

Fall, 1998

To the Campus Community:

What a year! It simply flew by for Mary Lib and me. It has been a learning experience for us both; we are looking forward to our second year. Since you care so much for the University, I wanted to take this opportunity to share with you my perspectives on our first year.

**Freshman Class.** The response of the state's top high school students to our message – that we want them to study here – has been fantastic! As judged by high school grade point averages and national tests, it appears the freshman class this fall will be the best ever; I am told nearly 25% will rank in the top 5% nationally. In one year, the number of National Merit and Achievement Finalists enrolling as freshmen will almost double; the number of entering freshmen on full academic scholarships will increase 8-fold. Many of the state's top students chose to attend the U of A rather than other respected private and public universities outside Arkansas. It is a strong vote of confidence in the University, but it also gives us a great deal of responsibility.

Although reports on the graduation rates at publicly supported four-year colleges and universities in Arkansas say ours is the highest among the 9 publicly supported universities, we do not take pride in a rate that, at 41 percent, is one of the nation's lowest. For that reason, our goal is to achieve a 6-year graduation rate of 66% in 6 years. Thus, this fall's freshman class must have a 6-year graduation rate of at least 66%.

For 1996-97, we had the lowest 6-year graduation rate among 44 universities making up the ACC, Big 10, Big 12, and SEC athletic conferences. When we reach our new goal, we will be in the middle of the pack, tied with Auburn, Colorado, and Michigan State and surrounded by Florida, Georgia Tech, Iowa, North Carolina State, Texas, and Texas A&M.

Many of our freshmen are entering the University with scholarship support, including major gifts from the Bodenhamer Foundation, the Sturgis Trust, and the Walton Family Foundation to support the best of our students. Despite this support, we need to raise additional private funds to support scholarships. My top priority for fund raising is to underwrite our scholarship program with a very large endowment so that our scarce state funds are used to improve our educational programs.

**Fund raising.** This has been an excellent year for the University. We raised \$28.1 million in private gift support – a 37% increase over the previous year. The number of gifts, at 30,843, is the largest in our history. Many alumni, friends, corporations, foundations, and other organizations have recognized the national and regional impact of the University, and have invested in us. This year's increase in private gift support will speed our emergence as a nationally respected research

university and enable us to provide new economic development and quality of life benefits for the people of Arkansas. Building on state funds, private gift support allows us to be nationally competitive. It is the margin necessary for excellence. It helps us add new facilities, recruit and retain excellent faculty, provide scholarships and fellowships for talented students, and offer special programs to enhance our educational mission.

The best news in private fund raising was the decision of David Gearhart to return as Vice Chancellor for Advancement. Dave shares our vision for the University in the next century and wants to help make it a reality. With his leadership, we will be able to reach the next level of private support for the University. However, he will tell you that it won't happen without strong commitment from our volunteers. We will call on many of you to help as we strive to build a nationally respected university.

While the rate of giving has increased, we still need to increase the size of our endowment. Currently at approximately \$119 million, our endowment ranks 65th among publicly supported universities, just behind the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. To be competitive with major state universities, our endowment needs to be at least \$400 million.

**Faculty.** We are fortunate to have a very strong faculty. I can list only a few examples of their accomplishments here. *The Lost Squadron*, a film to be aired by PBS on May 31, 1999, was written, produced, filmed, and edited by faculty and students in our journalism program. The film has won four international awards, including the coveted first place "Gold Camera" award at the Annual U.S. International Film and Video Festival in Chicago. The Architectural League of New York chose a member of our architecture faculty as one of eight recipients of its "Emerging Voices in Architecture" for 1998. The National Science Foundation selected one of our physics professors for its early career development award, granted competitively to promising young faculty in research and education. The Text and Academic Authors Association has awarded two William Holmes McGuffey Awards for Textbook Excellence and Longevity to one of our marketing professors.

Unfortunately, a number of very valuable faculty members decided to leave for other universities this year; the principal reasons they gave for leaving were higher salaries and greater support for their scholarly pursuits elsewhere. The year provided more evidence that we must generate more resources in order to pay nationally competitive salaries for nationally competitive performance.

**Students.** I would put our best students up against any in the nation, and I am very proud of their recent accomplishments. Two UA undergraduates were named to this year's *USA Today's* College All-Academic Team. Our classics team beat 16 other teams in a competition at Vanderbilt University. A computer science major was one of four students featured in *Computer World* magazine as a programmer prodigy. A graduate student won first prize in the Mid-South Flute Society Young Artist Competition. A Fulbright honors student majoring in French and music is the youngest person ever accepted by the Opera Institute to perform in the Rome Festival this summer. A graduate student in chemistry and biochemistry won the

Stephen E. Dwornik Award for the best student paper presented at the Lunar and Planetary Science conference.

Among the nationally competitive honors received by our students this year alone are a Marshall Scholarship, a Fulbright Fellowship, a Phi Kappa Phi Fellowship, a National Achievement Award from the landscape architecture honor society, two Truman Capote Fellowships in fiction, a National Science Foundation Fellowship, a National Security Education Program Scholarship to study in Chile, two Barry Goldwater Scholarships, and a State Farm Exceptional Student Fellowship. The industrial engineering honor society chapter was named the best in the nation. Student teams won first and second place in a national engineering design contest of the American Society of Agricultural Engineers. A team of students led by a computer science faculty member received a third place award in an international robot competition, our moot court team was victorious in a competition against the top law schools in the nation, and a team of engineering and science students was a finalist in a national computing competition. The list could go on!

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**Athletics.** Our men's and women's athletic teams have had a great year. The men's track team won their 29th and 30th national championships. John McDonnell's record is phenomenal; we are delighted he decided to remain and complete his career as a Razorback. The basketball Lady Razorbacks had a thrilling season, earning a trip to the Final Four in Kansas City. The volleyball Lady Backs team, in just four years, has won four SEC western division titles and this year won the SEC title. In all sports, we aspire to compete at the highest levels.

**Alcohol and Drugs.** University chancellors and presidents across the nation are struggling with the issue of alcohol and drugs on campus. Students died on several campuses this year as a result of alcohol or drug abuse. Fortunately, this campus was spared; but we came very close to having such a situation occur here. Our approach toward this problem has been to work in partnership with the Fayetteville community, enforcing the laws of the state and the policies of the university. Although we have made progress, we have not solved the problems of student abuse of alcohol and drugs. The Southeastern Conference presidents and chancellors discussed this subject at our annual meeting. I was surprised to learn many other SEC campuses have been more aggressive than we in confronting these problems. Expect us to be even more vocal, visible and visionary on this concern in the future.

**Diversity and Inclusion.** When I grade the University on accomplishments during the past year, I give us the lowest grade on providing our students with a diverse faculty, staff, and student body. Given the rapidly changing and shrinking world we live in, it is vital for students to be engaged in the teaching and learning process with people who do not look the same, do not think the same, do not learn the same way they do. Learning to work with and for people who do not look like themselves is essential to prepare this generation of students to succeed. My deep desire to enroll a diverse student population and build a diverse faculty and staff will be more evident during my second year.

The third Black Alumni Reunion is one of my most cherished memories of the past year. The outpouring of emotion and support left no doubt these alumni are committed to helping us make their alma mater a welcome home for African-Americans and other minorities. We must increase the diversity of the students, staff, and faculty and we must ensure that all aspects of university life are accessible to all members of the university community; it is the right thing to do – for all of us!

**Economic Engine.** The *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* reported this year that several Arkansas technology- and knowledge-based companies are not able to hire the workers they need in Arkansas; as a result, jobs are going to other states that do provide sufficient numbers of workers with the education and training they need. Decades ago, people went to where jobs were; today, jobs go to where people are. To attract high paying employers, Arkansas must be a source of nationally competitive talent. Some think workforce training is the sole responsibility of 2-year colleges. But it is clear that 4-year universities must play an equally significant role in providing workers for 21st century enterprises.

We recently received \$1.25 million from the Economic Development of Arkansas Fund Commission to support the work of our award-winning Genesis business incubator. We will seek additional support as we strive to make the University the state's economic engine. We have also requested state support for our University Research Center, to ensure that our graduate research program contributes significantly to the economic development of the state. Our research and development programs will be the foundation for a knowledge- and technology-based economy for Arkansas in the 21st Century.

**National Rankings.** Although rankings of universities are imperfect, they do influence prospective students and their parents, recruiters of graduates, private donors, and research sponsors. We dare not ignore them. The *U.S. News & World Report* ranking is one of the most widely read of them. It is based on a formula that includes such factors as our average standardized test score and our acceptance rate of entering freshmen, the institution's academic reputation, the percentage of alumni who provide financial support in addition to their membership in the alumni association, and our graduation rate, average faculty salary, student-to-faculty ratio, average class size and average education expenditure per student. Even though we provide a high quality education and our graduates compete well with those from more highly ranked universities, we do not fare well in factors constituting 87% of the points assigned.

In the most recent ranking, we were included in the third tier, along with Louisiana State University, Mississippi, Mississippi State, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, and South Carolina, among others. Given our goals, we are confident we will move into the second tier, which includes Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio State, Purdue, Tennessee, Texas, and Texas A&M, among others. (Although we will strive to be ranked in the top tier, being in the second tier is our immediate challenge.)

Just as every coach is committed to being nationally competitive, so is every UA professor, staff member, and administrator. Would anyone be satisfied if Nolan Richardson and Gary Blair had goals of having the best basketball teams in Arkansas? I don't think so. Neither should we be content with such goals for our academic programs. Being nationally competitive must be the goal in all that we do. Creating the will to succeed and generating the financial support to be nationally competitive are the challenges we face.

**University of Arkansas Press.** The two decisions which generated more public reaction than any others this year were the selection of Houston Nutt as head football coach and my decision, first, to close the University of Arkansas Press and, because of the outpouring of concern and support from Arkansans, my subsequent decision to continue it with tighter fiscal controls. The Press decision focused attention on the severe financial challenges we face. Although some believe annual university support of \$250,000 for the Press is not sufficient, external consultants and the *ad hoc* committee concluded the U of A's support is adequate *if coupled with private support*. The best news coming from the spotlight on the Press was the generous gift of \$1 million from the Tyson Foundation.

**University Library.** Great universities have great libraries. The escalating cost of periodicals and manuscripts has caused us to cancel subscriptions to a number of important journals and has limited us in our ability to acquire important manuscripts. Faculty, students, and alumni have advocated for increased support for the University Library. In response, I have committed to add \$1 million over a 5-year period to the library's books and materials budget; this is an increase of nearly 50%, from \$2.3 million to \$3.3 million. However, even that increase will not be sufficient because of continuing increases in the cost of periodicals. For future funding recommendations, the Arkansas Department of Higher Education will

compare the University Library budget with those at the nation's research universities, acknowledging the inadequacy of past support.

**Tuition and State Support.** The issue of tuition support is troubling. Low tuition is usually offset by higher state support; conversely, tuition is usually higher when state support is low. Both sources of income are low for the University of Arkansas compared to the top 25 public universities ranked by U.S. News & World Report. Since our students and their families face strong economic challenges, we need to receive above-average state support in order to keep tuition down. To that end, I will spend much of my time during the spring of 1999 at the legislative session in Little Rock. In January, I will share with you our legislative priorities and ask for your help in enunciating the goals that will give Arkansas the nationally competitive university it needs.

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**Facilities.** The most visible changes occurring on campus are those associated with renovations of the Alumni House and the Student Union; both will cause traffic problems during the coming year. However, change will continue to occur and will bring great benefits to the campus. Our expected 50% enrollment growth in the next decade will inevitably result in new construction and renovation. To guide us in our planning, we engaged a national firm to assist us in developing a campus master plan. It will be presented to the Board of Trustees in September.

**Our Future.** We stated a vision for the University to become the model land-grant university of the 21st Century. What does that mean? What sort of comprehensive research university does Arkansas need in the 21st Century? How do we compare with the nation's best universities in quality of education, statewide impact, mission, and scope? Given the state's population demographics and the mix of 2- and 4-year colleges and universities, what role is expected of the University? What will it mean for her people for Arkansas to have a truly first-rate research university? How much will it cost? How much financial support can we receive from state government? What level of externally sponsored research will we receive in the future? How will technology and distance learning affect the way we operate? What changes will be needed in our laboratories, classrooms, residence halls, other facilities, and infrastructure? These are some of the questions we must answer. All of our stakeholders must be involved in the process of defining what it means and what it takes to be the model land-grant university for the 21st century.

In closing, let me reaffirm that we are committed to the University of Arkansas being one of the nation's best publicly supported universities. States with strong economies have strong publicly supported research universities; unfortunately, the converse is also true. Being ranked in the top tier is not about "bragging rights;" it is about "living rights" for our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Many of you were among the more than 250 groups and 25,000 people I addressed this year in my travels to more than two-thirds of the 75 Arkansas counties and to alumni groups around the nation. I hope to maintain that pace as the legislative session allows and to see you again very soon. Please let me know how we can serve you better and how the University of Arkansas can become what you want it to be.

Few people are given the opportunity to be chancellor of their alma mater. I appreciate the chance to come home to lead the University of Arkansas into the next century. Thank you for the support and encouragement you gave Mary Lib and me. We do not take it for granted, but we do need it.

Sincerely,

John A. White  
Chancellor