It is my great privilege to offer my first welcome to this wonderful campus community. I am thrilled, humbled, and honored to serve as the tenth president of this great university. My remarks will cover the following topics:

- The Context of Higher Education Today
- The Special Nature of MSUM and Why We Can Be Very Proud
- My Goals for the Coming Year
- A Request for Assistance

The Context of Higher Education Today

We all see what is happening with the economy. The increased cost of fuel and the mortgage crisis have had negative impacts on state revenue, and thus the appropriation portion of our budget (approximately 37%). Similarly, this situation is difficult for many of you as well as for our students.

Still, we must remember, that we play a very important role in the future economic well being of our students and our region’s economy. Higher education contributes to the economy through both the individual benefit of graduates and the increased capacity of the regional workforce.

We are working together to plan some significant belt tightening. My preference is to prepare for the worst and hope for the best. This strategy helps us to better protect our people and programs. We will keep you posted as we learn more.

Later in this talk, I will discuss two initiatives that can have very positive impacts on the budget, specifically increased focus on retention and student success and increased fundraising.

Putting all this in context, MSUM will weather the current economic challenges and continue to make a difference in the lives of its students and the economic vitality of the region.

The Special Nature of MSUM and Why We Can Be Very Proud

In the following paragraphs, I present some of what I have been learning about this very special place. Briefly, it seems to me that we provide an elite private education experience at a state college price. To support this observation, I will discuss the following key characteristics of our university: student-centered, outstanding faculty and staff, excellent students, outstanding alumni, and caring community.

Student-Centered
We treat students as individuals with different experiences and aspirations (for example, first generation college students, adults working full time and seeking to complete a degree, traditional aged students who need to work full time to afford college). Our tuition, which is among the most affordable in the region, and our instructional quality combine to create an outstanding higher education value. We help students succeed by providing strong academic experiences as well as a full range of support services and social and community opportunities.

We provide multiple opportunities for students to enroll. For example, we have the Corrick Center, which provides academic support services. In addition, we are fortunate to be members of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System, which provides additional opportunities for enrollment and transfer. Finally, we are part of the Tri-College University.

Through challenging programs and guidance from faculty and staff with high expectations, we help students to discover and then reach their potential. We provide opportunities for significant student research, leadership development, service learning, creative production, and athletic competition. Further, we have strong, cohesive curricula that prepare students not only to participate in the workforce of today but also to create and lead the workforce and society of tomorrow.

**Outstanding Faculty and Staff**

Our faculty members take exceptional pride in their teaching and creative work. Faculty members at MSUM have received more prestigious awards and recognitions (e.g., Carnegie Foundation Minnesota Professor of the Year, Bush Fellow) than faculty at comparable universities. Most of our professors hold the highest degree in their field and most class sizes are small enough for students to know their professors. Faculty members in many disciplines have had good success in securing competitive grants for research and creative activity. Finally, many of our faculty committees actively examine and work to continually improve all aspects of the teaching and learning experience.

Our staff members are similarly highly recognized for their service to the campus, our community, and our state. For example, one staff leader has the distinction of winning two Chancellor’s awards, and many others have received top recognition in the state for their distinguished performance.

**Excellent Students**

Like our faculty and staff, our students seem to achieve more recognition than those of comparable universities. For example, seven students have won prestigious, national Goldwater scholarships during the last decade. Last year, our mass communication students received four national awards from the Society of Professional Journalists; only one other university in the nation had this many student awards.

Our students expect to be challenged, and they rise to the occasion. For example, our students graduate with very high success rates in their chosen careers, as well high acceptance rates to graduate and professional schools.

**Exceptional Alumni**

Like our students, faculty, and staff our alumni have achieved great heights. We have many CEOs and other executive leaders, K-12 teachers of the year, distinguished health care professionals, renowned writers, elected officials, non-profit and governmental professionals, and citizen leaders. Many of these individuals remain vital parts of our university through their ongoing participation and support.
Caring Community

Our faculty, staff, and students form a caring community. This is evident in how people treat each other as well as in the way our staff maintain our building and grounds.

Students, faculty, and staff work together to promote not only the health and wellbeing of community members but also their enrichment and that of the surrounding community. For example, our renowned Straw Hat Players draw sold out audiences; our students have completed thousands of hours of service learning in the community; our Small Business Development Center has provided consulting to more than 230 west central Minnesota businesses; and our Fourth of July Celebration serves as the central celebration for Fargo-Moorhead and the surrounding area.

Our campus welcomes and celebrates diversity and works actively to combat racism. Further, the campus and the surrounding community provide a safe, friendly, and convenient environment—a “small town” atmosphere with “metropolitan” amenities.

If we look at all of these attributes taken together, it seems to me that we provide an elite private education experience at a state university price. Clearly, we can all be very proud of MSUM. It is a very special place.

The ideas presented here represent a “work in progress” as we clarify our identity and our vision for the future. We have posted this piece on the President’s Office webpage under MSUM identity and welcome your feedback. We will continue to revise the draft according to feedback and will post revisions throughout the semester.

My Goals for the Coming Year

MSUM is a wonderful institution. I hope to focus my activities in a way that honors its excellence and prepares it for a vibrant future. The themes that I hope will characterize the first few years of my presidency are student success, enrollment, and endowment.

To focus my activities around those themes, I plan to work on the following goals during the coming year.

- Listening, Learning, and Building Relationships
- Building Shared Vision and Focused Identity
- Enhancing Enrollment and Student Success, including Retention
- Fund and Friend Raising

Listening, Learning, and Building Relationships

A key aspect of leadership is learning about the institution, its culture, its community, and key stakeholders. For that reason, I will be meeting with departments and other groups over the course of the coming year. I will also be meeting with local boards, key industry leaders, elected officials, our foundation board, and
key donors. In addition, I will conduct at least four listening sessions throughout the year and welcome any 
comments and suggestions you may have.

As part of this learning effort, we have started a stakeholder survey. Already, we have sent it to some of 
our external stakeholders (i.e., Foundation Board, Regional Advisory Board, selected donors) as well as to the 
leaders of the collective bargaining units. We have now put the survey on the web. It will be up for two weeks. 
We welcome your participation. Please look for it on the President’s Office web page. We will read each of the 
responses, and, with help, will organize them into major themes. We plan to report the findings in a series of 
stakeholder conferences during the year where we will seek feedback and additional input.

Finally, in order to help me better serve the university community, I have asked the presidential search 
committee to meet with me on a monthly basis during my first year. I am asking for their feedback and input on 
my transition.

Building Shared Vision and Focused Identity

Building on the earlier concepts of identity and the stakeholder surveys, we will continue discussions and 
develop successive iterations of documents describing our identity and a vision to move into the future. These 
documents will be shared widely for refinement during the coming year. We hope to have the identity piece 
complete by the end of the first semester, with the vision piece completed by the end of the year.

Both the vision and the identity pieces will form the foundation for a collaborative, community wide 
strategic planning process that will occur next year. This will work together with the campus facility master 
planning process. It is important that we build on our strengths, identity, and shared vision to plan strategically to 
position our university in the coming decade.

Enhancing Enrollment and Student Success, including Retention

MSUM is a super place. I would highly recommend it to any student who wants to work hard to discover 
and reach her or his potential. In fact, I believe that we are a well kept secret -- a bit too well kept, I think.

Competition for students is getting more difficult. The demographics of our region suggest fewer 
traditional aged students. And, despite their best intentions, some students need more structure in the beginning of 
their education to be successful. Therefore, we will carefully examine and improve our recruitment and retention 
efforts. We will include these key indicators in periodic public reports. We will also disaggregate them so we can 
look at patterns by ethnicity, gender, major, first generation status, and first time versus transfer status. It is 
important to note that increased retention rates can have positive impact on the budget.

Student success is fundamental to our mission. In addition to examination of retention indicators, we will 
also continue to assess, and, as necessary, improve, student learning outcomes in our general education and 
degree programs as well as graduation rates and time to degree.

Fund and Friend Raising

More than ever, the financial health of our university depends on a healthy portfolio of donor support 
along with knowledgeable and committed “friends”. Thus, I plan to spend more time than previous presidents 
spent in active fundraising with the expressed aim of increasing the endowment as well as other fundraising 
indicators such as annual fund participation and annual giving levels. It is important to note that I am able to do 
this because of the strong foundation provided by President Barden.
Over the past decade and a half, we have had multiple consultant reports on our fundraising operation. I have reviewed these documents, all of which suggest that we have room for improvement, and I have moved forward with a plan of action.

First, we will not do an external search for a VP for development at this time. Another external person will not provide us a silver bullet or panacea. Rather, we are very fortunate to have an alumna, former board member, and experienced executive, Joan Justesen, serving in the interim position. At my request, the Alumni Foundation Executive Board has agreed to keep Joan in the position, and we are very pleased.

Currently, we are engaged in a strategic facilitation with a fundraising consultant who knows MNSCU institutions. This effort involves members of the Foundation Board as well as members of the Cabinet and selected deans. It is already underway. The consultant will work with me, the Cabinet, the Foundation Board, development staff, and others in a coaching mode during the coming semester.

We are developing a draft strategic plan for fundraising and related communications. Drafts of the plan will be circulated to various stakeholder groups and will be posted on the web for comment. The plan should be complete and in place by Dec. 1.

While we are planning, we are also engaged in active fundraising. My current fundraising efforts are focused on academic scholarships, the wellness center, and athletics.

**A Request for Assistance**

In summary, my team and I plan to focus the coming year on listening and learning. In addition, we plan to continue and expand our work on enrollment and student success, while increasing endowment related activities. We will keep you posted on our efforts through periodic updates on my webpage. Now, I ask for your assistance.

First, please keep up your great work! You have made this a great university, and I am very proud of the opportunity to serve as your tenth president.

Second, please let me know of your awards and honors. This is a great place with great people, and we need to celebrate our achievements. Deans and Vice Presidents are collecting information for their divisions, and we are developing a campus “points of pride” web page.

Third, please take a few minutes to complete my stakeholder survey. It is on the web for two weeks, starting today. Your input will help me to better focus my activities during the coming year.

Fourth, please let me know of concerns and issues. I will be holding listening sessions throughout the year and welcome your participation. We will post the time and place on my webpage and send reminders. Of course, you are always welcome to send me an email or contact my office for an appointment.

I look forward to working with you during the coming years!