I am excited to be here today to provide remarks regarding the state of the university, although with barely six weeks on the campus, such a task is daunting to say the least. My having said that might have given you all hope that my remarks will be brief, but it has been my experience that, regardless of the circumstances, it is difficult to restrain an academic's biological clock—you know, the one that aligns all remarks with the standard length of a class. The standard class of my past 31 years has been 50 minutes. I promise to do much better than that!

First, Valerie, Meriem, and I would like to thank everyone for an incredibly warm welcome to Miami and to Oxford. Although many are working hard to deepen my understanding of Miami (not the least of whom is my assistant, Debbie Mason, who worries that I can't seem to remember my phone number), many of my deepest impressions of Miami remain those shaped by the process of viewing Miami from the outside. I am encouraged that those views from the outside have largely been corroborated by what I have encountered on campus, and that should be no surprise. During the recruitment process, a scoping document for the position of President of Miami University (PDF) was prepared based on extensive input from the campus and beyond. Valerie and I came to Miami with a strong sense of the university that we developed through that document and the many conversations it generated. This is a place that we found irresistibly attractive—a university of great values, of tradition, of excellence, and a university eager to be better. It is a university that values community and attracts people who believe that they can make a difference in the lives of our students, our society, and the world beyond.

Today I will reflect briefly on the major issues presented in the presidential scoping document since it provides the foundation for the future of Miami University. Since time is limited, I will focus on those issues related to mission; issues that I believe will frame our thinking and decisions in the year and years ahead.

Mission

Without a doubt, our ability to clearly and succinctly define who we are and who we hope to be is the single most important element shaping our choices now and in the future. The scoping document, in my view, provides a wonderful description of what Miami is and aspires to be, and quite frankly, that is what attracted us here. A university that has existed for nearly 200 years must be doing something right! What we need to do, then, is to intensify those qualities that have made Miami both distinctive and distinguished, in other words to "make Miami more Miami," taking the best of Miami and making it better (a phrase that has been picked up about me along with my fondness for KFC, cats, fishing, and Star Trek).

The document begins with a simple declarative statement:

*Founded in 1809, Miami University has a distinguished history as a prestigious public university recognized for outstanding undergraduate education and selective graduate and research programs. The University serves the state of Ohio, a regional and, increasingly over the past decade, a national audience.*

Then, in describing the challenge of mission leadership, the document notes:

*Miami University is a student-centered university, with a few carefully selected, excellent graduate programs that has built its success on liberal arts teaching to academically ambitious undergraduates. It builds great student and alumni loyalty, retains students beyond expectations, and teaches them to lead intellectually vigorous lives.*

*It has the virtues of a major university that offers the personalized attention to students found in the best small colleges. It values teaching and intense engagement of faculty with students, and its faculty are productive, nationally prominent researchers who*
invite their students into the excitement of discovery. It supports students in a highly involving residential experience on the Oxford campus and provides access to non-traditional students on its regional campuses. It provides a strong foundation in the traditional liberal arts for all students, and it offers nationally competitive professional programs in business, education, fine arts, and engineering. It supports students in attractive, state-of-the-art facilities on campuses in southwest Ohio, and it pushes its students to explore the world in a variety of international programs.

Every time I read this statement, I get excited by the very "idea" of Miami University and the prospect of working together to realize this vision. Let me take a few moments, then, to highlight three dimensions related to Miami's mission that I see as being most important and relate them to what we are currently doing or might do in the future: the centrality of undergraduate education, our public university identity, and our commitment to excellence.

Centrality of Undergraduate Education

By every measure that I know, we have achieved our reputation because we have been exceptionally successful at keeping our primary focus on the undergraduate experience, which is our inherent strength. I believe that Miami has been successful and can become even more successful by turning our assets into our advantages. Let me touch briefly on three of these assets that relate to undergraduate education: our size and composition, the Miami Experience, and our sense of community.

Size and Composition

At the top of the list of assets that can, and should be, our advantage is our size and special blend of undergraduate and graduate programs. Having served two top-flight academic institutions at opposite ends of the spectrum, Macalester College and the University of Washington, I am keenly aware of the advantages and disadvantages of each. In my view, Miami has achieved an exceptional balance between the two, truly a "golden mean" in which we combine intimacy and opportunity, undergraduate and graduate, to great effect. We are among the very best "universities of the third kind." This view is shared by others who are familiar with higher education across the country, as noted most recently in a Sunday issue of The New York Times:

"The focus is truly on educating undergraduates," says Terry Hartle, a senior vice president at the American Council on Education. "This is a medium-size institution with the advantages that confers”—high quality facilities, research opportunities —"but it still has the feel of a small liberal arts college."

The Miami Experience

The "feel of a small liberal arts college" is the result of having both engaged faculty and engaged students. As I speak to alumni throughout the country, they speak with deep feelings when they describe their Miami Experience. And when they do so, they reference first and foremost the deep engagement of the faculty that they enjoyed while here. This tradition of deep engagement has been a part of the Miami Experience for a long time and is, without a doubt, one of our strongest assets in attracting students and other faculty here. As one of our colleagues put it, if potential faculty members don't have the gene that compels them to teach and interact with students, they ought not to be at Miami. Our passion for scholarship is integral to teaching and should give it greater energy. Despite the centrality of this quality, though, we have seen a decline in engagement on many levels, a decline that we need to turn around. Students today are less likely to be taught by tenure-track faculty than they were a generation ago, and they are less likely to have that intense first-year experience that launches students into their education.

We currently have two efforts under way to address this issue and will need to consider additional steps in the years ahead. First, we are in the process of adding new faculty lines to provide a better student/teacher ratio. Second, Provost Herbst has launched a study of faculty workloads. Our most precious resource is our time, and we need to use it wisely. The workload question is entangled in the question of the balance between research and teaching. Let me be clear about this. There is no question that every highly ranked college and university has a research-active faculty. This is as true for Macalester College—which has no graduate programs, no external funding, and a significant teaching load—as it is for the University of Washington, with $1 billion of externally funded research. Thus, we need to be recognized for our high-quality, research-active faculty as well as for our extraordinary teaching. Overwhelmingly, when I talk with faculty on campus—both those who have been here a long time and
new faculty—they speak most enthusiastically about our emphasis on the balance of high expectations we have for both teaching and research. We need to continually examine our workload structure and our reward structure to ensure that we have the right balance of emphasis on teaching and research to accomplish our core missions. We also need to find methods to eliminate this dualism so that student learning and research merge seamlessly into faculty research and teaching, from our largest introductory classes to that special opportunity to work alongside a professor on a scholarly project.

The Miami Experience also includes our commitment to the Miami Plan and our tradition and goal of attracting "academically ambitious students," taught to lead "intellectually vigorous lives." Isn’t that a great phrase—"academically ambitious students"? I have spoken with many faculty who have come to Miami from positions at other universities, and they commonly note that students here are much more engaged with their classes, actively seeking additional contact with their teachers and fellow students. This ambition both extends into and feeds off the high degree of student involvement in co-curricular activities—another signature quality of the Miami Experience. Students come here expecting to participate in extracurricular activities and do participate at an uncommonly high level. Some of these activities are entirely student-run, but many of them directly depend on faculty involvement and support. I have been impressed by how often students talk about their desire for even more involvement of faculty in everything from learning communities and student organizations within departments to attendance at lectures, concerts, and athletic events.

An interesting factoid of Miami is that each year more than 7,500 students sign up for intramural broomball. While this may not directly add to our national reputation, I have come to believe that it speaks volumes about the energy of our student body and the bonds of tradition that add greatly to our experience here. Let me give fair warning, though. We are assembling a "Team Roudebush" that we hope will surprise the league later this year!

Sense of Community

Finally, the Miami Experience is distinctive because of the strong sense of community that is engendered, among other things, by our beautiful residential campus and small-town setting. It is not that we are isolated, with Cincinnati close by and a deep commitment to global experience and perspective. Indeed it is this mixture of a local community with intense interactions and a globally engaged university that helps to make Miami distinctive. So while we work to create a stronger sense of community, we are also working to increase the proportion of students studying abroad. Similarly, we seek to increase the number of international students on campus. These students greatly broaden our horizons in and out of classes.

While geography has been an advantage when it comes to creating our strong sense of community, this advantage has been challenged in recent years by increased dispersion of faculty and staff, necessitated by changing household patterns and limited local employment opportunities. There are several ways that we can counteract this; let me suggest three. First and foremost, we must strengthen our sense of community through our common vision and meaningful common experiences, embracing campus life as fully as possible. As noted above, participating even occasionally in extracurricular activities has a huge impact on our sense of community. Second, we need to work to make Oxford more attractive to faculty and staff by strengthening our partnership with the community and contributing even more effectively to the success of our local schools. And let me take this opportunity to congratulate the Talawanda School District for its recent success in statewide testing. The District came within .2 percent of achieving the top excellent rating and Talawanda High School achieved an excellent rating for the second year in a row. Third, in keeping with many of the recommendations of the Alcohol Task Force last spring, we need to work on improving the quality of campus life, for students on and off campus. We need to encourage a more active campus life that will both enhance the undergraduate experience and reduce the risks associated with alcohol abuse.

A truly distinguished community is also an inclusive community; a community that supports all within it. It is a community that not only tolerates difference but also embraces difference. We all know that the racial and economic profiles of the Miami community do not mirror our society, and there has been much discussion of how we can create a more diverse student body, faculty, and staff. These are important goals, and there are many specific steps we can, and must, take to attract and retain greater diversity. But the success of those programs requires more than action. It requires above all an inclusive climate, a fundamental attitude that recognizes our differences, celebrates those differences, and works tirelessly to ensure that all feel that they belong here, that they are welcomed, and that they can succeed. Diversity cannot be viewed as an issue "on the side." It is fundamental to our sense of community, and we must make creating a climate of inclusivity one of our very highest priorities.
Our Public University Identity

Declining state support for higher education across the U.S. has challenged the identity of public colleges and universities. It is common to hear comments to the effect that a school has gone from being state-supported to state-assisted to state-located, with the assumed implication that the public mission of the school should be commensurately reduced. I believe that such a view is generally a mistake, and certainly a mistake for Miami. We are a public university, and that identity is important to us for both practical and symbolic reasons.

On the practical level, state support remains a critical part of our bottom line. We still receive $60 million annually from the state through State Share of Instruction. While it is true that that sum represents only 10 percent of our total budget, it represents about 20 percent of our Educational and General budget. It would take an endowment of nearly $1.3 billion to replace our current level of state support—and we had a record year this past year with $33 million of new contributions. We would need to add about $3,000 additional tuition to every student to replace that support. And then there is the matter of our facilities. The value of buildings that have been provided by the state exceeds $1 billion. Thus, the state remains a major contributor to our bottom line.

While state support remains a critical part of our budget, I do not mean to imply that the level of support is appropriate. The State of Ohio is struggling financially as we work to transform our economy from its historically heavy industrial base to a modern, knowledge-based economy. We understand that education is the key to success in the decades ahead, and we need to press the state to invest more in higher education, both from our vantage point as providers of education and from our vantage point as citizens of the State of Ohio who share the broad concern for our future economic and civic life. It is our responsibility to deliver on the promise of higher education.

As a public university, our values are anchored in our sense of responsibility for the future, regardless of the percentage of funding that comes from the state. Our responsibilities begin with our students. Have we done our very best to prepare them to be contributing citizens? Have we produced a new generation of leaders, of workers, of entrepreneurs, of artists, of citizens who will create a better life for not only Ohioans, but for the broader world? Similarly, how does our scholarship contribute to the future? Much of the work we do is basic research, which results from the unfettered search for new understanding. But have we looked to see how this might extend to the broader society? Have we used the world around us to inspire our work? Finally, we have a responsibility to be voices of progress. Are we using our knowledge and understanding to contribute to the framing of issues that confront us locally, nationally, and globally?

Role of Regional Campuses

One of the significant ways that we contribute locally and regionally is through our regional campuses. These campuses were designed to provide access points to students who might be place-bound or who are perhaps older and seek a Miami education while working. New programs starting this fall will provide more flexibility and use more web-assisted instruction to enhance that mission. Increasingly, we are also looking to the regional campuses in terms of two-way flow. Students from the regional campuses relocate to Oxford or take classes in Oxford, while a growing number of Oxford students take courses at the regional campuses and/or use the regional campuses as portals into the Hamilton and Middletown communities for internships and service learning. It is important to note that Miami University, with three campuses, is the largest employer in Butler County and thus a major source of economic activity and dynamism for the region.

Miami Access Initiative

Throughout the history of the United States, public education has been viewed as a vehicle for social mobility, the means by which young people of all social and economic classes can advance. Unfortunately, with decreased state support, increased reliance on tuition, and higher academic standards, differential access to higher education across the nation is now increasing inequality rather than lessening it. We face the challenge of providing access to all students of all backgrounds. To increase access, we need to address both the issues of academic preparation and financial access. Miami can and must do more to help Ohio students prepare for college. Miami can and must do more to help Ohio students of all economic classes find the means to attend Miami. It is part of our responsibility as a public university. Also economic and social diversity are critical elements in a high-quality education, and we must increase access to Miami for students of all economic classes, including low-income students.
Thus I am very pleased to announce today a new program for the class that will enter Miami in Fall 2007: The Miami Access Initiative. This new initiative will provide tuition and fees for all new first-year students from Ohio entering the Oxford campus who have family incomes of less than $35,000. It will also apply to Ohio students relocating from the Hamilton and Middletown campuses with family incomes of less than $35,000. The program will provide all tuition and fees for eligible students for up to four years. We are able to take this significant new initiative because of a bequest in excess of $10 million from the estate of Lois K. Klawon, a 1939 alumna from Westlake, Ohio. Mrs. Klawon, who passed away last summer, requested that the income from her gift be used to support needy students. By combining our existing levels of support, the income from the Klawon gift, matching funds from other generous donors, and the federal and state financial aid these students already receive, we are able to undertake this significant new initiative that we hope will encourage students from low-income families to see Miami as a real option for a high-quality college experience, and that more of them will enroll at Miami. We are therefore now able to take a significant step toward our goal of making Miami accessible to all academically qualified students regardless of income.

Our Commitment to Excellence

The presidential scoping document also describes the university's goal to "lead the nation among public universities with a primary emphasis on undergraduate education." Reading the scoping document, it is clear that this ambition—this wonderful exuberant ambition—is not an ambition driven by rankings, but rather an ambition to achieve the best in what we do. Let me end my remarks today by focusing briefly on three elements critical to our excellence and success: mission focus, culture of innovation, and resources.

Mission Focus

Earlier I noted that the key to our success will be to convert our assets into our advantages. The heart of this point, and the major section of my remarks today, is the need to have a clear identity. With identity comes focus and with focus the ability to effectively direct attention and resources to those activities that ensure success. As my remarks have emphasized, I believe that the scoping document clarifies our identity, resolving a number of ambiguities that have resulted in less focus than we need if we are to be among the very best universities. What we need to do now is to express that identity in terms that both clarify and inspire. One task, already underway, is to rewrite our mission statement. While our recent accreditation process was viewed as a model for others and identified many outstanding qualities of Miami University, it also noted the need for greater clarity of mission and directed us to prepare a new mission statement. A committee has taken the first steps of that task and prepared background materials to frame our approach to a new statement. Provost Herbst will soon announce a new committee to draft that statement. It is an essential task and an important expression of our identity.

At a dinner in our home one night last week the topic of our national reputation came up in the context of The New York Times article that continued the theme that we are "a hidden gem." After the guests had left, one of the students who works for Carillon Catering expressed her frustration. "Why aren't we better known for our quality?" she asked in an exasperated voice. While it is nice to be a gem, it sure would be nice to be a known gem rather than a hidden gem! To become less "hidden" requires several strategies, but it begins with clear and strong messages, directed both internally and externally, that leave no doubt as to who we are.

In this modern era, one of the most powerful expressions of collegiate identity is the university website. I have looked at a lot of websites over the years because of my responsibilities with Macalester and Washington. In my view, Miami's website is at least as good as most, and very much like other university websites that give a sense of what universities are all about, but I can't say that it projects anything close to what makes Miami special and distinctive. In fact, of all the websites I have looked at, only Carleton College has ever evoked a "Wow!" response. When I first looked at Carleton's website my eyes immediately moved to the lower left where the following statement appears:

Founded in 1866, Carleton College is an independent and highly selective liberal arts college with a diverse and exceptionally able student body, a talented faculty whose first priority is teaching, and a continued commitment to the liberal arts.

I was taken both by the simplicity and by the directness of this statement, especially the phrase "a talented faculty whose first priority is teaching." What would such a statement look like for Miami? I challenge us to create such a statement, a statement that proclaims for all to see how unique Miami is while still reminding us of our central focus. As I noted in my public forum last spring, I would love to see
a similar effort to create a sentence that would appear in every ad for new faculty, adding to our national distinctiveness and clarity of focus.

Culture of Innovation

Miami University will soon celebrate its 200th birthday. To have even survived that long is a magnificent achievement, to have gotten better throughout most of that history is an even greater accomplishment. In general, institutions that have done so well over such a long time are known for their core values and their ability to innovate. In my view, we are in a period of enormous transformation in higher education, and more than ever our excellence depends on our ability to create a culture of innovation that will challenge everything we do. As many of you know, I am very fond of Jim Collins’ book, Good to Great, which I believe does a superb job of describing how institutions advance. The philosophy behind the book rests on a simple, powerful notion: that good is the mortal enemy of great. It is a notion that recognizes the need for an irrepresible impulse to improve. It strikes me that we face the risk of being satisfied with being very good and thus, resisting the impulse for change. I have observed in my many years in higher education that our strengths can often also prove to be our weaknesses. At Miami, our strengths lie in our confidence and our traditions. These have been and should be important to our success, but we must not let them lead us into complacency.

Many of you have read the book by Derek Bok, Our Underachieving Colleges. I truly believe that this book was written for Miami. It is a book that rests heavily on the values that have made Miami special, most notably our student-centered experience, but it is also a book that reminds us of the tremendous amount of work to be done in order for us to look at our bicentennial as the launch of our greatness and not the peak of our history. As we approach the years ahead, I hope and trust that we will create a culture of innovation second to none, producing new generations of successful alumni who will look back on their Miami Experience as the most transformative period in their lives.

Resources

For us to achieve greatness, it is clear that we need resources. Given our funding outlook, a significant portion of those needed resources must come from the better use of our current resources. As difficult as it is, we need to extend the culture of innovation into our resource allocation process. We need to make hard decisions about how we offer the Miami Experience. We need to become more aware that our time is our most precious resource and find ways to use it more effectively. The biggest challenge, I believe, is the systemic application of innovation. The academy is very good at producing successful individual projects, but we are generally very poor at learning from those experiences and extending them into a broader transformation of our curriculum and practices. I have no doubt that with focused effort, we can become the model for the new American education, and increase the impact of our resources.

In stressing the importance of innovation in stretching our resources, I do not mean to suggest that we don’t need more resources—we do. We absorbed a $2 million budget shortfall last year that is simply not sustainable without putting our quality at risk. As noted earlier, the State of Ohio will remain a significant component of our funding base, as will the federal government. We must do all that we can to stabilize, if not increase, their investment in higher education. But realistically, we cannot expect much in the way of new funding from these traditional funding bases. So we will be forced to increasingly rely on other sources—tuition, research grants, and development—much like private schools have done for a long time.

At virtually all colleges and universities there has been, and is likely to continue to be, growing pressure to increase tuition. We have worked hard in the past few years to better align tuition with the ability to pay for the cost of an education, effectively moving the state subsidy towards those who need it most. The new promise of support for students from families with annual incomes of under $35,000 is another major effort to create a rational tuition plan that makes it possible for all students to access the high-quality Miami education, while providing sufficient resources to sustain that high quality. We also have seen a significant rise in external research funding that at its best enables our faculty and students to participate at the highest levels of research, a point of great pride for Miami University. I hope and trust this will continue to grow, providing even more opportunity, but we need to take care to ensure that our quest for external funding complements, and does not detract from, our core educational mission.

Miami is very fortunate to have alumni with uncommon passion. As I described earlier, the Miami Experience is appreciated in its fullness—the academics, the co-curricular, the social life that marked a truly memorable and formative part of their lives. Launching the Campaign, ”For Love and Honor,” is our most serious effort ever to make sure that every alum continues to be connected to Miami and gives back so that the next generation of students can have a similarly fulfilling experience. Throughout Miami’s
entire history, every student attending the university has benefited from the generosity of others. The gift from Lois Klawon is one of the best examples of how the generosity of alumni provides opportunities for future generations of students.

Our goal, then, is to create sustained connections that enrich the lives of our alums, while earning their support for our future. The Campaign and the Bicentennial offer us unparalleled opportunities to do just that. Last year we raised a record $33 million, along with another $30 million in bequests and pledges. Yet our giving rate among alums at 16 percent remains only slightly above the national average of 14 percent. While we are today celebrating the magnificent $10 million gift of Mrs. Klawon, it is important to recognize the amazing potential of a higher level of giving by our alumni. If each of those alums who are not now giving were to contribute $200 per year to Miami, we would have nearly another $30 million to make Miami stronger and more accessible!

It is important to understand that the success of the Campaign is not solely the responsibility of our talented and dedicated advancement staff. Rather, it is a partnership in which every person at Miami can, and I hope will, play a significant role. From our extraordinary Reunion Weekend to divisional and departmental visiting committees, from a warm welcome on campus to an encouraging word to our new graduates, from a willingness to spend time with an alumni group somewhere off campus to a willingness to host alumni on campus, every one of us—faculty, staff, and students—has a part to play in the success of the Campaign and Miami's future. You will hear much more about this in the months ahead, and I know that we will join together to generate great excitement about the Campaign and, especially, the Bicentennial. Together we will ensure that all alumni have the chance to enjoy not only life-long learning because of their education at Miami, but also a deep life-long connection because of their experience during and after their years here.

Conclusion

Whenever there is a change in leadership of a major institution, there is an opportunity, indeed a responsibility, to reflect on core values. I believe that Miami has done that exceptionally well in crafting a presidential scoping document that affirms and describes our identity. Valerie and I were drawn to Miami because we saw, in its history and vision, a remarkable university, a university that not only has been recognized for what it has accomplished, but also a university that is capable of setting the standards for what universities can be. As a model "university of the third kind," we combine our passion for, and focus on, undergraduate education with our hunger for scholarship and the power of graduate education. We take our place among the best public universities in the nation, and willingly accept the responsibilities that go with that role. And we do all of this in a culture that is relentlessly committed to excellence. Valerie and I look forward to working with you to make Miami more Miami, by taking the best of Miami and making it better, propelling us to an even greater level of accomplishment and service.

I would like to end my remarks today by quoting briefly from an email that I received two days ago. The email notes, "I am not a Miami graduate, unfortunately, but I am an alumni. I attended Miami from 1975 to 1976, and it was one of the best experiences of my life. After college, I went to medical school, and I have now served the past 26 years in the U.S. Army as a physician." The note goes on to describe his recent deployment in Afghanistan, where "we worked side by side with the Afghan medical professionals and numerous non-governmental organizations and some governmental organizations. It was a most rewarding year, and many Miamians contributed." The email concludes with a statement that captures the ultimate mission of Miami. "I am so glad to see you are so proud of your [our] University and you should be. Miamians do great things in Oxford, but they really shine around the world."