

CONVOCATION
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 22, 2012

Thank you, Justin, and thank you, Mike, for your opening comments. More importantly, thank you for your service to Wilkes University. Please join me in thanking Justin and Mike for the good work they do in their respective roles here.

As you know, Justin and Mike are new chairs to FAC and USAC. So, before we proceed, I'd like to thank their predecessors, Don Mencer and Gretchen Yeninas, for their service to the University. Please join me in thanking them.

I hope you will permit me to introduce my wife, Amy, and my daughters, Grace and Molly, who are here with me this morning. You might notice that my boys, Jack and Brian, have not joined us this morning. Amy and I encouraged them to come, but I don't think they saw this as the optimal way to spend one of their last days of summer vacation. I trust you will excuse them.

Thank you all for being here this morning. Welcome back to Wilkes as we begin yet another academic year. We are beginning our 79th year serving the students of this valley and beyond. For those of you – like me – who are joining this community for your 1st year, I'd like to welcome you in a special way. Would anyone who has joined us – faculty or staff – in the past year please stand and be recognized? Welcome.

Before I get into my remarks, I'd like to thank each and every one of you for the warm welcome that you have extended to me during my first days as your president. It has meant a great deal to my family and me. We are thrilled to be among the newest members of this Army of Colonels.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to address a gathering of all of us who work here. You are the people who make things happen here at Wilkes. You are the ones who are literally dedicating your lives to Wilkes University and the students we serve. As I work through my onboarding plan, which includes visits to every administrative and academic department on campus, I am meeting a lot of people and learning a lot about Wilkes. So far, three things stand out to me.

First, this community is singularly focused on student success – from the professors who take the extra time to collaborate on research with students – to the coaches who mentor their athletes after wins and losses – from the advising staff who carefully craft curricular and co-curricular opportunities for our students – to the facilities staff who keep our campus beautiful – all of you work in some fashion or another to make students successful. This is a place where the idea of mentoring is imbedded into our DNA as a community. If you don't believe me, just ask Brad Kuzawinski. You may remember Brad, who graduated this past year with 3 degrees – electrical engineering, applied engineering science, and mechanical engineering. Oh, and while he was at it, he added minors in statistics, math, and physics. According to Brad's father, "He would never have accomplished this without the people at Wilkes. He had instructors at Wilkes that went above and beyond the call of duty." Or, just ask Laura Joy Perales. Laura was an online master's student in Instructional Media. She came from Nashville, Tennessee to campus for the first time for commencement. She told me: "I wanted to come to Wilkes and participate in commencement because I had a much more meaningful experience as an online student at

Wilkes than I did as a traditional residential student at my undergraduate institution in Tennessee.” As I said, this community is singularly focused on student success. And, to be perfectly honest, I don’t think people in the higher education community fully appreciate the great work that happens here. We need to find more effective ways to promote Wilkes.

Second, this community is committed – even hungry – to improve and to innovate. You ask: How do we improve student outcomes? How do we keep this first-class private education accessible and affordable? What can we do today to be better tomorrow? Let me give you just one example. Wilkes has created an innovative pre-engineering program that allows talented high school students to get a jump start on an engineering degree here at Wilkes. Recently, Rodney Ridley from Engineering and Alex Sperazza from Admissions conducted a meeting with prospective students and their parents. Here’s what one mom had to say. “I have to tell you, that meeting was a gift. I have never seen Matt pay attention to any meeting like he did last night. After the meeting, he was the first one out of his chair to talk to Rodney and Alex. He was so excited about what he heard. I was so proud and excited to see Matt so interested in something. Thanks so much for this unique opportunity.” We’ll need to continue this culture of innovation – and do it in this caring way – in order to tackle the challenges that lie ahead of us.

Third, the people associated with Wilkes University care – I mean really care – about this place. For those of you who work here, Wilkes is not just a job; it’s a vocation. For our students, Wilkes is not just a school; it’s a way of life. For those who graduated from here, Wilkes isn’t just their university; it’s their alma mater – in the Latin their “other mother.” If you doubt this, ask one of our recent students – Xiaoqiao Zhang. Here’s what she recently said about Wilkes. “As an international student, I don’t have any of my family members living in the States with me. At the Freedom Conference Championship finals in tennis, before I started my match, I was upset that I didn’t have my parents there to support me. My teammates spotted that I guess, so all of a sudden all of their parents came over and sat behind me. One parent came up to me and told me: “Good luck. You have your American family here to cheer you on.” Every day I felt so lucky to study here at Wilkes, because I no longer felt alone. I have friends and faculty and staff members there to support me when I needed them! There is a lot more I can tell you, but I don’t think I can explain my feeling about Wilkes with words.” Xiaoqiao is here today . . . because she just this summer joined us as our new international recruiter. Can you imagine a better person to represent what Wilkes offers to other international students?

A total commitment to student success, a spirit of innovation, and a caring community - what a privileged situation for a new president! I have said repeatedly that I would have relocated almost anywhere in the country for an opportunity to lead a university like Wilkes. To be able to do it in my adopted hometown of Northeast Pennsylvania – a place that my family and I have grown to love – is a special privilege in my life, one for which I am very grateful.

But, we can be better still. I fear the events of the past few years may be holding us back. We can put the past behind us. We need to restore the trust, the collaboration, and the family spirit that makes good institutions great ones. We must begin to trust each other again. Of course, just saying this doesn’t make it so, but saying it is the first step. We need to change some of the ways we do things. As Henry David Thoreau said: “Things do not change; people

change.” But, despite this overwhelming need for change, new presidents must move carefully . . . and not change too much too fast.

With this in mind, I’d like to update you on a number of changes that I have made in just my first 60 days or so, as well as update you on our progress on other important ongoing initiatives.

Interim Provost. As all of you know, our Provost, Reynold Verret, has moved on from Wilkes University. We had a chance to wish Reynold well at a reception in his honor earlier this summer. This gives us an opportunity to start again with new academic leadership. Given the timing, we needed to find an Interim Provost to lead our academic efforts, while we begin the process to search for a full-time replacement. In working with the Faculty Affairs Council, we decided to name a mini-search committee to provide genuine collaboration in this important decision. The FAC named 3 members from the faculty at large, and I named 3 members from the administration, two of whom are academic administrators. After careful deliberation, the committee met with me and provided 5 names of excellent individuals from around campus. I met with each person privately, then spoke at length with the cabinet and the deans. After my own careful consideration, I have asked Terri Wignot, Associate Professor of Chemistry, to serve as Interim Provost for the coming year. Terri brings years of service to Wilkes as a dedicated professor, long-time chair of the Chemistry Department, the Director of Science in Motion, a current member of the Admissions & Financial Aid Committee, our NCAA Faculty Athletics Representative, and a past member of the Faculty Affairs Council. Terri, would you please stand and be recognized? Thank you, Terri, for your willingness to take on this important position.

The search for a full-time replacement will begin in earnest in September. I have asked the VP for Student Affairs, Paul Adams, to lead this search. I will ask FAC to co-ordinate the election of the 4 faculty members and USAC to co-ordinate the election of the one non-administrative representative to this search committee. Stay tuned.

Cabinet. One of my first actions as the president to improve our collaborative decision-making was to formally expand my cabinet. Effective immediately all of the academic deans have joined the vice-presidents as full members of the cabinet. Including the deans provides more academic voices in University decision-making. It enables me a greater understanding of the issues in each college. It is designed to aid my ability both to obtain feedback from faculty and staff in the different colleges and to improve communication across campus. While we won’t always agree on decisions that are made, you deserve two things: 1) to offer your opinions in University decision-making and 2) to receive a clear rationale for decisions after they are made. Having the deans on the cabinet will help in achieving these goals. We will try this expanded cabinet for the coming year, especially this year of transition, and see how it goes.

Budget. It is pretty clear to me that the way in which we build our annual operating budgets could use some improvement. Let me be candid. Our operating budgets in the years ahead will continue to be challenging. Finding the right balance of investing in academic quality, compensating our faculty and staff, developing the campus, and saving for the future will be very difficult in an era when there’s downward pressure on tuition, upward pressure on financial aid, and upward pressure on operating expenses. We need to address these

challenges . . . together. Therefore, I have changed the process for building the budget. The new budget committee will include all members of the expanded cabinet, including all of our academic deans, and faculty and staff representatives, who will be elected by the FAC and USAC respectively. This process will begin in September with a goal to prepare the coming year's operating budget by the conclusion of the fall semester, giving us plenty of time to prepare to present this budget to the finance committee of the board at our February / March meeting.

In addition, I will be recommending that decisions on compensation remain in the fall, giving us a chance to determine the strength of our incoming undergraduate and graduate enrollment. In years when the enrollment looks strong, I will propose a compensation increase. In years when the enrollment is a bit weaker, then I may not propose an increase. This ties our compensation as a campus community directly to our primary revenue driver – tuition. I am hopeful that I can come back to the University community later in the fall with a positive recommendation.

Enrollment. Speaking of enrollment, our fall 2012 freshman class will number 600 (or a few more), marking only the second time in Wilkes history that we will enroll a freshman class over 600 students. The class includes 38 international freshmen, which is more than two times the fall 2011 number. With slightly less than 3,000 freshman applications, this is also the largest applicant pool on record. We anticipate a discount rate of approximately 47%, which is three percentage points below last year. And, our academic quality has remained consistent this year over last year. In fact, this year's freshman class will include 7 valedictorians and 6 salutatorians. In a departure from the national gender trend, our freshman class is equally divided between male and female students. This is good news for Wilkes. I'd like to thank all of our undergraduate enrollment team for their good work.

In addition, retention rates are up in almost every student category, with freshman-to-sophomore retention reporting at 82.9%, which is slightly higher than last year's all-time high. And, this is a reflection of the good work of everyone here today. Thank you.

Graduate enrollment for the fall looks solid, despite the continuing cuts to teacher education throughout the Commonwealth, which is resulting in decreasing enrollment in that area. This is also good news for Wilkes. I'd like to thank all of our graduate enrollment team for their good work, too.

Let me suggest that enrollment is one of the two issues that keep me awake at night. (The other, which probably goes without saying, is keeping the students entrusted to us safe and healthy.) We won't have the opportunity to deliver the life-transforming education here at Wilkes into the future if we don't continue to enroll robust classes. And, despite these successes, enrolling students will continue to be hyper-competitive in the years ahead as the demographics move against us. All of us must work together to enroll the quality and the quantity that we seek in our student body here at Wilkes. We must ensure that our programs match prospective student interest, that our enrollment functions are adequately resourced, and that our marketing efforts remain strong. As your president, I will focus on enrollment, both on the undergraduate and graduate levels, like a laser.

Mesa Initiative. Now, speaking of enrolling students, let me say a few words about our expansion west into Mesa, AZ. As you know, when I arrived, this project was well underway.

Like many of you, I had questions about it. Why Mesa? Why Wilkes? Why now? I have studied the information regarding the Mesa Initiative. I have spoken at great length with many of the Wilkes personnel who will be offering programs there. And, during just my second week on the job, I had an opportunity to visit Mesa to meet with the economic development officials and other consortium partners. I have come to the following conclusion: This is a tremendous opportunity for Wilkes University!

Nearly 80 years ago a group of community leaders here in Pennsylvania decided that they needed another higher education option for the people of this valley and beyond. Bucknell University answered that call and Bucknell Junior College (now Wilkes University) was born. Where would Wilkes-Barre be today without Wilkes University? Today, in Mesa, Arizona – a fast developing part of our nation – history is repeating itself. A group of community leaders in Arizona have decided that they need other higher education options for the people of their valley and beyond. They put out Requests for Information to hundreds of institutions nationwide. Just 28 institutions – twenty-eight entrepreneurial institutions like Wilkes – responded. Twelve were invited to interview. Just 4 were selected. Our university is one of them. The community leaders with whom I spoke cited: our impressive mix of programs, our personalized attention, our dedication to first generation students, and our commitment to regional economic development as factors in their decision. When Mesa started announcing the arrival of institutions like Wilkes, and Benedictine, and Albright, and Westminster, the inquiries from interested institutions started pouring in. This makes me very proud to be the president of Wilkes University.

Mesa, which is part of the greater Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area, has a very robust community college system, with enrollment of over 260,000 students. It has a strong public, research university system, including the University of Arizona, Arizona State University, and Northern Arizona University, all institutions that are nearing their capacity. However, students in Arizona have few, if any, private higher education options. We will be offering programs in Mesa that serve an important niche in that market. And, for the first 5 years, we will have program exclusivity to aid our ability to get properly established. Expanding to Mesa allows us to extend our unique brand across the country. It allows us the opportunity to potentially partner with first-class companies like Motorola and Intel. With our consortium partners we can reimagine the delivery of higher education in the 21st century.

Let me assure you as clearly as I can that we will manage the development of the Mesa location carefully. We have committed to a budget neutral proposition even in the first year, which is really unheard of and should be a measure of the opportunity out there. The goal over time, of course, is for the Mesa location to produce net positive contributions to the University's operating budget, providing additional resources to invest in Wilkes University. Mike Speziale, in conjunction with the deans of the colleges, will manage this effort carefully. I've always thought what starts out right ends up right. As you know, I have announced that Dr. Bonnie Culver will serve the coming year as the Interim Executive Director of the Mesa Center. We know Bonnie will represent Wilkes well. She has graciously agreed to serve in this capacity as part of her regular duties here at Wilkes. In fact, she and her dogs have parked their RV in Mesa as we speak.

I want to thank the Academic Planning Committee for its endorsement of this initiative. I will keep all of you closely apprised as the Mesa Initiative develops.

Innovation Council. As I mentioned earlier, one of the aspects of Wilkes that is most appealing to me is the spirit of innovation that I sense here on this campus. The creation of interdisciplinary programs, the Mesa Initiative, pre-engineering programs, our low-residency Creative Writing program, and other examples support this. During the search, I repeatedly indicated my interest in developing a culture of innovation and collaboration here at Wilkes that would enable us together to meet the challenges facing higher education in the years ahead. In order to continue to foster this culture, I propose the creation of an Innovation Council. This council would include multiple cross-functional teams of faculty, staff, students, maybe even board members and alumni. These teams would be charged with identifying innovative solutions to very specific University challenges. Potential topics could include: expanding enrollment in the liberal arts, improving alumni giving, obtaining more public recognition for our quality work, and other important challenges. The teams would be given a finite amount of time to deliberate, culminating in a formal presentation to the Board of Trustees, the senior administration, and anyone else in the University community who is interested in the findings. This Innovation Council will have the dual benefit of generating new, innovative ideas for possible implementation and of creating a culture of innovation and collaboration on this campus. This first topic, the first team, and a more formal description of the process will be rolled out in October.

Capital Campaign. I am pleased to report that the science center project remains on schedule and on budget – the two project updates that delight a university president. Through the efforts of our alumni relations and development team, the capital campaign to support the science center has now raised over \$11 million toward its \$20 million goal. That’s \$11 million raised in the past 18 months – unprecedented philanthropic support here at Wilkes! Let me warn you that the second half, in particular the last quarter, of any campaign is the toughest, but our goal remains to finish this campaign successfully by the opening of the building in the fall of 2013. Then, we will prepare the campus for a much larger, comprehensive campaign in the years ahead.

President’s Office. And, finally, allow me to address some rumors about my office. Yes, I will be moving out of UCOM and will be moving to Weckesser Hall, hopefully to the first floor of Weckesser Hall. No, I do not plan to build an apartment on the 3rd floor of Weckesser. (That floor could not handle the hot tub that I had requested.) Weckesser is one of our marquee buildings on this campus. It is much more centrally located to the campus, which will bring me closer to the center of the action. This move will cost very little. I hope to have this move completed sometime this fall.

This is a lot to digest at once I know. There is so much more dialogue I’d like to have with you. I hope we can keep these formal convocations as semi-annual events to kick off each semester. I look forward to visiting with the faculty and the staff at your respective retreats later this morning. I also intend to meet with the faculty and staff at large throughout the year, as well as to meet regularly with the FAC and the USAC. In addition, I will be sending periodic e-mail bulletins to share what’s on my mind with the campus community.

I encourage all of you to participate in the installation activities in mid-September, including the Day of Service on Saturday, September 8th, the Faculty Scholarship Showcase on Friday, September 14th, the campus-wide party on Friday, September 14th, and of course the formal installation on Saturday, September 15th. Details for all of these events are forthcoming.

I consider these activities an excuse to once again celebrate the rich history and promising future of Wilkes University. I hope you will all participate.

As I close today, I can't help but remember the person who first suggested to me that working in higher education could be an important – even noble – calling. This person was the president of Georgetown University when I was an undergraduate student, the late Timothy Healy, who went on to become the President of the New York Public Library before his premature death in 1992. I had the privilege of having Fr. Healy for a freshman poetry class. Because of this one class I transferred from the School of Business to the College of Arts & Sciences to become an English literature major. You can imagine my dad's reaction! Fr. Healy was the most learned man I have ever met. He understood the power of words. He cared about language. Fr. Healy often joked: "I don't understand lawyers. How can they call a 10,000-word document a brief?" If given the choice between a picture and a thousand words, he would take the words every time. Tim Healy once said: "The old teach and the young dream, and in that mystery comes a tomorrow that we – who are older – may never know, but will have helped to shape in the minds and hearts of our students."

As we begin our 79th academic year together here at Wilkes, let us renew our dedication to building those tomorrows for our students. Thank you very much for being here this morning.