

**Fall Faculty Meeting
Lang Hall Auditorium
Monday, September 19, 2016, 3:00-5:00 pm
“Leaning into our Future: The Thriving of the University of Northern Iowa”**

Good afternoon. Thank you, Faculty Chair Kidd, for the opportunity to address the faculty. It is a delight to return to campus after a week’s journey out west to Yellowstone National Park.

When Sasha and I drove into the park one week ago today, big fat snowflakes greeted us, nearly causing a white out. We were delighted. We thought for certain that the weather would chase all the tourists out of the park.

But Yellowstone is a destination of a lifetime. Indeed, we had been planning this trip for almost a year and a half, soon after we knew we would be moving to Iowa. While we thought we might experience some isolation, we were surrounded in our campsite by RVs and at every turn-out by tour buses.

Yellowstone is the nation’s first national park, established in 1872 through an incredible shared vision that recognized the inherent value of this wild landscape to future generations. In wild places such as this we are returned to ourselves, to our essence. We remember who we are and, most importantly, we remember that we are attached to something bigger, something much grander and more glorious than our everyday lives and everyday selves.

In the 1990s, wolves were reintroduced to Yellowstone as a missing element of a fully intact ecosystem, a pinnacle predator essential to a thriving community. We hoped, during our time in the park, that we would see the wolves.

As I experienced the communal vision that led to the vast conservation of land that became the national park system and to the eventual reintroduction of wolves that made the landscape whole, I was reminded of the University of Northern Iowa. This year, we mark our 140th anniversary. We, too, have a rich and varied history that offers us a future filled with possibility.

I wondered, will folks in 20 years, 30 years, 50 years look back at this time and say that we were courageous and bold, that we engaged this moment with a sense of urgency and

responsibility, that we laid the foundation for the thriving of this great university into the future?

At a time when higher education is under inordinate pressure, when our value is called into question at the national level, when the funding mechanism of the state may not favor a regional comprehensive university, will we choose to come together as a community and lean into a future that builds on our great past to forge the thriving of faculty, staff, students, and the greater Cedar Valley for many years to come?

In the last year, we have begun to answer this question affirmatively, creating momentum for this future.

- AMP: Through the collaborative and inclusive process of creating the Academic Master Plan, we developed a shared vision for a liberal arts education founded on engaged learning that is intentional and developmental that prepares our students not only as professionals but as civic agents who understand their responsibility to community.
- TESI: We have generated bold initiatives to further elevate Teacher Education. I have been impressed with the level of engagement and commitment with which this endeavor has been undertaken. Vickie Robinson, in her new role as Associate Vice President for Educator Preparation, will take over leadership of this initiative.
- BUDGET: In the last year, we developed avenues for sharing our budget and allocating funding, tied to our Vision, which allows us to make strategic investments in our future. I am happy to say that we will have a balanced budget in FY 2017 on base budget funding, that is, without using one time funds, the first time we have done so since 2008.
- DIVERSITY: We responded to an important rupture in our community around issues of race and diversity through deep listening and honest reckoning. We empowered the Diversity Advisory Committee to develop a transformative Diversity Action Plan and hired UNI's first Chief Diversity Officer.

And we have work in the year before us that will continue our momentum.

- UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLAN: Completing the University Strategic Plan will allow us to further focus our efforts and align our community towards a common vision. I deeply appreciate the rich participation in the process for creating our new strategic plan and the time that the Steering Committee has given to this endeavor.
- QIP: Successfully implementing our Quality Initiative Project will further elevate Community Engagement as a signature value of our community. I am hopeful that we will have conversations about the way in which community engaged scholarship and service learning courses can enrich our campus.
- VPSA: We will complete a search for the next Vice President for Student Affairs who will continue to build bridges across divisions to advance student success.

As I have had the opportunity to share our story over the last few months with alumni and friends and donors; as I've had meetings with staff in the Governor's office; as we have met with legislative staff on our campus—we invited 10 staffers to join us for a campus visit during the summer; as I've talked to business and community leaders; and as I've met with and talked to our Regents, what I have found is profound support for this vision and for the work of the faculty and staff at the University of Northern Iowa. This vision resonates with folks; the excitement and enthusiasm for our deep engagement with students is palpable; the support is authentic and sincere.

Yes, we are already answering the question of our time. Working collaboratively and inclusively, we are leaning into our future, and creating possibility.

Yet there is more work to do, work that is essential to the thriving of our students and of our community. There are two challenges before us that will make our own ecosystem whole, like the reintroduction of wolves in Yellowstone.

First, in preparation for our Higher Learning commission reaccreditation, we must develop university-wide student learning outcomes to be delivered—and assessed for the purposes of continuous improvement—in our Liberal Arts Core and all of our degree programs. This is essential work of the faculty that we must make certain is meaningful, providing us an

honest reflection of what our students are learning, and sustainable, so that it is integrated into our curriculum.

Second, in preparation for the continued challenges facing us as an institution of higher education, we have the opportunity to develop a system of shared governance that creates synergies across the voices of faculty, staff, and students as we come together to chart our path into the future.

We have great knowledge and wisdom in our senior faculty and staff who have had opportunities for leadership and professional development and who have served and are serving in important leadership roles. We must find ways to honor our elders; several emeritus and senior faculty have discussed this idea with me, though I must admit I have not found time to bring it to life.

We must also provide the same opportunities that our senior faculty have had to our junior faculty who have brought to campus new ideas, new energy, and a deep commitment to building a robust learning community.

If we can create a system that engages the wisdom of our elders and the innovation of our junior faculty, our ecosystem will be made whole and we will ensure the deep thriving of the University of Northern Iowa into the future. In building a model of shared governance on our campus, I am hopeful that we can elevate our culture of care as a central value of who we are and how we operate.

You have heard the Native American concept of the Seventh Generation. One common understanding of this concept is that these nations made decisions with seven generations hence in mind. But I heard another understanding from a Native American elder who explained to me that the seven generations include the three generations immediately preceding our time and the three generations to come.

If we can respond to these two challenges—the creation of student learning outcomes and of a shared system of governance—giving voice to our rich past at the same time that we acknowledge the way in which our work impacts future generations, we will, I firmly believe, offer a national model of what students should learn to have rich and fulfilling lives and how an

institution of higher education can work together as a community to create the opportunities for that learning to happen.

As we integrate ourselves into the national conversation about higher education, we will come to recognize that we are part of something bigger, something grander. With the opportunity before us comes great responsibility not only for the lives of our students, but for their families, their communities, and indeed for the thriving of higher education itself.

Theodore Roosevelt and the community of conservationists of his time were known for their vision and leadership. After Roosevelt had, through consultation with this community and through presidential order, saved tens of millions of acres of land, members of his own party who controlled Congress and were beholden to corporate interests sought to end his ability to preserve more land. They attached a rider to an agriculture bill that they knew he had to sign. The rider stated that land preservation had to be approved by Congress. He had one week to sign the bill.

In that week, working with his community, he preserved another 16 million acres. They saw into the future, understanding the essential link between the landscape of this great nation and our thriving democracy. Their foresight was clear. Their vision was bold.

That vision lives on and eventually led to the courageous reintroduction of wolves that now run in seventeen packs with names such as the Chief Joseph Pack, Hellroaring Creek Pack, and Gibbon Meadows Pack.

During one of our evenings in Yellowstone, Sasha and I stood in the Lamar Valley, hoping to see the wolves. Friends had seen them in this same spot two weeks prior. The sky cleared while we stood in the calm evening, waiting. The sun descended toward the distant mountains. The shadows lengthened. Inside, our spirits quieted and grew peaceful. Held deeply by a thriving landscape, one of the largest fully intact ecosystems in the United States, we were brought back to ourselves.

While we did not see wolves that evening, we knew they were there, several hundred of them running wild across the landscape.

Thank you for coming. Thank you for listening. And, most importantly, thank you for believing.