Welcome Back 2010

What a difference a year makes. At this time last year I was standing here looking at a sea of faces and recognizing very few. My emotions were all over the place....I was nervous, curious, excited. If you remember I talked about the day feeling like my first day of school experiences from the past. Well, like all first day experiences, that day quickly passed, and we moved at a rapid pace into a year of challenges, changes, achievement, and, shall I say it, snow.

Certainly the year was a year of great accomplishments too, and I’ll share some of those a bit later, but it was also a year of learning for me. As a part of my preparation for my interview I had reviewed every nook and cranny of the SU website trying to understand what made this place tick. The rankings were impressive, it was clear that the campus was student focused, and the physical aspects of the campus were beautiful. But the question I continued to ask was What makes Salisbury University a Maryland University of National Distinction? As I met faculty, met with committees, attended events (many events) I came to know and appreciate SU’s many points of distinction and was pleased that the majority of them were academic points of distinction. These points have become
so much a part of the fabric of who we are that we do not consciously think about them, but I think they merit highlighting as a reminder that we have so much that we can point to with pride.

• **Undergraduate research, scholarly and creative activity** permeate our undergraduate programs. From students working with Professor Hill to create the Tubman statue to students working in the GIS lab to map the devastation in Haiti to students conducting research in elementary and secondary classrooms. Our student researchers contribute to our broader community by tackling, with the assistance of faculty mentors, projects of importance to our local, regional, state, national, and global communities. Our spring research conference, which will celebrate its 10th year in 2011, and the Seidel gallery walk highlighted hundreds of students who presented reports of their work to their peers and faculty. In my remarks to students at the beginning of the research conference, I told them that it takes real courage to stand in front of your peers and mentors, present your research, and respond to questions and/or suggestions. That’s difficult even for those of us who are more seasoned. What a wonderful preparation this is for our students who will leave here knowing how to
tackle big questions and confident in their abilities to offer workable solutions. What makes us truly distinctive in this area is that our students also present their work to national audiences. For example, last year, as a result of your mentorship and willingness to include students in your research activities, 23 undergraduate students from Salisbury University presented papers at the National Council of Undergraduate Research conference in Wyoming. Undergraduate research, scholarly and creative activity are without a doubt a point of distinction at SU. Undergraduate research alone would qualify us as a Maryland University of National Distinction, but there is more.

- We have **renowned faculty.** In the last decade 15 faculty have been selected as Fulbright scholars to teach and study in other countries. These connections have led to enriched research projects for faculty and study abroad opportunities for our students. This year our colleague Ying Wu will be at the University of International Business and Economics in China and Gary Harrington will serve as a Fulbright Distinguished Chair for the second time in Poland. The work of these faculty and others who teach at international institutions places Salisbury University in the global arena,
which is exactly where we want and need to be. However, the rest of you have not been sitting back and watching the world go by. Collectively, faculty last year published 238 refereed articles, authored or joint authored 19 books, participated in 115 juried shows, and contributed 2780 days to public service. You have accomplished all of this despite continued restrictions to our budgets. Your work inside and outside of the classroom are major contributors to SU’s distinction.

- Our academic programs are of the highest quality and often expand beyond classroom instruction. Our program reviews and accreditation studies consistently confirm that our students are receiving high quality, relevant academic preparation. To address needs within the state we have offered our programs in social work, respiratory therapy, elementary education, and higher education at satellite centers throughout the state. Centers such as PACE, BEACON, the Center for Conflict Analysis and Dispute Resolution, and the Eastern Shore Regional GIS Center engage our students in civic engagement and service learning. They support our academics by allowing students to apply what they learn in the classroom to real life venues. We are responding to workforce needs and changing
demographics on the Eastern Shore by developing academics in procurement and logistics with Cecil College and by developing creative recruitment partnerships with community colleges. We set the tone and expectations that academics are core to the Salisbury experience by requiring new freshmen to come to campus ready to participate in their first academic discussion based on a book they read during the previous summer. We have partnered with housing to create living learning communities in each of the residence halls, and we have incorporated study abroad opportunities in our courses. Clearly our academic programs are a part of our distinction.

Within each of these larger distinctions there are hundreds of smaller, but still important, distinctions: faculty awards from professional organizations; grant projects that provide support to faculty research and student learning; a multitude of service learning activities. We continue to add to our distinction. We gained approval from the USM Board of Regents to offer the Doctor of Nursing Practice, which will be the first doctorate for Salisbury University. We are awaiting final approval from the Maryland Higher Education Council in late September. We added a Dean of Graduate Studies and Research who has the dual
responsibilities of guiding us in building the infrastructure for our growing graduate offerings, including the DNP, and helping us increase the number and variety of external grants and contracts we seek. We are helping Dr. Griffin get off to a good start with a largest-ever grant from the National Science Foundation for nearly a million dollars to support our STEM initiatives and a first-ever TRIO grant for over a million dollars to support the work of the Center for Student Achievement.

So, as wonderful and distinctive as we clearly are today, how do we move into the second decade of the 21st century and maintain all of the aspects of SU that we value: small school feel, student centeredness, high achievement, diversity of being and thought? This summer I read a book by Jim Collins, the author of *Good to Great*, entitled *How the Mighty Fall and Why Some Companies Never Give In*. Collins returns to the subjects of his previous book and describes how specific companies began to fail after they had reached the top. He attributes this failure to arrogance and the inability to know when and how change is needed. Collins comments that in order to stay the same, that is great, we must continue to change. Sometimes we cling so tenaciously to the way things are, that we fail to realize that the changes around us will inevitably change
who we are, without our input or sometimes knowledge, into an organization we do not want. We know, for instance, that the demographics of our area are changing. There will be in the near future fewer high school graduates and fewer of those who graduate will fit the profile of the student we have traditionally attracted. If we do nothing, in a few years we will begin to have declining enrollments. We must be flexible and we must determine how we can do what we do well in a constantly changing environment. In other words we must continue to strive for distinctiveness to attract the students we want and need.

How do we build 21st century programs in liberal arts, the sciences, education, business, international education, graduate education, and honors while keeping our feet firmly planted in who we are? How do we shape this change and yet maintain our values and our elements of distinctiveness? You might say it’s impossible. Well, I don’t believe in the impossible. Together in collaboration you and the university can step into the future and continue to be a Maryland University of National and, even, International Academic Distinction. At a provosts’ conference this summer George Mehaffy, in discussing how higher education institutions need to be responsive to change, stated “we are collectively smarter than we are individually.” I believe there is some truth to his
statement. One faculty member, alone, cannot maintain or enhance or create our distinctiveness; it will take a collective effort by all of us.

In the next few minutes allow me to share a few areas where I think we can grow and which will clearly set us apart as a Maryland University of Academic Distinction in the coming year.

**First, Graduate studies and research.** We are on a threshold of true excellence here. We have a convergence of factors that can catapult us into new possibilities: existing excellent programs; our first doctorate; a second doctorate in the planning stage; workforce demand for advanced study; a new graduate and research dean. Using these factors as our backbone, what can SU bring to the table that is new and innovative? The possibilities are immense, and the lure of jumping on one bandwagon after another can be strong. But after working with Dr. Griffin for just a few weeks, I know that he will guide us in a reasonable approach to the new opportunities and will always be mindful of who we are as an institution. Our graduate programs must make sense for SU and respond to a clearly identified need within our state. However, at the same time we need you to be innovative, flexible, and ready to respond when a need is identified. For example, with the relocation of military base operations into the Aberdeen
Proving Ground and Fort Mead, the staff at the bases is looking for collaborative partnerships to provide academic programs and to recruit and prepare future researchers and workers. Salisbury University has made it clear that we want to develop such a partnership that will pay off in student tuition, research opportunities for faculty and students, and internships for our majors. With your participation in such opportunities, graduate studies will become a new point of academic distinction for SU. The flip side of Dr. Griffin’s responsibilities is sponsored research. Last year we were awarded almost five million dollars in grants and contracts. We are considerably behind our peers in this area, but the NSF grant, the nursing grants, and the TRIO grant are helping us move in the right direction. I want to see us at eight million this year. Clifton is already working to organize his office staff to support faculty efforts and is making contacts within government agencies that will lead to growth in our research funding. Within the next year or so, research funding will also become a point of academic distinction.

2. **International education.** So much has been happening in international education in the last few months that I am almost too late in discussing the possibilities. Two events mark the emergence of international education as a point of academic distinction at SU: the ability to support J-1 visas for visiting
scholars and the opening of the English Language Institute, which is critical to growing our on-campus international population. For AY 2009-10 approximately 12%, or 226 students, participated in some form of study abroad. Seventy-nine percent studied abroad for 8 or less weeks, while 21% spent at least a semester. Trips abroad by our students and faculty during winter break, spring break and summer provide students and their faculty sponsors with opportunities to become familiar with other cultures, hone their language skills, and perhaps engage in service learning. However, longer term exchanges would immerse our students into the culture of another country and, thereby, deepen their knowledge and connections to that culture. Dr. Brian Stiegler, Director of International Education, has been working to create these longer term exchanges for our students by developing agreements with comprehensive international institutions that offer programs similar to SU. This summer I visited one such institution, Aning Teacher’s College in China. As I sat in classes and talked with faculty and students it was very clear that the faculty at Aning are very much like you; they are passionate about their disciplines and they are focused on student learning. This is the perfect institution for our students to experience the Chinese culture, perfect the language, and earn academic credits at SU. Two SU students will study at Aning for the fall semester and two Aning students will be
studying at SU. Such exchanges provide excellent experiences for our students and are affordable. Some SU students, in spite of the affordability of exchanges, will not participate in study abroad experiences. However, they deserve similar access to the knowledge of culture and language as those students who do study abroad. We can provide this access by enrolling more international students, by inviting international scholars to teach at Salisbury for a semester or more, and by encouraging cultural exchanges for musicians, artists and authors. Currently SU has less than 1% of our student body represented by international students. Our goal is to increase this number to about 3%. The opening of the English Language Institute, led by Dr. Sam Song, is one way to accomplish the growth we need. The agreement I signed this summer with Anging also provides for the exchange of faculty, and with the availability of the J-1 visa, this will become a reality by the spring. Our agreements with Tartu and other international institutions should also help to increase the number of international visiting faculty. Another avenue to create access for our students is through exchanges in the arts. In addition to the wonderful experiences available to the community through Panorama, two other special international cultural events will take place this fall. On September 11, a delegation from Estonia will visit Salisbury University. The University and the City of Salisbury will co-host a reception and a concert, during which two musical
pieces will be performed in Estonian. With the added possibility that the Prime
Minister of Estonia may be in attendance this promises to be a wonderful
experience for all. Later in the semester artists from Souzhou, China will visit our
campus for a day. Details for this visit are not complete, but the artists will spend
time with our art students and, perhaps, demonstrate the ancient art of
calligraphy. Both of these events are the direct result of academic partnerships
we have developed with universities in Estonia and China. Without a doubt
international education is a rapidly developing point of academic distinction.

3. Honors. Salisbury University continues to attract high achieving students. As
the President stated in her remarks, the average SAT for entering freshmen is
1700, and their average gpa is 3.65. Our honors program, while challenging a few
of our bright students, has not kept pace with the growth of our institution and
the increasing achievement levels of our students. It’s time for a change, a
revamping of the structure and size of honors. I have asked Melanie Perreault to
organize a small task force to help us plan the needed changes. Some of the
questions I have for the task force are (1) How do we increase the number of
students admitted to the honors program? What kind of model do we need to
support an increase? What is an appropriate goal for the number of students? (2)
How do we encourage faculty to participate? What incentives should be provided? (3) How do we change the perception that honors is a Fulton-only program? (4) How do we actively recruit students into the program? (5) What administrative structure do we need? (6) How and where do we find the resources to provide financial aid packages for honors students? And (7) How do we grow our Honors Program into an Honors College in just a few years? I am sure the task force will generate its own set of questions and may seek questions from others, but I do not want to spend years discussing without action. I have asked Melanie to give me a suggested course of action by the end of the fall semester. A university that prides itself on having a small school feel, a public private attitude, a renowned faculty, and high ability students should have an honors program that is a point of academic distinction.

Finally, how do we take all of our current points of distinction, our new points of distinction and our promising points of distinction and create a synergy around an academic commons? There have been multitudes of discussions about where the academic commons with a new library should be located, what should be included, what the building should look like. All of these are critically important to the planning. However, an academic commons must be a place where we, the
Salisbury University community, go to learn knowledge, to showcase knowledge, to create knowledge and where we link that knowledge back to the larger community to improve the lives and work of our citizens. We will eventually get a building; there is much behind the scenes activity related to making that a reality. But in the meantime, let’s work collaboratively to build the heart of the enterprise. An academic commons must be a key to our national distinction.

In closing, we can be proud of our accomplishments. Today Salisbury University is truly a university of national academic distinction. How do we carry that excellence in to the future? We are at the proverbial fork in the road. We can choose the road that leads us to despair where we continuously bemoan our third year of furloughs, our lack of sufficient faculty, and the challenges of a new generation of students. Or we can choose the path of optimism, innovation, creativity, and leadership that brings greater distinction for faculty and the university. The road we choose will determine the Salisbury University of the future. I know which way I’m going. I hope that road is crowded.

Thank you for being here today. Have a great semester!