

Week of March 13

This was one of those weeks that reflects the excellence and, perhaps more importantly, the vast potential of our university. So many events and happenings showcased the dedication of our faculty and staff, the promise of our current students, and the accomplishments of our alumni. When we make the statement “we control our own destiny,” this is why.

We still do not have much clarity on the state budget picture. The Revenue Estimating Conference met earlier this week to recognize the effects of the special legislative session that concluded last week. As expected, the state still has a \$70 million shortfall for this year and a \$750 million shortfall for next year. The good news is the state has numerous options to address both. Our options? Growth and retention.

The Week

Sunday night, Kappa Kappa Psi, the national service and leadership fraternity for bands, held its spring induction ceremony. I was privileged to be offered honorary membership, and relieved not to have to participate in the terrifying first half of the induction ceremony (members are strictly forbidden from discussing details).

Monday, William Ackel and Hall Adams from the Recreation Complex decided it would be better to hold their departmental meeting on campus since none of us had scuba gear. We talked about features and services that could be added to the facility’s offerings.

Afterwards, Drake and the Alumni and Development team updated me on their work. Our future will require greater external support than ever before. We are fortunate to have a team in place capable of leading our collective efforts in that regard. To a person, they get it.

The next department was Student Accounting and Cashiering. We discussed the impact of the escalating price of higher education on students, and how each transaction with a student is a moment of truth in the student’s pathway toward graduation. We talked about the changes the office made to remain open during the lunch hour. We also discussed some of the layers of process that inhibit further service improvements. The work of this office in student success is often unseen and under appreciated.

Later Monday, the Strategic Budgeting Committee presented its final briefing. I cannot tell you how grateful I am for the exemplary work of this group, or how excited I am to see the fruits of its labor. Expect to hear from Chairman Rushing in the next days for additional information.

In Auxiliary Services, we talked about OneCard, declining balance, food service, and multiple aspects of the university that are large parts of the student experience that we may not think about often.

Tuesday morning, the facilities team gathered for a discussion on their work. I thanked them for the incredible progress they have made over the past year despite being understaffed and under resourced. We talked about the state of the budget and implications of such to our work. Our campuses have \$30 million in deferred maintenance needs. We previously received state funding for this work, but like many other mandated costs, this support has fallen away over the past few years. Without the efforts of our team, that number could easily have risen to double that amount.

Shane Rasmussen provided me an update on the Folklife Center and our signature Folklife Festival. Each year, Shane works diligently to find the resources necessary to offer this extraordinary showcase of Louisiana culture.

Tuesday afternoon and evening, Dale Wohletz and Gil Gilson helped Tonia and me set up for the 1st Annual International Student Crawfish Boil at the residence. Without their help, I think I would still be cleaning the little critters (the crawfish, that is, not the international students). Tonia, Nicholas, and I were delighted to visit with students and staff from Russia, Ukraine, Slovakia, Croatia, Spain, France, Canada, Mexico, the Bahamas, Zimbabwe, Honduras, and Colombia.

Wednesday morning at the monthly employee breakfast, we enjoyed a little fellowship and (of course) discussed the status of the state budget. We talked a little about current initiatives and our vision for the future.

Next up was the team from Marketing and Branding. We talked about the quality of our branding and messaging. We discussed earned media and strategies for continuing the staggering progress in our social media efforts.

At the first meeting of the Strategic Plan Team, co-chairs Marcia Hardy and Roni Biscoe led a review of the Strategic Framework. Representatives from each of the five focus areas (the Student Experience, Academic Excellence, Market Responsiveness, Athletic Prominence, Community Enrichment) provided updates. Dr. Hardy discussed the expectations of the group and established a timeline for the effort. We will have a progress report by mid-August and a full plan ready for execution by mid-December. This plan will shape our efforts and further our pursuit of our vision for the next 5-7 years. Your engagement in the development of the plan will be crucial to our success.

After the strategic planning meeting, it was off to Baton Rouge for the ULS meeting. It was every bit as exciting as it sounds...

Thursday started with a visit with Dr. Gregory and Loletta Wynder in the Creole Heritage Center. This extraordinary operation continues to grow in influence and impact. How they are able to do what they do with such limited resources is beyond me, yet they are continually looking to do more. One key to their success is volunteerism. They will be seeking more assistance in the coming year, so if this is an area of interest for you, I am certain Ms. Loletta would love to talk to you.

Down the hall, Leah Jackson and her team from Informational Services updated me on their efforts to generate earned media while providing ever-increasing support for communications with internal stakeholders. Telling our story is vitally important in the current environment. We are blessed to have a team that produces copious, quality messaging in traditional and non-traditional formats.

Ray Strother, Tommy Whitehead, and I met briefly to bemoan the state of the Fourth Estate...

After a quick climb of Mt. Kyser, I met with Christie Price and team in the Testing Center. We talked about the increasing demand for services, especially in the area of proctoring. Given the appropriate support and facilities, the Testing Center has enormous potential.

During the visit with the Department of English, Foreign Language, and Cultural Studies, we talked about things ranging from the state budget to changing the filters on water dispensers. I learned about some challenges with online databases and electronic collections, and was pleased to hear

potential solutions. We discussed some of the TOPS proposals and related legislative initiatives. We also talked about the relevance and increasing importance of the department's offerings in modern workforce development efforts.

After lunch, Senator Long, Ted Jones, Dan Robin, Gil Gilson, Drake Owens, and I discussed our capital outlay efforts. A replacement of Kyser Hall, an overlay of our roadways, deferred maintenance, and accessibility improvements remain our top priorities.

The "team" from Internal Audit was next up. Liz and I discussed some legacy projects and a few current issues. I've told you this before, but we are blessed to have a leader of her character and talent leading this effort.

During the meeting with the Psychology Department, we talked about what seems to be an increasing interest on the part of students in psychology studies. We discussed the potential of certificates and concentrations in various areas of the discipline (I learned about biological psychology for the first time). We also talked about the potential for expanded graduate offerings. The mixture of new and more senior faculty is certainly not unique to this department, but the team seemed well-adjusted to the dynamic...as one would expect.

That evening, our friends Justin and James Rhodes of Rhodes Property and Development held a grand opening of their new showroom on Rapides Drive.

The Natchitoches-Northwestern Symphony hosted a concert Thursday night featuring the winners of the Concerto/Aria competition. Two extraordinary sopranos, a tight horn quartet (I watched them hone their already brilliant sound in a Boston Brass master class last fall), and a world class euphonium were the highlights of the evening. Conductor Doug Bakenhus (in his inimitable style) and the orchestra gave us a gorgeous second half of the concert with selections from Glinka and Beethoven.

Friday morning, Darlene Williams and the team from Technology, Innovation, and Economic Development updated me on progress at our CenLA, Leesville/Fort Polk, and Barksdale operations. We talked about the need to continue to push the envelope in market responsiveness through sponsored programs, dual enrollment, and online education. We also

discussed ways to ensure process does not hold us hostage. This team will be an integral component in our pursuit of continuous growth and relevance.

Keep Natchitoches Beautiful launched the Leaders Against Litter campaign at the MLK Community Center in Natchitoches.

The College of Business and Technology honored State Farm for its support of the new Networking and Mobile Applications Computer Labs. The reception in the Natchitoches Room of Russell Hall allowed us to say thank you to one of our most generous partners that happens to be a frequent employer destination for our graduates.

Most of the rest of the day was devoted to two key events: the Long Purple Line (LPL) induction and the President's Command Performance (PCP). The Alumni and Development team, with the help and support of many others, raised the bar in their execution of the events. The LPL luncheon was a celebration of Greg Ashlock, Foster Campbell, Glenn Talbert, Dr. James Holly, and the late Dr. Randy Webb. Each recipient was showcased in a video produced by our own Cole Gentry. In their acceptance remarks, each provided a compelling narrative of the role Northwestern State played in their remarkable careers. We were honored to have Brenda and Tamara Webb on campus to accept on behalf of Dr. Webb. My favorite aspect of the luncheon was the presence of some of our finest student leaders. This current generation of Demons promises to be the most accomplished yet. I believe they were inspired by the stories they heard.

During the afternoon hours, I was able to visit briefly with some of the teams and coaches Davina McClain brought to NSU for a speech and debate tournament. Because of her vision and commitment, students from some of the finest high schools in the state were introduced to NSU and the Louisiana Scholars' College.

Later Friday, Natchitoches Chamber President Tony Davis invited me to attend a brief discussion with Congressman John Fleming who was passing through town.

At Friday night's PCP, we were reminded yet again that NSU is home to one of the finest Creative and Performing Arts schools on the planet. Greg Handel coordinated the events of the night with his usual grace and

professionalism. The reception was first class despite the relocation to the Hanchey Gallery (if we had kept it outside, I have no doubt it would have rained). Inside A.A. Fredericks, the performances were just magnificent. I know of no better way to honor the legacies of CAPA Hall of Fame inductees Lenn Prince, Dr. Colleen Lancaster, and Dr. Jerry Payne than to show them the world class talent of our current generation of CAPA students and faculty. I am still in a state of awe at the artistry of the dance, the majesty of the vocals, and the brilliance of the music: performances that would have wowed audiences in any venue. Keep this in mind: after all of this played in Natchitoches Friday, the Chamber Choir performed with the Shreveport Symphony Orchestra Saturday night, and NSU Dance performed in the Nick Cave production in Shreveport Sunday.

Saturday morning, I was delighted to join Abbie Landry in welcoming high schoolers from around the state to the 25th Annual State High School Quiz Bowl competition. Afterwards, several Scholars' College students working the debate tournament brought me up to speed on college happenings, classical literature, and the meaning of life.

Saturday night, Tonia and I attended the 66th Demon Regiment military ball. The event honored the year of some of NSU's finest: our ROTC cadets. We were honored to welcome Lt. General (Ret.) Cosumano and Maj. General (Ret.) Wise back to their alma mater for the event. Congratulations to our ROTC leadership for another successful event.

Please contact me with any questions, comments, or concerns.