Words simply cannot express my excitement and gratitude for this moment with you. I am honored to stand before you today as the 17th President of Henderson State University, my alma mater. Henderson has played a critical role throughout my adult life and it holds a very special place in my heart. As a first-generation college student from a working class, blue-collar family, I have experienced the transformative impact that earning a college degree has on students and their families. Prior to 1992, two associate degrees were earned in my extended family (all four branches). Since that time, 20 baccalaureate and graduate degrees have been earned throughout my family, and I am proud to say that five of those degrees have been earned at Henderson State University.

Since I was announced as President in March after a very lengthy and competitive search process, many people have inquired about my “vision” for Henderson and the direction in which we need to go. My response has consistently been to articulate my first and most important goal: To listen and to learn. My goal is simply to ensure the vision that emerges is one that is shared and shaped by the campus community. The first step in this process is to obtain an independent and objective perspective of people, place, purpose and process. As a result, I formed an informal transitional advisory team consisting of the Presidents of the Faculty Senate, Staff Senate, Student Government Association, and the Vice President for External Affairs. Additionally, I have met with several areas throughout campus over the past few weeks and, now that our faculty has returned to campus, I will begin meeting with each academic department over the next four to six weeks.

The goal of these listening sessions is to hear about your dreams and passions in addition to your concerns regarding Henderson and our future. My visits with the faculty will be preceded by an informal survey designed to hear your collective thoughts about Henderson and our future. The survey will be posted online and I ask that you please complete it and return it to our office, with or without your signature. I will commit to reading each survey myself as I work to gain a deeper understanding of Henderson. This survey will serve as a starting point for my discussions with our campus community, which I plan to continue in various venues throughout the year.

As we begin our journey today, I would encourage you to consider the following questions that have been lingering, though not strongly articulated, over the past two years at Henderson:

1. Who are we? Who do we want to be and where do we want to go?
2. How do we get there in a manner that addresses the issues and concerns of the present while preparing us for the uncertainties of the future?
3. How will we honor and build upon our very rich legacy as a university?
4. How will we articulate the value of an education steeped in the liberal arts in a manner that allows us to be viewed as essential in the minds of the current and prospective students, parents, and communities we strive to serve on a daily basis?
5. When, how, and to whom will we tell the great story of Henderson?

Our answers to these questions will define our present and future as we chart a course to navigate through the ever-shifting higher education landscape. There is an ancient Chinese proverb that says, “The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago. The second best time is now.” Henderson, like all institutions of higher education in our country and in our state, is at a crossroads. The public’s continuing demand for stronger accountability and transparency in higher education; the shifting of the burden for paying for college to families; and the growing expectation that more students will graduate from our universities, underscore the importance of preparing ourselves to meet the challenges currently before us. As we contemplate how we will face these challenges while contributing to the Governor’s objective of doubling the number of baccalaureate degree holders in Arkansas by 2025 and the mandates accompanying recently enacted performance funding for higher education institutions, we begin to see the importance of positioning ourselves to succeed in the current educational and political environments.

In the life of our institution, it is time for us to plant a new tree. One that will allow those who follow us to reflect back 20 years from now and conclude: *They got it right and because of the work they (we) did, we are able to enjoy the shade and the fruit from the trees they planted for us.* Successfully planting our tree will require the right foundation to ensure that it takes root and flourishes in its current environment. The foundation for our tree will need to include a relentless and unwavering commitment to the following core principles:

1. Student success and student engagement. We must have a student-centered/learning-centered focus at the heart of the work we are all privileged to participate in. This student-centered focus requires that we place the interests of the student (traditional and non-traditional) first and foremost in all that we do. We exist to educate students and our ability to meet their needs in the current environment will directly determine the quality of our future as a university.
2. Academic Quality.
   a. A specific focus on the innovative nature and strength of our academic programs.
   b. Identifying and supporting mechanisms to continue enhancing the strength of our faculty.

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3. Diversity and Access
4. Fiscal Responsibility and Accountability
5. Shared Governance and Transparency
   a. Defines the collaborative and collegial nature of our relationships.
6. Campus Character
   a. Meeting the needs of our people by striving to provide a high quality work environment, appropriate compensation and affordable benefits, and professional development opportunities.
   b. The sense of support and value we extend to the students we serve.
   c. Ensuring the physical aesthetics of the campus are consistent with our continuing focus on institutional quality.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

A. Performance Funding:

Act 1203 enacted by the Arkansas General Assembly in April 2011 mandated performance funding for higher education institutions in the state of Arkansas. The Act mandates that “Over a period of five years starting with FY2013-2014, 25% of an institution's base funding will be allocated according to performance.” Hence, the awarding of a significant portion of our budget will be contingent upon our ability to satisfy certain performance indicators or measures. Performance funding will commence in Fall 2013 and will be phased in by 5% each year until the 25% threshold is reached in FY2017-2018. Currently, each 5% increase equates to $925,163 for HSU.

The measures utilized to assess performance under the performance funding methodology consist of both optional and mandatory measures. The mandatory measures consist of: (1) Continuous improvement in the number of bachelor’s degrees awarded; (2) Continuous improvement in the number of total degrees awarded; (3) Continuous improvement in the number of STEM degrees awarded; and (4) Progression. Progression measures the persistence rates of all students, thereby rejecting past models that focused exclusively on the retention/performance of first-time freshmen. This new model defines a cohort as anyone who is enrolled in at least six hours and it tracks these individuals throughout the next academic year, and over subsequent years, until they complete their academic program.

Universities are also expected to select a number of optional measures to support the mandatory measures. These measures include:

- Course Completion
- High Demand Credentials (Nursing, Criminology)
- Minority Student Credentials
- Non-traditional Student Credentials

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• Remedial Student Credentials
• Regional Economic Needs Programs Credentials (Teacher Education, Nursing, Social Work)
• Transfer Student Credentials
• Expenditure of Federal Awards
• Patents Issued
• New Company Start-ups.

Performance funding will also include one compensatory measure surrounding the percentage of the undergraduate population that receives Pell Grant support. Performance funding baseline data is currently being compiled for each institution and should be available later this fall at which time we will know the specific impact performance funding will have on next year’s (FY2013-14) budget. Student quality and student retention will be the keys to success under this methodology.

B. Arkansas Higher Education Funding Formula

The state of Arkansas has utilized a formula as the basis for determining an institution’s financial need for several years. The formula consists of a series of weighted values with growth (Student Semester Credit Hour production) being the primary determinant of need. Unfortunately, the funding formula has never been fully funded due to an inadequate amount of funds being available as our legislators have been forced to make some very difficult decisions concerning the funding of higher education, social services, our growing penal system, and the court mandated funding for our K-12 system. However, the state has strived to fund colleges and universities at 75% of the recommended funding level. As some institutions have experienced phenomenal growth over the past decade, their “need” as determined by the funding formula has risen precipitously while available funding to address these new needs has been minimal.

As a result, a significant “inequity” has arisen whereby several four-year institutions are significantly below the 75% threshold. Henderson is not one of those institutions. In fact, Henderson is currently funded at the 91.3% level, one of three institutions currently above the 75% threshold. Therefore, past recommendations called for “freezing” the award of any new dollars to those institutions currently above the 75% threshold until such time that all institutions currently below this this threshold were brought up to the 75% level. This decision is reflected in our 2012-2013 budget in that no new state funds were added to our permanent operating budget despite the fact that the Governor and General Assembly allocated new monies for the current fiscal year. However, the recommendation for the upcoming biennium is to provide a 2.3% Higher Education Price Index (HEPI) adjustment before any funding is allocated to those institutions currently below the 75% threshold.

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C. The Emergence and Growth of Distance Education

The continuing meteoric rise of distance education has resulted in 799 distance education degree programs being offered by in-state, out-of-state, public, private, and for-profit institutions; all competing for the opportunity to educate the people of Arkansas. Promoting a combination of high quality accredited programs, unrivaled student service, affordability and convenience; these institutions have grown considerably in recent years, often at the expense of smaller institutions such as Henderson. Their growth has been achieved primarily by re-directing would-be transfer students away from a traditional, four-year residential experience while catering to the needs of working, family-oriented professionals with a strategic array of highly desired graduate programs. Embracing distance education and strategic partnerships with two-year institutions, where it makes sense for Henderson, will be critically important to our future since transfer students represent the largest opportunity for sustainable growth with quality students.

The Funding Formula, the shift to Performance Funding, and the continuing growth and popularity of distance education, collectively convey the challenge before as we grapple internally with concerns regarding student enrollment, faculty and staff salaries, and ever-increasing campus deferred maintenance needs. These challenges are both real and significant and we must develop a comprehensive plan and supporting strategy to address these issues over the next several years.

THE PATH FORWARD

In order to excel in the current educational, fiscal, and political environment while remaining true to ourselves, I believe it is imperative that we focus on three things moving forward: (1) Honor the Past; (2) Seize the Present and (3) Prepare for Tomorrow.

Honoring the Past
We will tell the story of Henderson. The story of its people, our facilities, and the difference we are making in our region and throughout the world. Many wonderful legacies from the past 122 years have been entrusted to our care and we must build upon, not replace, this foundation in the years to come. As I mentioned earlier, I am a Reddie and I understand the importance that both history and tradition have played, and will continue to play, in the life of our institution. Our past is one of the items that allows us to distinguish ourselves from other institutions and is something that is indeed unique to Henderson.

Carpe Diem/Win the Day!
We must literally seize the opportunities before us and excel in all of our efforts as we proactively work to address concerns regarding reduced state funding, the current application of the state’s funding formula, and the emergence of

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performance funding with its emphasis on student engagement and success. Winning the day requires that we focus first and foremost on the heart and soul of the institution: the quality and strength of our academic programs and the faculty whose effort creates and sustains these programs. We must make every effort to protect the integrity of our programs while understanding that the evolving nature of our students will require that we make adjustments/changes to accommodate both their learning styles and their preferences for learning.

Next, winning the day requires that we implement a relentless focus on Enrollment Management, the common denominator of all that is done in higher education. Enrollment Management literally touches every facet of the university and it will play a critical role in defining who we will be in the future. Enrollment Management determines everything from the size of our faculty to the number of parking spaces we need. It is the primary determinant of the amount of funding we will receive from the state while also dictating the level of private support that will be needed to attract some of the very best students and faculty to Henderson. It drives our operating budget and directly impacts our ability to award well deserved salary adjustments for our faculty and our staff. It is indeed the number one challenge facing Henderson and it will receive an inordinate amount of attention over the next 18-24 months given the impact this item will have on Henderson’s present and future. We all will have to share ownership of this important initiative and I encourage you as the faculty of Henderson to support this effort fully as we work to define the steps we must take to recruit the very “best and brightest” students to Henderson.

Finally, winning the day will require that we also focus on University Advancement whereby we will define and articulate who we are and no longer allow ourselves to be defined by others or in relation/comparison to other institutions. For the reasons detailed earlier, it will be more important now than ever that we engage in friend raising, fundraising, marketing and branding. One characteristic that often distinguishes thriving universities from those that are striving to maintain the status quo is the level of private support received by an institution. Private support allows us to seed new programs, strengthen existing programs, recruit even higher achieving students, build world-class facilities, renovate existing facilities, create appropriately landscaped grounds, expand service learning opportunities for students and provide salary, recruitment and professional development support for our outstanding faculty and staff.

Winning the day in the current environment is not optional, it is mandatory if we are going to continue to offer an outstanding, liberal arts education to the students we serve. As a result, I will be working relentlessly over the next several months to complete the establishment of our leadership team in each of the areas referenced above. As you know, Dr. Vernon Miles has resigned his position as Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs to continue his pursuit of becoming a university

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president. The job of Provost is among the most difficult jobs in higher education and I want to thank Vernon for his service to Henderson. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Maralyn Sommer for her willingness to step up, once again, and serve as Interim Provost. Dr. Sommer has done an excellent job thus far and I am confident that she will continue to serve us well throughout the year. She has made it clear that she will only serve for a year and would like to return to normalcy as soon as possible. As a result, I will be formally appointing a search committee for the position of Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs sometime next week. The committee will consist of a broad cross section of the academic community along with one or two individuals from critical support areas. The group will be convened within the next two weeks to begin a very intense, aggressive search for a Provost. The academic community will have an opportunity to visit with each of the finalists for the position, as they will be invited to spend two days interviewing on campus while meeting members of the larger community. This will be a very important search for our campus and for me personally since the Provost will in many respects serve as my right hand person.

One component of my administrative team has already been filled with Dr. Lewis Shepherd agreeing, at my request, to serve as Vice President for Student and External Affairs. Dr. Shepherd has an impressive record of service as an administrator and his commitment to students and their success has been evident throughout his career. He will be working collaboratively with the campus community in all matters involving student affairs with an initial focus on student leadership initiatives as well as the development of a campus enrollment management plan. Dr. Shepherd, thank you for agreeing to serve in this capacity.

Another component of my administrative team will be the creation of the position of Vice President for University Advancement to coordinate and oversee the development, public relations, marketing, grant writing, and fundraising areas of the university. The university will be celebrating its 125th anniversary in three years and this celebration presents a rare opportunity to coordinate the efforts of university advancement in a manner that allows us to tell our story, enhance existing friendships, create new friendships, seek additional resources, and advance our university in ways that are simply not possible without external support. Surprisingly, Henderson has not had a Vice President for University Advancement for several years. Given the current challenges before us, we must provide additional emphasis in this area.

Preparing for Tomorrow

While I hope we will do many great things during my tenure as President of Henderson, I understand that hope, while a good thing, is not a strategy. Therefore, we will be very strategic in planning the future of our campus and in our day-to-day work activities to ensure Henderson is appropriately positioned to continue

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delivering a high quality education for the next 125 years. The immediate plan we will develop is an Enrollment Management Plan to ensure our recruitment and retention strategies are appropriate and effective as we prepare to meet the various opportunities presented by performance funding. We will also work to develop a strategic marketing plan that will enable us to tell the many great stories of Henderson in a more consistent and effective fashion. Our faculty is continuing to do many great things in the areas of teaching, student engagement, and research. These are great stories that will continue to inspire prospective students to choose Henderson and that will enhance our reputation throughout the communities we serve and beyond. Campus safety continues to be a significant concern for universities throughout the nation, as the threat/fears of campus violence remains an ever-present concern in all of our lives. As a result, we have begun reviewing our current campus safety plan to ensure the campus is appropriately prepared in the event the unimaginable were to occur. Finally, we will begin assessing the current campus strategic plan throughout the fall semester as we begin laying the foundation for a plan that will guide the university from Fall 2013 to Fall 2018.

The next 180 days will find me focused on four essential items as your president: (1) Connecting with the Campus; (2) Connecting with the Community; (3) Building a Senior Administrative Team; and (4) Working to develop an Enrollment Management Plan. Henderson State University is a very special place and we have the opportunity, and the responsibility, to make it even better. A student-centered approach that emphasizes the importance of strong academic programs supported by a strong faculty will position the university to win the day. Our students need to be told they are good enough and that they can indeed earn a college degree and that we are here to help them attain their goal. They need to be affirmed in who they are as individuals and to be challenged in who they can become as our leaders of tomorrow. They need to be told, and they need to hear, that Henderson is a place that can, and will, transform their lives. That is the legacy of our Henderson and collectively we have an opportunity to chart a path that will ensure Henderson continues to meet the needs of all we serve for another 125 years.

I am thrilled to serve as your President and believe we have the right mission, the right people, and that this is the right time for the state's liberal arts institution to assume our rightful place as one of the premier higher education institutions in our state. The strength of our faculty will be the primary determinate of whether this objective is achieved. Moving forward, I need you to dream big dreams about Henderson and how we can continue to transform the lives of the students we serve and ultimately impact the world in which we live and lead.

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