

The First Imperative:

GSU will expand access to underserved student populations.

Our enrollment will grow. We will increase the pipeline of students now lost to university education. More first-generation students will become life-long learners. They will achieve baccalaureate degrees and go on to graduate study. We will cooperate with K-12 institutions and community colleges, improving preparation for university study and creating an environment for student success.

We commit to providing first-generation college students with all benefits of university education - experiences that students from more privileged backgrounds take for granted. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), represented here today by its President Dr. Carol Geary Schneider, has highlighted disturbing inequities. First-generation college students take fewer courses in the humanities, social sciences, mathematics, and computer science than students from college-educated families.

First generation college students believe that they must major in something that sounds like a job. Students from college-educated families prepare for careers but understand the value of a strong liberal arts education. GSU will be a social justice university by providing opportunity for the highest level of university achievement to students underrepresented and underserved in higher education.

The Second Imperative:

GSU will be a student-centered university.

As we make future plans, we will always ask, “How will decisions affect students?” Are instructional designs fulfilling twenty-first century requirements? Do our calendar and class schedule address students’ needs? Are we doing everything possible to immerse students in the life of the university? Are we offering research partnerships and participation in stimulating new experiences?

We will put students first.

GSU will not be an ivory tower or a university on a hill. GSU will be a Public Square - open and accessible. But those who study in the Public Square have responsibilities, too. For example, in the spirit of our ongoing voter registration campaign, we are committed to infusing civic engagement into instruction and co-curricular activities university-wide.

Being student-centered does not imply lowering academic standards. It means the opposite. Being student-centered means respecting the student's right to the highest quality education. Students will be challenged - and guided - to achieve, often beyond their initial expectations. We must ensure that their diplomas are respected as evidence of their transformational educational experiences.

The Third Imperative:

GSU will be a model organization that asks, "Why not?" and listens.

Some of us remember that Robert Kennedy ended every stump speech by saying: "Some men see things as they are and ask, 'Why?' I dream of things as they never were and ask, 'Why not?'"

One year after Robert Kennedy's death, Governors State University was founded, encompassing that "Why not?" spirit - constructive, forward-looking, and problem-solving in our orientation. That is our heritage.

As you may know, since mid-September, we have been conducting a successful "Why Not?" campaign. This project empowers everyone to question - to ask why not do certain things differently, more effectively. Asking why not is a core value of the academy. It helps us to sort out necessary processes from bureaucracy and to distinguish traditions from habits. In a brief time, the "Why Not?" campaign has gathered hundreds of constructive suggestions for making GSU more transparent, more student-centered. We have already implemented some new ideas. We will continue to do so. The goal is transformative. We will be problem-solvers, not gatekeepers. In the Public Square, we are empowered and accountable, as we work for the public good.

The Fourth Imperative:

GSU will help unify the Chicago Southland, as well as Will, Kankakee, and the rest of Cook County.

GSU is the only public university in the south suburbs of Chicago and in all of Will and Kankakee Counties.

Many express hopes that this university will help unify the incredible diversity around us. Without a sense of community, growth is merely sprawl; development is exploitation. The Southland and Will and Kankakee Counties can be a beautiful mosaic or a hodgepodge. Education is the key. Great communities need great universities to be engines for economic, educational, and cultural health. GSU will be that engine and unifying force in ways more evident and more tangible than ever before. The university will be a Public Square for the region.

The Fifth Imperative:

GSU will apply expertise in research, scholarship, and creative activity to help solve real-world problems.

This priority transcends traditional definitions of applied research. The key is mutuality. The university listens to the community and works in partnership to define research issues. That research is then integrated into our teaching and community service missions. Our professional doctorates will be research-based and developed in partnership with the professions. Our first doctorate in physical therapy exemplifies that. Doctorates in occupational therapy and nursing practice will be approved soon. We have, in the works, a multi-disciplinary, multi-college doctorate in leadership, serving a variety of professions, including K-12 administrators.

Research, teaching, and community service will be integrated in the Public Square.

The Sixth Imperative:

GSU will be committed to a seamless educational experience, pre-school to graduate school (P-20), with special emphasis on partnerships between GSU and community colleges.

Education is a web of complex interconnections. K-12 institutions prepare students for higher education; universities prepare teachers for K-12 institutions. Everyone in education serves the public good by working on ways to cooperate up, down, and across the curriculum.

My first priority as GSU's president has been to meet with the presidents and provosts of our partner community colleges. My goal is to learn how GSU can improve the record of baccalaureate completion for students who begin their college careers at community colleges. Each community college, true to its unique location and mission, has excellent suggestions for working together.

I envision a Community College Compact.

GSU will continue to listen and learn from our community college colleagues. We intend to share facilities and faculty, to recruit jointly at high schools, and to coordinate advising. Our shared goal is to increase the number of community college transfers attaining a bachelor's degree, and beyond.

The Seventh Imperative:

GSU will provide a debt-free baccalaureate education for local community college transfer students at the poverty level.

We are working toward this goal now. We will reach it soon.

Nationally, the vast majority of minority students begin college careers in community college. Of those who start with the hope of completing a four-year degree, only 10 percent accomplish that goal within six years. If we extend the window indefinitely to fifteen years or more, the percentage rises only to 15 percent. Furthermore, a study entitled, *Access Denied*, by the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, reports another disturbing finding. Twenty percent of the highest achieving students, from families at the lowest income level, do not attend college at all. Think about that. Consider the implications for our nation in terms of untapped talent and social justice.

Fear of debt is a major obstacle to motivating poverty level, first-generation college students to complete college. When we say "financial aid," many students hear "loans," even though outright grants are available. Many do not complete the form, called FAFSA, which establishes eligibility for all public scholarship grants. Instead, they take on additional jobs and take fewer

courses. Often the extra pay decreases their eligibility for grants, and taking fewer courses makes them less likely to finish their degrees - ever. Talk about a Catch-22.

To address this problem, this August we initiated a special campaign. The intention is to supplement funds available to Illinois' poverty-level students from federal and state sources through an endowment, The GSU Promise. I am pleased to announce that my husband Mort and I have contributed \$10,000 to this endowment in honor of my predecessor, Dr. Stuart Fagan.

We aspired, by today, to raise the first \$100,000 for the endowment and for the necessary infrastructure to sustain it. We are proud to announce that the Chicago Community Trust has approved a grant of \$25,000 to support this leadership initiative. Thanks to Chicago Community Trust President and CEO, Terry Mazany, who is here today as a delegate from his alma mater, the University of Arizona. In addition, we have funds in hand and commitments for the first \$100,000 of the endowment. We have much more to do and many more students to serve. Please participate.