Greetings!

Fall semester is traditionally known for generating a lot of excitement and anticipation as students settle into challenging school activities, and faculty look forward to infusing new ideas and innovations in their course preparation.

Our university's student leadership opportunities and notable service-learning initiatives, along with collaborative scholarly relations that link a diversity of learners with faculty and staff mentors, make the WSU community a special place for all to grow and learn.

The variety of diversity and inclusiveness programs across campus serve as an inspiring reminder that equal opportunity, access and value for human differences must serve as a fundamental tenet as we find new ways to cultivate a climate of respect.

To that end, the Office of Diversity, the university's administrative committee on diversity and the program planning committee invite you to the upcoming 9th Annual Diversity Conference on Oct. 4-5.

Our theme, "Diversity, Democracy & Citizenship," is designed to explore and challenge the many complexities of democracy that make our nation and our Constitution great and continuing "works in progress."

A UNESCO report titled "Education for the 21st Century" says, "Education throughout life is based on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be."

I believe this fall's conference program has the elements of each pillar. We invite you, as part of our campus community, to be a part of this experience.

- Forrest Crawford, assistant to the president for institutional diversity

DeForest Soaries:
The Politics of Voting

Rev. Dr. DeForest B. Soaries was the first chairman of the Election Assistance Commission, created by Congress with the 2002 Help America Vote Act as the first federal body to oversee voting issues. Soaries also is senior pastor of the 7,000-member First Baptist Church of Lincoln Gardens in Somerset, N.J., and formerly served as New Jersey's Secretary of State.

Soaries will be the keynote speaker at Weber State University's 9th Annual Diversity Conference, "Diversity, Democracy & Citizenship."

In this transcript of the PBS program NOW (pbs.org/now) from September 2006, David Brancaccio reported about ongoing issues with voting in the United States and the work being done to address them. He spoke with Soaries and Paul DeGregorio, who was EAC chairman before Soaries' departure in 2004 until early 2007.

Brancaccio: So you come to this job full of optimism. If memory serves, things got off to a slow start over there.

Soaries: To say that it got off to a slow start is really to compliment the process. This was a tragedy. Right after we were confirmed, the four of us discovered that there was no operating budget for the commission itself.

There were no offices. There were no telephones. I literally went to Washington on the first Monday of January and had no place to report for work.

Brancaccio: I asked Soaries a question that was brought up by every state election official we spoke to—why didn't his federal commission order up real research it could share with the states before requiring them to buy all this new equipment?

Soaries: We had zero dollars for research years one of the EAC. What I wanted was enough money and we suspected that $10 million would do it—to create a prototype. We have prototypes for toasters. We have prototypes for microwaves. Electronic equipment in this country is assumed to have passed the muster of some standard. And it has except in the area of voting.

Brancaccio: So things got very frustrating for you on that commission?

Soaries: I hung in there until after the election. And right after the election I notified the White House that I was leaving. I've got 16-year-old sons. And I'd rather spend time with them at their basketball games than to work in Washington with a Congress and a White House that is not really committed to this task which I thought was fundamental to our democracy.

Brancaccio: Paul DeGregorio is the current Chairperson of the Election Assistance Commission and served along side Soaries for a time. DeGregorio acknowledges the commission got off to a slow start but says there has been progress and that the new technology offers unprecedented advantages.

DeGregorio: I have visited eight states this year to observe primary elections and I've seen in many cases—disabled voters, voting for the very first time, in private, and secretly. And one woman told me it was the first time in her life that her husband didn't know how she was casting her ballot.
Student Government: An ‘Educational Laboratory’

In the spring of 2006, Christopher Bentley was a relatively new student at WSU when a local issue motivated him to become civically involved. He spent weeks that semester gathering student signatures for a petition calling on university officials, city leaders, and the Utah Board of Regents to further study the impact of a suggested development involving WSU property.

The experience helped Bentley make contacts in student government and ultimately led him to become president of the WSU Student Senate this year. “Service changes you and makes you see the world differently,” he said.

As a member of the Student Senate, Bentley has an opportunity to be part of a governing body unlike those at most universities. In addition to senators from each of the seven academic colleges, 13 senators represent campus constituency groups, ranging from veterans to athletes to Native American students.

In 1983, Rick Southwick, the student representative to the Board of Regents that year, discussed with Rick Sline, then the dean of students, how best to represent all Weber State students. “The elected leaders were always white, typically male, and generally embedded in the dominant student culture,” Sline said. “There was little attention paid to the academic, cultural or political issues of students who had diverse needs and challenges.”

Thanks to the efforts of Southwick and the support of Sline, Weber State modified its student senate, choosing a form similar to the student assembly at the University of Michigan. “It was never the intent of this restructure to reflect the traditional democratic model of government seen at the state and national levels,” Sline said. “Instead, the intent was to construct a new model of democratic governance, where students of differing backgrounds and perspectives could engage in real dialogue.”

Jose Gomez, currently serving as advisor to the student senate, is a strong supporter of the system. “This structure allows us to have a variety of student voices represented,” he said.

Because of the learning opportunities available, Gomez believes the more students involved in student government, the better. “Student government is like a laboratory where students are conducting experiments and trying new things,” he said.

Bentley agrees. “I’ve had to learn to communicate during stressful situations, which I don’t think you can get out of a textbook,” he said. “It’s a great testing ground.”

He believes the extra time commitment will pay dividends throughout his life. “I’ll take the leadership experience and the communication skills with me wherever I go,” he said, adding that he hopes to one day hold office in local government.

Sline, now an associate professor of communication at WSU, feels that even though the WSU system isn’t perfect, it offers valuable lessons: “If we can’t experiment in an education environment, then where can we?”

- Travis Clemens, University Communications

WSUSA Recognized Constituencies

1. College of Applied Science & Technology
2. College of Arts & Humanities
3. John B. Goddard School of Business & Economics
4. Jerry & Vickie Mayo College of Education
5. Dr. Ezekiel R. Dumke College of Health Professions
6. College of Science
7. College of Social & Behavioral Sciences
8. Bachelor of Integrated Studies/Honors
9. Non-traditional
10. Traditional
11. Residency Halls
12. Disabilities
13. African American
14. Hispanic
15. Native American
16. International
17. Veterans
18. Asian/Pacific Islander
19. Davis Campus
20. Athletics

Any other group of students who: (a) bring to the WSUSA Senate a petition bearing the names of at least 50 percent plus 1 (one) of that constituency, not to exceed 250 signatures, and (b) are ratified by three-fourths majority vote of the current WSUSA Senate membership, excluding abstention votes, as a legitimate and necessary constituency. (Source: WSUSA Bylaws)

Alum Enjoys Political Involvement

Even though Louenda Downs majored in education, she still believes the seeds for her political career were planted at Weber State in the 1970s.

Downs, as a Davis County commissioner, said some of her favorite classes as an undergraduate were political science and business law courses. “I’ve always been interested in government and how it works,” she said.

After teaching elementary school children for more than seven years, Downs was approached by friends who asked her to consider running for the Davis School District Board of Education. She did, and spent eight years as a member of the board, during which time she helped to organize the Davis School District Foundation and rubbed shoulders with future state leaders Richard E. Kendell and Olene S. Walker.

“Sometimes life presents you with opportunities you didn’t plan for,” she said. “I love what I do.”

There are difficulties that come with holding public office, however. “Apathy is the greatest obstacle faced by government,” she said. “I know people are busy, but government is a vital part of our lives. It’s worth the minimal investment to at least know what’s going on.”

Downs said it’s important to make that investment because it gives people a sense of what government does for them, especially now that information is easier than ever to access. “There is so much information available on the Internet and in newspapers,” she said. “People just need to make the decision to be involved.”
Getting Students Engaged

According to WSU political science professor Leland Murray, the idea that this generation of students is apathetic about politics is false.

They’re just not being asked to do enough.

Murray and other faculty members are trying to find ways to get students more involved, and they’re seeing encouraging results.

“The more that young people are asked to participate, the more they will,” Murray said. “This current young generation isn’t apathetic because they are less politically aware than previous generations; they’re apathetic because the previous generations haven’t asked them or invited them to the table.”

Murray said the average age in U.S. Congress is around 60, while the average American is 32.

“When discussing policy, people that don’t get involved don’t get heard,” Murray said.

Murray illustrates her point with a specific experience: She once invited a group of students to watch a presidential debate with her. The candidates spoke on a variety of topics, including social security and prescription drugs. After the debate, she asked what the students thought. They wanted to know why issues like college tuition and topics more applicable to them weren’t discussed.

“They felt there was nothing there for them,” Murray said. “But the reason there was nothing there for them is because they’re not involved. It’s very important for them to get out there. It’s a chicken-egg problem until they do.”

Enter Gary Johnson, a WSU political science professor who is responsible for arranging student internships and jobs with local municipal and county governments. Many students go into these positions with misconceptions about government and leave with new insight, he said.

“You can have a fulfilling and meaningful life by being a public servant and also have an impact on the world,” Johnson said. “Once students understand that, it becomes a sexy thing to do.”

Murray said once students gets involved in politics, they’ll never stop. Johnson agrees.

“These students care a lot about what's going on,” Johnson said. “They’re going to be running the world in 20 years; it’s important they have the skills and knowledge to do so, like knowing how to run government and how the government works.”

-Jonathan McBride, University Communications
Weber State University student Zach Holbrook and his wife Roxanne step into a polling booth. Quietly, so no one else can hear, she lists the candidates. Zach whispers his choice, and Roxanne marks the ballot.

Zach is blind. He has never voted privately, but he is comfortable telling Roxanne his choice. "I trust her completely," he said.

Other citizens who are visually impaired, however, have had to rely on strangers, which has been a deterrent for many. "All American citizens have a right to a secret ballot," said advocate Alison Draper of the Disability Law Center, a civil rights organization in Utah.

Accessible voting has long been an issue in the United States, not just for people who are blind or visually impaired but for all citizens with disabilities who face many obstacles at and in getting to the polls.

Recent federal mandates, though, have made voting more accessible. Draper explained. "Voting isn't perfect anywhere," she said, "but it is improving in Utah."

The federal Help Americans Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) called for states to provide at least one electronic voting system per polling station for people with disabilities. Instead of one at each location, Utah provided all new machines for county and statewide elections.

Equipped with audio, the new systems feature pre-recorded messages that guide voters through ballots. Votes are cast via numbered touch pads.

While many Utahns have used the new touch screens—all 29 counties had installed them by the 2006 primaries—Zach has not yet had the opportunity. "Having Roxanne help me vote has always been fine," he said, "but I can definitely see the machines being beneficial to others. It will be interesting to try touch-screen voting."

The machines rate highly in accessibility, but Draper believes there is room for improvement. "There are some people, for example, who cannot push buttons," she said. "There are ways to fix problems like this, such as special attachments, but we aren't there yet."

In addition to HAVA requirements, all polling stations used for county and statewide elections must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. An ADA checklist includes guidance on everything from evaluating potential polling sites to measuring parking spaces.

Additional voting methods are available throughout Utah to assist citizens with disabilities. Weber County, for example, offers curbside, absentee and early voting, as well as emergency ballots for hospital and nursing home patients, said Weber County elections administrator Gloria Berrett.

"More places are becoming more accessible," said Jeff Morris, director of WSU Services for Students with Disabilities. "You see it in stores where aisles are wider, at buildings where wheelchair ramps have been installed, and now in polling stations. As a result, I think we're seeing more individuals with disabilities out and about, and that's wonderful."

- Amy Hendricks, University Communications

**Continued from front**

**Brancaccio:** DeGregorio maintains that it's to be expected the country will experience some growing pains as America continues to upgrade its voting systems. He says that each election will help the EAC and election officials refine the process—in fact he's given the timeline of sorts.

**DeGregorio:** It may take until 2010 before we may see a leveling off in the problems that we've seen in previous elections.

**Brancaccio:** 2010—a sobering assessment and another presidential election gone by. DeGregorio's estimate brings up a fundamental question—how much of a work in progress should we expect our election systems to be? And to what extent should the public worry about their vote counting?

Soaries says he has pondered these questions a lot.

**Brancaccio:** What are you worried about specifically, that might happen this fall during the election cycle?

**Soaries:** Oh, something's going to happen. There's going to be a power outage, where some machines don't work. And there's no contingency plan. There's going to be a close race, where there's an inability to do a recount that satisfies everyone's needs.

There's going to be an accusation of tampering that can't be disproved.

**Brancaccio:** But do you worry that just this discussion is going to stop people from voting? Throw up their hands hearing us?

**Soaries:** What we don't need is for people not to vote. What we need for people to do is to vote, and insist on answers to questions about the machine. We need people to show up. We need the public to not only engage in voting, but to engage in the process of holding the elections administration of voting accountable.