

LEADING THE WAY

**METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY
INAUGURAL CEREMONY ADDRESS
PRESIDENT VIRGINIA "GINNY" ARTHUR
APRIL 7, 2017**

Metropolitan
State University



Chair Vekich, Chancellor Rosenstone, Mayor Coleman, members of the platform party; Trustees, university and college delegates, honored guests, faculty and staff, students, community members, family and friends:

Welcome to Metropolitan State University, and thank you all for sharing this important day in the life of the university with me. I extend my deepest gratitude to all of you who have had a role in helping me reach this stage on my journey— and, as far as I can tell, that is nearly everyone in this auditorium or watching the live stream! Your friendship, support, encouragement, challenges, and confidence in me have given me the courage to continue to seek new ways of serving students and our community. I've come a long way from the scared, first-generation college student, who had no idea how to navigate the alien world of higher education and cried herself to sleep nearly every night of my first semester, annoying my very confident and worldly roommate.

I am the youngest of six children and I am so pleased that my oldest sibling, my brother Charles Patrick, his wife, and two of my nieces are here to spend this day with me. I am so lucky to have a spouse who, for the last 37 years, has enthusiastically cheered me on, telling me I can do anything, and backing that up by being a full partner in parenting and home work. My three children, Abigail, Anne and Alexander, have lived with and through the sometimes tumultuous times of a dual career family, and I am enormously proud of the people they have become. My grandsons, Michael and Matthew, are the world's best stress

relievers, at least until they learn to operate video recorders and make me a star of America's Funniest Home videos.

And, of course, I am very thankful to Chancellor Steven Rosenstone and the Trustees of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, who have entrusted the stewardship of this treasured University to me. I am at once honored and humbled to be invested today as the 7th President of this University.

It is also a pleasure to recognize and welcome so many of you who have long-standing commitments to the growth and progress of this amazing experiment called "Metropolitan State." Thank you for your investment in the 40,000+ students who have already been enriched and launched, or re-launched, by this University.

Since today is a day for reflecting on both the University's path forward and its future, let me say just a bit about our founding President David Sweet and his spouse and partner, Arleene.

David Sweet was certainly a visionary, and he was supported in his work of launching this University by Arleene, who remained a faithful friend of Metropolitan State up until the time of her death, just a few weeks ago. Arleene created the presidential medallion that I will be proud to wear today. Its rough-hewn sterling is a reminder that this enterprise, Metropolitan State, while of great value, is very much a work in progress, and not a polished piece for display only.

With both David and Arleene Sweet very much on our minds, I am deeply honored to recognize their daughter, Karen Sweet, who is with us today. Welcome, Karen, and thank you for being here.

In higher education, we like ceremonies where we get to dress up in medieval garb and that are full of symbolism to mark important transitions. Your program describes many of the symbols that you see, but I want to take a moment to call attention to a few symbolic aspects of today's ceremony, because they are integral to how Metropolitan State University will be fulfilling the theme of today's inaugural: Leading the Way for the Greater Good.

Let me talk first about the Dakotah blessing from Virgil Mountain Blacklance. Metropolitan State is situated on Dakotah land, and we acknowledge that our strength as a university is built on our connection to the ancestors and community which allow us to exist. I am deeply appreciative of this blessing, and on behalf of the University, I humbly accept it, and pledge to support the educational aspirations and needs of the American Indian community.

Our beautiful music today is provided by the North Hennepin Community College Chamber Singers. At today's reception, you will enjoy delicious food prepared by the culinary students at Saint Paul College. My colleague and friend, Dr. Sharon Pierce, president of Minneapolis Community and Technical College, brought greetings. Many of my presidential colleagues within Minnesota State honor our relationship by representing their colleges or universities here. These elements symbolize the strength of the reciprocal relationships within our System that nourish our programs and enable us to lead the way together for the greater good of our students and our state. Metropolitan State strongly values these partnerships, which are integral to achieving our goals, and I thank our partners for their generosity.

Our processional and recessional musical selections are somewhat unconventional for a U.S. university inaugural, but they were chosen to symbolize the multiplicity of cultures that enrich our academic community.

I am pleased that our distinguished alumna, Brigadier General Sandy Best, the first female general for the Minnesota National Guard, is a member of the platform party today, because Metropolitan State leads the way by serving the largest number of veteran students in the Minnesota State system. Indeed, General Frank Grass, who was the first general to represent the National Guard on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is also a distinguished alumnus of this university.

These symbols:

- honoring and learning from the past,
- partnership to serve students and community,
- inclusion,
- and service

are integral to how Metropolitan State is and will be leading the way for the greater good.

In thinking about how honoring learning from the past prepares this uncommon university to lead the way in higher education, let me tell you a story.

Just a little over a year ago, as the search for a new president for Metropolitan State was coming to a close, I received an email from one of our librarian faculty members with some exciting news. In a box of papers recently retrieved from storage at the

Minnesota Historical Society was a file labeled, “David Sweet’s Miscellaneous Papers.” These “miscellaneous papers” included a letter from then Chancellor Ted Mitau to Dr. Sweet, outlining the characteristics of the new university he was seeking to establish, and Dr. Sweet’s response. When I had a chance to see these founding documents – to see the vision Metropolitan State’s founders had for us back in 1971 – I realized that the core values and commitments of that time are still vital to how this university will continue to lead the way for the greater good.

What are those principles? First, Mitau and Sweet agreed that: ***Metropolitan State should be innovative and non-traditional:***

This assertion was based on Dr. Sweet’s observation that (and I am quoting) “Higher education today is in great difficulty, awaiting significant innovation, experimentation and reform.”

I just attended the Higher Learning Commission’s annual meeting, and speaker after speaker echoed Dr. Sweet’s point. Now, as then, innovative, flexible, and non-traditional approaches to higher education are needed to assure access and affordability, and, to maintain our democracy, build an equitable and just society, and minimize the extreme economic disparity that is corrosive to our shared prosperity.

Metropolitan State has been preparing for the past 46 years to meet the needs of today’s learners, who tend to be:

- older than average,
- place bound because of family obligations and the need to work full time,

- and who are maturing in communities that have not had past success in accessing and navigating higher education.

While many colleges and universities are grappling with implementing credit for prior learning, competency-based degrees, on-demand and community-based learning, year-round scheduling, and delivery in multiple locations, Metropolitan State has been doing these things for 46 years.

But, while the University can take satisfaction in its prescient accomplishments, it needs to look forward to new innovations that will meet the needs of learners in 2030 and beyond. We are looking to our recently created Center for Educational Innovation to stimulate that thinking and keep Metropolitan State in the forefront of meeting the evolving needs of students, employers and communities.

Second, Mitau and Sweet believed that **“Metropolitan State should be a college with the community as its campus.”** In fact, they persuaded the Minnesota legislature that this was so, and the statute provides that, “the campus of Metropolitan State University is the seven-county metropolitan area.”

While an early, unofficial tagline for Metropolitan State was, “the university without walls.” that was a misunderstanding. The point was not about buildings, but about presence—being where students were, and removing the barriers for those who wanted education but weren’t able to access it on a traditional campus. Thus, a more appropriate tagline for the University is that Metropolitan State is “the University without barriers.”

We need our walls to serve more than 11,500 students, house nearly 1000 employees, and provide the computer and science

labs, library resources, technology-rich classrooms, and administrative functions necessary to deliver quality academic programs and student services. But our commitment to bring education to the student and remove the barriers of travel or time is stronger than ever, as evidenced by our partnerships that bring degree programs to the campuses of our sister colleges around the Twin Cities.

This idea of community-as-campus also captures a core feature of our educational philosophy, which holds that knowledge takes many forms and is situated in the communities in which we are embedded.

To live this educational philosophy of community-situated knowledge, Metropolitan State pioneered ways to document informal, experiential, and context-based learning. Credit may be given for knowledge acquired from experiences, but those experiences are rigorously tested in terms of competencies. We have a cadre of more than 500 community faculty who bring their lived experience and expertise into the classroom, so that we can accurately identify and test needed competencies.

The notion of community as campus also underlies the University's unwavering commitment to civic engagement. We are proud that our faculty collaborate with community partners to offer more than 400 course sections with the "community engagement" designation, meaning that students are learning *from, with, and alongside* community experts who are deeply knowledgeable.

Through this engagement, our students are prepared for success and leadership in their careers and with an understanding of the

responsibility of an educated citizen to apply their knowledge and skills in service to the public good.

President Sweet's observation, that Metropolitan State is not an "enclave within the cities" for those who want to retreat from the urban environment and its issues, is exemplified today through partnerships that:

- advance community wealth-building through the East Side Economic Growth Initiative,
- work with hospitals and major health care employers in the Central Corridor Anchor Partnership to address the region's nursing shortages,
- engage the region's Workforce Innovation Boards and K-12 systems to forge cradle-to-career pathways,
- and build partnerships with school districts like Osseo or Hopkins, designed to multiply the teachers of color in our urban schools.

Partnerships underlie our most important work and are our most effective strategy for fulfilling our mission.

As stewards of place, we work with our neighborhood organizations to assure that our physical campus in St. Paul is a community resource. As we work to anchor the university more prominently on the west side of the Twin Cities, through academic partnerships with Minneapolis Community and Technical College, North Hennepin Community College,

Hennepin Technical College, Anoka Ramsey CC, Anoka Tech College, and Normandale Community College, we will become working, contributing members of those communities, as well.

The third principle of the founders is that that “Metropolitan State should serve non-traditional learners and meet the unmet educational needs of the Twin Cities.”

Initially, “unmet needs” included women whose educations had been paused to start families, and working adults who sought advancement but could not attend day-time classes. In the 1970’s, it was exceptionally difficult for students who attended “junior college” to transfer into four-year institutions to complete a bachelor’s degree.

President David Sweet summed up this revolutionary vision in a way that is completely contemporary: **“We are a college for those who have no college.”**

So who doesn’t have a college in 2017? Let me explain it this way.

Last year, the state demographer’s office produced a groundbreaking report on the economic status of 17 distinct cultural groups living in Minnesota. It illuminates facts about Minnesotans that show us why this founding principle of Metropolitan State is so critical to the economic, social and civic health of this region.

Minnesota’s white population is certainly the largest cultural subgroup, comprising approximately 82% of the population. However, they are also the oldest, and shortly there will be more

white Minnesotans over the age of 65 than there are white Minnesotans under the age of 18. By contrast, more than 50% of the Hmong and Somali population in Minnesota is under age 18. Those children are the workers and community leaders of the future.

Consider that, of Minnesotans of prime working age (defined as 25 – 64), about 35% have a bachelor's degree. White Minnesotans exceed this rate with about 37% having bachelor's degrees.

But, among the Ojibwe and Dakota, the rate is 8 – 9%;

- among Somalis – 11%;
- among Mexicans – 12%;
- among African American's – 17%;
- for the Hmong, degree attainment is about 21%.

Why does this matter? Well, the evidence is overwhelming that attaining a bachelor's degree brings economic security as it provides access to better paying jobs, and a lower likelihood of unemployment, even during recessions. Attaining a bachelor's degree is also a good predictor of civic engagement and, on average, according to happiness researchers (yes there are such people), it produces greater overall happiness and well-being than not having a bachelor's degree.

In addition, a well-prepared workforce is absolutely necessary for the state to attract and retain the types of employers that provide higher level, better paying and more satisfying work. The relatively high levels of education among our current population are directly tied to the number of Fortune 500

companies that are headquartered in the state and the active business and non-profit community that exists.

So what keeps people from achieving a post-secondary degree? That list includes poverty, language skills, lack of trust in the educational system, time constraints, family obligations, and lack of knowledge about how to access higher education.

Given our state demographer's information and what we know about the importance of education to a healthy and vibrant community, it is more important than ever that Metropolitan State provide access and opportunity for students who don't necessarily believe that a university education will ever be theirs. I see many indications that we are on the right track to turn around these educational gaps by developing the rich talent resident in the Twin Cities. After all, 42% of our students are American Indian or from communities of color, and this percentage is rapidly increasing. Among our students newly entering the University this academic year, nearly 50% are from these communities.

Let me give you just a couple of examples of our work. For instance:

Among our first cohort of twelve doctorally-prepared nurse practitioners, who graduated last May:

- 1 was Lebanese
- 1 was Vietnamese
- 1 Nepali
- 1 from Kenya

- 1 from Nigeria
- 1 Hmong woman
- 1 from the Sioux Nation
- 2 were Caucasian

As I sat on the stage facing those students, I wondered how many other doctoral program classes in the United States reflected such diversity?

To see them was to look into the future face of leadership and service of our state.

Our social work program is renowned for the diversity of its students and for its emphasis on educating culturally competent social work practitioners. Practicum placements occur in community agencies serving culturally diverse populations in the core Twin Cities.

This passion and commitment to developing under-utilized talent is the reason that the Hmong Nationalities Organization recently invited me and my executive team to a community meeting and welcoming ceremony. They passionately expressed their desire for higher education for themselves, their children, and their grandchildren. They want to partner with a University that respects and honors the cultural backgrounds of its students and will help preserve their cultural heritage. Metropolitan State is one of a dwindling number of universities that maintain an Ethnic Studies department.

During the ceremony, they presented me with a traditional Hmong baby carrier to remind me that I, as representative of the University, carry the hopes and aspirations of the community on

my back. Indeed, I understand that this university carries the hopes and dreams of many traditionally underserved students. A daunting but sacred responsibility.

These are just a tiny sample of our stories. But they illustrate how Metropolitan State leads the way for the greater good by making education available to the widest possible range of students, creating an environment where they can build on the strengths of their cultural differences and comfortably develop their knowledge and skills. They, in turn, lead the way within their families and our communities to a better life.

It is Metropolitan State's unique opportunity to serve the Twin Cities and the state by nurturing and developing rich but under-utilized talent.

In that regard, I am particularly proud of how Metropolitan State University is leading the way in social mobility. As we collectively examine some of the most troubling aspects of our country's current issues, there is growing evidence that an increasing divide between those who have wealth and material goods and those who have little contributes to the erosion of empathy for others in our society and results in polarizing political and social discourse. A nonprofit group called CollegeNet has developed the Social Mobility Index (SMI) for higher education. The SMI measures the extent to which a college or university educates more economically disadvantaged students (with family incomes below the national median) at lower tuition, so they can graduate and obtain well-paying jobs. Metropolitan State ranks 87th out of 918 universities ranked, and it is number one in Minnesota.

This is an important economic and social outcome of being a “college for those who have no college.”

I heard a gifted speaker, Fareed Zakaria, once say that, when you want to recapture your audience’s attention, just utter the words “in conclusion.” He reckoned that gives as much as ten more minutes! Now that I have your attention, and I have terrified you about what is still to come, I will only take a little more time, because a president can’t give a speech without also noting some of her other points of pride about her University. For example:

- Metropolitan State has been selected for a second time by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to receive its 2015 Community Engagement Classification.
- Metropolitan State has again been recognized by the National Security Agency and the Department of Homeland Security as a Center of Academic Excellence in Information Assurance.
- Last year, Metropolitan State was recognized by the International Center for Academic Integrity as a Campus of Integrity for its distinctive program, which treats integrity violations as an opportunity to learn from a mistake rather than a reason to impose punishment, and that uses the process to have a conversation about cultural variations in norms, and how those can be best acknowledged and navigated by all who are engaged with the process.
- It’s true that Metropolitan State University does not have competitive sports teams, which may in itself be a bragging point, but we do have a competitive student CyberSecurity team.

They placed second in Minnesota two years in a row. This year they placed first, and went to regional competitions in Chicago.

- As recognition for the design and implementation of our Racial Issues Graduation Requirement, Minnesota State's Office of Equity and Inclusion bestowed their ***Best Practices in Equity and Inclusion Award*** on the University earlier this year.
- In 2016, Metropolitan State's Nursing program received the "Higher Education Excellence in Diversity" award from *Insight into Diversity*.
- We are proud that faculty members from our School of Urban Education and their dean are being recognized by Minnesota Campus Compact for helping found the Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers in Minnesota.
- As a demonstration of their belief in a Metropolitan State education, Diana and Bob Carter recently gifted \$2 million to the university to provide scholarships and research support for students majoring in the natural sciences. Their son Jason, who passed away last May due to complications from leukemia, was a biology student at the university. This gift, the largest in the university's history, honors the academic quality, student support and flexibility which enabled Jason to realize important life goals.

As varied as these activities are, and many more that I have not named, they are expressions of Metropolitan State University's mission, vision, and University values. In particular, they are signposts along the way toward keeping the promise of my

administration's Strategic Intent Statement that will guide our efforts to lead the way:

Metropolitan State University provides an excellent, inclusive and engaging education to eliminate opportunity gaps and lead the Twin Cities community to a prosperous and equitable future.

It is an audacious goal but Metropolitan State was founded to be an audacious educational innovator.

Let me close now with a quotation from John Quincy Adams that a soon-to-be alumnus, employee and friend recently shared with me, and which I shamelessly appropriate:

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader.”

I pledge that this is how I will lead Metropolitan State University, and that this is how the Metropolitan State University community will lead the way for the greater good.

I look forward to your support and partnership in this endeavor.

Thank you.

Virginia “Ginny” Arthur, JD

President, Metropolitan State University