

Welcome to the 2014-15 Academic Year.

It's good to see so many of you here today and hopefully more of you are joining us remotely through the streaming video link.

I'm glad to see that we've survived the restructuring. Now we begin the hard work to implement the new structures.

We have three new colleges starting this year, and there are going to be challenges in getting these colleges started. I want to extend a special "thank you" to the office staff in each of these colleges. These folks bore the brunt of the uncertainty last year, and they've worked very hard over the summer to make things ready for their new deans, associate deans, and faculty.

The College of Arts, Letters, and Sciences is located on the second floor of the Fine Arts building, where the AHSS dean's office had been located. For those of you in the Sciences, this building may take some getting used to. The first time I visited a colleague in that building, I missed a turn, and they had to send a search party to rescue me from the tribe of wild oboists who were attempting to improve my embouchure.

The College of Education and Health Professions is located on the fourth floor of Dickinson, across the hall from the Donaghey Scholars Program, in the former office of the Dean of Education.

The College of Social Sciences is located on the first floor of Ross Hall, where the College of Professional Studies dean's office was located. Don't get too comfortable with that location, though, as they're going to be moving in about a year.

This first semester of the new colleges is going to be a learning experience for faculty and staff. Each college represents a merger of several disparate cultures. Your new dean's office might not do things the way your old dean's office did things. Let's all be patient with each other. It won't be long before the new way of doing things feels like the way we've always done things. And right now, you have a chance to reinvent your processes to better serve your students.

This year is going to be challenging for all of us. Whereas Damocles had only one sword suspended above his head, we have two.

In the near term, enrollment and retention continue to trend in an undesirable direction. There are a few things that faculty can do to address these problems, and I will speak at Friday's Faculty Senate meeting on these issues. The “good news” in this situation is that

we're under sufficient pressure as an institution that meaningful changes that address these problems have a good chance of being implemented, and we have leadership in the Provost's office that is encouraging us to figure these things out.

The second sword might not actually be a threat but an opportunity.

We've all witnessed over the past couple of decades a transformation that has been brought about by the internet. The telecommunications industry felt this transformation first. Ecommerce brought us eBay and Amazon, but also demolished less efficient business models. Social media didn't exist until recently ... that's a new thing that this transformation has brought us.

Now it appears to be our turn.

If we view the changes facing us as a threat to be resisted and fought, it probably will be. On the other hand, if you see the opportunities afforded to improve our efficiency and effectiveness,

our ability to reach students that we did not have access to previously, this could be a chance to invent something new and valuable.

I say “chance to invent” because I don't believe the next thing in higher education has been conceived yet. All the pieces are present in front of us, just like all the technologies that gave rise to the smart phone had been around for at least a decade before someone put a processor, a touch screen, and a cellular module together with an easy to use operating system.

But, we are still exploring possibilities on how to combine all of these new tools into effective educational strategies. We don't really see the “iPhone” or “Facebook” of 21st century education ... yet.

Someone is going to get the mix right though, and pretty soon. We need to be prepared, because, when it comes, it's going to come rapidly. Weaker, less adaptable institutions are probably not going to survive. But, academia will survive and will be stronger. UALR is going to survive this too.

And actually, UALR is positioned pretty effectively right now.

We're under sufficient but not necessarily existential pressures to improve our efficiency. We have a student population that is more like the life-long learner that is the unreached marketplace for academia. And, we have long, broad experience with distance-learning that may give us a better sense of what might work and what might be ineffective.

All of the classic pressures that give rise to invention are present at UALR right now. So, who knows? We might be the institution that gets it right first.

And, just as you would have to take my iPhone from my cold, dead hands ... when we get to this future academic institution, I doubt that many of us will look backward with a great sense of longing any more than we look fondly backward to the days when Ma Bell told you what beige rotary dial phone you would install in your living room, 'cause that's where the wire was.

So, let's get started on this new academic year. If nothing else, it's going to be interesting, new, and different.

Now, I'm going to turn the podium over to the Provost for her

remarks.