INAUGURAL ADDRESS
SLIPPERY ROCK UNIVERSITY

Embracing the challenge:
Excellence, innovation and responsible citizenship

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Thank you Chairman Puchini,
  Trustee Holmes,
  Executive Vice Chancellor Garland,
  Distinguished and honored quests, faculty, staff and students as well as members of the
platform party for your presence here today at this inauguration ceremony.

My sincere appreciation is also gratefully extended to the Board of Governors and the Slippery Rock
University Council of Trustees for the honor you have bestowed upon me to be inaugurated as the 16th
president of this outstanding university. I could not be more humbled by the trust you have placed in
my leadership. Thank you.

I also want to acknowledge the support of my family and friends who have traveled across the country
to join me for this occasion. These are the people that nurtured me long before I came to western
Pennsylvania, gave me the wisest of counsel and supported my personal and professional growth. It is
because of their belief that I continued to challenge myself and stand here before you today.

Thank you for always being by my side and giving me the encouragement I needed to move forward.
May I always have the strength and wisdom to help others in the way I have been helped.

Standing at the pinnacle of this group is my husband, Henry, our sons, Joel and Aaron, daughter-in-law,
Elizabeth and grandsons, William and Andrew, my brother Terry Holt, sister-in-law, Margy Campion,
and brother-in-law, David Norton. And, my best friend from college Alice Laurenson and her husband,
Tom. Please stand so everyone can recognize you.

My love and heartfelt appreciation is unconditionally yours for what you have given me. You not only
have provided encouragement during my professional journey, but as only family can do, helped me to
keep a focus on what is truly important in life – YOU! Thank you for the love, the laughter and yes,
sometimes the tears. Family is what makes life real and meaningful.

While these are people who helped me personally to prepare for this time in my life, there are colleagues
to whom I also owe a debt of gratitude for providing a professional vision and opportunity that led to
today’s inauguration.

Bob Aebersold, a friend and mentor, known in Slippery Rock as President Emeritus of SRU, helped to
guide my leadership development in Connecticut and first introduced me to this outstanding institution.
Thank you!

Selase Williams, thank you, for not only standing by my side at Southern Connecticut State University,
but also today during this inauguration. Your advocacy for justice and equal opportunity has
strengthened my belief in the goodness of man. I will always embrace your kind words and lasting
genuine friendship.
And, equally as important in my decision to take this position was Chancellor John Cavanaugh and my PASSHE colleague presidents, the Slippery Rock University Council of Trustees, the Board of Governors and in particular, Chairman Pichini. Their collective commitment to providing cutting edge public higher educational opportunities in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is respected and admired across the country. I am here to help support this focus and am honored to join you in service towards this goal.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not recognize the Slippery Rock University family especially those who extended themselves to organize the variety of inaugural activities we were privileged to experience this week. These events celebrated the rich tapestry of a Slippery Rock Education and this institution. Please join me in extending our collective appreciation to this committee for the time and effort each of these individuals gave to this event. Thanks should also be given to the facilities staff for ensuring that the beauty of the campus is evident on this day.

While my tenure at SRU has only spanned 16 weeks, Henry and I have grown to love the campus, admire the community and have received a warm welcome from faculty, staff, alumni, Trustees, foundation board members and students. For this, please accept my sincere expression of appreciation and gratitude to each of you who have helped to write the history of this institution, but will now be part of its future.

And, what a future we have! I continue to believe that this is an institution with a tradition of excellence and a future of unlimited potential.

Certainly, the professional recognition Slippery Rock has achieved, whether in last year’s Middle States Accreditation review or from the multiple public listings identifying Slippery Rock as one of the best universities in the northeast, a college of distinction, a best value in the country, a top college nationally in commitment to sustainability or historically, the university’s recognition by The CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION as a great place to work, reflects the excellence of the university and the respect that our colleagues have for our institution and your accomplishments.

And, please remember, these recognitions are not simply given – they are EARNED! They are earned as a result of your commitment to a vision of excellence and student success through the development of a caring community of lifelong learners - learners who connect to the real world not only through their academic programs, but also by reaching out to serve the society in which we live. Slippery Rock University not only transforms the lives of individuals, but also helps to shape the character of the community, the region, the Commonwealth and even the country.

Yes, Slippery Rock University is a public institution working for the good of the public.

These are values I embrace. This commitment is why I am humbled to be here as your 16th president. Your time and effort collectively given to bring Slippery Rock University to the position of preeminence that it holds today is a reflection of your belief in this institution and willingness to serve its mission. Thank you.

Indeed, the intellectual, social and physical development of the campus is truly impressive. For that reason, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge former President Bob Smith and Provost Bill Williams for their leadership over the past 10 years - leadership at a critical time in the life of this institution when its transformation and growth truly set the university apart as an educational leader.

Thank you, Bob and Bill for your genuine and unselfish leadership of this institution.
And, thank you, Charles Curry, as acting president, for keeping the momentum going during this time of transition.

But, we cannot bask contently on our past achievements. The 21st century beckons and will continue to present new challenges and opportunities, not only for our students, but also for us as educators in service to our students. The American Association of Colleges and Universities succinctly identified these challenges in their report, “Sounding the Call - Greater Expectations for the Learning Students Need in the Twenty-First Century.” Simply put, the report challenged universities to “…help college students become intentional learners who can adapt to new environments, integrate knowledge from different sources and continue to learn throughout their lives.”

I am here because I believe that Slippery Rock University can meet this challenge. In fact, I believe it can be a national leader in 21st century education. I believe in Slippery Rock’s energy, its wisdom, its creativity and its focus. But most importantly, I believe in its desire to support student success as demonstrated in our collective commitment to:

- Having a faculty that is full time and professionally credentialed
- To sustaining high quality and accredited academic programs
- To maintaining our investment in quality teaching and learning environments,
- To supporting life-long learning
- To encouraging students to recognize their civic responsibility
- And to initiatives that sustain the environment

It is said that if you are going in the wrong direction, speeding up does not help! Our commitment is not the WRONG direction. It is the right direction for SRU, for our faculty, staff, students, community and for the 21st century.

But, our true challenge is to ensure that we follow our educational commitment and continue our maturation as an institution focused on student success. To do this we must, like our students, continue to be intentional learners, pushing the boundaries of our discipline, adding to the knowledge of our profession, integrating information and expanding the reach of this institution and its curriculum. Slippery Rock University must not only be Pennsylvania’s premiere public residential university, but it must be dynamic and flexible in response to the challenges of our ever changing society and the people we serve; a leader in excellence, innovation and responsible citizenship. In this way, Slippery Rock University will continue to be the Best Choice, First Choice institution for our region, for our Commonwealth, for our students.

It is for this reason that the inaugural theme focuses on Embracing the Challenge. The challenge to not be satisfied with where we have been, but embrace the opportunity and excitement of where we can go, of how we need to mature to provide our students a successful transition into a career and a life-time of learning; for it will be our students and their accomplishments for which we are known.

So, I challenge you, Embrace the Challenge, think creatively, be bold, reach out, do the unexpected, but be intentional about the focus – a 21st century educational experience. It is not problematic to march to the beat of a different drummer, as we did today during our processional, or to be out of step, but we should do so with purpose. Together we will continue our march towards excellence. Together we will ensure that Slippery Rock University is a guiding light for public higher education in the Commonwealth and throughout the country. Together, Slippery Rock will be a university that delivers on the promise of providing an accessible, quality educational opportunity across all socio-economic classes for those who truly want to challenge their minds and change their future. Together, this is our challenge we must embrace.
In his address to the Massachusetts Legislature, more than fifty years ago, John F. Kennedy said the following:

“When at some future date the high court of history sits in judgment on each one of us…our success or failures in whatever office we hold will be measured by the answers to four questions:

- Were we truly people of courage
- Were we truly people of judgment
- Were we truly people of integrity
- Were we truly people of dedication?”

We as a society and as educators face many challenges, but there are also tremendous opportunities and much to be done. I believe together, we have the courage, the judgment, the integrity and the dedication to succeed. At Slippery Rock University let our commitment to the success of our students be our strongest and lasting legacy.