Today, ten months after arriving in River Falls, I humbly and enthusiastically accept the mantle of responsibility that accompanies this office and role of chancellor.

We are here together today to celebrate—to celebrate the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. We are here to honor the past; embrace the present; imagine and then build the future.

Honor the Past

We can be bold and optimistic as we meet the challenges of change thanks to the broad shoulders of our distinguished and talented predecessors who are our foundation. We honor them today.

We honor the past in many ways including recognizing the seminal accomplishments of three of my distinguished predecessors here—George Field, Gary Thibodeau and Virgil Nylander. And we dearly remember and honor Ann Lydecker and her devotion to UW-River Falls.

We are here at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls where quality education and the pursuit of knowledge have been the resonant, personal, and institutional focus since 1874. For 132 years, teaching and learning have been the universal language connecting thousands of faculty, staff and students.

The legacy of the normal school and its relation to the future of the territories and states they served endures here at River Falls. Why was educating teachers one of the first collaborative, civic actions taken by those first settlers, those emerging societies? They needed teachers, and it was well understood that teachers and education were critical actors in the shaping of societies via the knowledge and skills they impart and the values they profess and model. For it is those values and those caretakers who helped shape our actions, our communities, and our world.

We are here
Embracing the Present

Today, UW-River Falls is a proud member of an internationally respected and lauded teaching and learning system, the University of Wisconsin. As President
Reilly has articulated today and for many audiences, the UW System and each of its institutions, enthusiastically accept their responsibility to be the state’s premier developer of people and the potential that lies within each person. Collectively, the institutions of the UW System are a dynamic engine for development as our graduates create new economic opportunities for themselves and others, and fuel the future.

And we are equally charged with community enrichment, with building our communities via the cadre of engaged citizens who understand and accept public service as an integral part of their personal mission. These are horizons and goals that we at UW-River Falls embrace with great passion and commitment, for they are tangible reflections of our mission and our history. They are part of the answer to the query of why we show up every day, semester, year and for many, a lifetime.

We are here to
Imagine and Build the Future

We are gathered here in the opening moments of what will be the first true global century—a time of possibility for the most far-reaching, extensive contact among people on the planet in human history; an age when what we know and how we learn will be more important than where we live; an era, unprecedented in human history, when cross cultural collaboration may be the difference between economic success and failure.

Those connections will be vital to global political and human relations where globe-spanning challenges defy narrow and boilerplate solutions, and problems do not respect national borders. Each day we, our institutions, and society move deeper into the global century. Are we ready? How do we prepare ourselves, our students, and our society for success in this time, unlike no other?

We are here on Wisconsin’s western frontier in one of the most dynamic parts of the region with some of the country’s fastest growing counties. We are here where urban meets rural. How we tend to this historic transition may serve as a relevant model for rational, sustainable development here, in the USA and for other nations facing similar challenges. Led by our College of Agriculture, Food and Environmental Sciences in collaboration with its fellow colleges, UW-River Falls is uniquely positioned to respond to the challenges inherent in this change. We understand that we are stewards of this place and planners of our future.

We are here focused on Institutional Intentionality and the search for purpose, value and meaning. We create the world in which we work and fulfill our calling. It is a collaborative journey, powered by exceptional individual and group action gathered around common core values, mission, and vision.
Our focused core values, mission and vision have emerged from extensive campus and community contacts and our Vision and Values survey conducted last Fall. They will guide us through the next chapter of this historic institution’s development.

Those values include integrity, academic excellence, inclusiveness, community and continuous improvement.

Fundamentally, we maintain that the kind of society and institution we want is reflected in the values we embrace and use as guideposts in our lives and in our work.

By what we say, what we do, what we think, what we value, what we embrace and what we reject, we shape and define our lives and our communities.

The survey confirmed that our students come to us searching for information and inspiration, facts and insights, analysis and direction. They are looking for their unique pathway to a job, a career and a meaningful life. They are seekers, and so are we.

What we offer them is challenge and opportunity, the promise of possibilities intertwined with their, and our, capacities for discipline, focus and persistence.

Our mission is clear: We are here to help students learn so that they are successful as productive, creative, ethical and engaged citizens and leaders with an informed global perspective.

We are intentional in inviting our students to a life of engagement and tolerance, of service and global literacy, of continually developing themselves both as citizens and leaders. We join with them in striving for academic excellence through the consistent development of their potential as critical thinkers, effective communicators and committed life-long learners, and servant leaders.

This personalized, integrated education is rooted in relationships; in people; in connections of expert, committed, caring faculty and staff, and curious, motivated, persistent students. In this chemistry lies the genius of education’s success. This connection—this bond of teaching and learning—is a true passion, an endemic life force for us at River Falls, and it has been for over 130 years.

We invite our students to a life of engagement. To foster our students’ engagement, we invite them to explore critical issues and give them models to help them overcome what Robert Jay Lifton identifies as the “broken connection” between their values and their actions, between the world they inherit and the
one that they will pass on. One of the programs so dedicated is the American Democracy Project, a three-year-old national movement now enlisting over 200 institutions, Campus Compact and The New York Times, among other partners. Through this program and many others, we are dedicated to educating engaged citizens.

In the aftermath of the Katrina tragedy, each of us searched for our way to respond. UW-River Falls’ students, staff and faculty found their voice through one another, and through connecting immediately with staff and students at the University of Southern Mississippi. Collecting monies and goods for basic student needs when almost all was lost for their USM counterparts in the storms, the River Falls campus community decided to adopt a long-term perspective on the needs of the people of America’s Gulf Coast and, in doing so, gave fresh meaning to service, learning and leadership.

Among the results has been students traveling to the Gulf Coast over January Term and Spring Break to learn how to hang sheet rock, build roofs, clean up after nature’s fury, work together, and with people who they did not know and with some who had never met a college student, and certainly not any from this far north. Our River Falls team was moved by the spirit of service that brought the non-profit volunteers from around the nation to tend to this national wound. They were inspired. And they were inspiring to those they met in Mississippi, to their River Falls classmates when they returned, and to one another and to us. The unsolicited notes from people on the Gulf, those simple genuine expressions of profound gratitude, were more reward than they ever imagined. The spirit and power of service, of engagement and of leadership by example, by ”modeling the way,” has had a home here for many years. The UW-River Falls “Destination Corps” acted in that tradition, and frankly, raised the bar of service and engagement for all of us.

In an appearance before the US Congress to receive the Medal of Freedom, former Czech Republic President Vaclav Havel articulated our mission: “We are not alone, nor are we for ourselves alone.” That spirit is thriving here.

Over 6,000 individualized dreams will pass through our doors each semester, some fully formed, but most incomplete, masked, or subconscious. Each will be the manifestation of the sometimes vocalized, but often muted aspirations of an individual, family, tribe, community, state or country.

We are here for them. We become their mentors regardless of our title or responsibility, each of us in our own way.

But, when we do it together, when we do it collaboratively, when we do it guided by common core values, mission, and vision, when we do it with expertise,
experience, compassion and discipline, we together create that most wondrous of outcomes—a unique learning and living environment for our students and ourselves.

When we do it for the right reasons we create a formidable instrument of personal and societal change. We are a force for learning, leadership, and service for a community that stretches from River Falls, the St. Croix Valley, Wisconsin and around the globe. This is an expression of the Wisconsin Idea in the global century.

Some of the tools to advance learning, engagement, and leadership in a global perspective include undergraduate research, interdisciplinary learning, service learning, internships here and abroad, international study opportunities and sustained leadership development including the imminent launch of the Chancellor’s Leadership Class.

Undergraduate research is a particularly fruitful and encouraging approach to learning, and UW-River Falls has been among the institutions integrating these opportunities into the curriculum. CUR in their report last year labeled undergraduate research as “the pedagogy for the 21st century” and an essential mission for virtually all institutions. The central premise of undergraduate research is the formation of the collaborative enterprise between students and faculty. We are prepared to expand our existing serious commitment, and to join with our UW institution partners in exploring and sustaining this animated and potent approach to knowing and learning.

We are here to internationalize our education and our perspectives, to cultivate a world view and to pursue global literacy as an institutional and societal objective. We intend to expand our goal to “bring the world to River Falls and to take River Falls to the world.” To strive for less would neither fulfill our core values nor effectively prepare our students.

Today every country is scrambling to find its place in the “flattened world” popularly described by Thomas Friedman. “Every country thinks that it is behind. Innovation is often a synthesis of art and science and the best innovators often combine the two.” Every country is scurrying to upgrade its human talent base. John Hagel and John Brown remind us that “human talent is the only sustainable edge.” It is science and math interwoven with art, literature, music and the humanities, the integrated curriculum offered with expertise, professionalism and passion at UW-River Falls and our sister UW institutions, that best prepare students for international challenges yet unimagined. Investing in our people and their ability to create and to thrive in an integrated global environment will not only lead to productive and fulfilling lives, but also infuse our societies with citizens and leaders who understand opportunity and responsibility.
Our frame of reference will be global. Pierre Teihard de Chardin counseled a century ago when countries were king and no one could imagine otherwise that “The Age of Nations is passed; if we are not to perish, we must set aside our ancient prejudices, and build the earth.” From UW-River Falls’ continuing co-sponsorship of the Wisconsin in Scotland program and the International Traveling Classroom and Semester Abroad Europe to the numerous study tours offered by faculty, River Falls is assisting students in the essential process of developing an informed perspective, a global world view. Exciting possibilities with existing and new international institutional partners virtually on every continent will ensure that our students and faculty will continue to rediscover our world, and bring their new-found insight home, just as international students and faculty discover River Falls to be their home away from home.

We are here to create and sustain an environment of mutual respect, professional behavior, and an appreciation of individual differences and a celebration of the rich mosaic of human diversity in all its styles, shapes, contours and hues. We call it inclusiveness, and it has meaning to the extent that the value becomes custom/habit, an integral part of our lives, our relationships, and our world. As Lech Walesa once stated about the formidable quest for global peace and harmony, “There is work to do.” We join with our UW partners in modeling the way so that all may “live in larger freedom.”

We have an enduring and increasing commitment to our community, be it campus, town, state, country or world. We are stewards of this place and these precious resources—human, environmental, local and global. This reality and responsibility is evident to all of us as we embrace the beauty of River Falls, the Kinni, the St Croix Valley and our state. We must and will be an active partner in exploring, evaluating, and fostering sustainable development.

Since last July we have focused on institutional intentionality. What are we doing here?

We believe that we are here to:
Prepare, mentor, challenge, inspire, collaborate, teach, inquire, debate, nurture people and curiosity, critique, create, applaud, serve, and to “model the way” among other duties. We are here to be cultivators of the economy through our institution and our graduates. We are the generators of economic development, and political, cultural, and social as well.

We are here to encourage our students and one another, and our communities and state, to aspire to greatness and to set the pathway to accomplish the goal.
We are here to ensure an optimum quality of life by shaping citizens and leaders, communities and societies—one student, one class and one generation after another.

We are here to offer our students what, for centuries, persistent cultures and peoples implicitly have understood to be their inherited duty. We all learn it, each in our own way. I learned it from family, and in the verdant hills of eastern Oklahoma from the Cherokee Nation, and from the peoples of the Middle East and beyond, and from role models and mentors that enriched my life, some of whom are here in this arena.

And it is alive and thriving here on the state’s vibrant western frontier, at our university, in River Falls.

And as has happened since the last quarter of the nineteenth century here in River Falls, we are outfitting our graduates with “Roots and Wings.”

These anchors and aspirations have value across time and cultures. They are our principles linked to possibilities, traditions and dreams. They connect an enduring sense of place, of community, of being home, with firm confidence in the quality of our students’ preparation, their education to power their growth and success. They intertwine their set of skills, insights and ethics, with their aspirations, opportunities and their responsibility to the community.

These Roots and Wings are cultivated in public education at River Falls.

Our students are the living testimony to the efficacy and importance of public education. We believe in serving the public good as well as securing their private gain. Public service, civic engagement, service learning, inclusiveness, leadership development and global awareness have been and will be an integral part of their curriculum and this culture. Their experience here is a preview of lifelong habits that will build social capital, create and sustain vibrant communities, and offer the antidote to Robert Putnam’s concern that we are “bowling alone,” namely, that we care for, and look after, only ourselves.

When we do this right, lives change, opportunities proliferate and society emerges vibrant and creative. And these values endure through time in many ways including via the achievements of our students.

In this way we will create the keys to our future, responding to the challenge of global change with confidence, pursuing excellence and creating and replenishing the reservoir of talented and engaged citizens ready and able to lead the St. Croix Valley and Wisconsin deep into the global century, a time when possibilities and problems will leap borders as distance and time continue to
We are educating citizens and leaders—inspiring, mentoring and sculpting the next generation of researchers, entrepreneurs, civic leaders, diplomats, global thinkers and problem solvers, and good neighbors. We are creating the next Wisconsin and far beyond and are a vital ingredient in society’s promise to build a brighter future. We are here creating the roots and wings for the global century.

Fifty years from now very, very few, if any of us, will be here to ask the question: Who were those guys, those women and men who laid the bold, fresh foundations for the institution, the system and the state? Why did they ask those questions? Why did they make those decisions? What motivated them to plan and execute as they did?

It will be known that our intention was rooted in our values as expressed in our mission and vision, and brought to life by what we did each day, and that we had our eyes on the prize.

And it is that:
We will be the learning nucleus of the St. Croix Valley. We will act in close collaboration with communities, institutions and private enterprise to create a dynamic, knowledge-based economy, sustainable communities and environment, and an irresistibly attractive quality of life. Our efforts will be firmly rooted in unbounded inquiry and a cultivated sense of civility and creative expression. We will be a highly accessible gateway to explore the full range of human potential. We will inspire and educate citizens and leaders who, guided by our core values, will purposefully and ethically serve society. We will link our students and our communities to global opportunities and collaborative relationships in River Falls, the St. Croix Valley, in Wisconsin and beyond. We will be the life-long learning partner for all those who seek to discover their own potential and the richness and complexity of our multi-faceted world.

And through the pursuit of this vision we are challenging each other to step up, reaffirming a culture of learning and leading, of collaboration and caring, of authenticity and excellence.

Our aspiration is to live what we teach, to master talking and walking, and to model the way for those who are with us now and those we will not see and who will not know our names.

In this way we believe that we are deepening the roots and sprouting the wings of those who will surely follow us in this global century. In this way we follow and honor those who gave us our Roots and Wings.
As one insightful River Falls resident wrote in 1875 shortly after the Normal School was founded. “Generations upon generations yet to tread these fertile plains will reap the rich harvest of the works begun here today.”

We have the power to choose, to continue the journey that may have brought us to this work in the first place. In purposefully walking this path, UW-River Falls accepts the duty implied in our River Falls forefather’s remarks and also enshrined for more than 2000 years in the Hebrew Sayings of the Fathers:

“We are not required to finish the work; nor are we at liberty to neglect it.”

I thank you for this opportunity to join with you in blazing UW and River Falls’ path into the global century via the values we live and the students we serve.