

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN-FLINT  
CAPITAL CAMPAIGN KICKOFF  
UNIVERSITY THEATRE  
APRIL 16, 2005

**CHANCELLOR MESTAS' REMARKS**

I love this campus. It is my home. I feel comfortable here. It is large enough to offer a broad variety of choices and opportunities, as one would expect from a fine comprehensive university. Yet, it is small enough that students don't get lost in the multitude. Here, we care about our students one at a time.

I feel comfortable on this campus the way I feel comfortable within my family. Granted, we are not a *perfect* family. (I have never seen a perfect family, except on television, and not since the 50s.) We are a *caring* family. We care for one another, and we care for our university.

Once in a while somebody takes this family metaphor a bit too literally. Last year I had a group of students at my home for dinner, enjoying good food and a relaxed conversation. As the evening was coming to an end, I gave them my home phone number and told them to feel free to call me if they ever needed me, even late at night. (No big deal for me; I'm a night person.) "If it is important enough for you to wake me up in the middle of the night," I told them, "it is important enough for me to wake up and listen to what you have to say." Maybe I should have been more specific. The following evening, as I was having dinner at home with a faculty group, the phone rang. It was one of the students from the previous night. He wanted to know if I was busy. "Chancellor, I'm here with some friends, and I was wondering if we could go to your house and... hang out."

It was a tempting proposition. If I hadn't had guests, I would have invited them to come over. And that's my point. One of the reasons I *love* being Chancellor of UM-Flint is that I get phone calls like that. On any given day, I may have the option of just hanging out with students. Who could ask for more? What better way to stay young?

Don't get the impression, though, that this is a lazy campus. Laidback, yes, but bursting with energy, because these are exciting, transformational times at UM-Flint.

Let me give you an example: *student housing*. We are getting closer and closer to becoming a residential university. You know as well as I the beneficial impact that having students living on campus, in the middle of downtown Flint, will have for the university and for the neighboring community. I don't need to elaborate. Just imagine it.

Let me give you another example: we are about to start a campus conversation, led by the faculty, about *general education*. This will be the most important pedagogical dialogue going on at the university in the next year or so. At the most basic level, general education refers to the pattern of courses that every student must take, regardless of his or her major, as a graduation requirement. But it is much more than that.

General education is about developing students who are leaders, independent thinkers, and engaged citizens. I believe, for instance, that every undergraduate should be able to read critically, to analyze a topic from multiple perspectives, to master and apply the scientific method, to perform serious research under faculty guidance, and to use what he or she has learned for the good of the community. General education should not be about picking items from a menu. It should be about revealing the wonders of the world and the mind to the students.

Our general education program will be exciting, creative, and pedagogically sound, based not on bureaucratic constructions (how many classes to take from this area and how many from that other) but on an understanding of how people learn and what our students should expect to have learned—in terms of acquiring and applying knowledge and in terms of developing character and leadership—by the time a UM-Flint diploma is placed on their hands. I see that already with the eyes of the imagination

Let me give you still another example: We are about to complete a five-year *strategic plan* for the university. That will be our institutional agenda for the rest of my term as Chancellor. The details are still under discussion, but there is consensus that the mission of the university should rest on three pillars: *academic excellence*, *student centeredness* and *engaged citizenship*. Put those three pillars together and you get the identity of the

University of Michigan-Flint: who we are, who we aspire to be and who we shall be with careful planning, alert intelligence, hard work and... *imagination.*

And with your help.

We did not invite you here this afternoon to ask you for money—not here, not this afternoon. (There will be other times and other places to do that.) This campaign is *not* about money. You heard me right, but just in case, I'll say it again: *This campaign is not about money.* It is about *people.* That is the only way it could be, because the university is about people, people engaged in the never-ending pursuit of knowledge and understanding.

Sure, we need financial support for scholarships, to improve the campus facilities, to expand our library collection, and for other important purposes—and we will be asking for that support. After all, money builds what the imagination creates. But the campaign is about *people.* We need more scholarships, because no student who has the ability, the preparation and the will to succeed at UM-Flint should be denied that opportunity because she or he cannot afford it. We strive to keep the campus immaculate, safe and beautiful, because that's the best environment for learning. We have a library full of books, not because we hate trees, but because books are a path to learning. I once heard a wise man say that we should read *everything.* “You never know where you're going to find something worth learning.”

We invited you here to help us imagine the university of the future and to help us turn those images into a beautiful, exciting reality.

You have heard several people throughout this event say that *they* are UM-Flint. And I tell you now that *I* am UM-Flint. So... who is UM-Flint? The students (always first), the faculty, the staff, the Chancellor, the alumni, our neighbors, our donors and supporters, the leaders of this campaign, our friends in the community... all of you, all of us: the university family. *We are UM-Flint!*

Thank you.