

Towson University – Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

Excerpts from President Robert L. Caret's Fall Address

Stephens Hall Auditorium, September 4, 2003

“As you entered the hall today you were able to view examples of Towson’s many ‘Points of Pride.’ We have achieved such recognition across the campus, semester through semester, for many decades. We should be proud of what we have helped Towson accomplish and should be ready to help Towson continue to evolve to meet the needs of the citizens of the State of Maryland.

“I begin by providing an overview of Towson University, its past, its present, and, its future. But before I do that, let me digress for a moment, to answer a question I have been asked many times: ‘Why I am back?’ I am back because Towson is the right place for me today. I have a long history with the institution, I have great pride in what we have accomplished, and I feel I have the necessary skills to help address the needs that Towson faces today. The latter point is particularly important, because what drives me is getting things done and making change happen. If I didn’t think I could help Towson be successful, I wouldn’t be here in this role today. I thank you for this opportunity.

“Towson University, the second largest institution in the University System of Maryland, is 137 years old, is vibrant and is growing in both size and quality. From our earliest years, we have had core beliefs and values that focus on undergraduate teaching and learning, applied graduate education, and a belief in and commitment to access with quality. We also have several characteristics that have been common throughout the years: small classes, programs people want, real faculty and teaching, and a commitment to providing an arts and science-based foundation to all of our educational efforts.

“But let’s talk a bit about Towson today. If we look at the most recent national survey of student engagement, we see that Towson graduates have learned a great deal. They know how to think critically and analytically, they know how to write and speak clearly, they know how to analyze quantitative problems, and they have achieved a vast majority of the educational goals we have set for them. But we also have challenges. We find that only 40 percent of our graduates have a culminating senior experience and fewer than 35 percent of the freshman and only a bit more than 35 percent of the seniors feel they have truly interacted with faculty while at Towson. In addition, 50 percent of the students tell us they study 11 hours a week or less. Obviously, we are achieving many of our goals, but we have more to do.

“Now let’s look at our future. Drawing on our most recent strategic plan, the review and environmental scan that has occurred during two recent presidential searches, recent accreditation and certification and consultant visits, and having just completed the Transition Advisory Team (TAT) process, I have worked to summarize what I view as Towson’s challenges today. The results of the TAT efforts, terms we feel describe Towson, are summarized below:

Dedicated Faculty	Quality
Dedicated Staff	Good/Not Recognized
Connectivity w/Students	Accessible
Connectivity w/TU	Destination of Choice
Friendly Culture	SM Experience/LG Reality
Best of All (Ed) Worlds	Economic Engine
Many choices	K-12 Partners
Important	A Hybrid

“Again we see we have much to be proud of, happy with and applaud. But we also found through this review that we have additional issues and challenges before us: what is the “right” enrollment mix and size for the campus, where will we get the resources we need, how do we establish our direction and focus, how do we strengthen our image, and how do we communicate with all of our communities. There is good news and bad news in each of these areas. Examples follow:

Enrollment Mix and Balance:

Good News:

14,000 applicants for 1,900 freshman openings
 For those enrolling, a GPA of 3.6 and SATs of approximately 1030

Bad News:

Only 18 percent of the 14,000 applicants actually enrolled
 We vastly expanded our graduate offerings including doctorate offerings, but adequate funding was never provided

Resources:

Good News:

Faculty-student ratio of 17-18
 Flexible faculty teaching loads

Bad News:

We are more than 50 percent self-supporting
 We have a 600,000-square-foot space deficit
 Faculty salaries have slipped to the second quintile of AAUP salary scales

TU Image:

Good News:

- Small feel-large reality
- Accessible and high in quality
- Great outcomes: graduation rates and quality of graduates

Bad News:

- The TU Image – not a player in the University System of Maryland or state of Maryland
- Viewed as good but not sure why. Often gets lost in the shuffle

What do we need to do? We need to focus on five primary areas:

- Enrollment Management, Growth and Mix
- Student Experience, Success
- Partnership Philosophy
- Resources for Success
- Telling and Selling the Story

Enrollment: We need to grow by 2,500 FTE over the next ten years, continue to balance our graduate enrollment at about 20 percent (with 1 percent doctoral), adding selected new programs as needed, and we need to expand our President's Scholar Program and other merit-based programs to bring high quality students to the campus. We also need to expand opportunities for graduate teaching and research assistantships.

Student Experience and Success: We need to define outcomes for quality such as improved salary percentiles for our faculty, targeted programs to be among the best in the state, region or country, targeted and improved graduation and progression rates for our students, and we need to enhance the campus experience overall by providing more successful co-curricular activities and by providing much-needed advising to our students, advising which involves our faculty. Part of this effort will focus on the need for service learning, civic engagement, internships, and, to that end, our involvement in a number of external efforts such as the American Democracy Project, the Call for Liberal Learning Project, American Humanics and Campus Compact. We also need to provide facilities we are proud of. To that end, we will be launching a new, long-range Master Plan for the campus that shifts the entire axis of the campus to be more aligned with the center of Towson, the county seat of Baltimore County, and shifts our main entrance to the Towsontown Boulevard side of the campus.

“We also must continue to nurture and grow our external partnerships. We need to work with government, the schools, the local health providers, local business and local non-profits. We will use a variety of bridges to those external constituents such as our research centers, our extended education efforts, our

consulting efforts, and other forms of partnerships that may be in place or need to be developed. We should be involved in traditional and non-traditional educational efforts, economic development initiatives and efforts focused on social issues in our region.

“In order to make this happen we will need resources. To this end, we have several steps to take including getting approval for our new Master Plan, working with the System to revisit the State’s and System’s funding philosophy for higher education, and increasing our self-support efforts in grant and contract activity and fundraising.

“Finally, we need to tell the Towson story. *We are the Metropolitan University of this State—the Metropolitan University of Maryland.* We are a founding member of that consortium of institutions and have provided leadership to the organization for over 20 years. We are the only dues-paying member in the state and we carry the Metropolitan University banner and the Metropolitan University mission. We are partners with the metropolitan region and with that rule, we will work in the three areas discussed above: education, economic development and social change.

“We also need to communicate more effectively on campus. To that end, I will be establishing a number of mechanisms to allow for communication across the campus. As our need relates to my office, we will have coffees, study breaks, town meetings, and round tables. We will also improve communication across the campus using technology. We will be launching a weekly “E-Newsletter” and we will be working to collate all of the many e-mail announcements on the campus into a Daily Digest that we all get once a day.

“In closing, let me applaud all of you for what you have helped achieve here at Towson University. We provide an experience that is unique and important – *the Towson Experience – the experience of a lifetime -- where imagination becomes reality.* Our students need that kind of experience and we need to continue providing for them. We are the Metropolitan University of Maryland—we are on the move. We are the Metropolitan University of Maryland and we work in partnership with our community.

“Thank you and have a great academic year.”