



## **Inaugural Address of Dr. Robert N. Shelton**

19<sup>th</sup> President of The University of Arizona  
Thursday, October 26, 2006

Governor Napolitano; Mayor Walkup; Mayor Gordon; members of the Arizona Board of Regents; UA presidents emeriti; fellow university presidents; members of the UA faculty, the student body, classified staff and appointed professionals; honored guests; community members; and my family:

Thank you for your warm welcome to The University of Arizona and Tucson. And thank you to Jory Hancock, Director of the School of Dance, for directing this wonderful ceremony.

Regent Bulla, with all the energy, determination, creativity and humility that I can muster, I accept your charge.

We are assembled here to live out one of the academy's grandest traditions. I am honored beyond words to accept formally the challenge to serve as the 19<sup>th</sup> President of The University of Arizona.

I'd like to take a moment to speak of my predecessor, Peter Likins. His presidency was punctuated by his love of a challenge, and the joy he took in accomplishing the impossible with charisma and sheer force of will. How else could we have continued to grow and improve despite the harshest fiscal realities of the university's modern history? We didn't just survive – we thrived.

Bravo, President Likins. Your legacy is magnificent.

But, today, we peer into the future – deep into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century to learn what will be expected of this university in the decades to come.

The view is good from here, because we are standing on the broad shoulders of those who came before us, whose accomplishments give us a spectacular view:

- We are looking at breath taking pictures of the surface of Mars, taken with our own cameras, which contain the most powerful optics ever to leave Earth's orbit.



- We are probing the genetic structures of rice and maize so we can find ways to feed a more populous and hungrier planet.
- We are national leaders in the service of America's native nations and tribes, by preserving endangered Native American languages, improving health care through telemedicine and public health initiatives, and providing educational support through our ground breaking online resource center called Arizona Native Net.
- And as the rate of knowledge acquisition continues its logarithmic spiral, we are blessed with one of the finest research libraries of our time, which is finding new ways to collect, store, preserve, and share humanity's exponentially increasing knowledge base.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are looking ahead, and we cannot take our eyes off of the future, not even for one second, because Tucson and Arizona are counting on us to respond to three momentous responsibilities: to discover ways to improve the human condition, to apply those discoveries to our society, and to teach our discoveries to the next generation.

The challenge and significance of these responsibilities grow in size and complexity with each passing year, as we are charged with offering students an education that will serve them and our communities for a lifetime. A 21<sup>st</sup> Century education is about so much more than rote memorization or the practiced perfection of basic skills. It is about learning how to think critically and how to learn.

It is about turning information into insight.

Alvin Toffler aptly stated that the wave of human knowledge that will wash over the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will redefine literacy as the ability to learn and to relearn. To teach these advanced critical thinking skills, the UA must be at the leading edge of learning techniques, and so it will be. In fact, it already is.

For instance, the UA recently beat major competition to win creation of a National Foreign Language Resource Center, to re-engineer foreign language instruction so students can learn other languages faster, more fluently, and with the greater understanding of the cultures associated with them.

Our Department of Mathematics, seeing that students need to learn math skills differently to meet the demands of the modern work force, has won major grant funding to redefine the very nature of math instruction at the middle school, high school and college levels.



The payoffs are profound: new teaching techniques pioneered at the UA are producing college graduates with language and mathematics skills that will better prepare them to compete in the global arena they will one day lead.

We win grants like these because we are a community of intellectual entrepreneurs. This quality, as much as any other gift, will be key to our success in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

It's going to be a challenging time for the UA and every research university, because it is quite possible that in 10 to 20 years, only a handful of world-class, public research universities will exist in the United States.

The public's resolve to maintain such expensive propositions is weakening. Research universities that fall behind typically allow themselves to grow estranged from the communities and legislatures that support them. They think globally, but they don't always act locally. And when they are asked to show the return on the public's investment, their leaders often lack the vocabulary and the enthusiasm to articulate a compelling answer.

This cannot be the future of the UA. Arizona has invested too much in our success to allow us to backslide, or even stagnate. Instead, I am determined to set the UA on the opposite path: We will be a top 10 public research university. And all of the people of Arizona will be the beneficiaries of this achievement.

Being a top 10 public research university is not about bragging rights. It's about joining and leading the statewide effort to build a bright future for Arizona by setting an ambitious goal. It's about telling Arizona families that they don't have to look outside of Arizona to get the best college education in America. It's about telling high-tech, high-end companies that the educated work force they seek can be found here in Arizona. And it's about enhancing the quality of our individual and community lives here by ensuring that transformational advances will be discovered in Tucson and applied in Arizona first – by Arizona's first university.

What I am describing is a new covenant between the UA and the state of Arizona.

Our research efforts are helping to improve the human condition around the world, to be sure. But our central passion for research, teaching and service should be to transform the world *around us*.

We must pay as much attention to places like Marana and Morenci as we do to Mars and our medical school. Asking the taxpayers of Arizona to invest in this world-class research university will continue to make sense only if they experience the benefits with all of their senses.



To be sure, we have always been a source of talent when Arizona's industry, its governments, and its citizens have needed hydrologists, optical engineers, health professionals, business experts, legal scholars, bioscientists, social scientists, humanists, and artists.

They can look the world over and find no better concentration of experts than right here. That is why scholars the world over seek out the UA as a place to work. It's why they seek out Tucson as a place to live.

It's why I came here.

I wonder if Arizona residents know what the UA looks like from the outside. From my vantage points in North Carolina and California, I saw this as a place of boundless possibilities. As president of the UA, the reality on the ground closely matches the view from afar – with one notable exception.

I don't believe that we have yet put our best efforts forward in throwing the full weight of this university to work in service of this great city and this great state, and I don't believe we have done enough to broadcast our successes to our fellow Arizonans. As a result, this state has not been able to fully appreciate the remarkable treasure it has in the UA.

Well, ladies and gentlemen – Mayor Walkup and Mayor Gordon – Governor Napolitano – starting now, we're plotting a new course.

We will hold ourselves more accountable, and we stand ready to serve this state in times of need. In doing so, Arizona will feel the benefits of the UA's presence more tangibly. In short – Tucson and Arizona, we're here for you.

But there is another crucial part of this covenant: our performance must have your support. It is impossible to run a world-class research university on the cheap. Our instructional mission needs continued support. Our faculty deserve competitive salaries. And our economically disadvantaged students deserve the same commitment of financial aid that virtually every other state offers its students.

Our faculty members are constant targets of recruitment by other state and private universities that offer them far better compensation. But our goal cannot be simply to stave off a brain drain. It must be to maximize brain gain. If Arizona wants to compete seriously for smart growth in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it must invest in world-class faculty. Our sons and daughters and granddaughters and grandsons deserve nothing less.



I salute our professors. You define the breadth of our intellectual capital, and you set the heights to which we dare to dream. It is you who make the UA one of the most boldly interdisciplinary universities in the country.

Your drive to work across disciplines is a mark of strength, and a measure of your capacity to improve the human condition in very big ways.

I also salute our students. They are our reason for being, and they give this campus its life and spirit. But the truth of the matter is, it has become harder to afford to come here over the years.

The boost in the state's contribution to the Arizona Financial Aid Trust that the Governor and our students championed was a bold first step for Arizona's families. Now is the time for bold *next* steps to lift us out of our status as last among states in the amount of state-based financial aid students are offered.

Yes, Arizona, we are here for you but for that very reason we need your support now more than ever. Higher education is not simply a vehicle for individual gain – it is above all a public good. Once considered merely curators of past lore, universities are now called upon to be the incubators of a better future, not just for individuals, but for communities.

As we rededicate our institution to the service of this great state, with your tangible support we will commit ourselves to performing five crucial missions:

First, we must always be those to whom our society can turn for help in solving its complex problems.

Problems ranging from environmental sustainability to economic growth, to issues of public health, border policies, and beyond are being tackled from many angles here at the UA. If questions about things like water sustainability are to be answered, I want those answers to be found first and best right here at The University of Arizona.

That commitment to serve extends across the full panoply of research endeavors in which the UA is so actively engaged.

Our second essential mission is to expand our role as a central engine of economic development.

Our modern obligation is to accomplish three important objectives for Arizona's economy: produce a well-educated work force and entrepreneurs; create and transfer new technologies to the private sector; and serve as a resource center for Arizona's business community.



Modern work force and entrepreneurial development at a university means providing students an education with very different strategic underpinnings than we are accustomed to discussing. It demands that instructors apply avant-garde teaching techniques in classrooms reengineered and wired for the future. And, it means providing a framework for learning that is fresh and reflective of the world beyond this campus.

Ultimately, we must be able to plan, track and verify that our classroom instruction is achieving two vital outcomes: a citizenry of critical thinkers and a top-flight work force that is equipped to thrive in the working world that awaits.

Our third essential mission revolves around access to the UA. A great university serves as an empowerment zone for the American Dream.

In this age of information, inadequate education virtually bars one from securing the full blessings of liberty. An ignorant population is the surest path to the decline of our civilization.

We are proud to be the most ethnically diverse public university in Arizona, and we are well on our way to being designated a Hispanic Serving Institution. Some would declare victory for the UA, but I declare this to be a good start.

Strong diversity today means a stronger Arizona tomorrow, because those currently considered ethnic minorities will comprise a new collective majority in the coming years. We cannot fail our community's future by failing to educate its emerging leaders. And we must have educated citizens who are able to apply critical thinking skills to the exercise of democracy.

As we attract more students from underrepresented groups, it must be said that this doesn't mean displacing students. It means growing our enrollment.

Arizona is the second-fastest growing state in the country, and it will grow for the rest of our lives, and beyond. Clearly, the UA must grow with Arizona, and we will.

Much has been made of a perceived cap on future enrollment, so let me be clear: As long as I am president, the UA will work tirelessly to attract all qualified Arizona students.

Let me be equally clear on a corollary point: Achieving growth and diversity without educational quality would be completely unacceptable. We will never let growth erode quality.



Our fourth essential mission must be to continue intensifying academic excellence that enriches the quality of our scholarship and our graduates. We have so much to be proud of, from the Integrated Learning Center to the Faculty Fellows program to the marvelous example of the College of Science, wherein 65 percent of all undergraduates are directly involved in research as a part of their instruction.

We refer to ourselves with a great deal of pride as a student-centered research university. That description wasn't invented at the UA, but it is being perfected here, and I hear new stories every day that prove this point.

Our anthropology students get a lot of dirt under their fingernails, and our engineering students are as good as anyone at driving solar cars of their own design and construction. Our journalism students are getting a real-world education about community journalism by publishing *El Independiente*, the bilingual newspaper for South Tucson.

Our academic excellence is rooted in our belief that instruction is a living process for students to experience, and that research and mentored scholarship offer students the opportunity to witness and participate in discovery as it occurs.

Our fifth mission is to serve as a source of inspiration and life enrichment for our people and communities. We have helped to define southern Arizona's high quality of living with sports, performing arts, visual arts, literature, museums and more.

The UA must maintain its capacity to stun us into awe-inspired silence.

Think for a moment what you felt when you saw those first pictures of Titan and Mars that were sent back to Earth with UA instruments. Think about the last time you got lost in a photograph by Ansel Adams, whose body of work lives at the Center for Creative Photography. Think of the world turning its eyes to University Medical Center, as faculty from our College of Medicine performed those first artificial heart implants.

Consider how the music students who are performing for us today make our spirits soar.

Now, imagine the great moments to come.

To the parents of Arizona's college-bound children, I ask: Does this sound like a place you want to send your sons and daughters?



To the high school students of Arizona, I ask: Does this sound like a place you want to come for your education?

To all people of Arizona, I ask: Does this sound like an enterprise worthy of your investment?

It is said that we make our path in life by walking it. For 121 years, our path has been blazed by visionaries and entrepreneurs, by scientists and poets, by generations of students who arrive here with wide eyes, and leave here with widened horizons.

The University of Arizona's 21<sup>st</sup> century journey now beckons.

It will take us out, to Mars and beyond; in, to the deepest mysteries of the human body; back, into the past that created us; and forward, to who knows where.

Come, walk with me.