My great passion in higher education has been to explore how universities situate themselves in their communities. I believe that universities must be of their communities, not just landowners, and not just located in their communities. The American Democracy Project, of which WSU Vancouver is a member, talks about the role of universities as “stewards of place.”

Part of the excitement about being at WSU Vancouver is that this philosophy of engagement is part of the DNA of the campus. I think that’s true of many universities, particularly in the Pacific Northwest, but our campus was built with that in mind. With not even 25 years behind us, those who worked to bring our campus to this region are mostly still around, and they still have high expectations for community engagement and a return on investment. Partnerships are very important to our community and to our campus.

Let me update you a little on Washington State University Vancouver. Our enrollment is now just over 3,000 students, mostly undergraduate, but with master’s and doctoral education also on the campus. On average, our students are 26 years old. Ninety-five percent come from the region and 75 percent stay here. Two-thirds of our students transfer in, most of those from Lower Columbia College or Clark College. We share the research-intensive mission of WSU, so research expectations are high for our 150 faculty with Ph.D.s. Just under 10 percent of our student body, about 240 students, come from Cowlitz County.

A big part of WSU Vancouver’s future hinges on the outcome of an academic planning process we launched in the fall of 2013 and plan to wrap up in the fall of 2014. It may seem that academic planning is really an internal process, but I think it has everything to do with those of us in this room and in our community. We have certainly approached it as an internal and external process.

Here’s what we know:
- To meet the needs of our region and to provide more baccalaureate-educated graduates the workforce is demanding, we want to be approaching 6,000 students by the end of the decade.
• We need to be strategic in how we do that, matching student interest and employer demand.
• We have increased public-private partnerships over the last few years, but our future success will require public-private partnerships. The state will not necessarily be our primary partner in public higher education.

When you consider that 75 percent of our alumni remain in this region to live and work, the impact of WSU Vancouver on the local economy becomes evident. With over 11,000 WSU Vancouver alumni, our graduates are in many businesses and every local government. Here’s an example:

• This fall we launched the hospitality business management program in the College of Business. It was part of a short-term planning process.
• Hospitality business management was the most-requested business degree and second-most-requested degree that we were not offering.
• The hospitality industry has been recovering from the recession quickly and growing faster in this region than it is nationally.
• Leaders in the hospitality industry came to us and said they needed graduates with management and leadership skills and asked us to launch the program.
• By adding hospitality business management to our degree offerings, we are working to help solve a business problem in the community. We will make a difference almost immediately. Students in the program are required to perform 1,000 hours of paid internships. Our students will begin working in area businesses next semester.

An even more important example is nursing. Chris Bailey and his colleagues at LCC have been wonderful partners in bringing the Bachelor of Science in Nursing to Longview and the LCC campus. It has not exactly been a smooth road, but we have all of the approvals and resources in place, and we intend to start our first cohort in the fall semester. Students will have a combination of classes via video connection and face-to-face. This is a common model in WSU statewide.

Academic planning will also have an impact on our research agenda. The results of research activities at WSU Vancouver are far-reaching and positively impact our community and some of you directly.
• For instance, our mechanical engineering program is working to build sophisticated robots that work in warehouses, such as Amazon fulfillment centers.
• Engineering helped Christensen Shipyards expand its business to the wind-turbine blade fabrication market. New hybrid processes were developed in the advanced materials testing laboratory on campus.
• Our School of the Environment has a growing interest in hydrology, focused on environmental issues regarding water in the Pacific Northwest.

The research direction our campus takes will have just as profound an impact on the health of our communities as the programs we offer.

Let me go back to academic planning. From the beginning, this has been a community-based process. The goal of the academic planning project is to facilitate a highly collaborative process that will identify areas for expanding academic programs and research at WSU Vancouver. The results will prove useful in setting priorities for hiring, organization, capital and financial planning, fundraising, and marketing and outreach.

By “highly collaborative,” we mean to include all of our stakeholders—major employers and community leaders, and I know that some of you were interviewed as part of the process. We’ve connected with high school counselors in Kelso and Longview and college advisors at Lower Columbia College. Obviously, there’s also an internal component, in which faculty and staff provide input.

We’ve begun to draw some conclusions about what programs are most feasible, projected enrollments and proposed phased implementation of the programs. Things like human services, data science, computer and software engineering, and global logistics are high on the list. In the fall, we will start an enrollment-planning process that will help us achieve the size necessary to support our research agenda, meet the needs of our community and sustain the increasing number of partnerships we’re developing.

This planning process also sets the stage for our next milestone. Next week, WSU Vancouver will begin a yearlong celebration of our 25th anniversary. May 10—the day of our commencement this year—is the 25th anniversary of the day the state legislature passed the legislation that created our campus. On September 6, we will have a community celebration on campus, opening our doors to everyone in the region for the day. On November 7, we will have a 25th
anniversary celebration dinner to raise money for scholarships, our top fundraising priority. We understand the importance of college affordability and are dedicating our 25th anniversary to increasing access to students in our region.

Our partnerships in this region are critical to our success. I am grateful to our colleagues at LCC and the Longview and Kelso school districts for their commitment to working with me and my colleagues. I am also particularly grateful for the opportunity to spend a little time with you today to talk about the wonderful things happening on our campus.