President Zimpher’s Inaugural Address
May 21, 2004

Good afternoon everybody. Recall Chairman of the Ohio Board of Regents Tom Noe invoked my favorite song. This is how it goes, Tom…

*Down beside*
*Where the waters flow;*
*Down by the*
*Banks of the Ohio.*

Governor Taft: I am delighted to be back in the Great State of Ohio and I look forward to serving the interests of its people.

Mayor Luken: Cincinnati rocks! It’s just a way-cool city in which to live, work and play!

Regent Chair Noe: Ohio higher education is THE economic and intellectual engine for the state.

UC Trustee Chair George Schaefer and devoted members of the Board of Trustees, thank you for giving me this wonderful opportunity to serve the University of Cincinnati.

Distinguished members of the UC family -- cabinet, deans, faculty, staff, students, alumni, friends, neighbors, corporate and civic leaders -- I am overwhelmed by the sheer size of your presence here today -- my sincere gratitude not only for your warm welcome to this campus and this city, but most especially for your willingness to roll up your sleeves and go to work in behalf of this university, this community and society at large.

To DAAP fashion design wizards, Margie and Ann, you have woven into the fabric of this landmark regalia a sense of unequivocal institutional pride, which I will wear with honor.

“To whom much has been given, much is expected;” a philosophy I acquired early on, thanks to:

- my sister, Mary Ann and my brother, Rodney, who are just as surprised as I am to see our mutual upbringing come to this! They, more than any two people I know, epitomize what our parents had in mind for us. I just followed their lead. May my son, Fletcher, take note of the gene pool!

- my remarkable Theta sisters, who gave me a very early glimpse of women in leadership;

- my Gallia Academy High School graduating class of ’64, whose support and friendship I will always cherish;
and my husband and academic life partner, Ken Howey. Raised as a cheesehead, educated as a Badger, those of you at UC and in Cincinnati, and especially in CPS, who have gotten to know Ken and his deep and abiding commitment for teaching and learning in urban contexts, know why when we left UWM for Cincinnati, someone quickly opined, “You can go; but leave Ken!” Who could leave behind a guy who once said to me, “I love your leadership style!”

All this being said, to all of you here present, I can’t tell you how pleased I am that you have joined this celebration. You’ve come from far and wide, and from just across the street. Some of you have done this before; for others it’s a first. As Jeff noted, when you change presidents on the same life cycle as the cicadas, you have to wait awhile! I am especially pleased to be joined on the platform by presidents emeriti Joe Steger and Henry Winkler. I know some days it’s hard to watch! But I want you to know that I know I stand today on your broad shoulders of accomplishments. What an incredible legacy I have inherited:

A wide array of outstanding programs, a campus remarkable for its physical vibrancy and architectural eclecticism, its distinguished faculty of innovative scholars and teachers, a dedicated and creative staff, a diverse and spontaneous student body, a vast array of alumni and friends, and deep connections to the community.

Today we observe not a single occasion or one inauguration. We mark, instead, a triple celebration. My installation has been timed to recognize as well the newest elements in our MainStreet opening and to share with you a future vision for the University of Cincinnati, a plan that has resulted from months of collective soul-searching and consultation.

Our newly modernized Tangeman University Center and our brand new Joseph A. Steger Student Life Center once were mere ideas that grew out of the collective thought of our campus community. Their new and impressive mark on our landscape today represents a visible testament of the transition from aspiration to reality.

They also represent a bridging of the past to the future. Tangeman’s cupola and clock tower, which date back to 1937, still chime above us as we walk across the campus. Historic and graceful pillars continue to mark its front entrance. Yet inside, the center offers modern amenities that a new century not only desires, but also in many cases, requires.

Our UC MainStreet also stands as another kind of symbol, one that echoes in our future vision for UC. Like cities throughout the nation and the world, our university community now has a healthy and vital MainStreet. Ultimately, one street connects to another, then to another, until in the end all roads intersect in some way. Our MainStreet links to the community around us in a reciprocal relationship, and indeed with the nation and the world.

Our academic plan, *UC*|21: *Defining the New Urban Research University*, affirms the same kind of connection. UC|21 lays out an ambitious set of goals to define the role of the new urban research university in this dynamic new century, building on our capacity to serve and to lead.
Nearly a century ago in 1906, UC “reinvented” higher education with its creation of cooperative education -- experiential learning built on a well-researched scientific basis for on-the-job action -- the first such program in the world. Today with the demands and the challenges of the 21st century only beginning to unfold before us, our University of Cincinnati stands ready once again to “reinvent” itself with a new plan of action: UC|21.

Why did we endeavor to shape a vision of our future to begin with?

First, those who hired me – both the search and selection committee and members of the Board of Trustees – set this task as our highest priority. Through days and weeks of conversation both on and off campus, the mantra was repeated: “We need to chart an ambitious future deserving of a great university; a future that will propel UC to premier institutional stature.”

Beyond the charge I received from the Board of Trustees, I have said before and I’ll repeat today, vision trumps everything. As former Connecticut College President Claire Gaudiani once observed, “don’t dream scrawny!” We haven’t and we won’t.

Drifting into the future is not an option under this watch. Now more than ever, we need to craft our vision for the future, adopt a set of principles and pursue strategies that will bring that vision to life. What started as a series of consultations, from Day 1, through Week 1, and on into Month 1, quickly grew to include eight Town Hall meetings and scores of input sessions. We asked Bob Gleason of the Revere Group to serve as our friendly facilitator.

We stated that our goal was nothing short of “massive inclusivity” – we wanted to reach the full range of the university’s stakeholders – students, full- and part-time faculty, staff, emeriti, alumni, corporate partners, donors, civic and social service leaders, and neighbors.

By the time the last Town Hall was convened on April 20th, we astounded even ourselves. Our process proved to be unprecedented. We seemed to tap into a hunger to speak, to move this institution forward into a new level of greatness.

Added to the 240 Town Hall participants were another 2400 attendees at various Input Sessions. Hundreds of people also voiced their opinions using our Web site – garnering literally thousands of visits over recent weeks and months. The process resulted in over 800 pages of notes, which we have now painstakingly distilled into UC|21!

In all, our plan has identified “21” action steps that will not only help us to become, but also to define, what it means to be an urban research university in the 21st century. I hope it is a good sign that our 21 ideas are being unveiled on the 21st day of the month! Enough already!
Some may ask why we have inserted the word “urban” into our vision. To be truthful, our university community strongly debated the term. Some contended that too many people equate “urban” with decay, blight, flight and a myriad other troubling issues. They argued that we are placing our university at risk of being associated with these notions.

But to those of us who learn and live, work and play, in the city, “urban” does not mean disadvantage. Rather “urban” means opportunity, culture, excitement, vibrancy and vitality.

For the past 185 years, we have evolved with our city. We were founded with Cincinnati in our name. We have roots as a municipal university. We thrive in the middle of a metropolitan area, in one of the city’s most active economic centers.

We embrace a proposition that another university president invoked at an inauguration more than 100 years ago: "[J]ust as the great cities of the country represent the national life in its fullness and variety, so the urban universities are in the truest sense…national universities."

UC is national and international in impact, yet we also have the opportunity and I would even suggest the obligation to redefine the national perspective on what it means to be the new urban-engaged university -- What it truly means to integrate our triadic missions of learning, discovery and community engagement. It is time to move beyond theory to real commitment.

Urban research universities, such as UC, have both capacity and convening power to do so.

We must use these powers as instruments of engagement; to change forever the quality of our life together, to use our commitment to research and discovery, innovation and instruction, engagement and outreach in service to society. By engagement, we envision partnerships as two-way streets defined by mutual respect among the partners for what each brings to the table.

On the day that I publicly accepted this job last July, I asserted that urban universities, and especially one of the stature of the University of Cincinnati, will become prototypic 21st-century universities. The voices of hundreds of people from across the campus and community have refined the seed of that idea into UC|21.

We culled through that collective wisdom and found five core values that will guide us as we strive to serve the public as a new urban research university in a dynamic and unfolding century:

Scholarship: The creation and application of knowledge, with an emphasis on scholarly inquiry, research, experimentation, investigation and creative production.

Citizenship: The ability to apply knowledge and skills for responsible civic life and action, with an emphasis on public engagement and ethical purpose.

Stewardship: The responsibility of the university to carry out its unique place in society, which is to conserve intellectual inquiry.
Leadership: Motivating others to take actions that would not otherwise be taken.

And, Partnership: Working collaboratively and building collaborations to address complex issues and problems.

Our 21 action steps are organized around six aspirations, or standards of excellence, that we believe will best serve society and best position UC to serve the needs of our ever-changing world:

**Our First Standard of Excellence: Place Students at the Center**

To become a university that students choose rather than attend by default, we must do a better job of keeping students at the core of all we do.

**Our Second Standard of Excellence: Grow Our Research Capacity**

To build upon UC’s prominence in research, we must continue to build on our greatness as innovators and inventors to benefit society, have meaningful impact and enhance the quality of life for all. Today, we reside among the nation’s top 25 public research institutions, but we aspire for an ever-better standing.

**Our Third Standard of Excellence: Achieve Academic Prominence**

UC has achieved distinction through nationally ranked programs. In fact, UC may be unique in boasting distinguished programs while maintaining a deep commitment to open, accessible education that affords opportunity for those who might not find it elsewhere. We will also fuel our program excellence by placing liberal education at the core of both academic and professional programs. We seek to enhance our national presence and recognition, by drawing more attention to our assets and leveraging our entrance into the Big East Conference not only toward athletic success, but also to tell the story that is uniquely UC.

**Our Fourth Standard of Excellence: Forge Key Relationships and Partnerships**

Universities are places where new knowledge is formed and where potential is developed and discovered, but a university cannot be innovative by working in isolation. Community engagement is essential. We seek to create a front door to UC resources and expertise for the community and to develop more meaningful, reciprocal partnerships.

**Our Fifth Standard of Excellence: Establish a Sense of Place**

We have spent the past 15 years undergoing a major physical renaissance. Now we want to transform our institution into one that truly is “UC any time, anyplace,” with 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week services and educational activities.

**Our Sixth Standard of Excellence: Create Opportunity**
A university is ultimately a place where potential is nurtured and blossoms into successful graduates. Universities also serve as vital engines of opportunity for the local and global economy. UC21 seeks to strengthen UC’s position as an educator of a skilled, principled workforce and as a catalyst for entrepreneurship and as a partner in economic development.

With these goals now in mind, I reach what might be the most challenging components of the plan, yet to be realized. When executing a bold agenda, I’ve learned, call on someone who knows how to deliver a challenge. Say late night guru, David Letterman, and his “top ten reasons for everything!” Think of these as eminently plausible stretch goals. Something big enough that if reached could truly redefine this institution as we know it; yet achievable enough to engage UC and its community in the challenge of a life-time. Remember…make no small plans.

And so, very ambitious stretch goal #10: Change our mix of students to include more out-of-state students; students who bring with them different cultures and points of view and expose us to worlds beyond our boundaries, while keeping intact our commitment to “educate Ohio.”

Very important stretch goal #9: Convert over 80% of our classrooms to wireless technologies. We’re at 30% today, but we recognize from living with the way-cool wired generation, that we must go to that virtual place students call home. And we must settle for nothing less than 100% on-line access for our students to our courses and their instructors.

Very important stretch goal #8: Create a 24/7 campus, realizing that around-the-clock operations will mean more kilowatt hours per day, more slices of pizza in TUC, more public transportation, more evening and weekend classes, and in the final analysis, more access to our campus not only by our students, but our neighbors as well.

Very important stretch goal #7: Increase the number and caliber of faculty distinctions. One sign of a world class faculty is the number of prestigious awards such as Fulbright and Woodrow Wilson Fellowships. Thus our goal might well be to triple the number of these peer distinctions over the next five years.

Very important stretch goal #6:

Our distinguished faculty have already reached extraordinary external funding benchmarks in research. We have before us the incredible potential to attract additional research dollars to help us weave together the intellectual capacities of the University, its corporate and government partners, to literally save lives and simultaneously create jobs. A reasonable estimation of these ambitions would be to double the external funding we received to more than $600 million in the next five years—especially given our Medical Center’s ambitious Millennium Plan.

Very important stretch goal #5:

Wade into the dreaded mass media culture of reductive rankings. First strive to change the criterion to more meaningful measures of institutional and societal success. Then strive to meet
the metric: more highly ranked programs, more measurable contributions to the common good. Our ambitions assume continued investment in programs of excellence and the careful nurturance of programs well on their way to excellence.

**Very important stretch goal #4:**

Here we ought to be looking at doubling the number of National Merit Scholars in our freshman class and increasing the number of our freshmen students who graduate in the top 10% of their high school classes. We intend as well to continue to ensure “opportunity” here at UC. We do not see quality and opportunity as divided by the tyranny of the “or”; we see these as two sides of the same coin. We must, however, create the most effective pathways to success for the students we admit to UC, specifically through more robust partnerships with Cincinnati Public Schools and Cincinnati State, both of which are well underway, and with other two and four-year institutions across the state. If we continue on this collaborative course, UC will become a model transfer and articulation campus for Ohio.

**Very important stretch goal #3:**

Improve our graduation and retention rates to at least 75%. In other words, give us a graduation rate our football team (now graduating nearly 85% of its senior players) can be proud of.

**Very important stretch goal #2:**

Break into the ranks of the top 50 public and private universities, by whatever criteria, on whatever list, by blending our deep and historic commitment to community engagement with our already realized capacity as a research university. In other words, join the ranks of this nation’s TOP universities…on OUR terms.

**Very important stretch goal #1:**

Drum roll, please. We must ensure that we have the pocketbook to realize our ambitions. Our goal is to grow our financial and human resources beyond the rate of our increasing expenses. Overall, we aim to increase our general funds by 50% over the next five years. 50 in 5, we call it. To do so we will likely model our enrollments upwards to reach perhaps an additional 5000 students…educating Ohio for a better Ohio. We must seek regulatory relief and deregulation on tuition; become more entrepreneurial in the programs we can deliver anytime, anywhere; provide performance incentives for academic units to deliver more market-driven programs; and, most importantly, cultivate stronger relationships with our donors, clearly the major investors in our past, and I dare say, in our future.

Realizing the goals which we have set forth in UC|21 will, in fact, take a lot of hard work, energy, enthusiasm, commitment and frankly, collective will. Each of us here will play a role in that attainment. Students, faculty, staff, alumni, donors, community leaders, elected officials…Together, we will need to be willing to experiment, to change, to learn from mistakes, to act our way into this 21st century vision, and to celebrate its accomplishments.
A few weeks ago, one of our town hall participants, student Matthew Rosensweet, told me at a reception at his fraternity house that he believes UC stands at a turning point as a result of our work. Matt predicts that UC will never be the same…

And I share his confidence. Together we will define a new future.

As Chairman Schaefer observed, this is a moment in time for the University of Cincinnati. It will require great courage and significant leadership from us all. But we will prevail, and I believe be stronger for it.

In many ways, UC|21 has been a labor of love. We have come a long way in defining our ambitions for the future; undoubtedly we have a long way to go. This adaptation of the wisdom of Winston Churchill framed the benediction of our closing Town Hall meeting. It deserves to be repeated today:

This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning…for UC|21: Defining the New Urban Research University.

Go UC!