and department priorities. In keeping the spirit of Opening Day, I hope you have the opportunity to meet some of the new colleagues who are joining us and reconnect with old colleagues, especially at the lunch that follows our meeting. I also hope my brief remarks—and the opportunity for questions following them—will give you a sense of where we stand as a College and where we are headed.

Recognizing the winner of the Distinguished Instructor/ Lecturer Award—established in 2004—has become an important part of our Opening Day activities. We have a remarkable group of instructors and lecturers in the College who contribute so much to the mission of their departments and the College. This award was created to recognize their contributions. Every year the competition is keen and selecting the winner is a difficult task for the committee (which this year included Lee Nickoson-Massey, Jeannie Ludlow, Andy Schocket, and Jeff Snyder). After screening application materials, visiting classes, and deliberating among themselves, the committee selected Amy Ryback from our outstanding General Studies Writing Program as the winner. Amy, would you please come forward to accept this award, which consists of \$1,001 (for the 1001 things instructors and lecturers do for their students and colleagues) and a plaque commemorating your accomplishments. You will also receive a \$500 professional development fund. The committee was impressed with your commitment to students, your ability to challenge them while providing support and encouragement, and your success in helping them grow as writers. Thanks, Amy, for your skill and dedication to our students.

As we begin the 2007-08 academic year, we have many accomplishments—individual and collective—to celebrate. I wish I could mention all of them, but time constraints make that impossible. So I will limit myself to representative examples.

I'm especially proud of the innovative approaches to teaching and learning that continue to flourish in the College, helping make BGSU a good place for students to learn and grow. A & S faculty are truly taking the lead in making BGSU a premier learning community. To cite just a few examples:

- Yesterday, the first students moved into Global Village, our newest residential learning community. Composed of equal numbers of international and U.S. students, Global Village offers a unique intercultural living and learning environment that also contributes to one of BGSU's signature strengths—learning communities.

- BGSU faculty continue to create more service learning classes, providing opportunities for students to learn experientially even as they give back to the community. Chapman Learning Community has made service learning central to its curriculum; Simon Morgan-Russell and Peter Kuebeck have developed a course that helps recipients of the Bookstore Engagement Scholarship place their community service projects in a larger social and political context; and Jane Rosser, BGSU's director of Service Learning, is leading a faculty learning community whose members will work together to develop new service learning courses.

- BG Experience continues to mature and gain national recognition. In a major report that charts the course for preparing 21st century graduates to compete in a global economy, the American Association of Colleges & Universities cited BGeX as one of 16 programs nationwide that exemplify promising new approaches to preparing students for life in a rapidly changing world. BGSU was also one of eighteen institutions selected to participate in the AAC&U's Core Commitments initiative, which is designed to promote education for social and personal responsibility. The Core Commitments grant is helping us extend beyond the first year the focus on critical thinking about values begun in BGeX.

- Under the leadership of Jodi Haney, we are well along with development of a new doctoral program in learning science with a focus on science and mathematics education. This innovative new program will prepare future faculty to conduct research on how students learn mathematics and science and use these findings to create more effective pedagogies.

Inquiry, discovery, and creation of new knowledge are central to the mission of the College. Not only are they valuable in themselves, they inform our work with students, contribute to the well-being of our society, and provide the intellectual spark that makes universities incubators for ideas that can change the world and the way we understand it. If the research and creative accomplishments of A & S faculty during the past year are an indication—and I believe they are the *best* indication—we are a place that increasingly encourages and nurtures inquiry, discovery, and creativity. Let me cite just a few examples:

- Peggy Giordano, along with students and colleagues in the Center for Family and Demographic Research continue to ask big questions about children and families and provide important answers. Last September, their surprising findings were featured in a story on the romantic relationships of teenage boys in *Time*, and Peggy was interviewed about her work on *Good Morning America*!

- During the past year, Pavel Anzenbacher and Phil Castellano, members of the Center for Photochemical Sciences, attracted approximately \$4 million in external funding to support their research on solar conversion and photovoltaics—critical issues to the future of our planet.

- Peter Lu, whom we welcomed last year as our new Eminent Scholar in Chemistry, has not only played a critical role in developing a research cluster in biophotonics, but has secured approximately \$750,000 in federal support for his research on development of high tech bio-materials and new solar energy conversion systems.

- Laura Dilley, a member of the J.P. Scott Center for Neuroscience, Mind, and Behavior who holds a joint appointment in Communication Disorders and Psychology, has received

\$675,000 in NIH funding to support her work on speech development in infants with hearing impairments.

- Vern Bingman’s animal behavior research has not only attracted significant external support but is contributing to discussions about managing sleep deprivation in humans. He was quoted extensively on this subject in an article that appeared recently in *National Wildlife*.

- Humanities faculty have received several prestigious external awards to support their research and creative work. David Shoemaker and Steve Wall of Philosophy are recipients of fellowships from the Murphy Institute of Political Economy at Tulane University, while Theresa Williams of English has been granted an Ohio Arts Council Individual Excellence Award and Leigh Ann Wheeler of American Culture Studies and History a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship.

- A & S faculty also contributed to the world of ideas through publication of a veritable bookshelf of titles during the past year. These include a new collection of poetry by Larissa Szporluk, *Embryos and Idiots*; Carlo Celli’s *New Guide to Italian Cinema*, published by Palgrave Macmillan; a four volume reference collection on author, critic, and literary historian C.S. Lewis edited by Bruce Edwards; Fred Miller’s *A History of Philosophy of Law from the Greeks to the Scholastics*; Julie Barnes and Laura Leventhal’s *Usability Engineering* published by Prentice Hall; and Ken Pargament’s *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy*. There’s more, including Louisa Ha’s pioneering analysis of webcasting; Oliver Boyd-Barrett’s collection of essays *Communications, Media, Globalization, and Empire*; Andy Schocket’s *Founding Corporate Power in Early Philadelphia*; and Ken Kiple’s latest, *A Moveable Feast: Ten Millennia of Food Globalization*, which *The Economist* called “a fascinating tale.”

- The arts as well as the sciences are alive. Angel Vasquez, of our Department of Theatre and Film, has won kudos for his film, *Colma: The Musical*. The film has been screened in San Francisco and New York and will be shown in theatres in Houston, Los Angeles, and Portland and distributed to home viewers through Netflix. The *New York Times* called it “an itty-bitty film with a great big heart” that shows “how we learn to give voice—joyfully, honestly, loudly—to the truest parts of ourselves.”

- Three undergraduate students in our Digital Art program—Jim Levasseur, Tomas Jech, and Jacob Gardner—won first prize in the FJORG! Viking Animator Competition at SIGGRAPH 2007 in San Diego for their animation, “Switch.” The judges were directors and animators from PIXAR, SONY Imageworks, Industrial Light and Magic, and other studios. I’m told that after they received their awards our students were whisked off to dinner with industry movers and shakers in a stretch limousine. I know that their faculty mentors, Bonnie Mitchell and Dena Eber, are quite proud of their accomplishment.

While much of our intellectual product takes the form of basic research and creative work, A & S faculty and students are also deeply engaged with the larger community and use their academic expertise to meet critical community needs, working closely with a variety of community partners:

- Terry Rentner has received \$300,000 from the U.S. Department of Education to support her collaborative work with BGSU’s Student Health Service to develop effective interventions to reduce binge drinking.

- Water may be the critical issue of this century, and BGSU researchers are addressing issues of water quality in our region. Supported by major funding from the U.S. Department of

Agriculture, Bob Vincent continues his pioneering work on the effects of applying sewage sludge as fertilizer on the health of our rivers and lakes; Geology graduate student Ryan Dickerson has developed a model that may help mitigate the effects of large confined animal feeding operations on groundwater in the region; and freshmen in Bob Midden's Journeys into Science course continue their collaboration with the Department of Public Health to assess the effect of capped oil wells on water quality in Wood County.

- With their sights focused on environmental issues a bit further away from home, Catherine Cassara and Laura Lengel are pursuing collaborative work on environmental journalism with colleagues in North Africa that builds on several grants they have received from the U.S. Department of State.

A & S colleagues continue to win national and international recognition for their teaching, research, and creative work, a reminder that we are making an impact in our disciplines on a national and international level:

- Kris Blair, Chair of the Department of English, received the 2007 Technology Innovator Award from the Conference on College Composition and Communication for her leadership in using computers to advance writing pedagogy.

- Ron Shields, Chair of the Department of Theatre and Film, received the National Communication Association's Irene Coger Award for Distinguished Performance for his career achievements in directing and performance studies.

- Timothy Pogacar, Chair of the Department of German, Russian, East Asian Languages, has been elected President of the Society of Slovene Studies.

- Cornell University's Program on Ethics and Public Life conferred its 2007 Young Scholar Award on Jeff Moriarity of the Department of the Philosophy.

- Louisa Ha of the Department of Telecommunications received the Robert Picard award for significant contributions to media economics from the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication.

- Melissa Spirek will be a keynote speaker at the dedication of Letterman Hall, the new home of Ball State University's College of Communications, named for the comedian. In addition of a talk on future directions of the communication field, she will provide the "top ten" reasons the Letterman Building will lead multi-media higher education.

- A bit closer to home, Necoles Leontis and Susan Brown received the University's highest recognitions for research—the Olscamp Research Prize and the Outstanding Young Scholar Award.

While this list of accomplishments is long, it is far from inclusive. Although incomplete, it suggests that the College is blessed with talented, energetic faculty and students who are passionate about their work and who make extraordinary contributions to student learning, scholarship, our community, and our world.

Even as we celebrate our accomplishments, we must prepare for the significant challenges we face as the new year begins. Perhaps our most immediate challenge is enrollment. After almost a decade of robust growth, we will have fewer first-year students this fall. Why? Reduced scholarship assistance, greater willingness of competitors to discount tuition, and changing demographic trends. We have also fallen short of our goals for first-to-second year

retention. Last year, first-to-second year retention dipped. Indications are that the persistence rate will increase slightly this fall but won't reach the recent high point of 79% achieved in 2005. While we outperform most of our peers in this area, first to second year retention is an important indication of student success and, of course, affects overall enrollment.

The College of Arts & Sciences has been attentive to enrollment issues and, in fact, has contributed significantly to the enrollment growth BGSU has enjoyed in the past decade. A & S majors have increased by 12% since 2000, even though we implemented an enrollment management plan that reduced the number of students in our largest and fastest growing unit—the School of Art—by over 150. The number of first-year students choosing A & S has grown steadily in recent years. And while the College will have a smaller first-year class this fall than we did a year ago, we will see a decline of only 30 from last year. The aggressive efforts the College has made to increase retention also appear to be paying off, although we won't know for sure for several weeks, when the 15-day census is completed.

Enrollment issues are vitally important, and in the coming year we must give them greater attention. We are an enrollment driven institution, and smaller enrollments have immediate financial consequences. Indeed, it appears that the University will confront a \$3 million budget shortfall this fall. While the details are as yet unknown, this will almost certainly affect our ability to hire new faculty. Beyond financial considerations, the robust enrollment we have enjoyed in recent years is also an indication of our success in becoming the school of first choice for more students—something that is essential if we are to remain competitive.

Because enrollment is so vital, the University will be redoubling its efforts in recruitment and retention, and the College of Arts & Sciences must take the lead in this effort. The College has an outstanding faculty and a range of very strong academic programs that help students prepare for life and work in a rapidly changing world. We have a great deal to offer students and are well positioned to help the University attract talented students. The College will build on past efforts and become even more active in recruiting students, especially in math and the sciences—areas of high priority for the state—as well as in traditional liberal arts areas where we have the capacity to serve additional students.

A & S faculty are great ambassadors for BGSU. I appreciate the work you do in showcasing your programs at our fall Preview Days and our President's Day open house and in working with students and their parents one-on-one when they visit campus or make inquiries through e-mail. I also appreciate the time you spend representing your programs as judges at State Science Day, participating in our Women in Science program, reviewing student work in the School of Art's Portfolio Review, interacting with aspiring journalists and their teachers at the GLIPA workshops, and creating residential learning communities that are attractive to many students and have become such an important part of our institutional identity.

During the coming year, we must develop new approaches that will help us become even more effective in showcasing our programs to prospective students and their parents. I will be discussing enrollment strategies with chairs, Arts & Sciences Council, and faculty colleagues to develop new approaches to collaborating with the Admissions Office to assure that we get the message out to students about the strength of our programs. As we do so, be assured that I will

be respectful of your time and commitments. I am aware that your principal responsibilities are teaching, research, creative work, and making our academic programs strong. But recruitment is everyone's job.

Recruitment is one part of the enrollment equation; retention is the other. To maintain strong enrollment, we must help students succeed so they return for their sophomore year and proceed to timely graduation. Here again faculty play a crucial role because students' academic performance is the key factor in their persistence. Surveys consistently reveal that students give BGSU faculty high marks for their accessibility and concern for student welfare. That, of course, reflects well on you because A & S faculty teach 60% of the undergraduate student credit hours at BGSU and an even higher proportion of the courses taken by first-year students. Our outstanding writing instructors reach every first-year student and provide a good deal of personal attention while maintaining high academic standards. A & S faculty teach most of the BGeXperience courses, where they help create a supportive environment for students while challenging them and helping them develop key academic competencies that are crucial to academic success. As a group, you have also shown yourselves open to new approaches to teaching that engage students and promote learning as well as to becoming involved with students outside the classroom—through sponsoring research projects and working with student organizations.

You do a lot already, and I thank you for your commitment to students. As the new academic year begins, I ask you to pay special attention to students who are not attending class, are attending but seem disengaged, or who seem to be experiencing academic difficulty. Take the time to find out what the trouble may be, alert the advising staff in the College, help the student get assistance—whether it be from the writer's center, the math lab, their adviser or the counseling center. And do it as soon as possible; the earlier students get help, the better their chances for success. As a public university with a long tradition of making higher education accessible to first-generation college students, it's our responsibility to help students succeed. And if we do all we can to help students be successful, retention will improve. The student services staff in the College office will do its part in this effort, but faculty play a critical role because you are with students day-in and day-out and have a unique vantage point from which to assess student progress and help those experiencing difficulty get on track.

Like most universities across the nation, we also face financial challenges. While we constantly strive to achieve greater efficiency, the simple fact is that high quality academic programs are expensive. And as you all know, state support for public universities has declined during the past quarter century. In 2007, state leaders reversed the long decline in state support in an effort to make higher education stronger and more affordable. While we all appreciate their commitment, one budget year cannot reverse decades of neglect.

Even if the trend of greater state support continues, we will only be able to achieve excellence if we continue to seek and generate external support for our students, faculty and programs. The College is doing more than its share in this regard. External funding for research increased by about 15% last year, continuing a long-term trend that has seen external funding for the college grow almost three-fold since 2000. I am especially proud of the work done by faculty in Photochemical Sciences during the past several years, increasing external support from

around \$1 million per year to more than \$4 million last year. Mike Ogawa and his colleagues are to be congratulated for their success in building an outstanding research environment in the face of severe space limitations. Many other units also contribute to our success in generating the external funding that is essential to support high quality research, especially the Center for Family and Demographic Research, the J.P. Scott Center for Neuroscience, and the new School of Earth, Environment, and Society. I'd like to thank our faculty for their efforts to increase research productivity and funding and encourage each of you to set the bar even higher in the coming year. I pledge to continue to work with Heinz Bulmahn, the Vice Provost for Research, to facilitate your efforts in any way I can.

In addition to success in generating external research support, the College has increased private giving through its vigorous participation in the Building Dreams campaign, which is closing in on its \$120 million goal—seventeen months before it is scheduled to conclude. The College set a very ambitious goal of \$26 million, and we are well on our way to achieving it. The campaign has significantly increased endowed scholarships for students, enhanced support for students, faculty, and programs, and helped us bring a new performing arts facility—the Wolfe Center for the Arts—closer to reality. By getting alumni more engaged with the University, the campaign has already realized incalculable benefits for our students and academic programs. The College has benefited in innumerable ways from the commitment and involvement of our Advocates Boards. In addition, attorney alumni are helping us build a unique pre-law program; journalism and telecommunications alumni offer valuable guidance to faculty and students in those programs; geology alumni continue to assist students in many ways (including assistance in acquiring expensive state-of-the-art software); and alumni and friends enrich the School of Art in a variety of ways through their involvement in Medici Circle.

Facilities also remain a challenge—one that we have worked hard with Capital Planning, Facilities, the Provost, and the Development Office to address. The good news is that a number of projects are moving along nicely. We have recruited an exciting architectural firm from Oslo, Norway—Snohetta—to design to Wolfe Center; schematic design will conclude in the next month and construction should start next summer or fall. We are also ready to launch work on a new environmental studies teaching lab as well as renovations of lab space for new faculty, Williams Hall, and the Fine Arts Building. We are making progress, but we have a long way to go. We need additional research space, new teaching labs in the sciences, space to house the operations of our newest school—Earth Environment and Society—and renovation of dilapidated spaces in University, Hanna, and Mosley Halls and in the School of Art. I pledge to continue to remain attentive to these matters and to work with you to address both short-term and long-term needs.

A final challenge during the coming year is to identify our place in the University System of Ohio, recently announced by Governor Strickland and Chancellor Fingerhut. While details are unclear, the intention is to create greater differentiation among universities by requiring us to identify and focus on our strengths. BGSU is, I believe, well positioned to meet this challenge. We have long identified areas of excellence in graduate education through developing focused or niche doctoral programs, in research by making targeted investments through the Research Enhancement Initiative, in the arts and math/science education through collaboration that crosses the boundaries of departments and colleges, and in undergraduate education through a range of

signature programs—notably residential learning communities and BG Experience—that combine the benefits of a small liberal arts college with the advantages of a major university. This new initiative from Columbus will, of course, compel us to look really hard at what we do and make some difficult choices. It also offers us the opportunity to develop sharper identity, accentuate our strengths, invest more wisely, strengthen recruitment of students and faculty, and build on some of the remarkable accomplishments we have achieved in the past decade.

I am optimistic about our future. We confront our share of challenges, but we face these from a position of real strength. We have made tough choices, invested strategically, recruited outstanding faculty, are blessed with a dedicated staff, and every year we get a fresh infusion of bright, eager students. As a result, I am confident we will meet the challenges and, in the process, become an even better place for students to learn and all of us to do our work.