**A Commitment to Learning and Service**

**After all that, my family is clearly wondering who they are talking about.**

Presidential Inaugurations are (hopefully) relatively rare events that give Universities an opportunity to engage a campus and a community in a celebration of the possibilities ripe for any institution whose core business is that of learning.

I begin with thanks to Chancellor Davis, Dr. Herbst, Regent Potts, Regent Jenkins, and other Regents for their faith in me and our colleagues. I am grateful to former Regent Allan Vigil, whose support both as a board member and as a leader in this community, was, and is, remarkable. The University System has given me an exceptional range of leadership opportunities, and those opportunities helped me learn in ways that will hopefully influence positively the learning of thousands of others. While serving as Acting President at the University of West Georgia, Regent Potts traveled with me to visit one citizen who had objected to a theatrical performance on the West Georgia campus. Regent Potts’ support of not only the right to academic expression, but his defense of that expression in the context of deep American values worth fighting for, will be long appreciated by me.

The inauguration committee made this event possible, and their work merits special recognition here. Would the committee please stand? General Steve Stephens chairs the committee, and brought to that position some experience with planning inaugurations: the 1992 Clinton Inauguration, in addition to this one. Once again, Steve and his committee deserve much credit.

I am humbled and honored to be officially installed as the 4th president of Clayton State University. There are paths that have been created here both literally and metaphorically on what is one of Georgia’s most beautiful campuses—made so by literally generations of facilities staff who would accept no less. Those paths lead both around the lake and through the woods and to the future of our students and our community. New paths have been created as times have changed, and I too hope to help provide support for clearing those paths to the future.

Clearly, the standards have been set exceptionally high by those who have earlier led this institution—Dr. Harry Downs was founding president, served 25 years (in addition to serving time as interim chancellor) and was foundational in bringing Spivey Hall and the dreams and visions of Walter and Emily Spivey to our campus. Dr. Richard Skinner had a vision of how technology—at that time lap top computers—could transform learning. Dr. Skinner began, and Interim President Mike Vollmer and President Thomas Hardin helped complete a number of projects, not the least of which was the connection between learning at Clayton State and the national and State Archives at our front door. And of course Dr. Hardin oversaw a dramatic increase in the size of academic offerings, and the beginning of the residential component for Clayton State.

We are who we are because of those who influenced our views of the world—and so I begin with statements of appreciation. First let me express my appreciation to my family—especially my mother and father. My mother is here today. Thomas Friedman recently described some of our current economic challenges as addressable by the values of the greatest generation—my parents generation-- values that were at the heart of our household: “…a willingness to postpone gratification, invest for the future, work harder than the next guy, and hold their kids to the highest expectations.” And for raising me and my siblings in that context with tough love, I say thanks. My sister Mary Claire and my brother Paul (and their spouses) have come from Boston and Lyman Wyoming, respectively, and are extraordinary people, having recovered from the tragic role model provided by their older brother—they are teacher and retired miner, parents of great children; and their support and love I cherish. And of course thanks to my son Patrick, an exceptional human being whom I would respect and admire even if he were not my son—even if hour long arguments about whether Thomas Friedman had anything unique to say about international economic conditions are illustrative of Patrick’s concept of fun. And thanks to his mother Sandy and her husband Pat for giving our son more support than any of us could provide alone.

For academics, we often spend as much time with our colleagues as we do with families—and I am grateful to my colleagues at Baylor, the University of Louisville, The University of West Georgia, and of course here, at Clayton State University. Several Louisville and West Georgia Colleagues are here today, and I thank them for checking to see if I am really gone. And as a former debate coach, I benefited from a group of exceptionally smart and energetic former students and colleagues from across America—many of whom now find themselves in positions of national leadership in political and economic venues. Their friendships framed my perspectives on ideas. And thanks to my many community colleagues from Clayton and Carroll and Henry and Fayette counties. They have opened themselves to us in ways that have proven how much can be accomplished when universities and communities share the responsibilities for making our communities better each day. From all of them that I was able to frame what will be shared with colleagues here—commitments to transparency of information and assumptions from which to derive decisions, arrived at from shared efforts; commitments to frame conclusions on the best evidence we can find within the time allotted for decision; and a presumption of the value of collaboration—that even where there are disagreements, presuming we have grounds for agreements allows people to focus precious time on those areas in which true disagreement appears. And they have reinforced my own value for humor—mostly at my expense, and not at the expense of others, and clearly with an eye for taking tasks seriously, but me, not so much.

On campuses, I had the chance to observe great university presidents even if I did not know at the time I was ever to join their ranks. To single out one President, Beheruz Sethna put up with me for nearly 14 years. If one looks up energetic in the Oxford English Dictionary (on line now of course) there is a picture of Beheruz Sethna. From him I did not learn to send midnight e-mails—I already did that, and that would be early for Beheruz. No, from him I took a determination to set the highest of ethical standards, and a trust in the key values of the academy, and a reinforcement of the value of hard work in advance of the university for which one is privileged to serve. He also sees nothing contradictory between a near manic commitment to logic and its power, and an abiding faith in the better parts of others, and core values of academic freedom. To each of them I say thanks.

I also give **thanks to those bringing greetings, faculty, staff, students, (for the students, they have accepted to advise found in the Dead Poets Society—“Carpe Diem—seize the day—make your lives extraordinary” and look to us to help them accomplish those dreams). I give thanks to members of the general assembly, other elected officials from around Clayton County.**  **I am especially members of the foundation board, who have helped construct Laker Hall and the Student Activities Center, but will also help us establish the foundations for planned facilities over the next three decades that reflect needs to meet demographic and educational changes in our service area. Finally thanks running partners over the years—Patrick when he amuses me by running very slowly—Ron Atlas, Tom Sawyer, Chad Davidson, Micheal Crafton, Barb Wilson, Wendy Goodwin, the late Jim Mathis—best conversations happen on the road where lack of oxygen induces candor, but absence of substances except Gatorade induces recollection.**

We enter interesting times in higher education, in economic, social, political, technological, and almost all other conditions facing us today. I was taken by a recent Educause essay by a technology officer, Ron Kraemer from Wisconsin. He reported an exchange with a colleague beginning with “how are things going?” “I don’t know,” the colleague replied. “Lately I have been sensing a serious disturbance in the force.” To which Dr. Kraemer replied, “Also sensed this disturbance in the force, I have.” And many sense this disturbance. I must confess that there are many days in which we want to express our solutions in terms voiced by the character and great American Philosopher Blanche Dubois in “A Streetcar Named Desire:” “I don’t want realism,” Blanche proclaimed. “I want magic.” And while there are certainly magical elements associated with the transformational quality of higher education, each of us in our own way must wrestle with the realities facing higher education and our ability to sustain those transformation qualities under conditions of realism.

And so in anticipation of the completion of a strategic plan and a facilities master plan and their implementation plans in the coming months, I advanced three general premises which we believe will guide Clayton State—deriving them from internal surveys, extensive conversations, and a good deal of listening. First, we are of the business of educating citizens. There are at least three elements that are associated with that business. The first is obvious—we create the conditions for learning that prepare students to succeed in the economic environment in which they will live. And we must be driven to help them succeed. Clayton Junior College 40 year ago provided a foundation for later learning and technical skills of the 20th century. So too will the combination of liberal arts education, professional preparation programs, and applied knowledge and skills of Clayton State University Undergraduate and graduate programs prepare students for a 21st century economy. We will continue to review our current academic offerings. We will hold ourselves to standards of assessment that we will discuss later. And we will make changes in both current and future programs based on the consistency of such programs with our mission and plans, and on the demonstrated abilities of students to show what they know, what they can do, and what perspectives they can take based on that knowledge and ability. We must invest in those programs that will allow us to create opportunities for excellence in selective academic programs meeting regional and select state wide educational needs. NSSE indicates that our students already believe that they learn in an environment in which help is available for their academic success. We must continue to be more systematic in identifying early students in need of assistance, and bring students to that assistance earlier rather than later. We must bring students to career planning earlier rather than later, and help support their ability to accept shared responsibility for their success. We must build on traditions for future success, and make certain that admission is only the first step to graduation and student success.

But we will also be obliged to help students frame those perspectives—what is often framed as diversity. Here, however, we must continue along the course already set at Clayton State, in this second element of educating citizens, citizens must be prepared for a diverse future. Lee Pelton of Emerson College recently observed that “…diversity is not an add-on, but really is core to the academic mission of institutions that thrive on having diverse points of view, divergent backgrounds, and different ethnic heritages coming together.” **James Magazine** recently noted that Clayton State University is “proof that ethnic diversity and scholastic achievement can make for a happy marriage in the modern South.” And yet we must continue to deepen and enrich that diversity to include student connections to international experiences, connections across not only race, but class, prior educational and geographical experiences, and ethnicity. It must include living and working with a diversity of people. Importantly, that diversity must include exposure to a wide range of political and social experiences. And thus our third obligation in educating citizens is to provide students a chance to engage in a broader community as a part of their learning. That engagement helps us foster a desire to contribute to the boarder community in ways that are available to our students—some of that will be limited by obligations students have to work and to care for dependants at home—NSSE data indicates that our students are far more likely to have to work and care for dependants than their counterparts regionally and nationally. Nonetheless our task is to help sow the seeds for future leadership, and cultivate desires in some of our students to grow into such leaders. We must explore immediately ways to have us included in the Carnegie Foundation Classification of Engaged Campus. In the end, we are in the business of educating citizens.

We move to the second general premise to guide us--Clayton State University must be in the business of developing and nurturing partnerships. We at Clayton State are seeking partners in 21st century learning. What we wish to accomplish here I hope will be considered epic—“Surpassing the usual or ordinary, particularly in scope or size” But as a participant in the Hood to Coast relay race observed, “ you can’t do epic by yourself.” For partnerships to be successful there must be true partnerships—defined in a Microsoft White Paper as a “collaborative, mutually beneficial venture between two or more partners in pursuit of jointly agreed upon goals, with a division of labor based on the contributions and expertise of each partner.” Here we share but a few examples of those partnerships, although we will be always seeking help in bringing us together with new partners. We want to be partners with our students in learning. We have an obligation to support our students, and the current evidence suggests that they believe that we are doing so. But we also believe that they must be part of this commitment to success—that students will seek help, take advantage of opportunities, prepare for learning or at least readily acknowledge those occasions in which they are not prepared. We want to establish partnerships across the campus—across departments and across divisions. We want to bring together all who share in the commitment to continuous learning, and create space for those partners to bring the diverse perspectives that students, faculty, staff administration, and community can take from that commitment—truly shared governance with shared acceptance of responsibility. We want to partner with k-12 schools in our region--schools, especially in are main service area of Clayton, Henry and Fayette Counties, but certainly others who will seek us out as potential partners. Consistent with the advice of Edwards Deming, we want to work with those who will soon be sharing their students with us, and determine if there are ways in which we can support them in their efforts to create student success. We wish to partner with business and civic leaders in our communities. We need to listen to their needs and determine what role if any we might have in meeting those needs. Whether it is accountants, or nurses, or supply chain professionals, or law enforcement professionals or psychologists or teachers or educated citizens capable of continuous learning in a technological age, we need partners who will continue to help us frame our degree and continuing education programs. From time to time we will need to seek out funding partners, in both the public and private sectors, who will help us provide facilities and other resources to help foster learning in our region. We believe that higher education is an investment, and our obligation to our partners will be to provide as strong a return on those investments as possible. But we will need to seek support from those partners to help us make those initial investments. The Board of Regents and their staff have long served as partners in helping us foster conditions for success, and helping us find ways to share knowledge and expertise available across 35 institutions, at the same time helping to maintain the unique contributions individual institutions can make based on their location, their resources, and their missions. We promise to seek and nurture partners in 21st century learning.

The third and final premise for Clayton State concerns adaptation to change and framing of choices. Change is inevitable. And this institution has changed in profound ways many times in our brief history. Ours is an institution that has adapted to change, and shown it can make choices about our future strategically. All organizations have long faced Kenneth Burke’s choices of permanence and change—trying best not to confuse activities with transcendent value with those we just don’t feel like changing, and learning the challenges of those choices. And yet the times find the importance of those choices greater than ever before. We are under increased obligation to give an accounting of our activities—whether that is of graduation rates for students we accept, learning success for those who continue and graduate, or some other standard by which others judge the academy. And we are prepared to meet those obligations. We live in an age in which activities of an organization are supported, not because that organization is needy, but because that organization is worthy of support. And we are prepared to demonstrate that worthiness again and again. Sometimes that demonstration will come from our faculty; sometimes from our students; sometimes from those around us who support our efforts—and trace that support back more than 40 years ago when the citizens of this community taxed themselves to bring higher education here to this campus—and later to centers in Henry and Fayette County. Clayton State is an institution that has had change as an essential feature of its activities through almost all of its existence—and thus we are better prepared than most to prosper under these conditions of change. And in some instances, the change may include taking activities we have already begun, but this time work to savagely implement and vigorously assess those activities. But change we must within the context of strategic thinking and 21st century learning.

These changing conditions will require that we reflect as an institution of how we can best address those demands—how do we make learning central, and yet explore new means of delivering educational services? How do we carefully assess the learning of our students, and adroitly act on those assessments to change how we support students, how we craft our educational programs, how we focus our research energies to better understanding how we can improve learning? How do we attract greater resources to help us serve those learning needs? How can we find ways to support financially our faculty and staff, whose skills and knowledge will be in demand as economic recovery finally comes our way? And how do we make choices among those needs, in the event that resources are not sufficient to provide all that we would wish to provide. And how do we create a scorecard, as it were, to help us tell ourselves and others about our progress as well as of areas where more work is needed. And in answer to those and many other questions, the commitment to learning, guided by conditions of transparency, evidence based decisions, and presumptions of collaboration among partners will be essential.

I have been blessed by a love of learning. It is clear that I will never be able to play second base for the Boston Red Sox. Nike will never pay me to run. That being the case, it is clear that I have found myself with the best job imaginable—well, I could imagine a bigger budget, but bracket that for later. For now, let me say that Clayton State University is a great place because it is positioned to be a difference maker—to students, to the community, to the state. We are stewards of place, to cite an essay from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. We both create and navigate paths that should bring people to new futures. And students believe that their work here makes a difference for them. And faculty and staff and administrators believe that they can make a difference in lives—and that shared belief in making differences is exactly what makes Clayton State such a great place to be. Thanks to each of you for giving us this chance.