Governor Douglas, Mayor Clavelle, Chair Pizzagalli, President Fogel, trustees, distinguished guests, faculty, staff and students of the University of Vermont. Firstly, let me add my welcome to those of others at this ceremony of convocation which celebrates and announces the beginning of another academic year at the University of Vermont. The University is in fine circumstances – excellent students, strong enrollments, outstanding faculty and a dedicated staff. This academic year begins with over 8,000 undergraduates and around 3,000 other matriculated students. We welcome some 50 or so new faculty colleagues, we celebrate the inauguration of our new Honors College, and its first students. As we move around the campus the sights and sounds of new construction are obvious heralding an exciting program of building and renovation previously unknown at UVM. This University is on the move, forging ahead on many fronts. Its research and scholarship gains national recognition on a weekly basis, over $125,000,000 in sponsored awards to our researchers and scholars, scholars whose excellence in their field is translated directly to excellence in the classroom for our students, retention and graduation rates which are well above the norm for institutions of our type, outstanding teachers who can open new doors and perspectives for our students, technology applied to enhance the learning experience and accessibility of information, more and more students engaged in undergraduate research, experiential learning, community partnerships and service learning. Student athletes who win both on the court and in the classroom. A University that is touching the lives of Vermonters through its education, by creating jobs and attracting business to the state, by providing data that informs policy debates, by research that
literally extends from lakeside to mountain top and embraces the breadth of human endeavor.

You can be justly proud of what you are achieving and I both thank and congratulate you. However, we cannot rest on our laurels. In inviting the community to this convocation the President and I posed questions that are critical to our strategic plan and which will shape the academic discussions of this year. Those questions emanate from our university vision statement.

To be the nation's premier small public research university, preeminent in liberal education and the study of the environment and health, and dedicated to providing students with extraordinary opportunities for learning and personal development and to enhancing the cultural, social, and economic life of Vermont, the nation and the world.

The President has focused on further enhancing the quality of the student experience at UVM, and I want to briefly speak to the other elements. These are:

- Excellence and innovation in liberal education,
- Making good on our aspirations to become the environmental university,
- determining our priorities for education and scholarship in health, life and the biomedical sciences
- using our role as Vermont’s only research institution to further enhance Vermont’s economy
Through the faculty senate, open forums and email lists and web pages we will engage the community in a discussion about the topics and use those to shape our future plans and directions. Let me briefly address each of these.

Many institutions pride themselves on excellence in liberal education and we are among them. However, what does that really mean in the 21st century? Many institutions, not least of them Harvard, have turned to examining their educational objectives, curriculum and testing it for its relevance and quality. Probably, the classic elements of a liberal education are still valid – oral and written communication, quantitative skills, critical thinking, literacy, etc. Note that while liberal education is classically described in terms of outcomes only rarely does higher education measure educational outcomes. Rather we circumscribe a set of courses that our students take, which when completed, constitute “liberal arts education”.

Today information, both accurate and inaccurate, is instantaneously available and transmitted, trade and markets are global, technology is changing our lives but major scientific and technical questions need civic, informed debate which is often lacking. Violence, hatred, despotism and religious bigotry seem as common as at any time in global history, and our understanding of others, their languages and cultures is often wanting. We are entering the last few decades of fossil fuels, a deteriorating environment, and we face a growing world population with great disparities of wealth and resources. Arguably the need for higher education and an educated and engaged citizenry has never been greater. We have an obligation to ensure that all of our students gain the breadth, the knowledge and the skills that
will equip them well for their futures and to provide civic, social, political and professional leadership. The responsibility for excellence in liberal arts education is not confined to the College of Arts and Sciences, although they will continue to play a major role, it has to be an expectation of all UVM graduates in all our undergraduate programs. While core curricula have their place and value, they will probably not ensure that a UVM education is distinctive and high-quality. Hence, the President’s challenge that writing and communication across the disciplines and experiential learning in its various forms should be hallmarks of every UVM student’s curriculum. This will hone our graduates’ communication skills, their critical thinking, enhance their problem-solving abilities and promote team working. These are the types of skills and experiences not only valued by prospective employers but desired by our students. This year, through the senate, we will engage the community in vigorous debate to ensure that we strengthen our distinctiveness and excellence in this area.

We are also seeking to take advantage of our location, culture and history to become the premier small environmental university. This poses a significant challenge and is a title to which many will aspire. Most will fail but I am confident that we can succeed – partly because of existing programs and potential, partly our location and sense of place, but also because of our size. The environmental university certainly must have excellence, strength and depth in its academic programs and research related to the environment but that will not be enough. Environment is not a discipline, or the preserve of a few, but a theme around which all parts of the university can coalesce and contribute. The economists, the politicians, the engineers, the artists and humanists, the health professionals, the business students, all have their
place alongside the ecologists and environmental scientists. It should touch all our students programs but in different ways depending upon their interests and studies. Furthermore, study of the environment is essentially cross-disciplinary and to be successful we will have to develop programs that eliminate or permeate the boundaries of colleges and schools, departments and programs. This has typically been a challenge to higher education with its discipline structures and vertical hierarchies and will require more cross-disciplinary initiatives such as the Gund Institute. Success as the environmental university is also about how the university operates, how we build, how we manage our lands, how we use energy, our parking and transportation operations and so on. Dean Don DeHayes and I have developed a white paper on “becoming the environmental university” which is available on my web page for your review. My hope is that this will provide a starting point for a campus dialog about the steps needed for UVM to truly become the environmental university.

UVM has a proud history of excellence and accomplishment in the health and biomedical sciences. An outstanding medical school with an exciting new integrated curriculum, a research endeavor that was awarded over $70 million last year, and record applications in nursing, an excellent hospital partner forming an academic health center critical for Vermonter’s health and economy. Deans Evans and Rambur are preparing a paper to form the basis for an institution-wide discussion about the meaning of excellence in health for our undergraduate and graduate programs, for our research and scholarship, for institutional investments. Once again, while health is the focus for two of our academic units (Medicine and Nursing and Health Sciences) this is also a broader conversation in which many have something
to offer - health care policy, social work, psychology, nutrition, health care business and management, public health, environmental health are among the areas for us to be seeking shared initiatives and opportunities.

We have excellence in the life sciences, we have more biologists among our faculty than any other discipline and their expertise truly ranges from the molecular to the ecosystem level. We have made significant steps in strengthening and integrating our undergraduate programs in biological sciences. We are committed to investing in new life and biomedical science facilities both on campus and at Colchester, and addressing other facility challenges. As we seek, over the next few years, to expand graduate enrollments by approximately 60% and strengthen our research enterprise, we see substantial opportunities particularly in intersections between the life sciences, physical sciences and engineering – nanotechnology, bioengineering, imaging, sensors, materials science and computational biology are obvious examples. This year Vice President Carr will be actively engaging the community around research infrastructure and organizational issues and planning the growth of our graduate programs.

Supporting Vermont as its Research University.

As I mentioned earlier, it is difficult to overestimate the impact that the University of Vermont has on the economic and social well-being of Vermont. UVM educates the states’ health professionals, teachers, social workers, its politicians, its business people, its agriculturalists, its engineers and so on. Of our 85,000 living alumni, 25,000 are in Vermont. We are a $435,000,000 business with over 3,000 employees. We attract thousands of people and their families to this state to study and many stay and establish
businesses, pay taxes and create wealth. Vermont's economic future requires a vibrant University. Under President Fogel’s leadership we have recommitted ourselves to being an economic engine for the state. With federal and state support we have partnered to establish the Vermont Center for Emerging Technologies to help link university intellectual expertise to new business opportunities. We are seeing substantial growth in our patent filing and licenses and committed to using this to underpin our research capacity and create jobs in Vermont. Our commitment to our land-grant heritage remains strong despite some financial challenges. We are investing heavily in strengthening our engineering programs, developing an advanced computing capacity that is critical not only to the University but to Vermont as a whole.

However, we face challenges. Even when the President’s growth model is completed in 2013, we will still be a very small research university. That means we have to be very smart and analytical about investing our limited resources. We must carefully analyze opportunities in the context of our mission, our potential to be excellent, and our connection to the economic well-being of Vermont. This year we will be actively engaging the faculty in studies and dialog about the future size and shape of our research portfolio, the areas for growth of our graduate programs. A starting point is provided in the paper: *A View of Future Research Growth and Activity* written by Vice President Carr and myself. This is in the BOT materials for our Academic and Student Programs Committee and will also be posted on the web page.
So in closing, let me speak to our new and returning students. Never forget that you’re among the most privileged and advantaged on the planet to have this opportunity. For most people, higher education is a dream that will never become a reality. I urge you to work hard, get engaged, certainly enjoy and immerse yourselves in a stage in your lives which is wonderful and unique, but be safe, respect yourself and your fellow students and the community, ask questions, challenge yourself and others, and seek to make a difference - you will be amply rewarded if you do so. But never forget you are privileged and with that comes the responsibility not to waste that opportunity.

To my faculty and staff colleagues, thank you for your past efforts in creating this very special place and its achievement. Have a wonderful and productive year. Thank you.