Executive Summary

The President in this office is appointed by the Board of Trustees of the Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning to serve as the Institutional Executive Officer. He works weekly with a President’s Cabinet of senior managers.

I) State of the University Address 2009-2010 (August 2009)

Welcome to the 84th academic year of Delta State University. I’ve titled this year’s State of the University Address, “Asking and Answering the Right Questions.” The theme occurred to me earlier this summer after I prepared remarks for another occasion. In that speech I referred to Joseph Sittler, the sage who taught theology at the University of Chicago. He wrote, “There are few things more futile than answering questions no one is asking.” That is a reminder we all need now and again. As a relevant example, the most frequent question from state policymakers these days is: “How will you cut your budget?” In response, universities and other state agencies keep answering a different, unasked question: “What are the reasons you can’t cut your budget?” Then we’re surprised when no one listens to what we say.

Let’s acknowledge we are vexed by the negative economy and the consequences we’re experiencing. We can’t escape the question, “How will you cut your budget?” And we can’t ignore the indicators of a downward slope in our budget for years to come: shortfalls in state revenue, student flight to less expensive community colleges, the temporary nature of federal stimulus funding, and pending cuts mandated by the board’s formula for distributing state appropriations.

Usually it is deadly to begin a speech with budget information, but it is the issue occupying our thoughts and stealing time in our conversations. So, the first question I will ask and answer is: what is the status of the budget? The second question is: where does the budget go from here? Fiscal Year 2010 begins with an appropriation from the state – including federal stimulus funds – that is slightly larger than we received at the beginning of 2009. That’s the good news. The bad news is because of eroding state revenue projections the legislature used the stimulus dollars for both 2009 and 2010 for this one year. That apparently means we will start 2011 with half as much stimulus funding -- $900,000 versus $1,800,000. Also, there is a great likelihood of a mid-year cut this year matching or exceeding the reductions we experienced in 2009.

Of course, the answer to the question of budget status becomes real as it affects our campus. At the beginning of July, we cut more than $1,300,000 from the Delta State University budget for Fiscal Year 2010. Why would the problem be that large? There are several reasons. First of all, the actions we took last year to address the mid-year cut did not meet the full measure of the shortfall. Departments were unable to hold open some positions or curtail spending to the degree necessary. As a result, $750,000 of last year’s problem flowed into this year. Secondly, our board determined last year that only half of our tuition increase request would be granted and this year allowed no tuition increase. These decisions added between $900,000 and $1,000,000 to our predicament. Other issues included enrollment shrinkage because of the poor economy and unavoidable cost increases for goods and services.

We began planning for these problems more than a year ago with the expansion of our University Budget Committee and a charge that the committee would scrutinize all administrative units to recommend efficiency opportunities. It was an exhaustive and productive process that provided a basis...
for our decisions. We made cuts throughout the educational and general budget: $632,360 in personnel and $705,430 in core operations. The only salary increases we gave were those previously committed: faculty promotions and summer school faculty and chair increases, a total of nearly $145,000. We also eliminated some positions as we made reductions in the auxiliary budgets – the Division of Student Affairs was especially helpful with reorganizations. Thus you know the answers to the first question, What is the status of the budget?

The second question – Where does the budget go from here? – is more important, but the answer is shorter. The University Budget Committee will continue its work, this year reviewing in detail all academic budgets and the athletic budget. There will again be difficult decisions.

Being honest with ourselves is tremendously important throughout this process. Excusing or overlooking reductions when they occur will mean fighting our way through large, accumulated deficits down the road. Most of you have been very helpful as we have addressed the budget challenges. In a few cases we’ve met anger and determined resistance. I solicit your engagement in the issues, as well as your support for necessary decisions.

If you have worked closely with me, you’ve likely heard one illustration I often use in these situations. Maybe some of you have heard it too many times. Imagine all the things happening at Delta State and all the funds we’re using year-by-year to run the university represented by a desktop stretching six feet long and three feet wide. That’s fairly standard for a full-sized desk. Now, think about our budget challenges and the tough decisions we’ve had to make. In the same scale as the desk, those issues would be represented by a regular sheet of typing paper 8.5 by 11 inches. Visualize the expanse of the desk – it would take nearly 28 sheets of typing paper to cover it – yet we can’t take our eyes off the single sheet representing our budget predicament. We have to force ourselves to recognize the many areas of our organization where operations and funding are stable and where good things are happening. Surely we owe it to ourselves to celebrate those things on the remaining 96.4 percent of the desktop.

“Asking and Answering the Right Questions” is our theme today. Therefore the next question is: in spite of our challenges, what progress have we made? It really is quite a list.

First is our most recent big announcement. Teach For America has chosen Delta State University to host a Charter Summer Institute in 2010 with the expectation we will be a permanent site thereafter. Over the 20 or so years of the existence of this organization, seven previous sites have come on line – all at larger universities and all in major urban centers. Arizona State, Georgia Tech, Temple, and the University of Houston are examples. We competed against a good field and, in the end, won out over the other finalist, the University of Denver. Thus, Delta State became the first partner university located in a rural area, and we couldn’t be more proud of the result. I want to thank everyone who helped with this successful effort whether on our campus, in the Cleveland community, or across the Delta. There were many people campaigning. I note particularly today our new Commissioner, Dr. Hank Bounds, who first promoted Delta State to the Teach For America organization and asked that an invitation into the competition come our way. Thank you, Dr. Bounds, for your persistent support throughout the process.

For eight weeks this coming summer we’ll have hundreds of Teach For America staff and corps members on our campus. The point is to prepare and certify 500 to 600 new college graduates for teaching in some of our nation’s most challenged K-12 school systems. During the five-week peak period of the institute we could have a total of more than 800 new corps members and staff on our campus. Educationally and financially this is a win for Delta State, for Cleveland, and for the Mississippi Delta.

Another recent announcement was about the Healthy Campus/Community Initiative funded by Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Mississippi in the amount of $700,000 for the first seven months with the likelihood of additional funding to follow. The project addresses wellness issues on this campus, in Cleveland’s K-12 schools, and throughout our community. Soon to come are a half-mile walking track, new fitness equipment and additional services at the Wellness Center, and a campaign to get everyone involved. Thanks to the College of Education for taking the lead.
Also, thanks go to the Delta State University Foundation for working with us to fund a new, 362-bed student residence hall, using an innovative financing model. We’ll build the residence hall in about half the time and at a reduced cost, and we will be the first public university in Mississippi to use this privatized method for financing student housing. It is rather commonplace in other parts of the country. Our new facility will stand where Bond-Carpenter and Whittington-Williams once stood on the south side of the campus. It will offer students living accommodations appealing to our 21st century market, and their room rental fees will make the project self-funding. Next we plan a 32-unit apartment complex for faculty and staff.

Ironically, during this year of tight budgets, we are launching more facilities projects on the campus than we’ve seen for a long time. Federal money is providing a boulevard from Highway 8 directly into our athletic complex, as well as several other improvements in that area. There is also federal support for building a 50-station computer laboratory onto the School of Nursing. Private funding will replace the large university sign and electronic message board on Sunflower Road. State bond proceeds from the Mississippi Legislature are funding new roofs, a new chiller loop that will stabilize heating and air conditioning for the central campus, first phase renovations in Caylor-White Walters, new sprinkler systems in residence halls, electrical service upgrades, and some drainage improvements. In other words, this will be a full year for our colleagues in Finance and Administration.

As always, I have a list for you of notable accomplishments from the past year. When I solicited items from vice presidents and deans, the lists were so long we would be here until tomorrow if I talked about all of them. So here is a “Top 10 List.” I take full responsibility and apologize for all omissions.

10. The Division of Finance and Administration, and particularly the Facilities Management Team, continued to enjoy success with energy conservation efforts. Natural gas consumption on campus was down 26.98 percent during the past 12 months, and the use of electricity fell by 16.63 percent. These reductions came on top of similar savings last year. This earned the university an IHL Best Practices Award.
9. The Roberts-LaForge Library just passed the decade mark as the highest rated general university program and service according to student graduation surveys. Year-after-year their excellence shows.
8. The Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business, and Education, and the School of Nursing – all had an outstanding year of scholarship. Faculty produced more than 450 publications, presentations, exhibitions, and performances during the 2008/09 academic year.
7. Dr. Billy Morehead, formerly our Chief Financial Officer and now Chair of the Division of Accountancy, Computer Information Systems, and Finance, became the first Mississippian and the first academician elected as National President of the Association of Government Accountants, an international organization with 15,000 members.
6. The Grants Office worked effectively with faculty and staff to generate external funds. They reported an increase nearly 20 percent larger than the previous year’s performance with 79 grants totaling $12.1 million. In a related effort, despite a very difficult environment University Relations secured $9.5 million in state bond funding for facility projects and earmarked funds from the state and federal governments.
5. Renovation of the Whitfield Gymnasium into the Delta Music Institute was completed this past year. Now this old facility has new life and a fresh purpose as home to two world class recording studios and an academic program already recognized for its quality and its leadership.
4. The Thad Cochran Center for Rural School Leadership and Research studied results from its exemplary Educational Leadership Cohort Program where practicing teachers and administrators can earn graduate degrees. The research showed 122 of 139 program completers serving in Delta school districts.
3. There were two significant initiatives out of the Provost’s office. First, the math faculty adopted a model of course redesign developed by the Center for Academic Transformation using innovative technology-based strategies that have proven effective on campuses across the nation. Second, faculty and staff have completed the preliminary work for a Foundations of Excellence
project that relies on a model from the Policy Center on the First Year of College. Implementation during this year will add significant value for our new students.

2. Credit also goes to the Provost, her staff, and many who worked with them across the campus to rewrite the university’s Strategic Plan. Now updated for the period 2009 to 2014, this plan focuses our attention on five sharpened, well-stated goals related to student outcomes, program quality, and institutional effectiveness. Measurable indicators will allow us to monitor progress.

1. The School of Nursing now bears the name of its most generous benefactor, Robert E. Smith. His seven-figure contributions and commitments are making it financially possible for needy, deserving students to become outstanding nurses serving the healthcare needs of the Mississippi Delta. Mr. Smith set the bar high for other private donors, as the DSU Foundation works on a major, new fundraising campaign. (While we are on the subject of significant gifts, I want to recognize Dr. Rose Strahan. As she retired this past year, she began working with the DSU Foundation to arrange a planned gift that will come to the university at the time of her death in the amount of $750,000. Rose, your example inspires and challenges us all. Thank you.)

Before I answer the next right question, I want to express my gratitude for your accomplishments. Whether or not I mentioned your specific achievements, be assured that I and everyone else recognize the contributions of each individual in this campus community make it possible to say, “The state of this university is sound.” You have exhibited time and again commitment to mission, creativity in effort, and excellence in results. I’m proud of this university, and you should be proud of it as well. In the face of challenges even steeper than those we usually face, we just concluded an outstanding year. Thank you.

Next question: What’s on the horizon? Fasten your seat belts. If this is to be another outstanding year, we must accomplish even more. There is so much ahead:

- This is the year to work closely with our new Commissioner, the IHL Board, legislators, and other state policymakers to build greater awareness of the university’s contributions and to map a positive course through the threats of damaging funding cuts.
- This is the year to get a running start on our new strategic plan; maybe we can move through more milestones than expected. That’s been characteristic of us in the past.
- This is the year to continue strengthening services to the region through such efforts as the Delta Health Alliance, our collaborative organization with three other universities and the Delta Council. It has now expanded to 28 programs with an annual budget that has grown in six years from $2.5 million to more than $25 million. Early indications are that we could exceed $40 million for next year’s budget.
- This is the year we must redouble our efforts to assure a strong enrollment going into the future. Each person must accept responsibility for recruitment and retention, if we are to be successful.
- This is the year to do the heavy lifting of putting in place the Redesign of Teacher Preparation created by a system-level Blue Ribbon Committee.
- This is the year to continue our efforts to extend diversity in our faculty and administrative staff. We simply must exercise greater creativity and determination to reach our goals.
- This is the year to build the organization of the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area. Because of the leadership of our Delta Center for Culture and Learning and the support of many others, our region received this designation by vote of the United States Congress this past year. This brings great potential for regional development.
- This is the year for our fifth year report to our regional accrediting organization, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). It is a rigorous exercise with expectations similar to a full-blown, ten-year compliance report. It will require the attention of all departments and individuals.
- This is the year to work with the national and regional staff of Teach For America so the 2010 Summer Institute is a success. They will soon begin a series of planning visits.
This is the year to implement many of the grant-funded projects we won last year and to create new proposals that push us beyond last year’s results.

This is the year to offer students the advantages of Foundations of Excellence, the innovative model for math instruction, and new programs in many of the academic departments. It is also the year to refocus on our quality enhancement plan for faculty and student engagement.

This is the year for construction and renovation projects all over the campus.

This is the year the DSU Foundation must multiply already positive results to assure adequate funding for scholarships, faculty support, and other institutional priorities.

And today’s new announcement: this is the Year of the Arts. Annually we select an emphasis for our programming. We’ve just concluded the Year of Partnerships. During 2009/10, we will celebrate the Year of the Arts, and I’m pleased to recognize Dean Collier Parker as the coordinator of our celebration.

Clearly, this new academic year will require each of us to give our best. I know you could extend the list of priorities by adding the expectations you have for your unit. We’ll be busy every minute of every day.

There is a final question, a right question. It is one we all recognize as the most important. How is it going with our students? Accrediting organizations, governing boards, and state and federal policymakers all want to know about outcomes, and that usually means reports filled with numbers. At this point, however, I thought we could benefit from a few stories.

Kirsten McBride was a key member of our women’s basketball team that made the final four for the second time in two years. She also won the 2009 Psychology Faculty Award. Kirsten is one of 85 Delta State student-athletes who made Gulf South Conference All-Academic teams last year.

Peter Pinnow, a 1995 graduate of the Division of Languages and Literature, won nearly $40,000 on the television game show Jeopardy.

Another graduate of Languages and Literature, Stephanie Eddleman, earned her degree here in 2002. As a non-traditional undergraduate she commuted each class day from Marianna, Arkansas, nearly 100 miles each way. She graduated from Delta State with a 4.00 average. This summer she successfully defended her dissertation at Ole Miss to become Dr. Stephanie Eddleman.

Kate Kinnison graduated this spring after a great adventure as a congressional fellow in Senator Thad Cochran’s office complete with a chance to attend President Barack Obama’s Inauguration. She is a law school student this fall.

Andrew Martin, spring graduate, Davlon Miller, current graduate student, and Neal Kiihnl, BSN graduate in 2002, have all served military duty in the Middle East. Andrew and Neal both completed two tours, and Davlon, who finished his undergraduate degree here after returning from Iraq, will leave for Afghanistan in 2010.

At the end of fall semester last year, Tonya Longest learned she had breast cancer. During spring semester, while undergoing chemotherapy, she continued as a full-time student and graduated in May – a master’s degree in secondary education with an emphasis in art.

During her junior year, Kaitlyn Mize lost her mother in an automobile accident. Despite helping with two younger sisters, she graduated from Delta State in the spring of 2008. Now she has completed her first year at the University of Mississippi Medical School.

Each year over 800 students walk across the stage at our commencement ceremonies and leave well-prepared for success. It would be interesting to hear each of their stories. After all, they are why we do what we do.
Today we’ve asked and answered five questions: What is the status of the budget? Where does the budget go from here? In spite of our challenges, what progress have we made? What’s on the horizon? How is it going with our students? Not only are these the right questions, but also we dealt with them in the right order. We’ve gone from least to most important, from necessary, but boring questions about the budget to engaging, sometimes touching news about student success. In between we’ve looked at last year’s accomplishments and this year’s agenda. Set that one sheet with a few worrying financial issues over to the side. We’ve got a whole desktop of opportunities to occupy our attention.

I) Strategic Directions 2008/2009
developed by Cabinet and Academic Council summer 2009

1. Continue progress on IHL goals for DSU:
   - 95 percent first-write pass rate on NCLEX by end of FY09;
   - 21 percent minority faculty by end of FY09;
   - 550 community college transfer students by end of FY09;
   - 70 percent freshman to sophomore retention by end of FY09;
   - 55 percent six-year graduation rate by end of FY12.
2. Identify and implement strategies to enhance credit hour production.
3. Coordinate efforts related to student performance, thoroughly assess outcomes, and introduce innovations (ref., Foundations of Excellence, IHL Initiative for Course Redesign, Student Engagement Program, First Year Experience, etc.).
4. Enlist broad participation in assessing outcomes and linking results to rebalancing decisions, program changes, and strategic planning.
5. Expand efforts to retain quality faculty and staff and to build diversity in both groups.
6. Strengthen fundraising/grants development across the institution and announce a new capital campaign.
7. Expand the use of energy conservation strategies and other green initiatives.
8. Celebrate the Year of Partnerships.
9. Advance the following facilities projects: Roofing Replacements (esp., BPAC and Student Union), Caylor/White/Walters Science and Math Building, Housing Master Plan, Statesmen Park, Margaret Wade Plaza, Delta Music Institute, and Nursing Building Expansion.

II) Strategic Directions for 2009/2010
developed by Cabinet and Academic Council summer 2009 (linked to Engage Excellence: Strategic Plan goals)

1. Complete these projects related to enrollment with emphases on both short-term stability and long-term growth:
   - review financial aid programs and link to marketing effort; (Goal 2)
   - survey market for program demand in Greenville and Clarksdale; (Goal 2)
   - redesign website; (Goals 2 & 4)
   - create retention plan and assign responsibilities; (Goal 2)
   - build a university-wide, post-graduation tracking system. (Goals 1 & 2)
2. Build awareness and participation in CART and emergency response programs. (Goal 3)
3. Advance the following facilities projects:
   - first phase renovation of Caylor-White Walters; (Goal 4)
• Statesmen Boulevard and Park; (Goal 4)
• residence hall and apartment complex; (Goal 4)
• chiller loop; (Goal 4)
• sprinklers in residence halls; (Goal 4)
• electrical service upgrades; (Goal 4)
• drainage improvements. (Goal 4)

4. Increase migration of courses and programs to on-line and other methods of alternative delivery and create a five-year plan for this effort that assures steady growth, quality control, and integrity of programs. (Goal 1)

5. Expand diversity efforts:
   • assign priorities to diversity report recommendations and implement; (Goals 3 & 4)
   • achieve a milestone of 17 percent minority faculty as a progress point toward the system goal for DSU of 21 percent. Goal 3

6. Work on the following as high priority projects for the year:
   • implement Redesign of Teacher Preparation; (Goal 1)
   • provide greater resources for acquiring library materials and new technology; (Goal 4)
   • build attendance at athletic and entertainment events; (Goal 2)
   • introduce Healthy Campus/Community Initiative; (Goals 3 & 5)
   • prepare for Teach For America Summer Institute; (Goal 5)
   • continue emphasis on workplace issues; (Goal 5)
   • implement Strategic Plan; (Goal 4)
   • complete SACS/COC fifth-year report. (Goal 4)

7. Enhance results of fundraising efforts with both public and private sources. (Goals 4 & 5)

8. Develop sustainable funding plans for athletics and BPAC. (Goal 4)

9. Continue positive trend in energy savings, and initiate projects related to greening of campus. (Goal 4)

10. Address budget issues. (Goal 4)