



**Fall Faculty Meeting  
Friday, Aug. 24, 2012  
10 a.m., Tucker Theatre**

**Dr. Sidney A. McPhee, President**

Good morning.

As always, I am delighted to welcome each of you to our annual fall faculty meeting.

I have always approached the beginning of each new academic year with tremendous anticipation.

Today, I stand before you with the same excitement and enthusiasm that I felt when I began my tenure as president 12 years ago.

I am pleased to be among the first to welcome back returning faculty and staff and extend warm greetings to our newest employees.

On this occasion, I always look forward to providing you with an update on our University.

This morning, I want to highlight just a few achievements from this past year and comment on plans for the future that will ultimately lead to improved student success.

I have always enjoyed setting the tone for this gathering — and, in a larger sense, the year ahead of us — with a traditional declaration that “these are EXCITING times for the University.”

For this new year, I believe these are “EXCITING and VERY IMPORTANT” times for Middle Tennessee State University.”

Not only because we have celebrated an important milestone — our 100th anniversary! Not only because we

have opened wonderful new facilities that will enable us to better serve our students and the entire state, and not only because we have been and continue to be careful stewards of the University's resources.

But also because we enter our second century with a clear mission, and that mission is to increase our already considerable commitment to student success and, in doing so, helping provide even more college graduates for Tennessee's workforce.

At this time, let me take a few moments to recognize some individuals who

- are extremely important to this institution;
- are committed to our mission; and
- are invaluable to me in working to ensure the successful management and operation of this University.

Let me begin by introducing my executive team, a group of outstanding individuals who serve as my key advisers and are involved in much of the overall decision-making on our campus:

- Dr. Brad Bartel, university provost;
- Mr. Joe Bales, vice president for development and university relations;
- Mr. Bruce Petryshak, vice president for information technology and chief information officer;
- Dr. Deb Sells, vice president for student affairs and vice provost for enrollment and academic services; and
- Mrs. Kimberly Edgar, executive assistant to the president.

These individuals are doing an outstanding job on behalf of our University.

Also on the stage with me is Mr. Mike Gower, representing the Division of Business and Finance.

Please join me in expressing appreciation to this dedicated team of campus leaders.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize other members of the President's Cabinet.

Before I ask the entire group to stand, I would like to give special recognition to two individuals who have been added to our cabinet membership since last year:

- Professor Michael Arndt, Faculty Senate president for 2012-13 and assistant professor of trumpet and director of the MTSU Symphonic Brass Ensemble; and
- Coby Sherlock, Student Government Association president for 2012-13.

Now, will all of the members of the President's Cabinet please stand and be recognized? Please join me in thanking these individuals for their service and leadership.

We also have some other very special guests with us that I would like to acknowledge.

From the Tennessee General Assembly:

- State Sen. Bill Ketron, 13th District;
- State Sen. Jim Tracy, 16th District;
- State Rep. Joe Carr, 48th District;
- State Rep. Pat Marsh, 62nd District;

- State Rep. Mike Sparks, 49th District; and
- State Rep. Rick Womick, 34th District.

From our local leadership, Murfreesboro Mayor Tommy Bragg and Rutherford County Mayor Ernest Burgess.

Also with us is Mr. Bill Mooningham, president of the MTSU Foundation Board of Trustees.

Will you join me in welcoming our special guests and thanking them for being here today?

As we begin this new academic year, we all remember — in particular — this past year as one of the most important in our history.

We celebrated 100 years of exceptional service to the state of Tennessee.

When we began our Centennial Celebration last September with the sold-out Blue Tie Gala, few could have ever imagined that the year would have been such a successful, exciting and reflective time for our campus.

The Centennial activities spotlighted the true variety and depth of programs on our campus, including:

- an outstanding Homecoming celebration;
- a unique and thought-provoking group of speakers, which included retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, Oscar-winning actress Marlee Matlin, noted author and war correspondent Sebastian Junger and Pulitzer Prize-winner Leonard Pitts;

- the launching of our new Alumni Reunion weekend in April, which included a wide variety of open houses and special presentations within our colleges; and
- a spring graduation ceremony, where we celebrated the awarding of our 100,000th undergraduate degree.

We also dedicated our new College of Education Building on the day before our 100th birthday.

This campus' heritage is deeply rooted in its founding as a Normal School — a school established to train teachers! How fitting that we begin the year with the dedication of a state of the art facility for our College of Education.

And, of course, a fitting closure to our Centennial Celebration was the groundbreaking in May of our \$147 million Science Building project.

This 250,000-square-foot facility, to be ready in time for the spring semester in 2015, represents one of the most significant investments made toward the enhancement of science and technology education in Tennessee.

We are grateful to Gov. Bill Haslam, the Tennessee General Assembly, and in particular our local legislative delegation, who made this ambitious project a reality.

As the Centennial ended, and we began to look to the future, we announced a multi-million-dollar Centennial Campaign.

This effort, the largest in the University's history, has four distinct priorities, unique in their own right and vital to our success as an institution.

These priorities are:

- maintaining an exceptional student body by bolstering our scholarships and student aid;
- assuring the highest-quality faculty and staff by increasing tools needed to improve recruitment, retention and graduation.
- fostering an innovative learning environment by building partnerships, learning spaces and programs that support the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce;
- and competing at the highest levels athletically by focusing on top-notch competition and facilities while focusing on academic success in the classroom.

Each of the priorities focuses on enhancing the quality of education and assuring the success of our students, faculty and alumni – things that most directly impact the total quality of the University.

Already alumni and friends are positively responding to our campaign.

Today, we already have more than \$55 million pledged toward the campaign goal.

And, as a result of our early success, we have raised our original campaign goal from \$61 million to \$80 million.

The highlight of our efforts to date was the announcement of a \$10 million commitment from 1966 MTSU grad Andrew W. “Woody” Miller — the largest gift from an alumnus in the University’s history.

As we embark on our second century, we are well-positioned to build on our success and solidify our position as Tennessee's Best comprehensive university.

But there is much more to do if we are to reach our full potential.

As you well know, the state's funding formula for universities has changed. With the passage of the Complete College Tennessee Act, our state appropriation is now based on retention and graduation rates, not enrollment.

This change has prompted MTSU, as well as all of the state's public institutions of higher education, to rethink our operations and structure.

It makes it more important than ever for us to focus upon attracting more students who are best equipped for college and, as such, are most likely to graduate.

And it becomes critical that we develop support systems that will help all of our students succeed.

It is also time for us to again take a strong, careful look at the size of our institution and to consider the following questions and issues:

1. What should be our maximum enrollment?
2. How does that number balance with our resources and standards?

Last academic year, I asked for the development of a plan that would allow for enrollment growth in a deliberate and economically viable way.

The Strategic Plan for Enrollment Management, currently in draft form, is now before the Faculty Senate and others for feedback.

It addresses several critical questions, among them:

- Should we slow the growth of our freshman class?
- Can we better target high-achievers by slightly raising academic standards for guaranteed undergraduate admission?
- Should we continue to increase the number of graduate students, who earn their diplomas more quickly and reliably than undergraduates?
- Should we continue to aggressively pursue increasing the enrollment of more international students, a high-achieving group, whose members generally complete their degrees on time?
- And should we continue to increase our recruitment efforts and scholarship dollars for transfer students, who have survived the so-called “dropout years” of early college?

In 1993, a noted scholar of higher education administration, Vincent Tinto said universities must do more than recruit solid students — they must also build a culture that enables them to succeed.

Tinto put forward three very simple principles of “effective retention,” and they are:

1. Put student welfare ahead of other institutional goals. In other words, work first to take care of students and, most likely, most everything else will follow suit.
2. Create and maintain retention tools and practices that help all students, not just some of them.
3. Build a sense of community and common values, which helps to build connection and belonging by students to the university.

Now, I want to spend a minute on that third point — building a sense of community and common values for the institution.

A fascinating 2005 study by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities on best practices in student retention revealed several points that are worthy of reflection.

The successful universities profiled in the study worked to create a pervasive attitude that all students can succeed, reinforced by a wider culture of student engagement, on multiple levels.

They were not content to rest on past success.

Recently, we have initiated some programs to help improve student success on our campus.

For example, we started an Academic Alert program, which allows faculty to communicate directly with students about classroom performance and follow up on concerns. Last year, more than 27,000 early alerts were entered in this digital system.

We have assigned all incoming students to academic counselors, in addition to their standard academic advisers.

While advisers change each time a student changes majors, the student's academic counselor is the one person they can turn to for help — from enrollment through graduation — regardless of what they study.

AND...we are now deploying admissions advisers to major feeder community colleges in the region.

Through this program, prospective transfer students have access — on their own campus — to MTSU staff through regularly maintained office hours at the community college.

These are just three of the many ideas that are in place or being developed that focus upon student success. Through these and other retention efforts, we hope to improve student performance and scholarship and target resources to students when they most need them.

But there is still more to do.

We at MTSU are working to develop such a community, devoted to learning, growth and service.

We hold these values dear, and there's a simple phrase that conveys them: "I am True Blue."

Each time we repeat these words, we express not only the ideals we wish to share with our students, but also our commitment to the student-centered culture we are building on our campus.

New students at Convocation take the True Blue Pledge. It commits them to practice our core values of honesty and integrity; respect for diversity; engagement in the community; and committing to reason, not violence.

We have been overwhelmed by the passion and attachment that “True Blue” has received on campus since it was introduced at last August’s Convocation exercises.

The Student Government Association adopted it as its official motto and redesigned its seal to emphasize “True Blue.”

The pledge was incorporated into numerous student events, rallies and other activities.

It has been well received — not only by students and staff, but by our alumni and university supporters.

It was not intended to be a marketing slogan — and perhaps that is why it has resonated with some more deeply than just a phrase written for a billboard.

In short, “True Blue” stands for the very best of what Blue Raiders expect from one another — that, together, we are committed to the progress and success of our University. But without good actions to stand behind these good words, it will be meaningless.

Let me share with you a few examples of those who are True Blue.

If you asked Chad Lassiter, he would say that Dr. Joey Gray, a professor in the College of Behavioral and Health Sciences, is True Blue.

Chad says that Dr. Gray “has meant so much to me and has helped me overcome obstacles others put in my way. She is a true example of what a professor ... should strive to be.”

Chad goes on to say — and I quote, “I first met her when I was on academic probation and had to appeal to get back in school. She was the one who took a chance with me and believed in me.

Chad continues, “She has helped me overcome so many challenges and I know if it was not for her believing in me, I would not be graduating in December.”

Thank you, Dr. Gray, for being True Blue.

If you asked Tiffany Vance, she would say Dr. Lawanna Fisher, a professor in the University College, is True Blue.

Tiffany says that Dr. Fisher made her success as a student possible. Tiffany works full time in a demanding job and is a single mother. She needed to take algebra online and asked Dr. Fisher for her permission to take the course online.

Dr. Fisher gave Tiffany a very candid warning on the intensity of the class. She gave her permission but also committed to work with her through frequent reviews. From time to time, Tiffany would ask additional questions by email and Dr. Fisher took the time to provide videos of her answers.

Tiffany wrote to me: “That was so unexpected. I can’t imagine how many students she must have at any given time, and yet she took the time to do that for me.”

She passed — and got a “B.”

Dr. Fisher, thank you for being True Blue.

And if you asked Tyree Rumph, he would say Mr. Ben Jones, an assistant director in Accounting Services, is True Blue.

Tyree, who came here from Detroit, struggled with his studies shortly after arriving here. And, in the process of withdrawing from the University, he met Mr. Jones.

Mr. Jones met with Tyree and promised to help turn him in the right direction.

He meets with Tyree once a week, every week, over lunch, serving as a mentor, tutor and life coach to Tyree.

Mr. Jones is part of our business office; his job responsibilities do not call for him to directly work with students. Yet he has committed his time and talent to helping Tyree succeed.

And, by the way: During one of those lunches, Mr. Jones came to the aid of a colleague, Christi Farris, who was choking on a Cheeto, and saved her life.

Mr. Jones, thank you for being True Blue.

And last, but certainly not least, I would also like to recognize a special True Blue group.

If you ask any Blue Raider athlete about our athletic staff, they would say these individuals are definitely True Blue.

During the Spring 2012 semester, 145 of its 293 student-athletes earned a grade point average of 3.0 or higher and 58 made the University Dean's List.

Eighteen student athletes attained a 4.0 GPA.

This past year, the Sun Belt Conference named 62 Blue Raiders to the prestigious Commissioner's List for their exemplary academic record.

The NCAA bestows Public Recognition Awards upon teams that post Academic Performance scores among the top 10 percent in their sport.

MTSU had two such recognitions in football and men's golf; both sports were singled out for the second year in a row.

And only 12 FBS football programs were honored by the NCAA in 2012. Among those were Air Force, Duke, Miami (Fla.), Rice, Rutgers, Vanderbilt — and Middle Tennessee.

I want to thank everyone who is part of the athletic staff for their dedication to ensuring the continued athletic and academic success of our student athletes.

They are True Blue!

These are just a few examples — and I have many more than our time allows — of how we have shown our True Blue spirit, demonstrating that a major comprehensive university can show the care and attention of a small college.

That same True Blue spirit has been captured in the new Student Union building that opened today. We will have an official celebration on Sept. 19.

This beautiful facility, funded by our students and built for them, will nurture a sense of belonging and connection to our campus from our diverse student population.

The “One-Stop Shop,” adjacent to the new Union, will house all of the advising and business functions vital to new and returning students.

When this project is completed by 2014, it will mean no more shuffling students from building to building to get what they need to succeed.

It will be a great example of our student-centered focus.

And that spirit can be found in the colleagues who I approached this summer to join me as a Student Advocate.

In this new program, each of us was given five incoming freshmen whom we will monitor and mentor as they adjust to the new environment and rigors of college.

Again, these are just a few examples of recent initiatives implemented to help insure student success.

But there is so much more to do. If we sit on our hands and do nothing, we may fail to seize an opportunity that could define our second century.

Students will remember those faculty and staff members who challenged them the most, not the least.

They will remember the people who reached out, who connected with them.

That is why I ask each of you to remember that no matter what you do, as a member of the faculty, staff or administration, all of us have a responsibility for student success.

I thank you for your attention today and look forward to working with you in the coming academic year.

Together, we make student success possible at Middle Tennessee State University.