

## Provost's Speech Convocation-2011

Good afternoon colleagues, new and ---hummm, I started to say old colleagues, but I think you might prefer that I say returning/continuing colleagues.

It is a pleasure and an honor to be able to rejoin you as we work together to build a truly distinctive Zayed University.

To those of you who are returning, I am looking forward to renewing our friendship and I thank you for the many contributions that you have already made to help propel Zayed University from the vision of the late President of the UAE, His Highness Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan, and our President His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan Mubarak Al Nahayan to a university of national leadership and regional stature in just over a decade-- remarkable accomplishments by any standard! I know that we can count on you to continue to provide leadership and bring quality to the university and to its students.

To our new colleagues, I think that there are 63 of you, I welcome you and look forward to the energy and talent, along with the fresh ideas and creative spirit that you bring to help us strengthen the university. I know that we are fortunate to have you here and, in my opinion, you have chosen wisely in joining us as Zayed University is one of the most innovative and rapidly growing universities in the world, a place that has flourished and grown by capitalizing upon the entrepreneurial spirit of its faculty, staff, students and, indeed the nation as well. Some of you may have heard the quote from His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE who frequently says, "the word impossible is not in our vocabulary." Well that same spirit has prevailed at Zayed University since its founding when the entire university went from a statement of vision to opening campuses in two cities in less than six months and in eight years achieved full international accreditation.

Zayed University's progress has been driven by the intellectual powers of its faculty and students, and now with the opening of this iconic Abu Dhabi campus, we have world-class campuses in both cities. Please join me in extending our appreciation to both the Abu Dhabi and Dubai governments for their confidence in what we can do to educate their most precious possessions, first their daughters and now their sons, and for their generosity in building and equipping these two magnificent campuses.

When I left the UAE in late June I held little hope that we would be able to open the school year in this new campus. However, by scrambling long planned vacation schedules, over the summer

- The round the clock work by the talented, creative, and extremely hard working members of our Computing Services Department,
- The constant pushing of construction workers by member of the Campus Physical Development department,
- The vigilance and persistence of the Contracts and Procurement Department,

- The insistence to complete essential services by the people in the Campus Services department,
- The extraordinary efforts of the library staff and science and arts people to ensure that their collections and equipment were in the right place at the right time and not damaged,
- The diligence of our Admin. Assistants and Admin. Officers to ensure proper packing and labeling, and
- The planning and nagging by those folks in the Campus Director's office in Abu Dhabi,

they have accomplished what I consider a near miracle. Here we are! Will all of you in these offices and others who were involved in orchestrating the move, including others whom I may have missed, please stand so we can express our appreciation for your extraordinary work? Thank you.

From its founding Zayed University was charged to develop an undergraduate educational program for Emirati female students that would produce graduates comparable to the best in the world. We were asked to draw upon the best international practices and to adapt them to fit the traditions, cultures and priorities of this Arab country. Over time we have identified six learning outcomes that each graduate must possess, we call them ZULO's. It is our responsibility, individually and collectively, to ensure that our graduates are:

- bilingual in Arabic and English;
- proficient in the use of informational and communication technology;
- skilled in critical thinking and quantitative reasoning;
- literate in finding and evaluating information;
- leaders in their families and communities; and
- globally aware.

These ZULOs apply to every component of the university and I ask that each of you take action to see that they are incorporated into your work.

Our GPS for ensuring that we achieve the ZULOs is our vision statement as articulated by our President, His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan who said: *"Zayed University is "to become the leading university in the region, embodying the same rigorous standards and intellectual elements found in major universities throughout the world."*

Growing out of the Vision are the following concepts found in our Mission Statement which says that Zayed University seeks:

- to prepare Emirati students for meaningful and successful twenty-first century personal and professional lives;
- to graduate students who will help shape the future of the UAE;
- to support the economic and social advancement of the UAE;

- to lead innovation in higher education through teaching, learning, research and outreach; and
- to do so in a culturally diverse, humane, technologically advance and increasingly global environment.

These two statements act as a compass to provide far-reaching guidance for making Zayed University into the “Great University” that the leaders of the country expect.

I must say that every time I read these Vision and Mission statements I am reminded as to why I first became involved with Zayed University, now some 13 years ago. When I was first asked if I would be interested in serving as a consultant in the formation of a new university for women in the UAE, I immediately thought—“Wow, never in my professional life have I had the opportunity to help change the educational system not just of a university, not just of a state, but of an entire country, and though those changes, effect the educational system of one of the most important regions of the world today.” Of course I said yes. Those initial feelings have only intensified in these passing years and I hope that each of you shares with me those feelings of opportunity and responsibility.

But there is a second reason why I, and I hope you as well, find such satisfaction in working at Zayed University. Rarely, if ever, will one find so many talented, energetic, positive-thinking, risk-adverse, flexible and adventuresome people in one location as those of you who have chosen to come to this university! Your presence makes working here just plain enjoyable. Thank you.

Of course, involvement with Zayed University carries with it enormous responsibilities and sometimes daunting challenges and that is what I want to talk about with you for the next few minutes.

But first, let’s talk for a few minutes about our students and what they bring to and take from the university for they, too, are one of the riches of this University:

- they are wonderful young women, and now men, who are unusually polite and respectful of faculty and staff;
- they are quite intelligent, but often very poorly educated and especially so if they have gone through the public education system;
- they have been taught and rewarded in their schooling for developing amazing memorization skills and often discouraged and sometimes penalized for developing critical thinking and analysis skills---we have a major responsibility to help them understand the value of these areas at the university and to work carefully with them to develop as independent learners and to understand what we expect;
- they come from schools where good grades are sometimes given for less than excellent work and are often negotiable—this is not the ZU standard for educational excellence and we have a major responsibility to ensure that our students understand this, that we will uphold our standards, and that we will

help them achieve to our expectations, and that we will help them develop into independent learners and to understand what we expect;

- they are unusually creative and often artistic and can organize a stunning event in nanoseconds;
- they are quite accomplished in oral skills and have exceptional talent for memorization, but reflecting the oral society of which they are a part, they often are not so strong in writing and reading---we must ensure that every class we teach has strong reading and writing components and that student progress in those areas is carefully monitored;
- they are dedicated to helping their country achieve its ambitions; and
- they are capable of developing into outstanding students and young scholars and it is our responsibility to ensure their success.

The Zayed University educational program is designed to place entering students where we think they will be most successful and then move them forward as rapidly as possible.

Think of ZU as having three educational components, each designed to interface smoothly with the others.

Academic Bridge Program—where about 90% of our fresh HS graduates begin their studies with us. In the ABP students improve their English language proficiency and develop study skills needed to be successful in their university studies.

Colloquy on Integrated Learning (Colloquy or just COL)---where students first encounter the demands of a university-level education. They continue to develop their university-level skills in two languages (Arabic and English), in science and math, in the social sciences and humanities and should develop an understanding of how the knowledge of the world fits together in a global context. The Colloquy program prepares students to enter the major of choice. The Colloquy program is housed in the University College but I want to stress that that it belongs to the entire University and each of you must know about and support it; even teaching in it if you can. The *Colloquy on Integrated Learning* is the most distinctive program offered by Zayed University and it is the “brand” that we attach to each graduate; success in Colloquy greatly increases the probability of success in the major.

Majors---where students study a specific field in depth, polish their educational skills, and begin to become professionals in the field of study.

I have found that many people come to Zayed University because of its ambitious vision—they catch the spirit: *To help create a university that will not only change this country, but also this entire region of the world!*

Most people stay because they get to know and respect our students not only as promising young scholars and rising professionals, but as captivating individuals who teach us as much as we try to teach them.

Through our students, the impact of the education they receive will be passed to the next generation and beyond!

Each of you has this opportunity and it is clear to me that you take both the opportunity and the responsibility that it carries very seriously. Thank you for your superb work.

Today, charged by the challenges, expectations, and encouragement expressed by His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan and Dr. Sulaiman we are set to write the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter in the history of this amazing university.

In my following remarks, I want to expand upon and add to those seven institutional priorities and I ask that you review them on our Intranet as they constitute guidelines for the year.

#### 1. Administrative organization

Last spring we discussed with you some possibilities for giving more autonomy to our two campuses and over some time I expect that this will begin to occur. However, for at least this year, we are proceeding with basically the same administrative structure as we have had in the past although, we are making some modifications in responsibilities. As you know, over the summer several senior administrators left the university and we are now trying to fill some of those positions. In a few days we will announce these appointments:

Tom Cochran: Associate Provost and Campus Director and Operating Officer, Abu Dhabi Campus and Interim Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Jeff Belnap: Associate Provost for Academic Affairs – both campuses

Rex Taylor: Associate Provost for Outreach

Michael Allen: Assistant Provost for Faculty Affairs and Research

Bryan Gilroy: Assistant Provost for Enrollment Management and Interim Coordinator for space and programs in Dubai

Robin Dada: Interim Dean, College of Education

Kay Gallagher: Associate Director of Academic Bridge Program in Abu Dhabi

#### 2. Planning for the Second Decade of Zayed University

As all of you who were here last year will recall, we spent a great deal of effort designing a proposal for development of Zayed University in its second decade. Our charge was to develop a plan to move ZU from a primarily undergraduate university with a few masters-level programs to become a major research

university with campuses in both cities, and with each aligned with the priorities of their city/emirate.

Initially we had planned to devote much of this afternoon to discussion of the Great University plan, but have now decided that the Colleges have more urgent needs, which in some cases includes the ZUAD plan, so have given the afternoon to them for planning.

In developing this plan, it was decided that we would take advantage of the forthcoming new campus in Abu Dhabi and initially focus this planning process on that city. However,

The project entitled:

*“Zayed University and the Future of Abu Dhabi: The Great University for the Great City of Abu Dhabi”* was completed in June. This fall we are beginning to move forward to implement these plans as best as promptly and smoothly as we can.

This fall we will undertake a similar planning process for Zayed University in Dubai and the Northern Emirates.

One of our major projects for this year is to begin to implement the Great University plan which has initiatives in several areas:

- Colleges
  - strengthening and expanding the Colleges of Business, Education, Communication and Media Sciences, and Technological Innovation,
  - establishment of a new college of Arts and Creative Enterprises and reorganizing the CAS into the College of Liberal Arts and Sustainability Sciences.

Achievement of the objectives for each colleges is variable and substantial.

For example:

COE – rethinking its fundamental mission which will include expanding and to expand its involvement in providing professional development programs for public school teachers and administrators and connecting to the new national school reform project which we hope will start this fall;  
CAS – transforming itself into a new type of college once the Department of Art and Design becomes a new college  
CACE – creation of an entirely new college featuring the full range of arts including performance as well as visual

- Institutes: In Abu Dhabi we have proposed creation of six new Institutes of varying nature-some primarily research institutes while others combine research and outreach and education. They are:
  - Arabic Language
  - Development of Western Region
  - Study of Emirates Society
  - Development of Human Capital

## International Student Exchange Global Dialogue and World Peace

Research and Outreach are major features of the new Great Cities plan and both of these activities require freeing up time for faculty to pursue these critical areas. With the current enrollment crunch on the budget, many faculty have heavy teaching responsibilities, often resulting in overload work, which interfere with time for research, scholarly and creative activity and for engagement in service outside the campus. We must come to grips with this situation as we strive toward our greater university goals.

Consequently, I ask that each college be creative in looking for ways to maximize the efficiency and flexibility of its programs to provide time for our research-active faculty to do their own work and to supervise the research projects of undergraduate students.

### 3. Institutional Efficiencies

In these times of tight economic pressures, we must look into every corner to find efficiencies without losing quality to both the academic and administrative areas. Consequently, I ask that every administrative officer search for ways to combine activities and functions in order to free up even limited resources which can then be applied to pressing institutional needs that will enrich the experiences of our students.

### 4. Institutional Accreditation

I hope that you all know that this is the year when we have to prepare our five year report to our international accrediting agency, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. A key factor in the report is conducting a major Self Study of Institutional Effectiveness and progress. This work began last spring and will continue throughout this entire academic year.

My friends, retention of our accreditation through Middle States is one of the very most important issues to the university; loss of this accreditation would be a major embarrassment to the university and the nation. Consequently, I want to flatly state that we must do everything in our power to ensure full compliance with the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and, subsequently, continuation of our accreditation. This will be a university-wide process and I ask that each of you becomes knowledgeable about the standards and how your college relates to them.

A Self Study is strenuous but very important work as its preparation will require us to deeply analyze what we are doing, ascertain our effectiveness in every area of the university, and develop procedures to correct or improve areas which we find deficient. The work on the Self Study began last year and will intensify this year.

I realize that some of your colleges and programs are seeking disciplinary accreditations which may run concurrently with the Middle States reaffirmation

process. In some cases there will be overlap of analyses and we should ensure that we work as efficiently as we can in both areas.

5. Nationalization:

You will recall, since our founding we have been gradually increasing our employment of Emirati citizens. We will continue and accelerate this process, looking for highly qualified Nationals whom we can appoint into some higher level positions.

6. Program Reviews:

Academic Bridge Program – Beginning last year the ABP began a review of the effectiveness of their operations. We are finding that more students who appear to be well qualified are actually testing at lower placement levels than has historically been the case. Consequently, more students are taking longer to meet the exit requirements from the Bridge Program. This situation must change without lowering the entry level requirements. I have asked the ABP to develop some innovative approaches to language acquisition in hopes that we can find ways to accelerate student progress.

Colloquy--- This program is constantly seeking to improve its offerings and last year developed a new science course to better prepare our students. The new course will be tested and evaluated this year. Also, this year the Colloquy will focus on curricular revisions in mathematics and information technology.

7. Student Success Program:

Every College and university is concerned about the retention rate of its students. Lack of success is often an embarrassment to students and their families and also results in a poor economic return for the institution. ZU is not exempt from this situation.

Two years ago, ZU began to experiment with a range of actions to improve student success. Research data from western countries shows that student success is determined in the first few semesters of the college experience—at ZU this translates in to the experience in the Academic Bridge Program and in the Colloquy. We need to think of these two programs as a seamless progression route toward the majors. Consequently, we have created the “Student Success” Program as an effort to identify and assist struggling students at an earlier point.

8. Student Life:

An essential component of a University education is the availability of rich student experiences outside the formal academic structure but often connected to them. These areas include leadership and service learning programs, entrepreneurial opportunities, study-travel experiences, an active Student Council program, special interest clubs etc. Zayed University has a



long history of this type of activity and I ask the staffs in the Student life areas to carefully analyze what is working and to make adjustments as necessary. And, of course these programs should be available to both our male and female students.

9. Campus Ambiance:

A distinguishing feature of Zayed University has been the collegiality and collegueship among faculty and staff. Especially in the Abu Dhabi campus where most people know virtually every other employee, often sharing office areas with colleagues from different disciplines and countries. I find these relationships to be healthy and intellectually stimulating. As we now moved to our respective new campuses, I ask that each college and department make a conscious effort to find ways to continue this important feature of a ZU education.

So my colleagues, with this fabulous new campus in Abu Dhabi and our still new campus in Dubai, we have facilities for our university that challenge the best in the world. It is now up to us to use these facilities to enrich the education of our students and serve our respective communities. So, please join me in thanking the Abu Dhabi government and Mubadala for providing us with such a marvelous facility.

I have gone on too long to leave time for questions now, but if you will contact me, I will respond to your questions.

I very much look forward to an exciting and challenging year.

Thank you.