

Convocation Address

Destined to Lead

Dan Johnson, Provost

Thank you and good morning!

It is my privilege to welcome you back from your summer break. It is also a genuine pleasure to welcome our new colleagues—faculty and staff **all 258** of you—to Zayed University. The new members of the faculty and staff represent 34 nations. You are—indeed—coming to a very special place.

I would like to express my appreciation to His Excellency, Shaikh Nahayan for his address this morning but, more important, for his wise leadership as our President and the inspiration he brings to higher education here in the U.A.E. as Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

I would also like to thank Dr. Karen Holbrook for her challenging and inspirational Convocation address. Dr. Holbrook is widely recognized as a leader in American higher education. She is increasingly recognized for her work and leadership here in the Middle East and around the world. Dr. Holbrook, we are honored to have you as our guest for this Convocation.

I want to also recognize Dr. Holbrook's husband who joins her today, Jim Holbrook.

And, to my colleague and friend, Dr. Sulaiman Al Jassim, I want to convey publicly my gratitude for your strong support and we all want to thank you for the commitment and energy you bring to Zayed University as our Vice President. We appreciate all you do to advance this wonderful university.

And to the leaders of this nation, the United Arab Emirates, we extend our heart-felt gratitude for the vision you have for educating the young citizens of this country. These young people—our Zayed University students—are preparing themselves for responsible roles and leadership positions that will determine the future of this nation. We are all privileged to be a small part of this great enterprise and vision.

When I arrived at Zayed University last October, I found an institution, with its two major campuses in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, ready to write the next chapter in its remarkable development.

I heard clearly from our President, His Excellency Shaikh Nahayan, that he wanted ZU to go to the “next level” in its continuing development as a world-class university.

In studying the history of ZU, I was amazed at all that had been accomplished in such a short period of time. The University was barely 10 years old and it had already

- Received authorization and funding from the National government and the governments of Dubai and Abu Dhabi to build two major campuses;
- Assembled a first-rate faculty;
- Recruited an administrative team;
- Built a beautiful new campus here in Dubai;
- Approved plans and started construction on a new world-class university campus in Abu Dhabi
- Adopted all the policies and procedures necessary to establish and operate a major university;
- Developed and approved a curriculum for each of its five colleges, now six;
- Recruited a critical mass of students in Dubai and Abu Dhabi who desired the type of higher education ZU would become well known for; and, to top it all off;
- Received internationally recognized accreditation from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in the United States.

All this was accomplished in the first decade of this young university. All of you who played a part in these great accomplishments should feel a lasting sense of pride. Your achievement merits everyone's gratitude and respect.

Now you, and we who have joined you, confront a new decade.

I can tell you with absolute certainty, we have created some very high expectations for Zayed University. These expectations are manifested in many ways.

For example, during the past year we heard calls from many sources asking ZU to develop more academic programs and degrees, to become more involved in research focusing on national needs, and to bring the expertise of our faculty to bear on important local and national issues through our programs in outreach and engagement.

We heard from our students requests for more depth in the curriculum; for expanded choices in course offerings; for new majors and minors; and for more opportunities for internships, service learning and coops.

Dr. Sulaiman and I have heard from many Gulf country Ministers of Higher Education that they would like Zayed University to open its doors to international students. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and other Gulf countries are anxious for ZU to admit their students. This summer while in the U.S., I received inquiries from several higher education institutions about sending American students to our University.

We have heard from our alumni and we know that they are ready to step up and play a larger role in the development of the University. They want to help grow the campuses and to contribute their support to our students and their colleges.

In fact, nearly all of our constituents and stakeholders are calling on us to do more, to step up the pace, to expand programs in ways that will bring greater benefit to the U.A.E. and its citizens.

Few universities, if any, have experienced the rapid development that ZU has experienced.

Even fewer universities in the world have come on the scene in recent decades with higher expectations than Zayed University.

The central question for all of us is, How *should* we respond? Or, perhaps more important, how *will* we respond?

For the past six months we have worked hard to formulate an answer to this question.

Today, this very hour, we begin writing a “new chapter” in the history of Zayed University. We are embarking on an ambitious plan that will, over the next 3-5 years...

- Bring a significant increase in student enrollment
- Add substantially to the number of male students
- Begin adding international students to the student body
- Establish new academic programs at both the graduate and undergraduate levels
- Bring an enhanced outreach and engagement initiative to the University’s mission
- Establish closer working relationships with business, government, and the non-profit, social and health- services arena
- Develop greater emphasis on experiential learning, service learning, internships, and coops
- Substantially improve facilities, particularly in Abu Dhabi where 5,000 men are working literally around the clock to build our new campus, and
- Create opportunities for individuals, companies, corporations, foundations and others to join our efforts in these initiatives through the establishment of a strong Endowment for the University.

During these past six months we have focused our time and energies on developing a script, a plan that would enable Zayed University to take a *giant* step toward realizing the inspiring vision of our founders that we become “the leading University in the region.”

Scores of committee and task force meetings, countless discussions and conversations, a very successful Provost’s Council retreat, and days of drafting and re-drafting the various aspects of the script, yielded the plan that now describes how ZU will move to the “next level” over the coming 3-5 years.

We had the audacity to call our document, **Destined To Lead**. This is what the plan looks like. I want every member of the faculty and staff to have their own personal copy. We will make sure you have one. I’d also like for you to read it. Its brief: only about 70 pages long.

Destined To Lead describes 44 initiatives that are designed to move us to the “next level” on the path to being the leading university in the region.

These 44 initiatives will enable and empower our University to provide greater “service to our communities and the nation,” “educate and prepare the nation’s future leaders,” “embark on a quality assurance program,” and become increasingly “innovative in the uses of technology.”

Throughout the planning process, we were acutely aware of Shaikh Nahayan’s directive that we pay particular attention to the “implementation” of the plan. He wanted us to identify the costs and who will have responsibility for seeing the initiative through to completion.

All of us were very pleased last June when His Excellency reviewed the plan and gave his written endorsement to ***Destined To Lead*** as our guide for writing the next chapter in the history of Zayed University.

If I may, I would like to offer a couple of observations about the role this document will play in the months and years ahead.

My hope is that ***Destined To Lead*** will guide, but not necessarily “determine,” all of our efforts. I fully expect there will be new initiatives that will emerge as a result of a need or opportunity that we did not envision during the development of this plan.

These initiatives will serve as a “strategic plan,” and as such, will identify our priorities, inform our planning, and guide our decisions, particularly budget decisions. It is, in effect, more of an “action plan” that we will all know and understand.

You might ask, “How are we going to do all this?” And, “How are we going to pay for it?” Good questions!

As I noted earlier, with the help of Andre Racette our Chief Financial and Administrative Officer, we have attempted to *estimate* the cost of developing and implementing these new programs and initiatives. We believe we have a fairly good grasp on the costs.

The funding for these initiatives will come from several sources:

- **Formula Funding:** We anticipate that formula funding will be approved in the next few months. Formula funding will provide a predictable source of funds based on enrollment that allows the University to engage in long range planning and program development.
- **The Zayed University Endowment Fund:** Earnings from the endowment will generate significant support for professorships, equipment and many other elements of the plan. Our Endowment Campaign plan has been developed and staffed and will be formally launched this Fall. In addition,
- **Revenue from grants, contracts and graduate education:** We anticipate significant growth in outreach projects and services. We also expect to see significant growth in graduate programs and continuing education. These programs will provide some assistance in generating additional revenue for the planned initiatives.

Even with these additional resources, we will need to do all we can to **ensure greater efficiencies**. Our efforts to identify greater efficiencies across the university will help ensure we are doing all we can to be **good stewards** and use our funding wisely.

As we embark on the task of writing this new chapter in the life of Zayed University, I am excited by the fact that everyone here—faculty, staff, students, administration—can play a meaningful part in realizing the vision of becoming the “leading university in the region.”

You may write a phrase, a sentence, a paragraph, or, perhaps, a page in this new chapter. It is a **team effort**, a collaborative effort, requiring the support of the whole university, our communities and the nation if we are to be successful.

For many years I have been privileged to serve universities that have been dedicated to serving major cities and their metropolitan regions. We are a single university located in two great cities, Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

It has been said and widely quoted, “*There are no great cities without a great university.*” To be truly great, Zayed University must fulfill its destined role in educating the nation’s leaders and in leading the nation’s education.

This convocation brings our two campuses together and signals our joint resolve. I trust that you will join me, the faculty and staff in this noble endeavor.

Thank you. Have a wonderful and productive year!