

Northwestern

ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

State of the University Address

Interim President Richard Helldobler
February 23, 2017



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Good afternoon, Northeastern. Well, it's been a 150 days since I took office. In some respects, it seems like only yesterday; in others - Springfield - it seems like an eternity. But in any respect, it is an honor and a privilege to serve the University and our community in this role. Let me start off by thanking you for your support and for your confidence. I would also like to show my appreciation for the contribution to the life of the University as reflected in a variety of representative groups. As you are acknowledged, I ask that you please stand and that we hold our applause until all the groups are recognized.

The newly promoted and tenured faculty.

Recipients of the Bernard Brommel Research and the Audrey Reynolds Distinguished Teaching award, Dr. Emina Stojkovic and Dr. Ana Fraiman.

Excellence Awards recipients: Teaching professionals, instructors, and academic support professionals, employees who have earned excellence awards

Faculty who have earned sabbatical in educational leaves

The Human Resources office for managing payroll changes due to the Fair Labor Standards Act, the new electronic time-sheet processing, and electronic processing of FMLA

University Police for keeping our new residence hall occupants safe without any increase in positions

Congratulations to the Division of Institutional Advancement on meeting the 2016 goal of the Goodwin Gift Challenge a month early and on our way to the 2017 goal with more than \$127,000 raised since January 1st

To members of the community who have been working with Provost Roman-Lagunas on the Higher Learning Commission accreditation effort

And finally to the faculty and staff who serve our DACA students

You know, this list could go on and on. As I invited suggestions for appreciation today, I received lots of names, and in fact whole units, and for so many good reasons. In fact, in this difficult year, everyone has come together and worked hard and creatively. I ask that everyone, yes everyone, stand to be recognized and shake your neighbor's hand and say thank you. I want to thank all of you for your contributions.

You know in 2013, when I came to the University, I knew this was the place for me. I recognized immediately that the heart and spirit of Northeastern are special and different from those that characterize other colleges and universities. Northeastern's culture affirms the importance of higher education for a wide variety of students from traditional disciplines to new ones whether mathematics, entrepreneurship, or counselor education. And the University encourages brave, intellectual exploration led by talented and experienced faculty, and it is home to an incredibly diverse student body. So many of Northeastern's students will be the first in their families to earn a bachelor's degree when they graduate; for many of them, the quality of their lives and their earnings will exceed those of their parents after they graduate. This is the kind of opportunity that Northeastern provides, and it is in fact what the world needs.

When I first took on responsibility as Interim President last fall, it was important for me that I start my appointment with a clear list of objectives. In my previous role as Northeastern's Provost, I had the distinct privilege of working closely with the president emerita, vice presidents and members of the faculty and staff and had an intimate understanding of the challenges that we face as an institution. So, I was able to hit the ground running on October 1st. And in my first University Announcement, on October 3, I listed five goals for the University. And I want to touch briefly on each one of them and fill you in on what we have been able to accomplish.

Bolster student success initiatives. Our African-American Taskforce is up and running and continues to do good work. Through the recommendation of that task force, we have started a shuttle that is running from CCICS, El Centro, to the Brown stop, to the Main Campus. Dr. Sharon Bethea was appointed as special assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs for African-American Student Success.

Our HSI work continues under the direction of Dr. MT Garretton. A University-wide dialogue took place in the fall semester with approximately 150 participants. A panel will take place this semester on better collaborations of our student success program and an advisory board is in the works. We have piloted the StarFish software for student success, thanks to Barbara Sherry for leading that project. We've hired academic coaches to support the Wentworth Scholars Program, and we have a focused discussion on student success that is occurring with Forward 150.

Building academic programs. Our RN-to-BSN program is moving forward, thanks to Dr. Shayne Cofer for leading that search. The Master's in Public Health is moving forward, thanks to the good work of Dr. Jen Banas. The Masters in Social Work is starting accelerated cohort, thanks to Drs. Jade Stanley and Troy Harden for their leadership. A second cohort was added to the ENLACE program thanks to Dr. Frank Gaytan for his hard work in reviving that program. The State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board has granted approval for our middle grades,

undergraduate and graduate programs, thanks to Dr. Steve Wolk for working so hard on those changes. The BFA in Graphic Design begins, thanks to our great colleagues in art. The Doctorate in Linguistics is in the planning phase, thanks to Dr. Judith Kaplan-Weinger and Dr. Shahrzad Mahootian for their great work. Music department accreditation was reaffirmed with a commendation to the University for supporting the department during the fiscal crisis. Congratulations to Dr. Travis Heath and the department on that achievement. The MacTel program exceeded in enrollment expectations, thanks to Dr. Durene Wheeler and her excellent recruitment efforts.

Strengthen shared governance. The Faculty Senate, the University Planning and Budget Council, the Student Government Association and the University Advisory Council all co-sponsored Forward 150. They felt as I did that these crucial discussions needed to happen now and not after the budget crisis was over, and I thank every member of those committees for their leadership. We've increased regular meetings with the steering committee of the Faculty Senate. As you know, the Assembly Constitution requires that we meet once a semester; we are meeting once a month. I'd like to thank Dr. Erick Howenstine and members of the steering committee for their leadership on the Senate. We have done great work on the administrator survey task force and the proposed bylaws revisions are moving along quite nicely.

We have had trust-building workshops led by our own Dr. Sandy Williams for our leadership groups. I'd like to thank her for lending her expertise. We are working more closely with the Civil Service and A&P Council, thanks to Judy Brewer, Borislava Miltcheva and Rae Joyce Baguilat. Productive meetings with the UPI chapter president, thanks to Dr. Sophia Mihic for her leadership. I have regular meetings with the Student Government Association leadership and attend their meetings. I'd like to thank President Nick Martinez and all the officers on the Executive Board. And we held a town hall for A&P and non-negotiated Civil Service employees regarding our proposed salary-savings plan.

Share responsibility for success. We have regular press releases about faculty, staff and student success. We began Forward 150 to get community input about future directions of the university. We recognized faculty and student work at the research and creative symposia thanks to Dr. John Albazi for his many years of dedicated service. Learn and Lead was an effort to help faculty and staff succeed professionally, led by faculty and staff, thanks to Dr. April Nauman for her great work. Faculty and staff excellence awards, sabbatical and educational leaves are always in which we support our college - our colleagues and share our success.

And number five, complete our first capital campaign. The public launch for the capital campaign is planned with March and April events. As I mentioned earlier, we met the Goodwin Challenge 30 days ahead of schedule, and we're well on our way to meeting this year's goal with good prospects of achieving the goal earlier this year.

Enrollment. Now let me turn our attention to things that we care deeply about enrollment, which as you know is an important priority for the University as it plays a critical role in our growth and revenue. The state budget impasse has had a profound effect on our ability to recruit and retain students, both inside and outside of the Chicagoland area. Northeastern, like so many other public universities in the state, has suffered tremendous reputational and operational harm that we must work hard to overcome. Students who seek higher educational opportunities are increasingly looking outside the state to pursue their academic goals. Illinois ranks only second to New Jersey in the number of students we export annually. We lose approximately 16,000 college-going students to other states every year. While there are many political and economic forces that determine enrollment trends that we cannot control, I am very confident in our approach to managing the things we can control.

Before we get to our marketing and recruitment strategy, let's take a look at how we fared numbers wise recently. Spring enrollment dropped by 4.3 percent. We had growth in the graduate school and in the College of Business and Management, and I'd like to think Dean Stern and Dean Bedell for their leadership. Early fall 2018 projections are that enrollment will be nearly flat. While the incoming class continues to grow nicely, we still see enrollment declines due to retention of continuing students. This has to be our singular focus in the coming years. Thanks to Enrollment Management Services, Marketing, Academic Affairs Communications, New Student and Family Programs, advising and student success programs for their work in bringing in the incoming class.

Our recruitment strategy. There are discussions around our admission standards taking place in faculty governance in conjunction with faculty who have been studying this issue and in consultation with our student success programs. These discussions are focusing on the readiness of the students that we are bringing in and admitting. Discussions are occurring about redesigning EMERGE and STP in order to serve more students with the same amount of money. With considerations of requiring summer bridge programs for students who have certain admission decisions scores. Our digital marketing campaign continues to perform well in terms of increased attendance at key events, applications and brand awareness with significant improvements in the number of website visits. Enrollment, retention and graduation must be everyone's priority if we are to survive the current budget climate in this state and one might argue in the nation. I laid out some of my concerns in my remarks of the kickoff of Forward 150, and I encourage you to visit the NEIUpport channel to watch the video.

I want to switch gears a little bit and talk about our undocumented students. Since November 9th, when the election outcome took some of us by surprise, many of you expressed worry and fear regarding the direction of our country. You've also expressed concerns for our undocumented students. Let me reiterate what I said before. A change in the White House will not alter Northeastern's commitment to our mission and the diversity of all members of our community regardless of their gender, ability, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion or immigration status. Since November, I have openly expressed my strong support for the Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals - or the DACA program - signing my name to a number of letters to elected officials, including the United States President. Similarly when an Executive Order from the White House called to restrict those from seven predominantly Muslim countries from entering the U.S., I quickly denounced this as a form of religious discrimination that is not only unconstitutional, but is highly inconsistent with our University Values.

While we should be pleased that we're making good progress on the goals set forth since day one, I wish I could say the same about the progress that Springfield has been making on passing a state budget. Boo! Well, let's all do a collective boo on three. One. Two. Three.

On Wednesday, March 1st, it will be 20 months since we last had a state budget. Last week, I attended the Governor's Budget Address and while his speech did not directly address higher education, his office released an outline of his plan to cut state support of public universities by 15 percent from Fiscal Year 15's revised levels. As always, we hope for a resolution to the state budget impasse and especially hope that it will include adequate funding for Northeastern and all public universities in the state. As a result of the political stalemate in Springfield, we continue with plans to implement a salary savings or furlough program. The lack of a state budget for nearly 20 months has depleted our cash reserves and has forced the University to take drastic actions. We have to do something in order to fulfill our promise to our students and keep our doors open.

We have decided that a salary savings or furlough program along with strict cost savings coupled with a hiring freeze except for critical positions is how we can stay afloat until the next infusion of cash when fall tuition dollars come in. While we have enough money to sustain operations through the end of the fiscal year, which ends on June 30th, we won't have enough to last through the summer and into September. If we begin a salary savings or furlough program next month, we know that we can make it. So, negotiations are currently underway between the University and the five collective bargaining units that represent Northeastern employees. My hope is that those negotiations will be completed in the coming weeks. My greater hope though is that there will be a solution to our budget crisis before then in our state's capital. Should we receive either an adequate stopgap funding measure or an adequate appropriation before our anticipated start date of mid-March, we will not implement the program. If we begin the program and receive funding, we will hit the pause button, refigure our finances moving forward.

Sadly, more than 250 student-workers who are paid through state funds will lose their jobs if or when we implement a salary savings or furlough program. The Illinois State University's Civil Service statute was recently amended to require that before furloughs can be implemented, and all student appointments shall be terminated unless the student appointment is required for health and public safety or the appointment is part of the student's financial aid or if the student is receiving academic credit is part of the conditions of the student appointment. This is heartbreaking, especially since I know that students rely on that work to pay for school and living expenses. I have asked the Vice President for Legal Affairs Melissa Reardon-Henry to explore Northeastern's legal options in light of this provision. And many of you might have heard my interview on WBEZ yesterday, expressing my exasperation with this rule.

These are the things that keep me up at night. But these are also the things that light the fire in my soul to fight for this special place that we call Northeastern and to fight for adequate and reliable state funding for higher education. As you know from my recent university communications, the past month has been a busy one in terms of our advocacy in Springfield and in the media. Along with the Executive Director for Governmental Relations Dr. Suleyma Perez, I watch with great interest the state of the state and the state of the budget addresses by the Governor. I joined dozens of members of our community on a day trip to Springfield to attend this State House rally to invest in higher education, and I want to thank all of you who joined me to let lawmakers know that a college degree is one of the most reliable predictors of success and one of the biggest contributors to a strong state economy.

During these visits, I met with numerous representatives and senators, members of both the House and the Senate members of the appropriation committees and members of the Black and Latino caucuses to explain the difficult financial position that the budget impasse has put us in and to plead for relief in the form of either another stopgap measure or an adequate appropriation. Just as noteworthy is the media attention that we've been receiving. In the past few weeks, I was interviewed locally on public radio, quoted in local online media and participated in a report on National Public Radio's Morning Edition that was broadcast nationwide. Please refer to the University Announcement that I sent out last Wednesday for a link to those interviews.

Now, we can choose to live our lives in the looming shadow of the budget crisis and let it paralyze us or we can continue to hope and plan for the future. I choose the latter, and I hope all of you will join me. Northeastern Illinois University is an enduring institution with the 150-year history. I have no doubt that the next 150 years will be even brighter if we become bolder. It is imperative that we not allow our current financial situation to keep us from charting our course for the next century and a half. Here are five ways that demonstrate how we're not going to take it line down.

We have come together as engaged university community to fight innovative solutions that will secure a Northeastern's future. Many of you have participated in Friday discussions that have taken part in healthy dialogues about who we are, how we operate, and the opportunities we must consider. When I started this process at the beginning of the semester, I couldn't have imagined how productive, frustrating, messy and yet enlightening it has been turning out to be. I want to thank all of the students, faculty staff, and alumni and friends who have participated and who will continue to participate in the discussions throughout the semester. And I encourage you if you haven't been to these discussions yet to please join us.

Every 10 years the University undergoes the process of reaffirmation of accreditation with The Higher Learning Commission, which is our regional accrediting body. This accreditation allows us to do important things at the University like award federal financial aid, allows our credits to transfer to other institutions, allows our degrees to prepare students for higher level of learning. It is what many referred to as the Big Kahuna of accreditations. It is not only an opportunity to observe and verify that we meet the high standards that we promise, but it is also an opportunity to reevaluate all aspects of our University and to make sure that we maintain our commitment to excellence. This process, which is being led by Provost Vicki Roman-Lagunas, has been underway for some time now. And we expect it to be completed soon in the next few

weeks. I want to personally thank the Provost for her leadership and the large group of dedicated faculty and staff who are working diligently to ensure a successful outcome.

For the first time in the University's history, we will publicly launch our first comprehensive fundraising campaign in just a few weeks. The goal of our campaign called, "Transforming Lives," the campaign for Northeastern Illinois University is to raise \$10 million to fund two important initiatives: creating extraordinary scholarship support and creating exceptional learning environments. Stay tuned for more information about the campaign's upcoming public launch. Kudos to Vice President for Institutional Advancement Liesl Downey and her team for their hard work. I have often said that Northeastern has the biggest hearts of any place that I have worked. One of the many indicators of this for me was even though we had furloughs last year, faculty and staff giving to the foundation increased at the University. Give yourselves a round of applause.

In spite of severe budget constraints Northeastern understands that that the development of new academic programs that answers the need of the job marketplace is key to our future growth and survival. New programs have always been part of our evolution during these past few years, and we've introduced many of them. One program that is currently in the works is the Master's in Public Health program to be offered at the El Centro campus, which aligns with our mission. It will bring new enrollment to the University and is in response to labor force needs in the State and in the country. In addition to new programs, we are continuing to look at building a second residents hall. Though its construction might still be years away, we've learned from last fall's opening of the Nest that a rigorous residential and academic experience is one of the most sound investments that we could have made. In addition to the enhancements of our academic programs and to University Life we must also continue to make strategic investments in recruiting as well as developing and retaining outstanding, diverse faculty and students.

Finally, this year, we will embark on a year-long celebration of the University's 150th anniversary. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to mark our sesquicentennial and we are going to do it right. We have put together a strong team of spirited individuals led by NEIU 150 chairs, Chief Communications Officer Mike Dizon and Professor Emerita Shelley Bannister who will help us acknowledge our long history of service to students and the community, as we look forward to the next 15 decades. I can't wait for you to join me in celebrating the kickoff of this milestone starting this fall during NEIU Weekend.

No matter what challenge we're dealing with now or what plans we are making for the future, everything comes down to whether it fits our University's Mission and Vision. We've all read these two statements many times before, but I want you to read them with me again and hear how the real beauty of these statements is that they can mean different things to different people.

Northeastern Illinois University as a public comprehensive university with locations throughout Chicago provides an exceptional environment for learning, teaching and scholarship. We prepare a diverse community of students for leadership and service in our region and a dynamic multicultural world.

To me our mission is telling us that Northeastern's education isn't just about delivering instruction, it's about building strong partnerships among faculty and students and community through exploration, creation and innovation. It is about having an engaged university community that will lead us into the next one 150 years.

Northeastern Illinois will be a leader among metropolitan universities known for its dedication to its urban mission for the quality of its programs, for the success of its graduates and for the diversity of its learning environment. Our vision is to become a leader among metropolitan universities.

This goal of excellence doesn't seem so farfetched when you are deeply inspired by strong dedicated students who hold the same high standards for themselves. As I stand here on the stage looking at all of you here today, I see a strong and proud Northeastern. I also see a promising future that is brighter and bolder than ever before.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to all members of the University community for your loyalty and commitment to our fine institution. The success of our University is not found in the President's office, but rather in all corners of our University and for your unwavering support and commitment to our students. And I want to thank all of you.

