

**Metropolitan State University, Where Life and Learning Meet:
The Future Before Us**

“Nobody ever expected me to be President.” -- Abraham Lincoln,
Second campaign speech against Douglas, Springfield, Illinois (July 17, 1858)

Thank you, Commissioner Sederburg, for your kind introduction.

Mayor Coleman; distinguished members of the Minnesota State Legislature; Trustees Dickson, Grendahl, Thomas, and Van Houten; Chancellor McCormick; distinguished colleagues from the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system and representatives of other colleges, universities, and learned societies; Mrs. Sweet; President Bradshaw; members of the Metropolitan State University Foundation Board; faculty; students; staff; alumni; friends; and family:

One of the special joys for me today is to be surrounded by so many of my family and friends and colleagues. My husband, Allyn Uniacke, and I are particularly grateful to our family and special friends who have traveled a distance to be with us today. We also are deeply grateful for our new friends and colleagues who have extended to us such warmth and encouragement since we arrived in the Twin Cities just over a year ago. I thank you, all of you, for being here today.

I also thank the private and charitable supporters of the University who generously provided the funding for today's Inaugural events, particularly Metropolitan State University Foundation Board Chair Steve Keating and the Travelers Companies. I am honored and humbled by your generous support. Thank you so much.

Finally, I would like to publicly thank Chancellor McCormick and the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Board of Trustees for giving me the opportunity to serve as the sixth president of Metropolitan State University. I am honored to accept the leadership charge that I have been given. I will talk about that shortly. But first, I would like to tell you a little about my own journey, because it has a lot to do with my sense of connection with the students I see every day here at Metropolitan State University.

I come from unlikely roots, a farm in Southern Indiana, near Louisville, Kentucky. It was a poor area, backward by many standards. Very few people went to college. But I was very fortunate. Mother Nature had blessed me with intellectual curiosity, energy, and good health. And my parents and family were very nurturing and supportive of my four siblings and me. They loved us, laughed with us, encouraged us. They encouraged us to experiment, to learn, to develop personal integrity, a good work ethic, and special skills.

I was amply blessed by both Nature and Nurture. But a third component was also necessary for me to be able to take the journey that has brought me before you today. That was Opportunity.

**President Hammersmith's Inaugural Address
October 2, 2009**

For me, the opportunity was a combination of natural ability, family encouragement, and generous funding for education, funding by a private donor and by the state and federal governments. Like many of our students, I benefitted greatly – totally – from the generosity of others.

Success

Nature. Nurture. Opportunity. Success requires all three. Nowhere has this been more elegantly portrayed, I think, than in Malcolm Gladwell's latest book, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (Gladwell, 2008). In this book, "outliers" refers to people who are extraordinarily successful, whether in business, science, the arts, athletics, or simply in living exceptionally long and healthy lives. Our natural tendency is to explain success strictly in terms of the individual – the individual must have extraordinary intelligence, talent, ambition, or genes.

Gladwell argues that such explanations are incomplete and misdirected. Rather, he writes: "In order to understand the outlier I think you have to look around them—at their culture and community and family and generation" (<http://www.gladwell.com/outliers/index.html>).

Applying that logic, Gladwell notices some very interesting patterns.

- Outstanding hockey players and soccer players tend to be born in January, February, or March. Hmm, are athletic genetics only active during three months of the year?
- Our computer pioneers like Bill Gates were all born within a year and a half of each other and had the opportunity to program computers, at a young age, immediately after the demise of the punch cards that people of my generation had to use. Hmm, what's going on here?
- Almost no one, he argues, gets really, really proficient at any complex skill – whether it's in athletics, art, science, or anything else – unless they have had the opportunity to invest about 10,000 hours in it. Some other experts say 7 years of consistent practice. Maybe that explains why I never became expert at ballroom dancing.

From the research that Gladwell reviews in this book, the real bottom line is this:

"Success...arises out of a predictable and powerful set of circumstances and opportunities (Gladwell, *Outliers*, p. 155).

"It is not the brightest who succeed [emphasis added]. Nor is success simply the sum of the decisions and efforts we make on our own behalf. It is, rather, a gift. Outliers are those who have been given opportunities—and who have had the strength and presence of mind to seize them" (Gladwell, *Outliers*, p. 267).

President Hammersmith's Inaugural Address
October 2, 2009

Gladwell studied the extraordinarily successful, but I believe his conclusions apply more broadly. Success requires natural ability but not extraordinary brilliance. And once you are bright enough, he argues, an extra 25 or 30 IQ points don't necessarily make you more successful. It's what you do with it that matters. Successful people have been nurtured, by their families, schools, and communities. Without nurture, it's tough to succeed, even with natural ability.

Success also requires opportunity. The opportunity can be education, an expanding economy, good coaching, mentoring, or other life experiences that enable a person to grow and perform.

Success happens when you combine Nature, Nurture, and Opportunity – when you create the environment in which individuals with natural ability and supportive families and communities have the opportunity to flourish. Think about that combination. It describes me, and I expect it describes most of you. It definitely describes most of our students.

Metropolitan State Students

This is where we come back to Metropolitan State University. In our seven-county Twin Cities service area and in the communities and businesses we serve, we are surrounded by hidden assets. By men and women who bring a wealth of real-world experience and who are bright, motivated, curious, and interested. By individuals who work hard and who want to better themselves, their communities, and their world, but who for whatever reason did not have or take the opportunity to complete their education immediately after high school. They include men and women from diverse backgrounds, cultures, religious traditions, and communities. They bring a rich array of family and community experiences, aspirations and beliefs, and economic conditions. They are lifelong learners, and they are the hidden assets of our future.

These are the students we serve at Metropolitan State University. We enroll almost 10,000 students a year, but only 300 freshmen. 95% of our students are transfer students. Our average student is 32 years old, working, and enrolled part-time in either undergraduate or graduate studies. We have no residence halls, no fraternities, no sororities, no athletics, and no frills. Just education.

Unlike many urban universities, we are not an open admission institution. Our students are quite capable. Faculty who have taught both at Metropolitan State University and at the University of Minnesota or the University of St. Thomas tell me that our students are busier than students at those institutions, but that they are no less capable, and they produce.

Thirty percent of our students are people of color, both people who were born here and people who were born in other lands. I am proud to report that we have virtually no achievement gap in the retention and graduation rates of our students of color. I know of very few other institutions that can make that claim.

President Hammersmith's Inaugural Address

October 2, 2009

Online courses and online degree programs are a significant part of our program. One in three Metropolitan State students is enrolled in at least one on-line course at any given time. Nationally, Metropolitan State was a pioneer in the development of online education, and the Higher Learning Commission in their review last spring said that we can serve as the national model on how to do online education right. Our on-line courses and degree programs enable us to serve students from across the state and beyond, and the United States Peace Corp has selected Metropolitan State as its exclusive partner for US Peace Corp volunteers.

As I mentioned earlier, ninety-five percent of our students are transfer students. The average Metropolitan State student arrives with four college transcripts. The veterans sometimes bring as many as fifteen. Clearly, these students have both ability and experience. Our largest single source of students is the University of Minnesota. Other students transfer to us from other MnSCU institutions, the privates, or out-of-state universities.

What Students Say

Metropolitan State students, I have discovered, can be sophisticated critics of higher education, and they are very articulate about comparing their Metropolitan State experience with their experiences at other institutions. This is what they have told me, over and over again, about Metropolitan State University. Please listen carefully, because if you don't study or work here at Metropolitan State, this may not be what you would expect.

Our students tell me that Metropolitan State faculty and courses are more challenging and more demanding than those at their other institutions of higher learning. Both undergraduate and graduate students say that Metropolitan State faculty push them, because our classes are small and they can't get by with just doing the readings and assignments, coming to class, and taking the tests. One graduate student, who is pursuing a second master's degree, told me this summer that her work here is far more challenging than was the work for her first master's degree at the University of Minnesota. I have heard that type of comment from so many different students and alumni that I have come to take it very, very seriously.

Another comment I hear consistently has to do with the privilege of studying with both our outstanding resident and community faculty. We have over 500 community faculty. These are outstanding practicing professionals from across the Twin Cities who teach up to ten credit hours a year in their particular specialty areas. They are considered part of our permanent faculty and they contribute greatly to our curriculum and our programs.

Our Master of Ceremonies told me that he was thrilled to take his first graduate course in strategic planning from the Vice President for Strategic Planning at Honeywell International. Another alumnus told me that while he was pursuing his MBA degree, he was working full-time for Allina health care organization's Department of Human Resources. Imagine his delight at the opportunity to take a course in his career area from a Vice President of the Mayo Clinic. Our law enforcement students enjoy community faculty

President Hammersmith's Inaugural Address

October 2, 2009

like John Harrington, Chief of the St. Paul Police Department, and our political science students enjoy community faculty members like State Senator Sandy Pappas.

Our graduates tell me that the opportunity to study with practicing professionals as well as our student-centered full-time faculty is the best possible combination. It's where life and learning meet.

Many of our students apply what they are learning in their classes directly to the workplace even while they are in school. Remember, most of our students are working adults. Many are already in their career field but now want to complete a bachelor's degree or a graduate degree. Or they are pursuing an individualized degree plan especially designed to meet their particular career needs. By the time they graduate they already have been applying their learning for years. That's where life and learning meet.

Students and alumni tell me their education at Metropolitan State University was greatly enriched by the diversity of our student body, faculty, and staff. Metropolitan State is a place where students of diverse backgrounds work together, learn together, and acquire the cultural competency that they need to excel in today's world. Our students tell me that they learn not only from their faculty, but also – and very much so – from their classmates. Some students have told me that if they take a course at another university, where classes are more homogeneous, they feel like something important is missing. That is the broad diversity of perspective, experience, and beliefs that we enjoy, every day, here at Metropolitan State. As one student expressed it to me, "This is a life you learn." Where life and learning meet.

Finally, students and alumni alike identify Metropolitan State's flexibility as one of its greatest features, enabling them to get a high-quality education while juggling work, family, and other important responsibilities. We teach classes at seventeen different locations across our seven-county metropolitan service area. Students also can take individual classes or whole degree programs online. Although most of our students tell us they prefer face-to-face or blended courses, at any given time thirty percent of them are enrolled in at least one online course, and we are the primary provider of online baccalaureate and master's degree programs for the whole MnSCU system.

Our students and alumni also appreciate the flexibility of our academic programs. Nationally, we pioneered the individualized major here at Metropolitan State, and it is our most popular major. The individualized degree program allows our adult students, with faculty oversight, to design and pursue a program of studies that meets their individual career interests and goals.

Quality

When I came into Metropolitan State in 2008, it was with high expectations of quality. What I have found in the past year has been beyond expectation. Let me share with you some examples.

**President Hammersmith's Inaugural Address
October 2, 2009**

- The Minnesota Society of CPAs has chosen Metropolitan State University as its preferred provider of master's and doctoral degrees in Business Administration for Minnesota's certified public accountants. The United States Peace Corp has selected Metropolitan State University as its sole provider.
- Our College of Management graduates are evaluated as superior by the national Educational Testing Service. The Educational Testing Service is best known, of course, as the company that brought us the SAT test, the GRE exam and many others. More recently, in this age of accountability, the Educational Testing Service has also developed content-area competency exams for undergraduate fields of study and these are used by colleges and universities across the country. This is how Metropolitan State University's College of Management graduates in business administration performed last year compared with 83,000 other business graduates from across the nation:
 - ***Our business students score, on average, at the 85th percentile in accounting.***
 - ***Our business students score, on average, at the 85th percentile in economics.***
 - ***Our business students score, on average, at the 75th percentile in finance.***
 - ***Our business students score, on average, at the 70th percentile in information systems.***

This isn't just Sue Hammersmith saying our graduates are superior. It's the nation's leading educational testing service.

- ***Metropolitan State graduates in fields that require professional licensing exams (such as accounting, nursing, and law enforcement) have the highest pass rates in the MnSCU system.*** Our professional licensure exam pass rate is ten percentage points higher than Minnesota State University - Mankato's and nine percentage points higher than St. Cloud State University's. Again, this isn't just Sue Hammersmith saying our graduates are superior. It's the independent professional licensing boards.
- ***Metropolitan State enjoys extraordinarily high rates of student retention and success – the highest or among the highest in the MnSCU system – and Metropolitan State has virtually closed the gap between the graduation rates of white students and students of color.*** This is according to sophisticated statistical analysis done by the MnSCU's Office of Internal Research, using a national methodology and benchmark.

President Hammersmith's Inaugural Address

October 2, 2009

- ***And Metropolitan State University has won numerous national awards and recognitions for its pioneering work on faculty development, online education, online student services, adult education, and individual learning assessment.***

These recognitions and awards come from an array of national professional associations including the TIAA-CREF Institute, the National Academic Advising Association, and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning. Long before I ever dreamed this would be my destination, I had heard of the distinctive mission and accomplishments of Metropolitan State University, and I think our distinctive accomplishments are more recognized nationally than here at home.

These are all demonstrable indicators of the high-quality opportunities for success that we offer here at Metropolitan State University.

Charges and Challenges

But I'm not here today to talk about the present. I'm here to talk about the future of Minnesota's Metropolitan State University. We have been given a number of charges and challenges:

- First, the Governor has given Minnesota colleges and universities the challenge – as a stretch goal – to offer twenty-five percent of our enrollments on-line. We embrace that challenge, but we're having a hard time finding the stretch in it. One in three Metropolitan State students are already enrolled in at least one online course, and twenty percent of our enrollments are totally online. Sixty percent of our courses are significantly on line. We are so pleased that the Governor recognizes the legitimacy and importance of our investment in online education.
- Second, the Board of Trustees has given all the MnSCU institutions the challenge to lessen the achievement gap between their traditional students and their disadvantaged and minority students. Metropolitan State has virtually accomplished that goal. Our students of color have graduation rates that are virtually on par with those of our white students, and our retention and graduation rates are as high as any in the MnSCU system.
- Third, the Chancellor has challenged us to grow our enrollments to 20,000 students by the year 2020. Chancellor, last year when you gave me that challenge, it sounded very ambitious...until I started looking at our enrollments. Our enrollments already have grown 20% in the last 3 years. Our challenge is not how to attract more students. Our challenge is how to accommodate the growth that is already occurring, naturally, even as our base allocation decreases. Our challenge is how to maintain the quality that our students expect and demand, and how to maintain amid diminishing resources the opportunity to succeed that *is* Metropolitan State University.

President Hammersmith's Inaugural Address

October 2, 2009

Personally, I believe that the growth of Metropolitan State University is inevitable, and perhaps on a greater scale than the Chancellor asked for. Why? Because Minnesota and the growing metropolitan area that we call the Twin Cities desperately need us to grow. Right now, there is enormous growth in the pipeline, in the very communities that Metropolitan State serves better than anyone. These include:

- Working adults, who must juggle work, family, and other responsibilities.
- Students of color, who constitute thirty percent of our student body.
- New immigrants whose success is nurtured by their families and their communities here in the Twin Cities.
- Adults with unique educational interests and needs, who thrive in our individualized major.
- Businesses and agencies such as the St. Paul Fire Department, who want to promote baccalaureate studies among their fire fighters and emergency medical technicians.
- Students who wish to continue their education after completing an associate degree at any of Minnesota's two-year colleges. To meet the needs of these students, Metropolitan State University maintains well over 400 articulation agreements with 33 different partner institutions.
- Within the Twin Cities, MnSCU's ten two-year colleges enroll approximately 140,000 students. Half or more of those students aspire to a baccalaureate degree. These students are in the pipeline now. Their alternatives for a bachelor's degree here in the Twin Cities are basically Metropolitan State University, where they can get an affordable, high-quality education; the U, where they will pay twice as much; or the privates, where they will pay six times as much.

Many traditional institutions, accustomed to serving primarily white eighteen-year-olds, have to worry about their enrollments declining in the years ahead. But the demographic groups that we serve are growing:

- those over twenty-seven years of age,
- minorities,
- immigrants,
- community college graduates,
- university graduates seeking additional degrees, graduate degrees, or continuing education

These populations are all growing and are projected to do so for years to come. This is documented in the US Department for Education's recently-published Projections of Education Statistics to 2018 (*U.S.D.E., Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 37th ed., Hussar, W.J. and Bailey, T.M., 2009*). And the Twin Cities metroplex is projected to grow by another million people in the not-too-distant future.

Yes, I believe the growth of Metropolitan State University is inevitable, but we cannot do it without a fair-share state investment to give the opportunity to succeed to the men and women we serve so well. They are our hidden assets, our future. The State of Minnesota

**President Hammersmith's Inaugural Address
October 2, 2009**

now provides only forty percent of our operating budget and that share is projected to diminish dramatically in the next biennium.

Minnesota is known across the country for its progressive leadership, its commitment to the common good, and its quality of life. It is unthinkable to me that the state of Minnesota would not provide the men and women, the communities, or the businesses we serve with the opportunity to pursue a high-quality, affordable education that meets their needs without indenturing them to a lifetime of student debt. Our future depends on finding a way to extend the opportunity for success to the communities and populations that Metropolitan State University serves so well.

Mr. Chancellor and honorable Trustees, I stand before you today to accept the challenges you have given. Right here in the Twin Cities, a multitude of men, women, and the next generation who are now young people, all have the native ability, the nurturing support of family and community, and the determination they need to succeed in higher education and in our evolving economy.

They are our hidden assets, and they are our future. I commit myself to ensuring that these residents have the opportunity to learn that I enjoyed so many years ago.

I see a great future ahead of us. I am an optimist. I agree with Helen Keller, one of my great heroes. She said:

“No pessimist ever discovered the secrets of the stars, or sailed to an uncharted land, or opened a new heaven to the human spirit”
(<http://www.quotationpage.com/quote/32595.html>).

Yes, I am an optimist. I know the Twin Cities and the state will continue to provide us with a diverse array of learners who have plenty of native ability and an absolute determination to succeed. I am confident that their families and communities will continue to nurture and support them. I trust Minnesota to provide us with the resources we need to provide a growing number of Twin Cities residents, working men and women, new immigrants, and online learners with their opportunity to succeed.

They are our hidden assets, and they are our future. Thank you so much for being here today and joining me in this celebration of the future that lies before us.