Good afternoon and let me add my welcome to all of you.

Whether you are a rookie or a veteran, this time of year is very special for all of us. As we begin another school year at this important place, I’d like to share with you some thoughts on the coming school year.

First, congratulations to PAUL FAHEY on receiving the Jack Earl Award. Paul, you are a fitting addition to the list of Earl Award winners and a shining example of teaching as a vocation. Thank you for all you do for our students and our University.

Congratulations as well to MIKE CANN for his distinguished career in teaching and promoting green chemistry. You have put The University of Scranton on the map and because of your work that map is a bit greener and more sustainable than it might have been. Thank you.

Next, to all the new faculty and staff members, thank you for joining us. You have made a wise decision to join this University. I look forward to working with you in your new roles.

You have joined us at a special time in the life of the University. Earlier this month, we started a yearlong celebration of the 125th anniversary of our founding. On August 12, 1888, Bishop William O’Hara, the first Bishop of Scranton, blessed a single cornerstone for his future college which was then called St. Thomas College and now The University of Scranton. This singular “act of faith,” as Frank Homer calls it, serves as a beacon for us today. Bishop O’Hara’s bold vision seemed unimaginable in 1888 but 125 years later it motivates us to build on the legacy of those who have come before us. We look back on our founding with gratitude for Bishop O’Hara’s dream and look forward to our University’s bright future to which we all will contribute. In that vein, we will celebrate throughout the academic year with a diverse schedule of events. Next week, we will host our “campus kickoff” of the 125th anniversary with the Mass of the Holy Spirit. Bishop Joseph Bambera, the tenth Bishop of Scranton, will serve as the principal celebrant and lunch will be served on the Dionne Green. Please join us for this important event in the life of our University.

President Obama’s visit to the Electric City last week to discuss the future of higher education in America provides us the opportunity to pause and to situate our work in that great enterprise. Before I take a few moments to comment on this matter, allow me publically to thank President Obama and Vice-President Biden for choosing Friday and not Saturday of move-in weekend to visit town. Just imagine a Saturday visit . . .
In anticipation of President Obama’s visit, I released the following statement:

We appreciate President Obama choosing Northeastern Pennsylvania to address the nation especially given the vital role that higher education plays in the regional economy. He offers sweeping proposals that must be studied with care to understand the potential positive or negative affect on our students and our University.

We support efforts to empower students and families to make informed decisions about college. Such efforts need to be clear, coordinated and fair. We also share with the President a deep concern for access to higher education and, as a school recognized for quality and value, are committed to remaining an affordable choice in Catholic and Jesuit higher education.

While we excel at career preparation, we are not defined by it. We are committed to the broader purpose of helping our students to become the people they were created to be, which transcends the important work we do to prepare them for careers or advanced study.

As we begin a new school year by welcoming the Class of 2017, and confronting the new realities of American higher education, I am reminded of what Peter Hans Kolvenbach, former superior general of the Jesuit order, famously expressed in October 2000: “The real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who[m] our students become.” At The University of Scranton, we must not lose this focus. At our University we aspire to “provide a superior, transformational learning experience, preparing students who, in the words of Jesuit founder St. Ignatius Loyola, will ‘set the world on fire.’” This is how our graduates will do whatever they choose to do; this is the value-added of a Scranton education.

Of course, we can’t bury our heads in the sand. This coming year will be one of serious challenges, in many ways symbolized by President Obama’s visit. His remarks last week confirm the seriousness of the larger national debate over the cost and purpose of higher education. Although we often see ourselves as unique and isolated from such challenges, the reality driven home by the President’s visit and our smaller entering class is that we are not. This is important for us because:

- First, the general economic picture has already limited our ability to raise tuition, and will likely limit us even further;
- Second, the national debate and the President’s recommendations for making higher education more affordable, will require of us a variety of responses, most intrusively with regard to reporting requirements and financial aid tracking; and
- Third, for a variety of factors that we are still analyzing to understand, we face a smaller class this year than we had expected. While this smaller class need not dramatically affect this year’s budget, it will limit our flexibility, and may impose actual financial limits on our budgets for the next three years.

Given the quality and creativity of our institution, these challenges, while real and serious, need not be understood as negative. Rather, they present an opportunity to re-examine closely our mission and the presumptions and practices with which we approach that mission. We will
need to be clear on what it means to be a Catholic and Jesuit master’s university in these uncertain times. To that end, we must carefully examine the steps and practices we should take as an institution to support and improve our operation, and to implement our conclusions.

At a practical level, how might we as faculty, staff and administrators coordinate our efforts to do better what we already do well? Allow me a comment on process, followed by a substantive proposal. In my January 2013 “State of the University” address, I proposed that faculty, staff, and administrative leaders convene to discuss how to advance the notion of “shared governance” on campus. I remain convinced that we need to govern well together so that new initiatives can succeed. To that end, I plan to meet with each senate this fall to hear its concerns and to discuss my plans for the institution. (Rebecca Mikesell, President of the Faculty Senate, has already invited me to meet with the faculty.) I hope to coordinate these senate visits with my Schemel Forum address on Jesuit education in the 21st century scheduled for Thursday, November 14 at 5:30 pm.

To attract and retain the student of the future The University of Scranton needs to strengthen its value proposition. To that end, three concurrent strategic conversations—on enrollment management, financial planning, and new academic programs—are already in progress on campus. To answer the question how to attract and retain future students requires us to identify ways in which curricular development, including new programs and student learning outcomes assessment, can be pursued to enhance the attractiveness of a Scranton education and to reinforce how our institutional learning outcomes advance the principles of Jesuit education. Again, I will encourage and work with the Faculty Senate on curricular development. And let’s not forget the money question: How will the University pay to enroll and then educate these students?

As I’ve said before: In the crowded marketplace of American higher education, we need to stake our claim on what we do well, and how we plan to improve.

Before we adjourn to eat and drink, I want again to congratulate PAUL and MIKE. Your recognition today is well deserved and you serve as an example to us all here at the University. Also, let me celebrate those who made this event possible: Peggy Burke and the Provost’s Office staff for organizing everything; members of the physical plant who continue to amaze; and our catering folks who always feed us so well.

Thank you all for everything that you do here at our University.

God bless you and God bless The University of Scranton.