

# **Presidential Investiture Address**

**Dr. Larry Minks, President**

**Southeastern Oklahoma State University**

**October 27, 2010**

To the members of the Board of Regents of the Regional University System of Oklahoma, members of the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, University students, faculty, staff, and alumni, and to the community: I want to thank you for your attendance today, and I want to thank you for your support and for your passion for Southeastern Oklahoma State University. We are successful as a University because of your continued dedication and commitment to the values of higher education.

I would also like to welcome all of our special guests, including my colleagues from the Regional University System of Oklahoma, and the other presidents and delegates here representing the various institutions of higher education.

I assure you that planning an investiture of this nature is a daunting task, and I would like to thank the chairs of the Investiture Committee -- Dr. Ken Chinn, Ms. Teriki Hicks, and Mr. Matt Heggy. Also, thanks to Mrs. Vicki Hudson, our Master of Ceremonies.

There were many, many other individuals involved in the planning of today's event and in the interest of time, I am not going to recognize each one of them individually. But I do want to

express my sincere appreciation to everyone who has made this day possible.

It's also a very special feeling to see so many of our students participating in this ceremony.

I also want to thank Regent Massey, Chancellor Johnson, Dr. Gold for the Invocation, Dr. Sturch for offering the Welcome and Dr. Aaron Adair for our special reading, Dr. Chinn, Ms. Hicks, Mr. Heggy, and Mr. Webb for their kind salutations.

I am very blessed to have a wonderful family that I would like to introduce. First, my wife, Joan, who is truly an inspiration to me; and our four children, Laura, Amanda, Joy, and Aaron—Amanda and Aaron are with us today.

My two sisters are here today—Mrs. Nancy Coleman, Broomfield, CO and Mrs. Margaret Mizushimi, Wellington, CO.

This very special day is a Day of Appreciation...of Recognition...and of Commitment.

### **Appreciation**

Today, we must **Appreciate** our history and the guiding principles and ideals that this institution was founded upon in 1909.

I would ask everyone to take a moment to reflect upon the many lives have been shaped and guided by this University over the past century. Think about all of the students – many of them first-generation college graduates -- who

have passed through these halls and gone on to be successful not only in their chosen fields, but in life as honorable and productive citizens. This is quite a legacy.

And to our faculty and staff: think about the positive impact that *you* have made on the lives of others during *your* time at Southeastern.

All of us need to appreciate the history, traditions, and culture that have been and continue to be a part of Southeastern Oklahoma State University.

I ask you to remember such educators as E.T. Dunlap, Paul Laird, Tom Houston, Allen Shearer, and the many others who have contributed so mightily to our history. If not for

their guidance and vision, Southeastern would not be here today.

As a student, faculty member, staff member or alumnus, it is a privilege to be a part of Southeastern Oklahoma State University.

However, with this privilege comes a responsibility to uphold the trust and values of those who came before us.

### **Recognition**

Today is also a day of **Recognition**. We must recognize who we are and where we are as individuals and as an institution of higher learning.

Much has changed at Southeastern over the past 100 years. During that time, our name has evolved from Southeastern Normal School to

Southeastern State Teachers College to  
Southeastern State College to Southeastern  
Oklahoma State University.

As most of you know, our original mission was to educate teachers for the public schools of Oklahoma. And although teacher education remains a cornerstone of the University, we now offer bachelor's and master's degree programs in a wide variety of fields through our School of Arts and Sciences, School of Education and Behavioral Sciences, the John Massey School of Business, and the School of Graduate and University Studies.

Beyond the Durant campus, we have expanded to six outreach sites, including the

McCurtain County branch campus, in order to better meet the needs of our students.

We have grown hand-in-hand with the Durant community -- a community that has always embraced and supported Southeastern and its beliefs.

Although we gather today in Montgomery Auditorium in historic Morrison Hall, our facilities have changed significantly.

From 20 acres, no buildings, and a few trees in 1909, to 268 acres, 45 buildings, and quite a number of Magnolia trees today, our campus has experienced exceptional growth.

Under the leadership of then-President Glen D. Johnson, the University witnessed an unprecedented upgrade in facilities from 1997-

2007, including the construction of a new general classroom building, the new Shearer Residence Hall, the renovated Paul Laird football field and Choctaw and Chickasaw Towers, the new Bloomer Sullivan Arena, and the Glen D. Johnson Student Union.

My memories of Southeastern date back to 1976 when I served as an assistant professor. It was in August of that year that I taught my first class in Room 222 in this very building.

Although we lacked such sophisticated tools as the laptop computer and smartphone, we had our share of technological advances, at least so it seemed at the time. For instance, in 1976, the Apple 1 home computer was

introduced for the first time, as was the VHS home video cassette recorder.

Even though our facilities and technology have progressed dramatically since 1909 and even since 1976, one basic premise that has not changed is the critical role that the teacher plays.

Technology is a great teaching tool, but it is not a teacher. Nothing can replace the teacher, who creates the environment for teaching and learning to occur.

This is so true at Southeastern, where our dedicated faculty go the extra mile to ensure that our students are successful. Just ask any of our graduates and they will relate a story about a favorite professor who influenced or perhaps even changed their life.

As C. Roland “Chris” Christensen, Robert Walmsley University Professor Emeritus at Harvard once said: “What students become is as important as what they learn. The endpoint of teaching is as much human as intellectual growth. Where qualities of person are as central as qualities of mind -- as is true in all professional education – we must engage the whole being of our students so that they become open and receptive to multiple levels of understanding. And we must engage our whole selves as well. We must teach not only what we know, but who we are.”

The quest for knowledge is continuous and never-ceasing, for both the student *and* for the teacher.

In the words of noted educator, Charles Gragg, “teachers must also learn.” We cannot truly teach unless we let ourselves experience the continuing exhilaration of exploration – the mastery and communication of ideas, coupled with the reception of new insights, and the never-ending desire to know more. Teaching and learning are inseparable; the process of education is a reciprocal gift.

To the faculty at Southeastern, I say thank you for your support of and commitment to, our 4,000 students. This University is poised to

reach greater heights because of the talents and energy you devote to your profession.

As a dynamic regional University, Southeastern has much to be proud of.

Our students excel in the classroom, having been chosen as Brad Henry International Scholars and as recipients of the George and Donna Nigh Public Service Scholarship. Outstanding students are also attracted to the Honors Program and President's Leadership Class.

Our John Massey School of Business is one of only six business programs world-wide accredited by both The Association of Collegiate Business Schools and Programs, and The

Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business – International.

Southeastern is also recognized as a leader in higher education among the Native American population. In fact, our University ranks seventh in the nation in awarding undergraduate degrees to Native American students in all disciplines combined. This is something that we are very proud of, and is due, in large part, to the strong partnerships developed between the University and the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and The Chickasaw Nation.

We are also at the forefront in establishing new initiatives such as the “Masonic Institute for Professional Development and Lectureship

Series", which will be coordinated by the faculty and staff of the Southeastern Department of Educational Instruction and Leadership. This will benefit both University and public school teachers.

As noted earlier, the University and Durant community have a long tradition of sharing a cooperative spirit. A shining example of this spirit is the new Bloomer Sullivan Arena and renovated Paul Laird Football Field – improvements that were completed only because we worked together.

In the area of civic engagement, Southeastern has for the past two years been named to the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll. This is the

highest federal recognition a university can receive for its commitment to volunteering, service-learning and civic engagement.

Our faculty and staff continue to excel as well, earning numerous awards and honors, while being actively involved in research and publishing, and presenting at national and international professional conferences.

Teaching, learning, research, and service -- they're all in place at Southeastern.

All of these accomplishments should be shared and celebrated by each person in this auditorium.

## **Commitment**

Finally, today is a day of **Commitment**.

As we begin the next chapter in the history of Southeastern Oklahoma State University, we need to look beyond our current successes. Together, we must look inward and **commit** to making a transformational change.

President John F. Kennedy once said, “change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.”

In its simplest form, transformational change is working together to move an organization forward amidst uncertainty—that is, the emergence of a new organizational state that is unknown until it takes shape---which usually emerges out of the drift of an older organizational state.

In higher education today, we know one thing for certain – and that is we face great uncertainty.

Uncertainty regarding enrollment levels, uncertainty regarding funding, uncertainty regarding programming, staffing, and the list goes on and on.

These uncertainties or challenges can lead us to suffer great anxiety. Or these uncertainties and challenges can lead us to pull closer together as a tight-knit family would.

Over the past century, Southeastern has never allowed its spirit to be broken despite facing significant obstacles and challenges throughout its history.

So the question is how do we address these challenges?

Do we sit back and hope for better times, or do we actively pursue solutions?

Remember that Southeastern offers the opportunity, through hard work, to receive a powerful gift – the gift of an education. We all have a strong collective belief in the changing of human life through education.

I believe there are three fundamental concepts that we must emphasize to continue down our road of success.

**(Teaching)** First and foremost, we must continue to re-focus on teaching – that is why we are here and that is what we do best -- **Teach.** The faculty is the lifeblood of any

successful higher education institution and we must maintain that level of quality.

We must do everything in our power to ensure quality instruction in the classroom. To do so, it is critical that we continue to recruit and retain quality faculty.

There is no question in my mind that when it comes to recruiting outstanding students, the most important ingredient is outstanding professors. No question about it -- there is simply no substitute for quality teaching and the resulting influence on the classroom environment.

**(Collaboration-Partnerships)** The second fundamental concept, we need to expand upon our **collaboration and partnerships**.

We must strive for unprecedented integration and collaboration with our state and federal legislators, with our regents, and with our sister institutions. We must collaborate with our alumni, with business, with our local community, and with our region, nation, and global structures.

Southeastern has established numerous partnerships to the benefit of many. I mentioned earlier the strong relationships that exist between the University and the Choctaw and Chickasaw Nations. This has resulted in, among many other things, the creation of the Native American

Center for Student Success, which provides critical advisement services.

Other examples of the many successful partnerships and collaborative efforts we have in place are the Southeastern at Grayson College program, in which we offer the Elementary Education program; the Southeastern – East Central University Nursing Project; the Allied Health initiative with Eastern Oklahoma State College and McCurtain Memorial Hospital at our McCurtain County branch campus; close working relationships with Murray State College and East Central at the Ardmore Higher Education Center; and the collaboration with Tinker Air Force Base and Oklahoma City Community College, through which we offer our aviation programs.

Earlier this month, we announced the establishment of the George Kaiser Family Foundation and Southeastern Oklahoma State University pre-medical studies scholarship.

Out of collaboration, integration, and partnerships come ideas, diversity, scholarships, grants, internships, new programs, and resources. In other words, collaboration, integration, and partnerships result in solutions to challenges.

We must nurture and grow these collaborative efforts, while at the same time, seeking new, innovative opportunities. The potential is there and we must be aggressive in our efforts.

A close friend and colleague at the system-level shared with me recently the belief that the next 25-50 year models of the Southeastern quadrant of Oklahoma and north Texas will virtually be determined by the degree of collaboration of Southeastern with its two year and four year institutional partners within the region. We must work collaboratively in leveraging our strengths and embracing system-wide initiatives of accessibility, affordability, enrollment growth, and accountability.

Southeastern will continue to play a key role in statewide planning initiatives in regional stewardship and development by leveraging system and campus assets against the state's and region's economic and community development needs.

I can assure you that collaboration is going to play a crucial role in the future of higher education not only on a regional level but on a global level.

**(Innovation)** And finally, the third fundamental concept is that of innovation. We must also be innovative in our approach to the future -- I encourage you to be creative, to constructively challenge the status quo, to challenge yourself and your peers.

Successful transformational change requires courage, strength, flexibility, and time.

It also requires a strategic phasing and staging of efforts in order to build a strong foundation and at the same time allow for reinvention.

This will require organizational development and change that will reach into our very existence—that will reach into our very soul. It will help shape and mold Southeastern to meet the needs of our students well into the future.

Traditional education has been about “what we knew” and “let’s have you know it too”—but today, more than ever before, we have to worry about educating for the unknown. It’s ever more important today that people become adaptive learners; over and over again throughout their lives on many fronts, they will have to learn and relearn, and learn beyond what they already know---and if there is one thing for sure, that means learning for understanding. It’s inherently flexible—it has stretch, it has reach, it

has leverage---that is why it is so important for it to become a central part of educating for the unknown and teaching/learning for the future.

Those universities that adapt to change will be successful. Those universities that don't adapt to change will stagnate, struggle, eventually cease to be relevant, and perhaps not even exist in their current form.

As an institution and as individuals, we must **commit** to make the changes necessary to be successful in the future. We must not fear change; instead, we must embrace change.

I ask that you join me as we, together as a community, make a **commitment** to rededication, reinvention, and to continual improvement.

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as the  
19<sup>th</sup> President of Southeastern Oklahoma State  
University.

Thank you.