Good afternoon everyone. Let me begin by first acknowledging Emeritus President and Mrs. Alma Duncan, Emeritus President and Dr. Linda Caputo and adding my voice in appreciation of the retirees in attendance today. You honor us by the legacy of excellence you built. You have entrusted a precious gift to us, the sterling reputation of Millersville that you so tirelessly forged. You have modeled a professional life of dedication and service, providing those of us who follow you, vivid examples to emulate. Thank you for coming today.

I also want to extend a warm welcome to faculty, administrators, and staff who are joining the Millersville community this year. We are thrilled to have you as part of the University and look forward to your contributions of intellect and creativity that will serve as the energy fueling our institutional movement forward.

There are few pleasures I enjoy more in life than a good story. Good stories often begin with “once upon a time,” “it came to pass,” or “long ago.” These short introductory phrases create common understanding in young and old and connect the listener with a sense of excitement and anticipation.

Communicologists have traced storytellers as far back as ancient Egypt, and they have been a cornerstone in the structure of every civilization since. Known as shamans or bards, and in West African cultures as Griots, storytellers are the stewards of our unity across generations, the keepers of our cultural values, and the weavers of the cultural threads that bind us together.

So I’m going to serve as a Griot and spend the next few minutes telling you a good story. Long ago, in 1855, Lancaster school district superintendent J. P. Wickersham and some private citizens engaged in a bold endeavor to run a three-month summer teacher’s institute. These dreamers persevered, overcoming skeptics, nay sayers, extreme heat, and rocky soil. With the faith of more than 130 students -- and the investment of approximately $35 from each student to cover room, board, and tuition -- that summer program led to ground breaking for “Old Main,” which is now the site of Ganser Library. And thus Millersville University was born. NOW THAT’S A GOOD STORY!

Today I will be calling for each of you to become Griots for Millersville. We have a wonderful story, and we need to have energized advocates who can share this good news throughout the region.

We already are a first-choice institution in countless ways but we need to do a better job of letting the broader community know what we know -- that Millersville University is a place where students can choose to seize opportunities. To achieve this goal, each of us is called to stand with pride and energy and claim the relevance that is Millersville to the Lancaster area and beyond. AND THAT’S A GOOD STORY!
You might recall that last year, I made several commitments during convocation, namely: the creation of a University Planning Council and the development of our new strategic vision statement, a promise to open lines of communication in terms of the budget, the launching of our third institution-wide Capital Fund Campaign and the beginning process of developing our institutional identity.

Let me continue the story by sharing a few of last year’s accomplishments and also report on our progress on those commitments.

Our primary focus is our students. Millersville is distinguished by intelligent, hard-working students who embrace the life of the Lancaster area and contribute substantially to its betterment. Employers recruit our graduates, and many of them earn their way into the most rigorous programs offered by the finest graduate schools.

We applaud the impressive level of faculty support of student research projects that included: 15 in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, 10 in the School of Education, and 140 in the School of Science and Mathematics; also there were more than 150 students from a wide cross-section of the University that presented findings at local, regional, national, and international conferences.

Congratulations are in order for those academic programs which successfully obtained accreditation last year. In addition, the Advancement division received the CASE gold medal award for its publications associated with its year-long “150th Anniversary Celebration” in 2004-2005.

MU still is ranked first of all Pennsylvania 14 state-owned universities by U.S. News & World Report and Kiplinger.

As the provost indicated earlier, MU continues to vigorously intensify our performing arts agenda and support our efforts in strengthening freshmen year programming.

Millersville is committed to reaching out to the global community. Thus, we remain resolved to expand opportunities for our students to benefit from the intellectual richness afforded them through a globalize society. In this past year, 189 students traveled abroad for academic credit, representing a 14.5% increase from the previous year.

A new partnership agreement with the University of Puerto Rico, Mayaguez was signed in April 2006. This agreement -- the University’s 13th global partnership agreement -- allows for a broad spectrum of collaboration that will enable us to serve the Latino community better and simultaneously enhance our faculty and students research and learning opportunities.

Our story continues as we draw strength from our Community and Academic Partnerships. Experiential learning is a priority at MU. Movement into the surrounding community expands potential laboratory experiences for all of our students well before their senior year. The relationships forged through these exchanges between campus and community members foster greater mutual awareness and understanding of the needs and dreams of both populations.
Our commitment to civic and community engagement is outstanding. 2005-06 saw 2,732 students from a myriad of academic disciplines contributing 114,897 hours of service-learning, equivalent to contributing more than $2 million to the local community. 4,109 students enrolled in internships, practica, field experiences, coops or student teaching placements. The Corporate University at Millersville, in partnership with Graduate Studies, received a funding commitment of $389,000 from the Lancaster County Community Foundation for three years to establish the Nonprofit Resource Network at Millersville.

We remain on the cutting edge in the area of Information Technology. With the investment of Student Technology Fee Revenue, we added 13 more smart classrooms in Breidenstine, Byerly, Pucillo, and Brooks. A new digital-media computer lab was installed in Bassler to meet the instructional needs for digital media writing, design, production, and research. And a computer lab was added to Chryst Hall to support instruction in English composition and journalism.

Recognizing the richness of a diverse community and the critical impact of quality role models, we have remained steadfast in our commitment to recruiting and retaining a diversified faculty and staff. We are proud that Millersville University faculty members are among the most highly qualified and diverse throughout the state system and regional community. With 96% of our faculty holding terminal degrees, we rank highest in the state system with respect to the caliber of our faculty’s credentials.

A good indication of the University’s commitment to inclusivity is the participation of more than 600 faculty and staff since 2003 in more than thirty day-long workshops delivered by the Office of Social Equity and Diversity.

The face of our university shines through our facilities and campus. The learning environment is enhanced with the renovation of Dutcher and Wickersham, and work has begun on the new building for the School of Education. Our students residing in Hull and Hobbs Halls have returned this fall to the treat of air-conditioned rooms and a complete renewal within each building. Throughout the campus, you cannot help but notice the new parking, roadway, and sidewalk improvements, the building of a long-awaited weight training facility for our athletes, and the beginning of a new baseball stadium.

We are meeting our commitment to opening lines of communication. As I promised you last year, the budget process has been opened to the entire University community. Eighteen presentations were made on the projected financial position of the University over the next two years. These presentations were made to every executive division and reached more than 500 faculty, staff, students, trustees, and retired faculty and staff. Budget updates will continue to be a standard for this administration.

These updates helped prepare the campus community for million-dollar reductions predicted for 2006-07 and 2007-08 based on information provided by the State System of Higher Education and historical university data. It is important to recall that as a result of the advocacy of the presidents, trustees, students, APSCUF leadership and membership, and state system staff, the
Legislature and Board of Governors respectively awarded the state system universities a 5% increase in the Commonwealth’s appropriation and a 2.7% increase in tuition.

We appreciate the Commonwealth’s investment in the future of our universities; however, we should not lose sight of the fact that the 2006-07 appropriation still represents a 7% reduction per student, when adjusted for inflation, compared to the amount received ten years ago. In order to balance the 2006-07 budget, the University reduced permanent expenditures by approximately a half-million dollars and did not fund $1.4 million of your priority one-time need requests which affect equipment upgrades, physical plant improvements, and programming initiatives. Nonetheless, through effective planning and careful stewardship, the University continues to maintain a high level of excellence and will continue to do so even as we work to address the budget challenges we will face in 2007-08.

As promised, the University Planning Council was established and has provided needed guidance for our future. The UPC was charged to develop a new vision document with outcomes and key performance indicators based on input from the campus community and key stakeholders. A tall order by anyone’s account, the UPC embraced this charge, worked tirelessly, and deserves high praise. The latest draft vision statement prominently sets out Millersville’s aspiration to be the best!

This will be achieved through nourishing undergraduate and graduate programs of distinction, fostering a passion for learning, maintaining an appreciation of the liberal arts, celebrating the diverse contributions of all people and ideas, and mandating responsible stewardship of our resources. Our final and best outcome is an education that empowers Millersville students to make a difference in the places they work and live.

As testament to the quality investment we provide, University Advancement continues to build mutual partnerships for success. The University raised $3.3 million in private cash and pledge gifts and $4.6 million in competitive public grants. The current market value of the University’s endowment has crossed the $15 million dollar mark. This outstanding accomplishment represents dozens of faculty proposals and awards, including a three-year $810,000 NSF grant focused on encouraging more students to consider careers in advanced manufacturing technology.

Last year at this time I told you that as the year unfolded we would be embarking on the bold path of a capital funds campaign. Starting last summer and continuing throughout the past academic year, Jerry Eckert, Vice President for University Advancement, and I met with alumni, business, and community leaders asking them to serve on a capital campaign cabinet to determine objectives, goals, theme and logo, and prospect identification and solicitation. Only the third such capital effort in the history of the University, the present plan is to go public in two years with hopefully $30 million secured.

To this end, it is my pleasure to introduce Mr. Steve Kepchar, class of 1970, and senior vice president for Morgan Stanley, who will chair this effort with 28 other volunteers comprising the campaign cabinet. The two major directions of this campaign are:
• Building endowments in support of major University objectives dealing with globalization, civic/community engagement, faculty/student research, scholarships, instructional equipment, and health and wellness programs (endowment growth provides that needed “extra” that moves institutions toward greatness).
• Facility renovation and expansion direction (library and performing arts center) brings us closer toward the successful end of a 15-17 year initiative to completely renovate and expand our academic and student affairs programs.

This will be a major effort on my part and will involve a considerable amount of my time and energy. How that story will end will depend much on the level of engagement that every member of the campus community provides and the leadership each of us demonstrates in this unfolding drama.

As you can clearly see from all the stellar accomplishments of the past year, we have a solid base on which to build and thrive for the coming year. Good as our story has been, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. We must not allow ourselves to slip into the complacency of satisfaction with conditions as they are, but continually strive towards the vision of being second to none.

Characters in good stories don’t become heroic without being tested, and often that testing springs from their environment. An engaging plot line unfolds a narrative of women and men rising to the challenges presented, and then marshalling those often untapped qualities of their better selves to ultimately immerse victorious. Make no mistake, the challenges looming before us are daunting as regional demographics will soon begin to change considerably.

Beginning in 2009, and continuing through 2014, it is estimated that the number of students graduating from high school nationally and in Pennsylvania will decline by 4.4% and 9.3% respectively. This demographic drama will intensify the competition for new students -- especially better-qualified students – and will make it incumbent on all institutions (even good institutions like Millersville) to extend themselves to be even better.

Beyond the changing demographics there are other challenges to meet: maintaining a reasonable balance between the level of state appropriations and the tuition students and their families have to pay; the lack of appreciation, if not outright assault on the liberal arts; and the Spellings Commission Report recommendation that would squeeze institutional accountability into a single factor – performance on a college graduation exit test.

In light of these looming external forces that will challenge us to respond with calculated innovation, we can ill afford satisfaction to be defined as status quo. Institutions that remain content with their current levels of achievement will look back only to see their sister institutions move ahead.

I recently had the opportunity to finally see a film that friends have been telling me about for some time, Dead Poet’s Society. In case you are one of the few folk who, like me, have not seen the film, it stars Robin Williams as an unorthodox and yet highly inspiring educator. At one point in the film he tells his students to embrace the Latin mantra “carpe diem” which, means “seize
While it made for a memorable scene, I would argue that Williams’ character did not challenge the students to their full potential. Far too many individuals limit vision by thinking of it in the present, in the here and now. Vision is not present tense -- it isn’t seizing the moment and being satisfied with the status quo. Vision is about seizing the future and that is what I am calling each of you to do -- seize the future -- in this coming year and in the years to come.

Motivated by this passion to move forward, many have worked numerous hours this past year in soliciting wide-range campus input, and from that crafting our institutional identity. As you will recall, last year we engaged the services of Cognitive Marketing, a national, professional consulting firm, as an external partner who was given two tasks. The first was to provide an objective eye as to how we are viewed institutionally in the larger community. The second, and more challenging, was to provide concrete recommendations as to how we can enhance that image and more clearly articulate our story to the region -- a story of the unparalleled asset that is Millersville University. In the next few moments, I want to share some of their responses to these two tasks and then provide some broad strokes in terms of what I see the proactive action we must take.

But first, it is important to acknowledge that institutional identity is far more than a marketing project for the external world. It requires serious reflection and casting a critical eye to what we do internally. It is the realization that institutional identity is not calcified, it is living.

Institutional Identity is our commitment to live out the promise of a quality education we make to the students who we successfully recruit to Millersville. To make good on our promise. we must be clear to ourselves as to who we are today, and who we want to be in the years to come. To do this requires seeing ourselves from multiple perspectives.

In a rather unprecedented pedagogical move for the culture of a very formal boy’s preparatory school, Robin Williams’ character in the film Dead Poets Society, invites the students to literally get out of the complacency of their seats and stand on their desk tops as they strive to interpret the meaning of a story they have read. The teacher tells his students that often greater insight comes by seeing the familiar from a different position. Similarly, through the institutional identity project, our consultants have encouraged each of us to see the university from a slightly different point of view.

Given their charge, the firm conducted important research including interviews and surveys of approximately 1,500 students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, and business and community leaders during the spring, summer, and fall of 2005. As all good investigative scholars and change agents know, any new directions must be “rooted” in research, and the firm’s findings were presented in late fall of 2005 with recommendations made in the winter of 2006.

Here are some of the key findings we have learned about who we are from our self study. First, the good news.

- We are home to a faculty of dedicated educators considered among the very best in their disciplines.
- Millersville is distinguished by intelligent, hard-working students who embrace the life of the Lancaster area and contribute substantially to its betterment.
The strong relational ties between our faculty and students awaken in students a sense of limitless possibilities as they become aware of their own intellectual capacity to explore and heighten their commitment to serve the broader community.

The university has a proud and loyal alumni base. Older alumni, in particular, give much of the credit for their success in life to their alma mater.

In short, the people who are Millersville -- staff, faculty, students, administrators, parents, and alumni -- believe that a good life begins with learning, that hard work leads to success, and that caring and active service leads to a better world.

Like most stories, there is often an alternative narrative. As we embolden on the path of self identifying, we cannot simply affirm what is done well. We must have the courage and will to critically analyze what can be enhanced.

Our self study revealed a serious lack of understanding within our campus community and antiquated perceptions from the external community.

Within the campus, our current graduate students and faculty are frustrated that the graduate program is not yet delivering the same level of excellence as our undergraduate programs.

Perhaps most disturbing, the study revealed a relatively unenergetic citizenry with respect to pride in the institution – we’re too comfortable!

Externally we are caught in an inevitable conflict of being part of a state system in an era when we are called upon more and more by our constituents and our funding to be independent. Centralization continues to be a challenge that could minimize opportunities for individualized university approaches. We must find creative ways of working within the state system without abandoning our commitment of providing access to excellence.

Finally, we learned that there are still those in the larger external community that consider Millersville a “second choice” or “back-up” choice when it comes to college selection.

Many current undergraduate students and members of the Lancaster community, once they learn more about us from direct contact, are “pleasantly surprised” at our quality. They had considered us, “that nice little teacher’s college in the country.”

While we did not abandon our heritage of excellence in teacher preparation as we were transformed into a University, all other programs we offer must obtain prominence as recognized reasons for choosing Millersville. Additionally, our competitors are no longer merely our State System peers -- we are directly positioned against all public and most private schools.

So that is who we are. The question before us now is where does our story go from here? To share our story we need to identify tools that will help us sharpen and crystallize our institutional identity both internally and externally. To do this we must be willing to differentiate ourselves, we must use simple and direct language, we must be open to change, we must be truthful about who we are, and we must provide a long-term commitment to assure we can sustain who we want to be.
If we are to really know ourselves and be able to share that understanding with others there are four key messages that we must make intentional components of the Millersville story. First, Millersville has a great reputation.

Second, Millersville is a supportive and enriching community.

Third, Millersville awakens the intellect.

Finally, Millersville offers abundant academic resources.

The powerful concluding scene of the film *Dead Poet’s Society* provides students, the opportunity to tell the truth, in the face of daunting external challenges urging them to remain silent. At a pivotal moment, one courageous student seizes the opportunity, boldly climbs on top of his desk so that all may hear, and vehemently states the truth, “My captain, my captain.” His action becomes an inspiration and he is soon joined by a chorus of others who proclaim the true story.

And so, we too must stand up to the world and live up to what will become our Millersville promise: to provide an educational opportunity second to none, and to affirm that promise, acting on our signature statement to seize the opportunity.

Clearly Millersville is an opportunity not to be missed, but one to be seized! As we seize the opportunity to tell our true story, we affirm Millersville’s legacy. As we seize the opportunity to tell our story we give distinctive voice to who we are and move beyond the shallow claim of “me too.” When we seize the opportunity to tell our story we share a universal message applicable to all constituency groups -- a message of pride and relevance in a changing world. Most critically, each time we seize the opportunity to tell our story it serves as a reminder to the entire Millersville community of the promise we make to our students: to provide an educational experience that is second to none.

There are too many who have missed the Millersville story! The exceptional education we provide should not come as a “surprise” to our entering students but as a confirmation that Millersville was and is an inspired choice………a first choice. As part of our story, let me share with you some visual concepts that suggest the impact Millersville has had throughout history and to the present day, and that will become a part of the implementation of institutional identity.

Implementation plans for sharing our story will begin in earnest this fall starting with the internal community and will involve all of us on some level. Let me stress that I am excited by and committed to this direction. It will be a long-term journey of at least five years or more, and I promise that we will walk together -- and as we walk this path together we will “intentionally” transform our University.

As part of this process I am pleased to announce the first recognition of employees who through their daily work “seize the opportunity” to make the University “second to none.” Throughout this year and the following years we will continue this recognition program for our students, faculty and staff. Details will be announced soon. The individuals I am about to recognize are
Griots in their own right, storytellers of this institution who honor us all by their dedication to keep our story alive.

We honor two groups of staff for their extraordinary efforts:

- Over the summer, the Maintenance Operations and Information Technology staff members responded to an overnight fire and outage in our main electrical system. The resulting power failure covered the western half of the campus, impacted electrical, telephone and computer equipment, and could have shut down all campus operations. Their extraordinary efforts prevented further damage that could have resulted in a multi-day or --week outage. They worked quickly to restore services so normal business could resume with minimal disruption. We commend and honor these staff who worked well beyond their normal shifts schedules and demonstrated a spirit of cooperation that exemplifies the best of Millersville University.

- The University Grounds Crew for their sustained efforts – year in and year out - you make MU a beautiful and attractive institution that is appealing and inviting to students, faculty and staff, and visitors. Students continue to tell us that the beautiful campus is one of the major reasons they chose MU, aside from the quality of our academic programs and our affordability.

These efforts by these employees exemplify the pride and excellence in work that stands out as shining examples of MU’s commitment to be second to none. If you are here with us today, I invite you to please stand so that we may all affirm our appreciation.

Knowing who we are, and sharing the story with external groups are two important steps. But we must go further. I am calling for regular and intentional promotion of our institutional image that will become etched -- not as a “pleasant surprise” but an “unwavering confirmation” -- in the minds of the region. You can begin today as you share among colleagues, students, and with me those exceptional ventures in which you engage. Keep reflecting and keep refining our image so that we seize the opportunity to be on the cutting edge of educational change.

In all that we do from this moment forward let our words and actions be guided by the promise to our students who have seized the opportunity to attend our University: that a Millersville education will be second to none. We must be the Griots for Millersville’s vibrant story, for if not us, then who?

Together we can make this a reality. Join me and stand on top of your desks. From where I stand, I see a University that is the preferred choice of students who come to campus expecting to “seize the opportunity” to grow and become all that they are able to be.

NOW THAT IS A GREAT STORY.