

Good morning. The beginning of the academic year has been a time to which many of us have looked forward for a while—and some of us for quite some time. And at least for some of us, it continues to bring excitement and anticipation. But some of that excitement these days comes from sources outside of our institutions—as Carol Christ observes in a review of Kirst and Mitchell’s recent work: *Remaking College—the Changing Ecology of higher education.*” According to Professor Christ, “They insist that higher education is an ecology – “as comprising myriad service providers, instructional and administrative labour, funders and regulators interacting in a messy system of educational production. They feel we must attend to this ecology if we are to make adequate sense of the enormous changes unsettling higher education.” And a number of us wrestle daily with that changing ecology with its many interrelated elements, in which shifting ecological conditions will continue to find ways in which learning, however changing, can continue to prosper.

I start by saying thanks to the entire university community, whose participation in the strategic planning process during the spring and summer was absolutely amazing. Upwards to a 100 volunteers worked on the objectives outlined in Dr. May’s current draft document—but more on that later.

For the next few minutes, I wish to do three things. First, I want to identify several parts of the last year that were quite positive, and a few that created challenges for all of us. Second, I want to frame some of my current projections for our next strategic planning cycle—and third, I want to make a few concluding remarks about prospects and opportunities for our university.

To the first area, in many ways, there was a great deal to be positive about Clayton State University. For the first time in several years, enrollments rose—in large parts thanks to a dramatic increase in summer enrollments, reflecting an incredibly effective shared effort of many academic departments making significant changes in summer offerings to reflect specific demands by departmental students. It reflected hard work by our colleagues in enrollment management, including advising and financial aid, to make more students aware of the work of academic programs and the benefits of summer enrollment. Our fond hope is that will continue. This was the first year for our focused academic advising center, and coupled with emerging faculty mentoring for students, amazing strides for student success are ahead of us as well as starting with us now. There were examples of leadership efforts by faculty—departmental, college and university groups accelerated but did not make less rigorous review of programs in film production, for example, and creating the conditions in which this institution has the only BA program in production in the state, and developed the model for the initial academic sequence of the Georgia film academy. Our Fact Book cites recognition by national groups for being seen as a safe institution nationally based on FBI crime statistics, best value in Georgia for 4 year institutions by JAMES MAGAZINE, Top school by Military Advanced Education and Transition magazine for serving veterans, national rankings in psychology, teacher education, BSIT, nursing and nursing graduate program and health care management on-line programs, Human resource leadership MBA, New Lakeview Science and Discovery Center was opened, library renovations were completed, and a new class of university professors were named and supported through the excellent work of university advancement. Move On When Ready dramatically increased our ability to serve high performing students from area school systems. Spivey Hall celebrated its 25th anniversary and the College of Business was reaffirmed for accreditation, earned by less than 5% of the world’s business programs. MARTA now serves our campus, as a precursor for new transportation access to our campus. Adding some internal university funds to those approved by the state legislature, faculty and staff salaries were increased—and thankfully so.

Even though many of you may have legally approved Tasers with you today, only law enforcement officers will have a legal right to carry a fire arm on campus today. While not fully funded, our major renovation project for the academic core received funding sufficient to complete roof repairs on several buildings—ribbon cutting sometime later this year.

On the other hand, some changes in our ecology provided new challenges for us. Of course we continue to work to communicate to a number of students the value they can achieve from learning with us—even as declines in enrollment in earlier fiscal years forced us to face for the first time in several years a reduction in formula funding support from the Board of Regents. While we have taken steps to address that, state formula calculations will require us to move forward for the time being with fewer state financial resources—especially at a time when departments and colleges have identified new activities and need. Contrary to occasional assertions, our enrollment standards have not been reduced in response to this—but changing K-12 environments do not always create conditions in which student academic achievement and “soft skills,” as is the current jargon, are not always matched. The intrusive nature of analytics and advising will address some of this—but for some colleagues not soon enough. Our residence halls at Clayton Station required significant renovations because of inherited structural challenges—even as they are now better than new, it created circumstances that did not benefit our students. And while statistically some of the safest places in metropolitan Atlanta, our campus and Clayton County often bring undeserved fears of safety. Daily conversations happened somewhere on campus daily about actions by the Board of Regents, the General Assembly, the US Department of Education—concerns created by actors from all parts of the political continuum—so at least we have that going for us. Because for better or for worse, if there were ever times in which leadership in higher education could simply say “trust us,” if there were ever such a time, are now gone forever.

These are the times in which choices by the institution are most important. We cannot expect that there will be any more hours to do things, or dollars to act upon them. We can and must make choices about the things which we can and will do—choices that build on natural strengths of our institution and our faculty, staff, students and community.

The current iteration of which can be found at <http://www.clayton.edu/portals/1/strategic-plan/CSU-Strategic-Plan-Document-Draft-6.0-4-1-16.pdf> I offer special thanks to Dr. Gary May and Dr. Keith Miller for their leadership in moving this effort forward. It has been the result of multiple iterations, literally hundreds of participants helping us advance a series of choices. Those choices include deliberate investments in student learning and student success. Some elements of that success will be vested in the continuation of PACE’s continuing success in finding ways in which learning in academic programs can be achieved in a community based context. Others will be vested in finding ways to be more intentional in relating what students learn in our classes to ways in which we increasingly find ways to help students identify what they have learned—and what that learning can mean. Jeffrey Selingo in his work LIFE AFTER COLLEGE identifies one goal that I believe we can achieve significantly over the next five years. Selingo writes: “The most successful graduates I found in researching this book were those who could translate what they learned in one context (the classroom, for instance) to another that is far different from where they originally learned the concept, (such as a project in the public, private, or non-profit sector. [This is called] transfer learning—the ability to generalize core principles and apply them in many different places.”

While originally coded as the EDGE program in earlier drafts of the plan, this goal provides a map for being a national model for bringing together academic advising, course learning, career advising, and internship learning. And watching the expansion of the PACE initiative and the connection such has found to a broad external community, I am confident we can be the kind of model that the current plan suggests we can be.

The plan commits us to becoming a leader in fostering opportunities to learn and practice leadership across the university—including a seminar starting this fall for associate and new professors interested in exploring such opportunities.

The plan commits us to deliberate and thoughtful and sustained enrollment management—rooted in a combination of activities in recruitment, advising, mentoring, and data driven choices for students that will increase chances for their success—such as the addition of a health sciences major to serve students whose good work prepares them for nursing, but whose grades may not be enough for entry into that program. The plan will commit us to a comprehensive fund raising campaign over the life of the plan. And it will commit us to continue to build on our deliberate efforts to test and explore and support faculty efforts in innovations and applications to scale for enhancements of student learning. And it will commit us to being more intentional about the ways in which we communicate—to be more deliberate and invested in increasing ways in which audiences understand who Clayton State is and why what we do is important to Georgia's higher education future. And it will ask us to be more intentional about the ways in which we communicate internally—how do we deliberately communicate with each other to get our work done? And how do we deliberately communicate with each other to improve the ways in which true means of inclusiveness and diversity by identifying and expanding opportunities for interacting with, and listening to people who are not like us. Dealing with issues associated with differences in race, gender, sex, orientation, class and other characteristics requires that we start by observing how communication works now. That can then function as a means of making us a model for preparing students for a world in which they will navigate. It will equip them for a world that will demand individuals who can be successful in such complex communication environments.

In these ways, I am convinced we can be a model for other universities, and a model created by choosing to give priority in time and talent where we can authentically serve as a model. We cannot be Harvard on the South Side—but Harvard cannot be Clayton State on the Charles. We plan to finalize the plan, together with explicit measures or markers for success by October 1, after public comment periods of the work of nearly 100 faculty, staff and students who have participated in the planning process to date—and solidify our claim of conditions in which dreams are made real.

I want to conclude with a note of appreciation to a current staff member of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce who heard this opening presentation last year—and quoted it just this past weekend attributing the quote to me—I shared at the time that the quotation was from the film *A League of Their Own*—and the statement was as follows: "...in response to the lament found in a dialogue from the film: *A League of Their Own*—that the effort had just gotten hard, the character Jimmy Dugan, played by Tom Hanks remarked:

"It's supposed to be hard. If it wasn't hard everyone would do it. The hard is what makes it great." And the things that are accomplished here each day by our colleagues are often hard—and that is what make it so great. And the more that we work to make this the shared work of all of us, the more likely it is that we will find new and creative ways to achieve that greatness with that hard work. And continue

to make it great—to all of my colleagues, I say thanks each day, hoping we will be able to share a beverage together this afternoon and toast to learning.