



From the Office of the President

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REGIS UNIVERSITY | DENVER, COLORADO

**State of the University Welcome Address
Regis University
St. John Francis Regis Chapel
August 18, 2015**

Thank you all for joining me this afternoon as we get ready to begin another academic year together, my fourth as President, many more years of service for some of you, and our 139th year as a Jesuit University serving our region, nation, and indeed the world.

In the past three years as I've given this talk, I have been sharing my hopes for us, and even more pressingly, some of the challenges that we have faced as a University community. Today I'm happy to share with you some of the reasons that I am growing increasingly hopeful and confident about our future.

I begin as always with my greatest source of hope and achievement for Regis—the experiences of our students. So, here are a few brief examples of some of the great Regis graduates we celebrated at Commencement this past May:

- Students like Brandon who, along with multiple deployments overseas as an Army National Guard member managed to complete his Regis degree, volunteers for disaster relief with the Red Cross and mentors local youth offenders in juvenile facilities.
- Or Amanda, who lost a family member in the Aurora Theater shooting and who has turned her grief into a career in social work and advocacy for enhanced gun ownership registration.
- Or finally, consider Biar Atem, one of “The Lost Boys” of Sudan, who fled his war-torn country looking for just a chance. Having arrived in the U.S. with nothing, he worked days as a janitor and studied at night, eventually earning his MBA from Regis. He is now a manager with the Sands Corporation in Las Vegas, and he is truly a living symbol of the American dream.

Each of these graduates was transformed by their Regis student experience; each of them is making a difference for our community and world; and each of them has shared with us how they were impacted by our Regis people – by what you have meant to them and done for them. They are my constant sources of hope.



Financial Health of the University

I'm very encouraged by the progress we are making to strengthen our financial health as a University. A few points I'd like to share and celebrate:

First, because of you and your efforts, we have successfully resolved the \$5.4 million operating budget shortfall I discussed with you at last year's State of the University address, and we ended Fiscal Year 2015 with a \$612,000 positive balance. Let me say that again: We ended the fiscal year with a \$612,000 surplus.

These great 2015 financial results also reflect \$4.3 million in gifts and pledges, a 48 percent increase over the previous year. I am further pleased by the fact that the structural budget changes we made to achieve these results will be sustained moving forward and as part of our three-year financial plan. We ended this past fiscal year in much better shape than we had expected. As you know, we made the commitment to balance not only our overall University finances, which include our endowment resources and gifts from donors and alums, but also our annual operating budget of expenses and income from student enrollments. That seemed like a pretty big hill to climb a year ago, but I'm happy to report that we are now living within our means.

While these results reflect considerable hard work and sacrifice, I am proud that even while we reduced our overall operating costs, we actually increased our investment in our faculty and the student learning experience. Specifically, while we reduced total operating expenses by \$3.9 million, we increased academic instructional spending by \$600,000. In addition, we implemented a 1 percent raise on May 1 for all regular employees.

Thanks to all of this hard work, the outside world is also taking note. Standard & Poor's (S&P), a credit rating agency which reviews the financial health and credit risk of colleges and universities, reaffirmed our credit rating with a stable outlook. This is extremely reassuring to our lenders, donors, and accreditors, particularly in an environment where credit agencies are downgrading colleges and universities four times more often than sustaining or upgrading them. Many universities of our size and endowment are receiving a negative outlook from S&P.

These are tremendous accomplishments that all of you helped make happen through careful and thoughtful analysis and prioritization of what means most to our students and their learning experience. I'd like to recognize in particular the hard work of the University Budget Committee, without whom this turnaround would not have taken place so carefully and successfully.

Turning to the enrollment plan, we are ending our multi-session summer period with approximately \$100,000 over budgeted revenue. Summer revenue totals about \$20 million and represents 14 percent of our total tuition and fee revenue. Our Admissions staff obviously did a tremendous job to bring this about. At the same time, enrollment is our



collective responsibility, so I am grateful to each one of you for helping make this success possible.

We are all Admissions reps in a sense by the care we show our students, and we all tell the Regis story eloquently through our interactions with them. Thursday we will welcome our largest freshman class of traditional undergraduates and, later this month and throughout the fall, we will gain a better understanding of our new enrollment patterns as Regis University transitions from three to five colleges. Now clearly, we're feeling the strain of the largest freshman class ever. That's a very good problem to have. However, we'll need to deal with our housing needs very soon.

New Colleges/Strategic Plan Implementation:

Speaking of our new colleges, I'm encouraged by the strong opening work of our two newest colleges, the College of Business and Economics and the College of Computer & Information Sciences. I'd like to make sure all of you have a chance to meet our two new Deans Timothy Keane and Shari Plantz-Masters. Tim, dean of the College of Business and Economics, comes to us from the John Cook School of Business at St. Louis University, a sister Jesuit School, where he headed up their Emerson Leadership Institute. Shari, dean of the College of Computer & Information Sciences, has been with Regis as a faculty member for some years following a distinguished career at U.S. West in the telecommunications industry. Tim and Shari and their colleagues are hard at work designing new projects to give Regis a stronger place in our business communities in the region.

I would also ask Elisa Robyn to stand. Elisa is our new Dean for the College of Professional Studies, and while this is not a new college for Regis, it is undergoing significant reorganization and redirection under Elisa's guidance as part of our strategic plan. While Elisa has been with us in varying capacities for almost twenty years, she also brings experience to this new role from having been a dean at the Community College of Denver and the Rocky Mountain College of Art & Design. I'm very happy that we've had a chance this morning to highlight all three of these new deans.

In addition to this visible hard work on our new colleges, we are also making headway with other elements of our strategic plan, including progress on future experiential learning opportunities, faculty development in our Jesuit mission and teaching excellence, cross university collaboration on student advising, and exploring new opportunities in our desire to become a more global learning community.

Comprehensive Campaign:

I am also pleased that we are about to launch our next major fundraising campaign this coming year—both because I'm anxious to go out and raise money for Regis and our students, and also because I think we have an exciting story to tell. Our University Advancement team this fall will be conducting a feasibility study with our best donor prospects, and we will be asking your advice on what projects will best enhance the experience of our students. Look for opportunities to work with Jason Caniglia and his team.



Community Recognition:

Finally, Regis is becoming recognized more and more frequently for our contributions in the community—a sign of our growing presence and impact. In the interest of time, I won't go through all of these great events and projects, but I urge you to look at the handout you received when you came into the Chapel this afternoon, which also includes some important University updates.

Challenges:

With all of this hopeful news, we still have to focus on the challenges ahead of us this year:

- Financial & Unfunded Priorities. We need to finalize the cuts we committed to in building this year's operating budget units, to fund an institutional spending reserve, and to restructure our \$54 million in long-term debt to gain the best possible rates and terms. The improvement in our financial ratios I mentioned above will go a long way toward making that refinancing possible.
- Making sure we keep our enrollment progress going forward throughout all of our programs.
- Leadership transitions. As some of you may know, our Provost, Dr. Patricia Ladewig, has announced that she will retire at the end of this academic year, shortly after commencement. She feels that the timing is right—our new colleges will have launched, we have a strong academic team in place, and we are now ready to move forward as a thriving institution. For myself, I know I would not have been as effective a president without her wisdom and support. Pat, I will always be grateful to you. We will begin a national search process for her successor this fall.

Tom Reynolds, our Vice President for Mission and Chief of Staff, will also step down from those roles at the end of this upcoming year. He is, as I'm sure you know, one of the leaders among Mission and Identity VP's among Jesuit universities, and I'll also miss his wisdom in my own daily activities. We haven't yet set up that replacement process, but we'll keep you posted on that as well.

- Campus master plan. Finally, we know we have some challenging decisions to make around the future space of our campus, including what new buildings we should include in our next Comprehensive Campaign, how we should address student housing needs, and what should be our role in being part of the neighborhood development soon to go on around us, especially along the Federal Boulevard corridor.



Many big issues are ahead of us.

Let me close where I began. We have all worked very hard and it has paid off in many ways in the past year, in our enrollments, in our financial health, and in so many other ways. The wider community now knows what we have known for a long time – that we provide a transformational educational experience for students of all ages, that we have righted the finances of our University, and that people are noticing our renewed and well-grounded confidence. I am deeply grateful to you for what you have done to bring Regis to this new level of achievement.

You may recall earlier in this talk that I briefly mentioned some investments in both employees and our students learning experiences this past year. Now I want to talk about one more investment as I close. I know well how much you all do for Regis and how much time and care you have dedicated to our students. I also know that your time with family and friends is equally, even more important. I'm announcing today that as with last year the University will again grant you the gift of time for the upcoming Christmas holiday, from December 24-January 4. We might have waited until later to decide this, but I know many of you need advance notice to make your plans for this special and sacred time in your lives.

We have much to do and like a fledgling we know our fragility. However, we are stronger today than we were four years ago and I have a growing confidence in what all of you bring to Regis and our students. We are beginning to THRIVE.