

**LEADING  
THE WAY**

**METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY  
INAUGURAL DINNER REMARKS  
PRESIDENT VIRGINIA "GINNY" ARTHUR  
APRIL 6, 2017**

**Metropolitan**  
State University



Good evening everyone. I want to add my warmest greetings to those already expressed, and my personal thanks to all of you for being here.

I especially want to thank all of this evening's speakers for their supportive and thoughtful comments.

In addition to our speakers, it is my great pleasure to recognize just a few others who are here tonight:

- Trustees Alex Cirillo and Dawn Erlandson were members of the presidential search process, and have been incredibly supportive of me during both that process and my transition;
- Maria Antonia Calvo, Spain's honorary consul for Minnesota and the Dakotas is a great friend of the University, and I have enjoyed working with her to bring the international film festival to Metropolitan State. She brought her spouse along tonight—Chancellor Steven Rosenstone.
- Chancellor-elect Devinder Malhotra was previously the interim president at Metropolitan State. Apparently I wasn't a good enough subordinate the first time around, so he is going to be my boss again! I will try to get it right this time... Seriously, he has been a wonderful mentor and I am looking forward to benefiting from his wise advice next year.
- Karen Sweet is the daughter of our founding president, Dr. David Sweet, and she is here with her husband, Robin Fondow,

- Ramsey County Commissioner Rafael Ortega—who, among many other supports for the University, helped develop and begin our well known Social Work program;
- Former state senator John Milton,
- Former state representative Steve Trimble, who provided invaluable support for bringing the University to its current permanent location on Dayton’s Bluff.
- Brigadier General Sandy Best, Chief of Staff, MN National Guard—and a proud alumna. And we are so proud of her.
- Pat Effenberger, from the editorial board of the Saint Paul Pioneer Press and her spouse, Don Effenberger.
- Among my family and friends: I especially want to recognize my brother, Charles Patrick Arthur. We are the bookends of the family—I am the youngest of six children and he is...well...the oldest, and I mean a lot older. It means so much to me to have him, my sister-in-law Fran, and my nieces, Patty Sisti and Mary Arthur, here with me. They traveled from upstate NY, where I grew up, and it is not an easy journey.
- Of course, my spouse and partner, Tom Haluska, gets my special thanks and appreciation for 37 years of help and patience, along with my three Lake Woebagon “way above average” children, Abbie, Annie and Alex, and sons-in-law Michael Bremer and Jon White. And my grandsons Michael and Matthew, who make all life worth living and all cares disappear. I love you all so much.

I wish I could take time to recognize each of you individually—esteemed colleagues from other universities and colleges, Metropolitan State faculty, staff, students, alumni, Foundation Board members, and my executive team, community partners and members, but time does not permit.

Thank you all for sharing your time, your presence, and your good wishes.

Tonight, I am extremely honored and humbled to be celebrating this opportunity to serve as the seventh president of Metropolitan State University. My deepest appreciation to the Trustees of Minnesota State and to Chancellor Steven Rosenstone, for entrusting me with the public treasure that is Metropolitan State. My work at the University is, in every sense, a calling, aligned with my most deeply held values. I am committed to being a good steward of the University's resources and of our System of colleges and universities, and a fierce and untiring advocate for our alumni, students and students-to-be.

Even though I have a script this evening...there is no script for stepping out and taking on the challenge and the responsibilities of a presidency. Although it does turn out there is a guidebook for how presidents can get in trouble. The book is called *Presidencies Derailed* and my presidential mentor shared it with me last July. To paraphrase Paul Simon, there are at least 50 ways to lose your presidency!!

But when it comes to the work of a president, it is fortunate that I have a high tolerance for ambiguity and I usually love the fact that nothing about this work is pre-determined; that this work, in its current context, has never been done before; and that it will never happen again in the same way. Walking a daily tightrope is also easier because I am not alone. I am lucky to be surrounded with dedicated professionals in every nook and cranny of the University. Their commitment to our mission and good work allows me to do the work that presidents need to do. Things like:

- keeping abreast of developing trends,
- communicating the vision,
- inspiring commitment
- recognizing, supporting, coaching and encouraging our team members,
- developing and finding the resources that will enable faculty and staff to do the job of providing excellent academic preparation and supportive services so our students can succeed,
- making friends for the university and telling the inspiring stories of our students and making sure everyone is aware of the critical work we do at the university, and
- collaborating with presidents across the System and with business and community leaders. And if that's not enough...

*other duties as assigned!*

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A few months ago, I heard a speaker on strategy make the analogy that leading a university is like a marathon. Not only does it take training and stamina, but all you really know about the race is the general course and your goal. You want to make it to Mile 26.2, but you don't know what your physical and mental condition will be at Mile 5 or 10 or 20, and you can't control the weather or the crowd or hazards that may appear at any time. So you just have to be as prepared as you can to continue through whatever conditions you encounter and you have to remain focused on the goal and have faith you will reach it. Yes, that sounds a lot like the presidency to me.

Amidst this great uncertainty about how we will do the work and how it will unfold, we do know how we are preparing and what further preparation and training are needed, we have ideas about some of the strategies and tactics that will keep us on course, and we are very clear about the goal. We seek nothing less than to:

*Provide an excellent, inclusive and engaging education as a means of eliminating opportunity gaps and leading the Twin Cities community to a prosperous and equitable future.*

We know this is a bold, audacious goal, but Metropolitan State was founded to be a bold, audacious innovator.

We are motivated by the importance and urgency of this work for our students, their families, our communities, and our state. We know it is common for universities to say that they transform lives, and indeed they do. But the transformation that occurs through a Metropolitan State University education is more akin to metamorphosis than shedding an exoskeleton that has become too small (Our entomology professor, the bug guy, would be proud). Student story after story illustrates the profound change that connection with Metropolitan State brings to people:

Whether it is the addict who finds purpose and meaning in becoming a counselor and in turn helps others to a fulfilling and productive life;

- Or the theater student who finds a way to give voice to a confusing experience of abuse and abandonment and wins prizes for her original production;
- Or the woman whose life experience taught her that she wasn't worthy of education or worthy to aspire to a career, who becomes a leader in the nonprofit world;
- Or the man whose lifelong depression kept him from experiencing joy, until he discovered that he was talented at statistics and loved what he could do;
- Or to those who so often tell us they are setting examples for their children so that one day those children can realize unbounded dreams and aspirations.

To show how pervasive this need for metamorphosis is, let me tell you a story. Last night my executive team and I, as part of this inaugural celebration, joined our nursing students who provide wellness services during a community dinner for the homeless and poor of the East side of St. Paul. We wanted to serve the community by serving them food. I'm the president so I got the best job -- serving love by dispensing hugs to all who came through the line. I was moved by people who have so little material comfort but still manage to carry hopes and dreams for others, if not for themselves. They generously congratulated me and reminded me how important Metropolitan State is to this community. One woman approached me with either her granddaughter or niece, and said the girl, who was a little shy about talking to a university president, had a question for me. At her elder's urging, she asked me if there were any opportunities for her to take college classes while she was in high school, and the older woman said with pride: "She wants to be SOMETHING."

So given this purpose, I would like to spend just a few minutes thinking with you about the work ahead for Metropolitan State —why it is important, and what the major themes will be.

We are very intentional about being a public, urban university, and especially about being THE public, urban university in the Twin Cities. As our founding president, David Sweet, said, we are not an "enclave within the cities" for those who want to retreat from the urban environment and its issues. We address ourselves to public purposes by our presence and our work in this region's core cities and in the neighboring communities that share many urban characteristics. Metropolitan State was

charged to serve the seven-county metropolitan region—in a statutory turn of phrase, the region is our campus.

If you ask a demographer about “our campus,” you will be learn that this federally-defined Metropolitan Statistical Area includes 16 counties (2 of which are in Wisconsin), and that it is the 16th largest in the nation; in fact, this region is the 41st largest global economy.

As a public university in a globally-connected urban region, we place a high priority on providing equitable and inclusive access to our programs and services, so we are a visibly global learning community. This is a great asset to the students who enroll with us. As I get out and talk to students, they tell me that a unique and valued characteristic of a Metropolitan State University education is the opportunity to engage actively in learning in classrooms and educational community settings that bring them into meaningful interactions with students who have differing life experiences, cultural backgrounds and political outlooks. This is a strategic asset for our region because it prepares all of our students not just to appreciate or celebrate diversity, but to navigate interpersonal relationships with people different from themselves. Our employers are just realizing that a diverse group of workers, in and of itself, is at least as likely to generate destructive conflict and personal pain as it is creativity and a sense of belonging, if the individuals don't know how to communicate and work across differences. A Metro State education adds value in this subtle but important way!

Our demographer friend, again, tells us that unprecedented numbers of highly-skilled regional workers are reaching and surpassing retirement age. Many of those likely retirees are white and relatively well educated. But all the population growth in Minnesota over the next few decades is expected to occur in the communities of color and new American communities that are under-represented in higher education, and thus, if things don't change, they will not be ready to assume the knowledge work of the 21st century. This underdevelopment of talent is an urgent challenge for our state and can quickly become a crisis.

American Indian students and students from communities of color make up 42% of Metropolitan State students and that percentage is rapidly increasing. Among newly admitted students during the current academic year, nearly 50% were American Indian or students of color. Because Metropolitan State is a comprehensive university, we are preparing students in a range of fields with high demand, like nursing and dental hygiene, accounting, urban teaching, technical communication and professional writing, cyber-security and computer science, law enforcement and criminal justice, human services and social work, business administration, public and non-profit administration, supply chain and operations management, and through individualized studies for other, emerging or unique fields. We are proud of the fact that our educational philosophy centers on the authority of the learner in determining their learning and path through education. If one is to believe Jeff Selingo, a noted national expert on the future of higher education, our approach is sound. A comprehensive survey of

employers that he recently conducted shows that employers want universities to graduate students who are:

- Curious
- Creative
- Digitally aware
- Contextual thinkers
- Self-directed problem solvers
- And HUMBLE.

Take heart, supporters and providers of liberal arts education! You are providing 21st century work skills like no one else.

Maybe, like me, you are particularly intrigued by the inclusion of “humility” on this list. I learned that employers mean someone willing to listen, to learn, to take their turn, to be generous in supporting team members, to be self-reflective and to cultivate self-knowledge. If that doesn't sum up a Metropolitan State graduate, I don't know what other term does. I find our students and graduates remarkable for their humility, so once we can help them through the door to employment I know they will excel.

As a public institution, our responsibilities to the citizens of Minnesota extend beyond our core purpose of providing high-quality, accessible, and affordable higher education opportunities to the region's residents. We also work closely with partners in business and industry, local governments, civic leaders, and policy makers to align our academic program

development to respond to projected employment needs in established and new growth industries.

Based on our decades of experience in serving working adults, we are at the center of the Minnesota State system's ambitious plan for meeting the critical need for baccalaureate-degreed workers in this region. The overwhelming majority of our students remain in this region to work and raise families after graduation. Furthermore, our diverse graduates are vital to redressing the documented loss of young, educated Twin Cities professionals of color.

As a university, we recognize that our region's challenges are too complex to be met by acting in isolation. We are committed to intentional, coordinated collaboration through sustained partnerships. This commitment to partnerships is at the heart of our mission, and it is fundamental to how we understand our work and our responsibilities as a university. Our key partners range from system colleges, where so many of our students get their start, to county and state agencies, to hospitals and colleges in the Midway corridor, to K-12 systems that seek to engage our urban teachers.

We see ourselves as long-term stewards of place. Our commitment to the well-being of our students' communities is lasting. We seek to shape our institutional activities, from out-of-state purchasing to facilities planning and design, so that they add value to the communities where our campuses are located.

From our founding, we have prioritized engagement with our community. Our vision statement speaks of “an unwavering commitment to civic engagement.” That work has grown over time and we are proud of the work of our faculty in collaborating with our community partners, modeling for students what it means to learn from, with, and alongside community experts.

Well, I learned from a seasoned speaker that the best way to capture or recapture your audience’s attention is to utter the words, “IN CONCLUSION.”

So, in conclusion, let me say that the challenges are daunting, the way is uncertain, but the goal is clear and inspiring. I am excited to be leading Metropolitan State at such a critical time for our state and nation. I look forward to engaging with each of you to help us lead the way and make a difference for the common good.

Thank you for your attention, your good wishes, and your support.

Virginia “Ginny” Arthur, JD

President, Metropolitan State University