

## THE CHARACTER OF STONY BROOK

John Marburger

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There is no change except against a standard, and changing institutions may gauge themselves against their pasts or against the society that defines their function. Stony Brook is certainly different today than a few years or a few decades ago. And measured by what we were, we can see great progress. Measured by what society expects of us, we see tremendous unmet needs and challenges. Measured by what we expect of ourselves--well, what *do* we expect of ourselves?

Today I want to talk about the changes and the needs and the expectations we have of the future. It seems to me that this is a good time to talk explicitly about what kind of institution we want Stony Brook to be. The strains of budget cutting have divided us and distracted our attention from the larger evolutions of our campus. In fact, we are remarkably strong and, as usual, we are not acknowledging it adequately to ourselves or to our publics. But, surprisingly, some deep problems have been repaired, and we have an opportunity to move forward more rapidly than most other universities during this recession period.

### Change at Stony Brook

During this past month we watched the final arc of a hypnotic trajectory that rose with the launch of Sputnik I on October 4, 1957. At that time, close to Stony Brook's birthday, America measured its need for higher education symbolically against the perception that an enemy nation threatened us with greater technical accomplishment. Our experience during World War II showed how critical science was for dominance in warfare. It was not love of arts and letters that built campuses throughout the 1960's. It was the need for national security through excellence in all the arts of war. We took advantage of it to build institutions that served a higher purpose. But let us not be blinded by our own idealism. While other forces were indeed at work, Society supported us then, at our beginning, because we could produce knowledge necessary for national defense.

That has all changed. Not only has the Soviet Union vanished as the ultimate enemy but, Desert Storm notwithstanding, the ability to wage successful war has vanished as the only basis for national survival. These were basic rules of the game. Now they are changing, and it is up to us to demonstrate our continuing value to Society under the new rules, whatever they are. Last year at this time, I spoke about what Stony Brook had to do to meet the challenge of our changing world. In talking today about the future, I will begin with present difficulties

and challenges and attempt to identify some Stony Brook themes that carry forward the standards of intellectual integrity and optimism characteristic of universities for ten centuries.

That word "characteristic" brings me to the title of my message today: The Character of Stony Brook. Character and change are curiously linked. Change brings out character, and character guides us through change. We seek characteristics of institutions as invariants in their behavior over time. But we do not respect those characteristics so much for the accident that they survived as for the extent to which they were intentional. That is the difference between a characteristic and a character. We have one, we mean the other.

It has fallen to presidents to set forth in convocation addresses the character of their institutions. I do this today because it seems to me that we face challenges that we will meet only by being very confident about our character. I want to talk first about a small number of important issues that strongly affect our future. Let us begin with the challenge that has dominated our attention for nearly a year: the budget.

### **The Budget**

Our budget problems this year were created by a very real recession that has affected most states throughout our nation. It was not a result of bad management here or in Albany, nor of inadequate political clout by Long Island, nor of the Governor's dislike for SUNY. As far as I can tell, the Governor does not dislike SUNY. He wants SUNY to succeed, and he is serious about creating conditions for that to happen. Our legislators continue to support us and we continue to benefit from legislative assistance, including adjustments to our budget.

#### *Its effect on people*

As the dust settles on the campus budget for 1991/92, we have "permanently" closed approximately 140 jobs and we are maintaining many additional vacancies to meet our budget targets. Because we intentionally kept large numbers of positions open during the last eighteen months in anticipation of major cuts, only a small number of our employees, fewer than eight, will be forced to look for new jobs outside the university. This number is in addition to eight others who lost their jobs in last year's cuts. That is still too many, and I hope that during the next few months we can find new opportunities for them. But many more have had their lives disrupted. Some are going to be in new positions they did not seek. Others will be transferred to self-funded operations, and they will bear more of the responsibility

for generating funding for their own positions. And the hopes of some who expected to be rehired or reappointed have been dashed. On behalf of the institution to which all of you affected had entrusted your livelihoods and futures, I extend my deepest compassion and regret.

#### *Its effect on operations*

The budget reductions are having an enormous effect on the way Stony Brook works. Many employees who had come to rely on overtime for part of their paycheck will no longer receive it (we have already saved over a million dollars this way). And the services they performed on overtime will be available only during regular shifts, if at all. Consequently, more employees are being assigned to shifts that are inconvenient for them. At the same time, there is more explicit control of some functions to ensure that the essential business gets done. Some offices will find that the people they once relied upon to get needed service, perhaps as a special favor, are no longer as responsive. That does not mean that they are not doing their jobs well. It is possible that they are doing them better. But our employees are seeing a more intrusive management. There are more audits, more careful examinations of how business is done, more demands that business not be as usual. Starting this year I expect to see a five-year cycle of administrative departmental reviews similar to those traditional for academic departments. Several are now in progress. By far the greatest impact of the reductions has been on administrative operations, and under that impact the way we do things is looking very different.

#### *Its effect on academic programs*

In the area of academic programs, the many instances where adjunct faculty are not being hired as usual will leave holes in our course offerings. Bigger holes will be left by enforced vacant regular faculty positions. Fewer graduate students will be supported on state funds, but fortunately, we have been able to maintain and even slightly increase the total number of supported students. Graduate student recruiting has been reduced, and Vice Provost King believes this is responsible for fewer than expected graduate applications. (Undergraduate applications were above expectations). Technical staff support for academic programs is being reduced. Travel funds are even tighter than usual. The ranks of technicians, stockroom clerks, typists, graphics support specialists and curators, are thinned--and this in the face of one of the largest enrollment Stony Brook has ever seen--probably close to 1,800 students when all the figures are in. The consequence will be larger classes for many students and somewhat fewer course opportunities. But there are compensating improvements of which I will speak later.

## **Some Non-budget problems**

### *Major Maintenance*

Some of the most visible problems we have been experiencing have nothing to do with the budget crisis. The overheated offices on West Campus this summer were the result of record heat and of having only one of the two customary chillers on line. (I can assure you that the discomfort was not a consequence of our desire to save energy. We are continuing to save energy through other means.) The other chiller requires major repairs beyond the campus budget capacity. While it is possible to attribute the delay in repairing the chiller to the budget difficulties, I believe the problem lies much deeper in statewide attitudes toward major maintenance projects. SUNY's ability to fund such projects has been declining because funds historically used for them have been eliminated in the sequence of "one-shot" cost saving measures imposed in the state Executive Budget process. Nevertheless, we know that the Budget Division is concerned about the mounting problem, and at least no one is denying that a problem exists. You will be hearing more about major maintenance during the current year.

### *Parking*

Parking is another problem that is only indirectly related to the budget difficulties. To solve the problem in the long run, we either need fewer automobiles on campus or more parking structures. Given our location and the nature of our student body, the chances of the former are remote. Given the obstacles to charging users for parking and the reluctance of the state to provide it as a free service, the chances of the latter are not much better. At this point, all I can promise are unpopular proposals and lots of information about reality.

The Department of Parking and Transportation has produced and distributed a document that explains much about the parking situation and should clear up many questions that have been raised about the parking situation on campus. Also available is a longer document that gives extensive information about the operations and finances of parking on campus. I emphasize that while the parking problem is not itself a budget problem, the management of parking by the state has created a budget problem for us. Money has already been extracted from our budget in anticipation that we will impose fees to pay its cost.

## *The Need for Feedback*

So many changes were made so quickly during the past eighteen months of budget cutting that I feel the need to recalibrate my perceptions of how the campus is working. Provost Edelstein and I, and other administrative colleagues as appropriate, are arranging to visit as many departments as possible this fall to find out directly how the budget reductions are affecting them and to help distinguish between problems that are truly budget driven and problems that we might be able to address within our current resources. Compared with the total campus budget of more than \$500 million, the cuts were small, and given time we can do much to reallocate resources to improve intolerable conditions. Our enemies during these past months were time and ignorance. If we can keep our heads now in the aftermath, we can use the one to subdue the other. Let us spend time learning what we have done, healing wounds inadvertently administered, and finding opportunities to move our enterprise ahead.

## **The Research Environment**

### *The national scene*

I am sure everyone here is aware that last month Stanford's President Donald Kennedy, one of higher education's most respected leaders, announced that he would step down from his post one year from now. In his announcement, he referred to the publicity engendered by congressional scrutiny of the management of federal indirect cost charges at Stanford. All other large research universities are also under scrutiny, including Stony Brook, and several have announced that they would return funds to the federal government that may have been improperly charged. These dramatic events are among the effects of a long concern in Washington about increasing indirect costs on federal grants and contracts. I have participated in Washington discussions of this issue over the years and testified earlier this year in hearings on the subject sponsored by the House Subcommittee on Science of the Science, Space and Technology Committee.

In my opinion, there is not a serious problem with the management of indirect costs. Agencies and Congress would like to make more funds available for research, and they see the indirect cost budget as a source of funds to do so. These funds are vulnerable primarily because few people understand indirect costs except accountants and business professors. Principal investigators have been complaining for years that research funds have been diminished by the inefficient management of overhead services. Whether this is true or not, the argument falls on receptive ears in Washington. This year the federal Office of Management and Budget will almost certainly adopt

new rules limiting the administrative portion of indirect costs. Current proposals would cost Stony Brook about a million dollars if no other actions were to take place.

### *Major changes in SUNY*

It is not clear what impact new federal regulations will have on Stony Brook because so many other changes are occurring here and in SUNY that affect the cost and management of overhead services and indirect cost reimbursements. Never in SUNY's history have there been such profound changes affecting the research mission. I will summarize them here because they are so important for our campus.

*First*, the state Division of Budget has agreed to cap the infamous "tithe" on indirect cost reimbursements. In a one time trade of state funds for indirect cost funds, DoB agreed to permit the Research Foundation to retain 100% of future reimbursements. At a cost of \$16 million in base funding SUNY-wide, I would have preferred the buyout to be less expensive, but at least the tithe is gone. This transaction does not result in any net benefit to Stony Brook during the current year but will in future years as sponsored research continues to grow.

*Second*, the Research Foundation has abandoned its formula for distributing indirect cost reimbursements to campuses. That formula was very disadvantageous to Stony Brook, and its demise will mean additional funds to our campus in excess of two million dollars per year. There was a buyout cost for this action also, but appreciably less than that for the tithe.

*Third*, the Research Foundation is decentralizing major operations to the university centers and dramatically reducing the size of its central staff. Whether this will result in net gains for Stony Brook is not yet clear, but we have more direct management control over services that formerly we were forced to buy from RF Central at their rates. The incentive is high for us to manage these services efficiently.

*Fourth*, SUNY for the first time has acknowledged responsibility for the research mission in its central organization. The Chancellor has established an office focusing on research under the direction of Dr. Richard Jarvis reporting to Provost Joseph Burke. Provost Edelstein is a member of a new SUNY research advisory committee established for this office. Dr. Jarvis is a researcher who has had experience as a principal investigator in the SUNY system, a first for the central administration. The consequences for Stony Brook can only be positive. Research and scholarship are Stony Brook's greatest

missions will increase our ability to secure SUNY support for our initiatives.

The changes described above occurred in response to initiatives launched by Stony Brook and Buffalo with support from the Research Foundation management. I would like to acknowledge Provost Joseph Burke's willingness to listen objectively to arguments we raised, eventually to accept their validity and then to encourage action based upon them.

*Fifth*, following extensive study and discussion of the funding and management of research support operations at Stony Brook, the Provost is implementing significant changes in this area. Provost Edelstein will report on the details elsewhere, but the changes are obviously related to the decentralization of Research Foundation operations to our campus and to other changes in financial management here at Stony Brook. It is important to understand that these changes are not being made because of deficiencies in the existing operations, which have been managed well for many years under the direction of Bob Schneider and his colleagues. Their work often in the past received complimentary rankings from the Senate Committee on Administration.

I am recounting these changes because many developments in recent years have created pressure on Stony Brook's research community. The Provost and I are encouraged by the developments I have described above. We are convinced that it is possible to reverse what has been perceived as a negative trend and improve the atmosphere for research on our campus. We are committed to doing so, and I have asked the Provost to design a broad initiative to strengthen the research mission at Stony Brook. Such an initiative can be funded by taking full advantage of the flexibility we enjoy in the expenditure of indirect cost reimbursements.

### **Undergraduate Students**

The University at Stony Brook is a rich community of highly active, exceptionally talented people whose will to influence society cannot be subdued by adversity. In laboratories, libraries, operating rooms, galleries and concert halls, Stony Brook people continue to excel at what they do. Despite the budget situation, measures of campus activity are at all-time highs: enrollments, federal funding for research, hospital patients, ambulatory patients, degrees awarded, scholarships awarded, Continuing Education programs, Evening College enrollments, campus cultural events, concerts, exhibits, patent

disclosures, revenue from patents and licenses, philanthropic support, numbers of employees, overall volume of financial activity, relations with regional schools, curriculum development, projects supported by industrial partners, diversity of student body, accomplishments of student athletes and intercollegiate teams. We continue to attract the best faculty, and our faculty continue to earn national acclaim for their work. We opened a new sports facility, new graduate housing and secured resources for a technology incubator building. Taking all these measures together we are probably the most successful public research university in the northeast United States. But setting aside the facilities problems our new Campus Master Plan is designed to solve, there is one area where Stony Brook's statistics show us at a disadvantage. In the competition for highly achieving high school graduates, Stony Brook does not excel.

### *The case for student quality*

It is easy to say that Stony Brook's graduate student quality is outstanding and that since graduate education and research are our unique missions, we should concentrate on graduate students and not worry about the undergraduates. But I am not even proposing that argument as a straw man. There are good reasons why we should give high priority to increasing the numbers of conventional high achievers among our students. Let me start with one that is not so good. By a logic incomprehensible to me, most people measure the quality of educational institutions by the excellence of the people they attract, that is, before they have benefitted from the education in question. That seems terribly wrong headed, and I do not accept it as a valid basis for concern about the credentials of incoming freshmen. We should be more proud of the value we add than of the ability we attract. By that criterion, I believe Stony Brook is successful far beyond the norm for universities of our type. But the relatively low SAT scores of our incoming freshmen are counted against us in the inevitable comparisons with other campuses.

Now let me give two better reasons for concern: first, there is a tremendous net outflow of intellectual talent from Long Island. Essentially all of Long Island's most talented high school graduates leave the region for their higher education. I do not have statistics on the percentage who return, but I can imagine that it would compare unfavorably to that of a third world country that similarly sends its talent abroad for education. That phenomenon is of great concern to Long Islanders and to the state at large because we have traditionally been the region within the state with the most vital economic growth. Stony Brook is the only university on Long Island with the faculty quality and the institutional resources to compete with Ivy League

schools for the matriculation of the most highly talented students. We must either keep the best here on Long Island or bring in other brilliant students from elsewhere to replace them.

The second reason for concern is that only a fraction of all students have the capacity to realize the highest level of accomplishment in a particular field of human endeavor. And Stony Brook's faculty are among the few in our nation who have the ability to carry students with such potential to that high level. Society loses when talent is not matched with talent. The argument is a familiar one to musicians. Master cellists do not develop under mediocre teachers. We have fine cellists among our music students because we have one of the world's great teachers and performers in Timothy Eddy. The world of cello performance is enhanced by the combination of brilliant teacher and brilliant student. There is a sense in which something of Timothy would be wasted if he had no student competent to his level of ability. I believe many of our faculty feel underused in this way in their experiences with undergraduates. I do not mean to cater to faculty who want no part of making valuable the lives of any that come to us. But I do believe that there is something inefficient about a system that does not exploit its best chances for excellence.

#### *Favorable signs*

It is not easy to change this picture. We cannot, for example, simply raise our standards for admission. We need more highly achieving students to enroll. Last year, I listed what I think is necessary to make progress. This year, I can point to some signs of progress.

*First*, there is the fact of our considerably increased fall freshman enrollment despite unfavorable demographic trends. Within SUNY we have set ourselves the most challenging enrollment goals, and our achievement of them is impressive. Increased enrollments give us better control over the profile of students we admit and provide room for experimentation with new modes of recruiting.

*Second*, we have at last a general education curriculum of which we can be proud. After a decade of experimentation with a curriculum that finally became terminally complicated, the Diversified Educational Curriculum promises to embody the early goals of reform in a practical, intellectually sound approach that should be the envy of other universities. I extend my congratulations to everyone who helped bring this curriculum into existence.

*Third*, our experience with key programs to enhance undergraduate academic life has been entirely positive, and the programs

are thriving. The Honors College, Residential Colleges, URECA, SBU 101 courses, and older programs such as Federated Learning Communities, Sigma Beta Honor Society, and SAINTS are all continuing to attract the necessary critical mass of faculty interest and student support.

*Fourth*, we have a Vice Provost for Undergraduate Studies, Professor Douglas, who brings academic distinction, knowledge of Stony Brook, a long history of interest in teaching, and the determination to make Stony Brook an excellent environment for undergraduate learning.

This list can become quite long, because the problem of inadequate numbers of highly achieving freshmen is widely recognized and many different offices and groups are working on it. The Offices of Student Affairs, Residential Life, University Affairs, Campus Services, and the Board of the Stony Brook Foundation all have relevant initiatives. Increasing the numbers of highly achieving freshmen must remain high on our priority list for the entire decade. It will take that long to achieve some of our current goals for facilities and campus life improvements designed to make our campus more attractive to undergraduates.

### **Stony Brook Character**

This emphasis on undergraduates must not be seen as a turning away from our essential missions of scholarship, research and graduate instruction. It is rather an effort to redress an imbalance that has been recognized at least since our 1973 accreditation study. Indeed, every systematic assessment of academic life on our campus has drawn attention to the "two Stony Brooks": one that produces scholarship of exceptional quality, and another that produces more frustration than enlightenment for undergraduates. It was during the 1973 self study that Patrick Hill invented the Federated Learning Communities to bring the two Stony Brooks together to create a superior learning environment for a small number of undergraduates. I think there is a relationship between our failure to attract as many high achievers as we would like today and our continuing failure to resolve the "two Stony Brook" issue.

The "two Stony Brook" phenomenon has persisted so long that I would have to call it one of our characteristics. It is not a positive one, and there is a widespread awareness that it must change.

There is a tendency at Stony Brook, one it shares with many Long Islanders, to identify negative characteristics and dwell upon them, leaving little room in the social consciousness for the positive

characteristics that ought to be a source of pride. But I do not want to engage further in that exercise today. A counteracting tendency is our determination to improve ourselves, and yet another is our willingness to experiment with new forms and to cut our losses if an idea does not work out.

## **Excellence**

I believe that alongside those *characteristics* that we have acquired by virtue of our history or location, we have others that are more like elements of a *character* that we should cherish and encourage. The very fact that we are concerned about the profile of quality among our students speaks of our concern for excellence in every undertaking. I propose to place this first on our list of elements of the Stony Brook Character--a list of qualities that we intend to guide us into the future:

*Stony Brook intends to achieve excellence in every aspect of its operation.*

This is a bold statement, but one to which we can legitimately aspire. We have demonstrably the most excellent faculty among public universities in the northeast, and we have arguably among the best graduate students. Our contributions to new knowledge excel in many fields. Our hospital offers excellent health care. We have excellent programs in letters, arts and sciences and the professions. Now we need to secure our domains of excellence and expand them to include all aspects of undergraduate education as well as to new or unfinished programs.

## **Sophistication**

Next to the intention to achieve excellence I would place a tendency widespread at Stony Brook to emphasize those activities and areas that are the most sophisticated and demanding. The training we offer in public policy and business has a quantitative slant. Social science degrees are likely to require courses in advanced mathematics. Our brand of physics uses the most sophisticated tools of theoretical and experimental science to reach into the most fundamental questions of the origins of matter and the universe. The performance component of our music department adheres to the highest international standards. Our theatre program places unusual demands on student actors, bringing forth productions of exceptional complexity. I will speak more later about the significance of having a medical school and a teaching hospital within our campus, but ours

prepares medical students to employ the most advanced and sophisticated technologies to treat the most difficult conditions. In short,

*In whatever fields of human endeavor Stony Brook provides training and an environment for scholarship, we intend to pursue the most sophisticated and demanding aspects of those fields.*

I am not speaking only of graduate level work here, I am speaking of the difference between competence and virtuosity, of work that requires the utmost polishing of the skills of thought, of performance, of technique. Stony Brook is a community of scholars of the most challenging subjects known to humankind and a place where students may reach pinnacles of human potentiality, if they are able and willing.

### **National competitiveness**

The question arises as to what students we serve with all this excellence and sophistication. At Stony Brook, our tendency is to turn this question around. Our mission is not so much to serve students as to serve society through our students. We are producing a valuable human resource for Long Island, for New York State, for our nation, and for the world. I spoke before of our mission to reverse the brain drain from our region. Although we strive to bring the best to Long Island, our primary objective is to produce world-competitive graduates on Long Island.

*Stony Brook intends to produce students who can compete successfully in the fields offered with those prepared at any other institution in the world.*

### **Diversity**

Furthermore, we do not believe that accidents of race or sex or ethnicity or place of origin are relevant to excellence. We have always taken talent in whatever package it presents itself. Arguments and opinions about the validity of culture and lifestyle are not as interesting to us as whether a student has a commitment to excellence and service to society. Even after we succeed in raising the number of highly achieving freshmen, we will find a wide diversity of students in our profile. We will always have an enrollment that spans a wide spectrum of preparations and places a wide spectrum of demands on our faculty. We currently have the most diverse student body on either the graduate or the undergraduate level of any SUNY center and that will continue in the future. Our proximity to New York City and large immigrant populations makes it natural that:

*Stony Brook actively pursues talent within every population. Consequently the Stony Brook university community is highly diverse.*

I suggested above that we value a commitment to "service to society" by our students. The same can be said for everyone at Stony Brook. We are in the first place a public university, which in this country suggests a somewhat stronger social role compared with private universities. Most people joining us as faculty or employees understand that and willingly buy into the notion that the traditional teaching, research and service functions of universities are here bent deliberately but appropriately toward the needs of the state.

### **Sense of public mission**

Beyond the fact of our public support, Stony Brook has a special sense of public mission that is permanently a part of our character. We are the only research university on Long Island. The state commission chaired by Henry Heald that gave us our charge referred explicitly to social purposes, to technology development and to the need to compete with other states and nations. Our location is not far from New York City, a situation that leads automatically to raised consciousness of the need for new solutions for the problems of society.

*Stony Brook encourages explicit social applications of scholarship and research.*

In looking back over these elements of the Stony Brook character, and looking objectively at what Stony Brook actually does as an institution, it seems to me that there is one paradigmatic activity so massive and so accurately capturing the spirit of our intentions as to symbolize the nature of the entire university. That activity is health care. Be aware that health care now comprises half of all we do in terms of budget: approximately \$250 million out of a campus total of \$500 million is hospital and other patient care activity.

### **Health care as a paradigm for Stony Brook**

But it is not the size of the health care enterprise that impresses me. It is the fact that within University Hospital are encountered the most acute of all human problems in conjunction with the most advanced forms of science and technology. It is the insistence on excellence, the sharp consciousness of the life or death difference made by even the smallest job, the spirit of dedication to the alleviation of human suffering, the readiness to make heroic sacrifices of time and emotional energy to save the life of anyone who needs help, regardless of sex, race, origin or personality.

Nearly every academic department could legitimately have a role in the drama of a tertiary care hospital. Every service department actually does have such a role. Many undergraduates volunteer or work part time in our hospital. Many West Campus faculty and students conduct research and studies based upon hospital applications. The vision of that other founding commission chaired by Malcolm Muir is being fulfilled. The health care and medical training functions support and are supported by the research university in which they take place.

I see the character of Stony Brook as strongly reflected in its health care mission. It insists on excellence; it incorporates the latest technology and the most sophisticated knowledge; it necessarily adheres to national standards and prepares nationally competitive people; it strives to carry out its mission of mercy without respect to sex or race or creed or color; even those who carry out basic scientific studies acknowledge the applied nature of their work. Their aim is to save lives.

*Health care is symbolic of Stony Brook's character and provides a standard for all that we do.*

#### **The measure of our change**

Stony Brook is very nearly a mature university. We have weathered an extremely difficult budget year, and we are not only intact but still growing. We can complain about many things going wrong, and yet we continue to add success upon success in our missions of teaching, research and service. Measured against our past we have come a very long way. Measured against the needs and expectations of society, we are clearly doing what we were designed to do. The question of what we expect from ourselves is one that I can only answer as your representative, but to me the answers are rather clear.

Stony Brook intends to become the most academically respected public university in the eastern United States.

Stony Brook intends to become the major force for technology based economic development on Long Island.

Stony Brook intends to provide the best possible advanced health care to the Long Island region.

Stony Brook intends to produce students from the most diverse economic and cultural backgrounds who can provide leadership in the most advanced and sophisticated fields of human endeavor.

Through the science, scholarship and creative activity of its faculty, students, and alumni, Stony Brook intends to create new insights that improve the quality of life for all throughout the world.

These are not small ambitions, but we are arguably well on our way to achieving them.

I have often been accused of optimism, and some of you may think that reemphasizing our grand ambitions at a time of despair and gloom and campus tension is not useful. But I have always insisted that the source of my positive convictions about Stony Brook is not optimism but realism. Most of our painful problems today do not have very deep roots. We are experiencing a shock wave radiating from a source of change that would not be so noticeable if it were not so sudden. The Stony Brook characteristic of exaggerated self criticism has been useful in driving us relentlessly along our path to greatness. But it also blinds us to our true accomplishments.

I have not attempted to catalogue all those accomplishments today. My annual report that will appear soon is once again full of concrete evidence that this institution is achieving far beyond the norm by nearly any measure. It is right to focus on those areas where progress is impeded, or even turned back. But when we ignore our extraordinary strength we mislead our friends and even ourselves about our true value to society.

The part of Stony Brook's character I most admire is our determination to prevail through all adversity. The problems we face now are scarcely significant compared to what we have already overcome. I welcome the opportunity to work together with you to make Stony Brook a great institution.