

OMAHA PRESS CLUB SPEECH
CHANCELLOR JOHN E. CHRISTENSEN

RECENT CHANGES AT UNO

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Introduction

Omaha Public Radio presents another luncheon broadcast from The Omaha Press Club on Noon Forum. On today's program, we will hear a talk by John Christensen, the Chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The title of his presentation will be "Recent Changes at UNO". This program was recorded by Omaha Public Radio on Thursday afternoon, May 16, 2013, for broadcast at this time. The opinions expressed are those of the speaker and do not necessarily represent those of The Omaha Press Club, KIOS FM, or the Omaha Public School District. Here now to introduce the program is Hugh Cowden, a member of The Omaha Press Club's Education Committee.

Hugh Cowden

Today we are going to get an update from UNO Chancellor John Christensen on at least a number of the important changes that have been occurring at the University of Nebraska at Omaha over the last several years. Dr. Christensen was named Chancellor six years ago this month in May of 2007. Since then, UNO has had developments in academics, for example, information technology and proposed changes in engineering, in athletics, including the move to Division I and the impending hockey arena and in the physical plant, for example, the **new Community Engagement Center** and the new College of Business Administration.

Dr. Christensen began teaching at UNO in 1978 in the College of Education's Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders. He was Chairman of that department for twelve years before becoming Dean of the College of Education and later, the Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs. Dr. Christensen earned a B.S. in Speech Communications and Drama from Dana College in Blair, Nebraska, in 1971, a Master's degree in Special Education and Speech Pathology from UNO in 1974, and a Ph.D. in Speech Pathology and Audiology from the University of Kansas in 1980. He is the first UNO alumnus to occupy the office of UNO Chancellor. After his remarks, he will be glad to take questions from the audience. There are pencils and paper at your tables for you to write them during the lunch and an Education Committee member will come around and pick them up and bring them up to me. It is a pleasure for me to welcome a long time colleague of mine until my retirement in 1995, Dr. John Christensen, the Chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

[Applause]

Dr. John Christensen

Thank you. Hugh violated one of the policies that I have now instituted on campus and that is, you may not retire until I retire but that was kind of his nature. It is great to see you again, Hugh. I want to thank all of you for attending but most of all, I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to provide a brief update about what's happening at UNO today. I also want you to know what a privilege it is for me to serve as Chancellor of UNO, to be a part of a hundred and five year history of a great institution, to be a part of its growth and to be a part of the growth in this community, it's amazing.

I am going to start by framing with just a few things, kind of a campus profile, if you will, and then I want to talk a little bit about what is going on. We are a campus of about 15,500 students and occasionally, you hear different numbers. You hear 14,700 or whatever the case may be. Let me tell you what the difference is. On our campus in Omaha, we have about 14,700 students but we also have programs that are based in Lincoln and they are our students, they are our programs, Criminology and Criminal Justice, for example, and so those students are part of our population. Our total enrollment for the University of Nebraska at Omaha is about 15,500 students.

This has been a ratio. The nature of that student body has remained rather stable over the years, about 80 percent of our students are from the metropolitan area. About 10 percent of our students are from greater Nebraska, and the remaining 10 percent are students from out of state or out of country, and as I said, that fluctuates periodically but that is a fairly typical profile of our student body.

This year we have a minority population on campus which is 17 percent, that is an historic high for our campus. It is very important to our faculty and staff

the care and concern that faculty and staff have for students, not only academically but personally.

I want to share something with you that I asked our Institutional Research to gather some data for me and I think it is a fairly interesting and powerful set of data, albeit small at this particular juncture, but in the recent past, the last couple of years, what we have learned, and I will use our graduating class in December, '12. What we have learned is more than 80 percent of that group





Now, there are other additions taking place, I'm going to share that with you in just a minute but before I do that, the transition is more than just buildings so a significant part of the transition going forward is to bring the campus together to create a single campus wide priority and that is enrollment management. We started work on this about three years ago. We have used Noel Levitz which is a well-known national consulting firm to help us develop strategic plans for recruitment and retention on our campus. Those plans have now been completed. It is always going to be a work in progress, they are never done but we implemented the original plans in February and I anticipate that

We have redone our branding. We have added wayfinding to the campus. One of the concerns of the community is I don't know where I'm going, I can't find the right building, so the signage on campus now is there. We have reorganized Public Relations and I think for the first time in the history of the University actually a marketing director who is helping us to figure out how to tell the story and bless someone who gave us Erin Owen in terms of helping us think about how it is we tell the UNO story. I think it is a wonderful story, we've been rather shy and reserved about that which is, I guess, kind of the Omaha way. We need to stop doing that and tell the story as best we can.

We brought graduation back to campus and this year Mother Nature was not very nice to us but we decided to implement Plan B Tuesday after getting as much weather information as we could. We did implement that and it is a great experience. Le

community thanks to Susie Buffett and the Buffetts; we have about 800 students in the Thompson Learning Center on campus now. Jim and Shirley Young have a learning center

very close collaboration with the Medical Center and the second is in Exercise Science. We are also ramping up the type of research that metropolitan universities are best suited to do and that's applied research, translational research where you take what we know and you are very pragmatic about how it can be translated into community advantage.

I said our third strategic goal was to be community engaged. We have been recognized nationally for the engagement that occurs here. We are deeply committed to a number of organizations, not for profit business and so on, in

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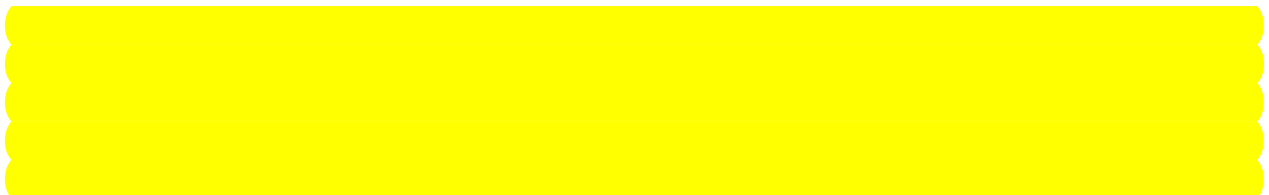
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our engagement with the community. I think it is adding significantly to our students' academic experience. I think it contributes to citizenship and giving back as well.

This is an estimate but I know that over 10,000 students last year were involved in Three Days of Service, Seven Days of Service, Martin Luther King Day, Global Youth Services Day, service learning kind of activities along with our student organizations doing things like raising food for the food banks with the Salvation Army so collectively we're touching a lot of lives on the campus and I think in a meaningful way.

A couple of great things are happening on campus as we're speaking. One of those, and I'll pass this around, is a Biomechanics Research Center that is adjacent to the HPER Building, it actually connects to that building so that the space inside can also contribute to this research center. This is all about motion research and what can it do and people puzzle over that. This is the only freestanding research center in the world to focus on this. We work very closely, again, with the Medical Center. We've been involved in helping to develop training programs for surgeons who are trying to create particular movement to utilize robotic surgery, for example. These people are looking at infant populations to try to examine motion and movement differences which might be predictive early on of neurological disturbances.

They are also working with geriatrics, I am very much interested in this one where they're studying falls which is a common geriatric problems. Are they ways once we understand the mechanics of motion in geriatric populations that we might be able to mitigate the potential of fall possibilities? This is going to be a great addition to the campus. The dedication will be on Thursday, September 5, 2013, so in other words, this fall. If you have an opportunity, I wish you could join us.



because the community told us. We did a number of group meetings with the focus groups in the community and they told us parking was an issue. Now I disagree with that. That's my story, UNO does not have a parking problem and I'm sticking to that but we did it anyway, just out of courtesy.

What I'm most proud of is the cumulative GPA of our student athletes is 3.35, highest in history. It's being led by women's volleyball and men's hockey, those are the two highest team GPA's and I want to tell you, we don't have any slackers among the group and that's what it's all about. I'm also pleased to report that last year for the first time in eleven years, the Athletic Department closed the year in the black and I expect that to happen again this year. That is great news but you need to understand, that's news with some caveats and the most important is part of the arrangement was we're capping state support to athletics. It cannot grow beyond what that cap is, and so it says something about the management and the decisions that were made with respect to athletics, painful but necessary.

I want to tell you that of all the institutions in Division I that do not have football, all of them, and Trev can tell you the exact number. I can't remember so I'm not going to make up anything. If it were a different group, I'd make up something but you'll check me out. Of all of those programs, UNO and Wichita State are the only two, they are the two that have the lowest state support and they are the only two who are under 50 percent support. Now if you examine universities right now, you're finding institutions that are contributing \$15 to \$17 million a year in student fees to maintain their athletic programs. That's not the case at UNO and by virtue of the decisions we made then, it will never be the case.

Great cities have great public universities and our capital campaign has helped us in this transformation incredibly. We're at about \$171 million in gifts to help us build capacity to help us support our students and our programs. We have about 18 months left, that number is going to grow and the generosity of this community is absolutely remarkable. I share with some of my colleagues at national meetings about things that go on and I know they think I'm fibbing, they just don't get it. Most of them don't know where Omaha's at anyway so the vision that we have of being a premier institution is going to happen. One of the reasons it will happen is because of the passion of our faculty and our staff and another reason is that we're in Omaha so heartfelt thanks to all of you for helping us transform what is a tremendous university. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

John Christensen
I don't . . .

Talk about the UNO branding effort. The icon is excellent. I think it's excellent, too, but it sort of resembles Olson Subaru but . . . [Laughter] . . . but talk about that.

John Christensen

I'm going to have to ask them for a donation. We're selling cars now. The brand was the result of work that we had done with a consulting firm. We wanted to change a lot of things about the campus as part of this transformation to send a signal about this is not your parents' UNO any longer. That's not out of disrespect for history, trust me. It's about trying to move the institution forward.

This was really the campus consensus of all we had and if you look at it and you distinguish the colors, there's the U, the N and the O. They also recommended that we change the Maverick and the look of the Maverick, that's been the more interesting one. Aaron has been incredibly involved in helping with this but this is very popular, that one is less popular. It's popular, I'm comparing it with the old Maverick and some people like that a lot, some

couple of days talk about, you know? I told them before they were coming, I said, and trust me, we do have concrete at least out, you know, out to about 72nd Street from the river and, you know, there were moments where I don't