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## UA3/9/4 Inaugural Address

Gary Ransdell

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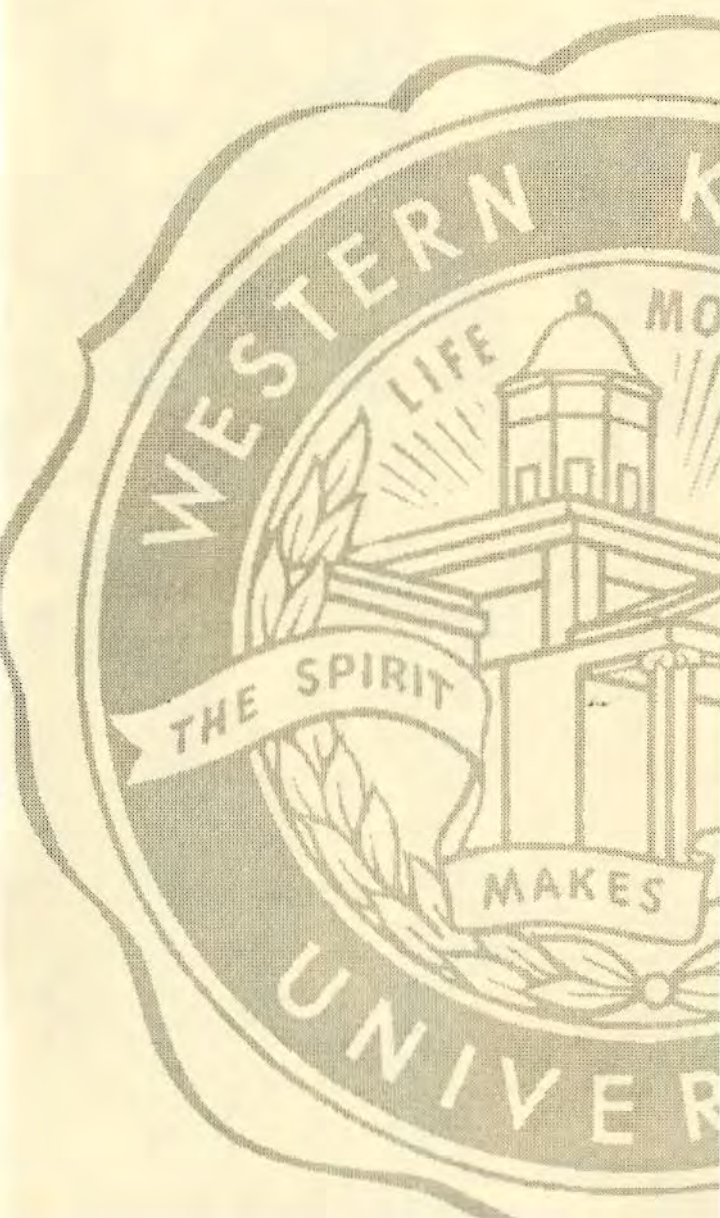
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# INAUGURAL ADDRESS

GARY A. RANDELL







## INAUGURAL ADDRESS

GARY A. RANSELL  
MAY 8, 1998

**T**hank you, Ms. Loafman. Thank you, to you as Chair of the Board of Regents and to your colleagues on the Board, for allowing me to gather here in this historic place on this beautiful day and be among friends, classmates, and colleagues—friends who guide our campus, community, state, and nation.

Governor Patton, Speaker Richards, Chairman Hardin, Judge Buchanon, Mayor Reneau, distinguished former presidents of Western, Western retirees, members of the faculty, colleagues in administration, members of the staff, alumni, and, most importantly, students—all who comprise the Western family and who have nurtured and cherished the Western experience. I humbly accept this opportunity to work with you to fulfill the dream of Henry Hardin Cherry, to be of optimum service to the Commonwealth and to achieve national prominence for Western.

I want to publicly thank Dr. Burch for her service during the months prior to my arrival and for her energetic leadership since my arrival. As Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, she has important academic tasks to lead. She knows her role as Chief Academic Officer. She also knows the faculty's role is to think for the university, the President's role is to speak for the university, and the Provost's role is to keep the faculty from speaking too much and the President from thinking too much! Thank you, Barbara.

Three of the four Western presidents who shaped



my values as an administrator join me on the stage today—men who led this great university for more than 40 years and from whose footsteps I can begin to step out, assured by their support and friendship, and that of thousands of other men and women who are themselves leaders in the Western family.

Many of you knew Kelly Thompson better than I, but many of you may not know the important role he played in instilling in me, first, an institutional spirit, second, the value of human relationships, third, the importance of a strong base of support that could accommodate any political party, and, fourth, the need to develop sound planning for the buildings and grounds, which define our campus.

Dero Downing was my president as a student, and in my first appointment as an employee of Western. No man loves this place more or better exemplifies the bond which exists in the Western family than Dr. Downing. Those values have been immensely reinforced in recent months as I have listened and continued to learn from this man.

I also served under John Minton when he was first Vice President and then President. I value him as a mentor. My educational and professional decisions were guided by Dr. Minton. He instilled in me an appreciation of the need for continuous improvement in my own capacities and in the institution I serve. He also demonstrated, by example, the kind of relationship which needs to exist between a student and a campus leader.

And Don Zacharias, the last President for whom I worked at Western. It is from Don Zacharias that I learned about the immense scope of higher education and the lessons to be learned from outstanding universities which have national and international impact. He also left a lasting impression on me regarding the importance of standing by your conviction to do the right thing, regardless of how it may be perceived by others.

If, in some way, I can influence others to the degree to which these individuals have influenced me, then my service in this role will indeed be meaningful.

And, Tom Meredith, your leadership at Western since 1988 has provided a firm foundation on which we can further build this university over the next several years. I am particularly appreciative of the emer-

gency warning system which you championed a couple of years ago. It performed admirably three weeks ago!

I must also thank Paul Cook, not only for his numerous roles over the years—from faculty member, to Budget Director, to Interim President—but also for his service to me and to Western this past legislative session.

Of most importance to me personally, however, are the three people for whom I live each waking moment and for whom I am most grateful: Julie, Patrick, and Matthew. If you would indulge me for just a moment, I would like for these centers of my universe to stand and allow me to thank them for the meaning they bring to my life.

For the balance of my lifetime, I will treasure this special day of symbolism and honor, this day which has brought me full circle—from the day in the fall of 1969 when my mother and my father brought me to Barnes-Campbell Hall—to this day which they had no way to envision, but for which their presence is as real as anyone's here.

**M**y thoughts today are rooted in a delicate balance between the past and the future. Few universities in this nation have as rich and as unique a history as this university. Two things are eminently important at this moment in time in the life of Western Kentucky University: knowing where we have been as a university family and in what direction we must travel. Our capacity to achieve this university's full potential will, in large measure, be determined by the degree to which we are able to define: those things which make Western distinctive and special in the hearts of all who have passed this colonnade, and those things which inhibit us and hold us back. Since my appointment on September 12, I have been consumed with measuring the past and in contemplating the future.

We are blessed with a rich history. Visionary leaders before us have blended geography, architecture, curriculum, and passion to create a physical presence, an intellectual strength, and a spirit which makes this university unique. Henry Hardin Cherry's dreams and virtues, Ed Diddle's red towel, and Kelly Thompson's buckeyes—things that define our character and that deserve our nurturing that are uniquely Western, like





the architecture which crowns this Hill, like the Kentucky Museum, or our public broadcasting capacities, or these grounds, or the symbol of the most recent generation of Western students: Big Red.

We have been fortunate to have rallied around leaders whose lives were dedicated to genuine meaning in the Western experience. Presidents Cherry and Garrett had the wisdom to expand the Western family and the Western curriculum by consummating marriages among four esteemed institutions, long before mergers and acquisitions were in vogue.

The State Normal School with its early roots in Glasgow is the forerunner of our College of Education, our historical strength as a leader in the preparation of teachers and educators throughout the Commonwealth.

Our Ogden College of Science, Technology, and Health is sustained through the Ogden College Foundation and in the legacy of Ogden College which became part of Western in 1928. This marriage in large measure set the standard for Western's continuing strength in the life and physical sciences.

Potter College for young ladies, which became part of Western in 1909, set a standard for excellence in the

Arts and Humanities which today is pervasive throughout our fine liberal arts and social sciences curricula.

The Bowling Green Business University, which for years produced leaders of business and captains of industry across this nation, has served as a pillar of strength for Western's Bowling Green College of Business Administration since its merger with Western in 1963.

Four independent institutions paving the way for four undergraduate colleges at Western Kentucky University. Unique in higher education? Yes. Special in the hearts and minds of those alumni who now embrace Western? You bet!

My pledge to all who helped shape our rich history is to work diligently with present and future faculty, staff, students, and constituents, to cherish and nurture those things which define our character and make us special.

I am equally dedicated, however, to change—to helping us identify habits, maybe even some traditions—which may limit our capacity to see as Henry Hardin Cherry told Kelly Thompson, "Beyond this Hill and the borders of this community and state."

Procedures and methods which for years have determined how this university conducts its business will have little to do with how we conduct our affairs in the future.

For the past six months, I have been meeting with the faculty, the administration, and the staff, in every academic and administrative department across this campus. I have met with constituency groups and community leaders in most of the major population centers throughout our primary service area in Kentucky, and I've met individually with benefactors and prospective benefactors who are in a position to shape Western's future.

Having met with nearly every employee on this campus and numerous constituents off campus, I now have a feel for our collective dreams and aspirations—as well as our frustrations and concerns, and we have a healthy dose of both.

I believe you share my ambition to transform Western into a university of national prominence. I believe you share my desire to ensure empowerment and authority among our faculty and staff, to create incentives for sound decisions, both financial and program-



matic, to replace complacency with authority, to encourage those with newfound authority to take the initiative.

**A**n English writer once wrote a story about a janitor at St. Peter's Church in London. The janitor was dismissed from his duties for being illiterate. Jobless, the man invested his meager savings in a tiny tobacco shop. Soon he prospered, bought another, expanded, ended up with a chain of tobacco stores and accumulated considerable wealth. One day the man's banker said, "You've done well for an illiterate. I wonder where you would be if you could read and write?" "Well," replied the man, "I'd still be the janitor at St. Peter's Church."

Embedded in that marvelous story are all the ingredients which I believe to be necessary for success in any endeavor. These include opportunity, challenge, adaptation to change, hard work, persistence, confidence, a sense of purpose, a sense of humor, discipline, faith, pride, and vision. These are requisite characteristics for success whether we are referring to individuals, universities, or nations. They will be essential to our journey at Western.

Our first priority in that journey is academic quality—strength of faculty, students, and curriculum. Ours is a commitment to outstanding teaching, relevant research, regional partnerships, and educating the whole student.

If our vision is to become the best comprehensive undergraduate university in the Commonwealth, and to be among the best in the nation, then that vision must be anchored today, as it was in the early years of Western, with exceptional faculty and exceptional students. Our faculty is, and has been, the bedrock of this Hill. If any college or university is to be great, its faculty must lead the way toward that greatness. This requires continued attention to the development of that faculty, making the difficult choices, and reaching for the balanced meritocracy of superior talent, intellect, and values.

Our faculty and our students must pursue what Thomas Jefferson called the most precious freedom: "The freedom to become unequal." He made the distinction, as we must, between equality of rights and equality of results. We must nurture, and even vault, our intellectual elite. To encourage the best minds is

to help our society achieve its best. Excellence has value in its implications for the greater good of society. One brilliant mind can conceive an idea, but it is the university which will ensure that society is served by its birth.

Faculty development must be complemented by the commitment to vigorous recruitment of students who are exceptional. Faculty and students together challenge each other's dreams and capacities. These commitments—faculty development and student recruitment—are not new to Western, but the vigor with which they are pursued must be rekindled.

Our second priority is enhancing the overall Western experience for everyone in the Western family, from the newest freshman to the oldest alumnus, from instructor to endowed Chair holder (and we will get a few of those), from campus resident to city and state leader. The Western experience will be shaped by curriculum, facilities, programming, attitude, spirit, and access.

Our transformation will occur through a renewal of our physical campus, through the building of an endowment, through the wisdom of our Governor and legislature who understand the priorities of higher education in the Commonwealth, through budgetary empowerment, through distribution of campus authority, through the nourishment of our historical values, and through our Extended Campus and Distance Learning capacities.

Our resolve to enhance the Western experience must, however, focus on the freshman class, those who access Western through its Main Campus. The collegiate career at Western should be the greatest learning experience of a student's life, with the best in scholarly and social and recreational opportunities. The exchange of human ideas and ideals and intellectual discourse between students and faculty must continue to be the hallmark of the Western experience.

Each freshman class must achieve increased academic quality as well as demographic, geographic, racial, international, and gender diversity. Our challenge is to increase our applicant pool, accept a consistent number of students from that larger pool, and develop the scholarship and financial aid capacity through public and private resources to allow us to recruit and matriculate the best among those which we accept.



Students within commuting distance of Glasgow, Elizabethtown, Owensboro, and other regional access points will experience Western through our collaborative efforts of the Community College and Tech Systems in their communities. The emergence of the Commonwealth Virtual University and Western's leadership role in its creation will ensure a combination of meaningful distance learning courses and degree programs offered in the convenience of one's home or office.

Strengthening our academic quality and enhancing the Western experience will require the best of all of us—not just our faculty, administration, and staff but everyone assembled here today. It will require four things of us: to be **Visionary**, to remain **Flexible to Change**, to be dedicated to the **Achievement of Measurable Goals**, and to **Be Diligent in the Pursuit of Needed Resources**.

Such requirements compel us to determine what each of us specifically can do to enhance this university and the intellectual, cultural, and social opportunities afforded our students. We must ensure boldness in our curriculum and quality in our environment. We must ensure an environment of giving and receiving, of thought and thinking, of exposure to other people, other lands, other cultures, and exposure to new ideas, and new outcomes.

Vision will be essential. We must consider the demands of the next generation. We can't predict what the world will be like when today's students retire in the year 2050, but we do know that this world will expect the Western graduate to be able to read and to analyze, to write well, to think critically, to probe, to be visionary, and to be technically competent. That's what Western does. That's what our faculty do. That's what our students should do.

We want to educate teachers and accountants and journalists and scientists—and we do that well. We also want the economists and the sociologists to understand the environment, to be well rounded, to be able to inspire others with the written and spoken word. The Western graduate must be a leader in corporate America, in education, or in public life.

The educational environment on this campus is rare. It is rooted in a strong liberal arts core and complemented by strengths in the sciences, yet we are well known for quality in our communications and

education disciplines, and for graduates who succeed in business. Ours is a challenge to ensure quality and relevancy in scholarship, to ensure the availability of scholarships, to ensure humanism and relevant application of technology, and to balance the mental, physical, and emotional development of our students.

There is an intensity with which we engage our students, the care with which faculty tend to this fundamental engagement, not to coddle, but to diligently challenge our students, to instill in them not only career options, but the range of options the degree to which we ensure value in our educational experience.

The evenings I spent in several of our residence halls in December and January assured me that we have students who are hungry to learn and eager to improve the quality of life at Western. These students are motivated, and they are going to press their educational expectations on this university. As we continue to improve the academic strength of our student body, we can expect those educational expectations to grow.

Our mission is to be nationally competitive, particularly at the undergraduate level, and to be of optimum service to the citizens of the Commonwealth. We want to be defined by the value we add to the credentials of those students who access us and to the collegiate experience which produces the kind of informed and dedicated citizen this country so desperately needs.

Governor Patton has described higher education as the economic engine which will drive the future of the Commonwealth. He is right. Our premium on teaching, our penchant for relevant research, will in-





deed propel this Commonwealth—especially those 27 counties which The Council on Postsecondary Education has specifically assigned to Western for extended campus service. The characterization of Western as a regional institution, however, is far more Germane to our past than to our future.

We must build into the fabric and financial planning of this institution a process which facilitates change. The intellectual market doesn't force change in an academic institution in the same way that the ordinary market does in the private sector. We must ourselves be dedicated to change in relevant and meaningful ways. It has been said that "Of all the forces acting on man, change is the most beneficial and the most difficult."

Next week, our Board of Regents will be asked to endorse a group of universities to which we will compare our academic and administrative performance on an ongoing basis. Through such comparisons, we will identify strengths and weaknesses and have cause to dedicate decisions and resources to building our strengths and correcting our weaknesses. By its July meeting, our Board will review the planning process in which this university has been engaged. For several years but in which we have become focused in recent months. Guided by a succinct vision and mission, the spirit of recent legislation in Frankfort and the realities of a Board-commissioned institutional review, we are drawing a road map by which our future progress will be measured.

By the establishment of a group of universities to which we can compare our policies, actions, and outcomes, we are establishing our parameters for change. We know we must act and perform in ways that allow us to compare favorably to institutions well recognized as strong comprehensive universities emphasizing the undergraduate experience.

Measuring our performance against an aspirational peer group is one way to help chart a transformational course. Another way is to incorporate the best and brightest minds among our constituency into our decision-making process. In this regard, I am pleased to introduce to you today 80 individuals who have agreed to serve on our new Board of Advisors. These individuals bring a wealth of experience, intellect, and insight to Western. They met yesterday for the first time, and they will meet annually for the next five

years for the purpose of assessing our progress and ensuring that we as a university community stay focused on the achievement of specific transformational goals.

Just as satisfied undergraduates attract potential undergraduates, successful alumni encourage success among alumni. By exposing this group to the campus, and by exposing the campus to this group, we further open our doors to Bowling Green, to the Commonwealth, and to the nation. Loyalty, ambition, and accomplishment will intrinsically link this Board of Advisors to Western's future. Will the members of the Board of Advisors please stand and be recognized.

This group, as of yesterday afternoon, has refined and endorsed five strategic goals to which we are collectively dedicated over the next five years. These goals are grouped into five strategic areas which broadly include: Student Learning and Development; Attracting and Retaining Kentucky's Most Talented Students; Attracting and Retaining Strong Faculty and Staff; Responding to Public Educational, Social, Cultural, and Economic Needs; and, Improving Institutional Effectiveness and Efficiency.

By June 30, 2003, Western Kentucky University will achieve national prominence in the University's stated Programs of Distinction as measured by national standards for those disciplines. We will increase the average ACT Composite score for new freshmen on the Main Campus to 22.5, increase the percentage of entering freshmen in the top 10 percent of their high school class from 15 percent to 25 percent, or maintain the average grade-point ratio for incoming freshmen on the Main Campus at 3.0 or above. We will increase by 25 percent accessibility through Community College and Extended Campus programs as measured by enrolled credit hours and awarding of Associate's, Bachelor's, and Master's Degrees. We will increase the retention rate of first-time, full-time freshmen at a rate of 2 percent a year for the next five years.

We will increase by 10 percent annually the number of students and faculty engaged in international learning experiences. We will increase the ethnic, gender, and racial diversity of the student, faculty, and staff population. All Western graduates will demonstrate appropriate use of information technology to function competitively in their respective disciplines. At least 50 percent of classrooms, including instruc-



tional laboratories, will be equipped as "smart" classrooms. Western will offer at least ten programs for degrees or certification through the Commonwealth Virtual University, and Western's distance learning enrollment will increase by 50 percent. We will increase by 20 percent the number of leadership development programs for both Western students and area high school students, increase by 20 percent the number of student life programs available on the weekends, increase student participation in service activities by 20 percent, and student participation in cultural activities by 25 percent, and we will increase by 50 percent the current average attendance for each revenue-producing athletic team.

We will identify and implement a new business information and Human Resource information system, which utilizes a paperless employment application, compensation and promotion process, and electronic storage of permanent financial and employee records.

We will achieve a level of \$18 million a year in Sponsored Programs. We will invest \$60 million in public and private assets for new facilities and capital improvements to existing facilities on the Main Campus and \$20 million for Extended Campus facilities. In this regard, we will also restore the campus to the park-like atmosphere and architectural integrity enjoyed by previous generations of Western students. The University's combined endowment will grow to \$50 million and will include at least ten new endowed faculty positions and 25 new endowed scholarships. Private gift support will grow to a level of \$10 million a year. The University's deferred gift inventory will reach a level of \$25 million, and we will achieve 20 percent participation among alumni in the University's Annual Fund.

I am extremely fortunate to be returning to Western at a time when things are possible. I personally want to commend Governor Paul Patton, Speaker Jody Richards, and Dr. Jim Ramsey for marshalling the philosophical and financial resources of this State for higher education and recognizing the bold realities of such an investment. Yes, it is encouraging that for the first time in over 20 years the state will build an academic building on the Western campus. It is encouraging that this state, for the first time in many years, is willing to devote money to deferred maintenance.

It is encouraging to watch Western respond to the state's mandate to identify academic programs of distinction and to produce its own resources in order to leverage resources made available by state government. It is encouraging that this legislature has stepped forward to recognize scholarly achievement among our college-bound student population through the creation of a Merit Scholarship program—because it's the right thing to do and because it will keep our best and brightest students on our campuses. I also know, however, that when the best students in our state find that financial barriers are reduced—and college-bound decisions are based on strength of faculty, quality of curriculum and character of campus—then Western can become the university of choice.

But let us not for one minute assume that state government can provide the means to propel Western to national prominence. Frankfort is making up for lost ground and is providing an impetus, and indeed some incentives for us to help ourselves, and as a Western family help ourselves we must.

The one common denominator among nationally-recognized institutions is the degree to which those affiliated with an institution take ownership in its prosperity. This university has spent 92 years cultivating a love affair with those who have lived and worked and grown up here. It is time for all generations in the Western family, young and old, and those of us in the middle, to step forward and cause Western to achieve its full potential. Let us all dedicate ourselves to permanency in this great place. Buildings will come and go, people will be replaced, curricula will change, methods of learning will adapt or evolve, but two things will ensure permanency of the Western Spirit: One, sustained knowledge of our heritage, and two, the building of our financial endowment. If each generation ensures that the next generation values our uniqueness and supports our teaching and learning capacity, then we can all be assured that the Western spirit will indeed exist forever.

There are a number of things that set the university apart from other segments of society. Shared governance and academic freedom are two, but the concept of endowment is rooted in higher education and is the one variable which will ensure that higher education—and Western—will exist in perpetuity. Let us dedicate ourselves to ensuring financial solvency for



future generations of Western students, faculty, staff and alumni. An appreciation of our heritage and a strong endowment are things that we must provide all future generations.

I've used the following example often in recent months because it is a dramatic way to illustrate the permanency which endowment affords our colleges and universities. Since the year 1500, 62 social institutions have existed without interruption in the Western World. Two are nations: England and Sweden. Two are churches: the Catholic and the Lutheran church; and 58 are colleges or universities. The constants among those universities of the ages are tradition and endowment. Those which survive have defined their character and established the financial capacity to sustain that character. An Endowed Chair or an Endowed Scholarship will fulfill its intended purpose for hundreds and even thousands, of years.

The extraordinary phenomenon we call education is uniquely defined at Western because we engage the entire campus and the entire Western family. The classroom, the laboratory, the athletic field, the dining hall, the library, the residence hall, the President's Home, the Downing Center, the Preston Center, Thompson Complex, the Kentucky Building, Diddle Arena, Cherry Hall, Grise Hall, the buildings which surround us, and buildings soon to go up in Elizabethtown and Glasgow, all become places where we enjoy ideas, learn, and get serious about having fun. It is time for all of those associated with Western—alumni, faculty, staff, students, parents, legislators, and friends—to renew our shared commitment to the values embodied in the spirit of Western—a spirit which transcends time and person.

**I**n closing, I share one additional thought about excellence. With the plethora of books and articles on the subject in recent years, an observation the Poet Hesoid (He-see-odd) made in 724 B.C. may capture it best: "Badness you can get easily, in quantity; the road is smooth and it lies close by. But in front of excellence, the immortal Gods have put sweat, and long and steep is the way to it, and rough at first, but when you come to the top, then it is easy, even though it is hard."

Our vision is bold. Our journey will not be easy, but together we will achieve. However hard it may be, we are a family attuned to its mission, proud of its





past, and prepared for the future.

You honor me and you honor my family in investing the Office of the President to my care, in this special place, on top of this Hill. I formally accept the Presidency of Western Kentucky University. I pledge to you and to the citizens of the Commonwealth of Kentucky my dedication to these responsibilities and my fidelity to the trust you have placed in me, and I ask you to join me in the transformation of Western to an institution for the ages.

Thank you.







*Prepared by the Office of the Registrar  
and the Office of University Relations*