Commencement Address to the Charter Graduating Class of the University of North Florida June 12, 1974

By Allan W. Ostar, Executive Director American Association of State Colleges and Universities
Allan W. Ostar is a nationally recognized authority on public higher education. As Executive Director of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities he is the chief executive of a Washington-based organization representing 315 public colleges and universities enrolling approximately 2,000,000 students.

Ostar is a frequent spokesman for public higher education before congressional committees. Nationally he has been among the most vigorous and effective champions of a continued American commitment to assuring low cost educational opportunities for all.

A graduate of Penn State, he is a former G.I. Bill student who has distinguished himself in a 25 year career in higher education. Previous to his appointment at AASCU in 1965, Ostar served as director of the Joint Office of Institutional Research at the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges.

He serves in various advisory capacities to the U.S. Office of Department of Health, Education and Welfare, the U.S. Office of Education and the National Laboratory for Higher Education. In 1968, Ostar was selected by the Ford and Sloan Foundations as a member of a five-man team which toured the world to prepare reports on higher education planning and development.

In his remarks at commencement exercises for the Charter Class of the University of North Florida, Ostar effectively outlined the case for public higher education and the critical role of emerging urban institutions such as the University of North Florida. His text for that occasion is reprinted as a means of preserving and more widely disseminating this important message.
Thank you President Carpenter, distinguished guests, members of the Class of 1974, and those unsung heroes who have shared in the anxieties and the anticipations of this great day: the parents and spouses.

I was pleased and honored when President Carpenter invited me to share this occasion with you. I hesitate to call it auspicious, because that's a word that is greatly overworked this time of the year on college campuses. However, if any commencement in the country deserves to be termed auspicious, it is this one. Auspicious not only for you graduates, but for the University, signifying that it has come of age. Auspicious for President Carpenter, whose hard work, dedication, and skillful efforts in both Jacksonville and Tallahassee have transformed a dream into an exciting new university. Auspicious for the faculty who can take pride in their accomplishments as you receive your diplomas. Auspicious for the citizens of Jacksonville, whose recognition of the need for a community university and whose effective support will make this entire region a more attractive place to live and work.
Auspicious and exciting. This is a unique commencement. It is surrounded by more than an atmosphere of pomp and circumstance. It carries with it an aura of excitement.

It is refreshing to get away from Washington and be with people who have demonstrated their faith in themselves, their future, and their community. What better way to demonstrate this faith than by creating a new university. The work and the planning of many people, against a certain amount of trial and tribulation, has proved itself. And you are that living proof. As a charter class, you are not following in the footsteps of a tradition. You are beginning a tradition.

As your first commencement speaker, I would like to also help establish a tradition—a tradition of short commencement addresses. I am tempted to make this the most noteworthy commencement address of the 1974 season—I could do so by simply saying "congratulations and good luck" and then sit down. By the time President Carpenter got over the shock, the story would be on every news wire in the country, and the University of North Florida would be the envy of graduating seniors everywhere. But surely you would not expect anyone from Washington, D.C., to be so shortwinded.

I would like to offer President Carpenter my sincere congratulations for the work he has done here at the University of North Florida. In today's world of beleagured college presidents it is difficult to assume a presidency and pick up the daily administrative details left behind by your predecessor. It is extremely challenging to assume a presidency when the only predecessors in the office have been painters and electricians. Then the details are all loose ends waiting to be tied up into an operating university.

I am proud to have the opportunity to work for and with the University of North Florida through the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. It is an exciting and exhilarating challenge to represent the 312 member state colleges and
universities. Their commitment to responsive and responsible change makes them the most innovative institutions in the country.

It is a diverse group of institutions. They differ in size, in location, in program emphasis, and in age. However, our state colleges and universities share a common goal and a common philosophy.

The goal is to provide to the largest number of people possible a meaningful and quality education. Let me explain what I mean by meaningful and quality. When you leave here today, you'll leave with a good solid idea of what you want to do. You may even have a job. Even if you don't, you know what you want to do. College has helped you explore your skills and capabilities, discover your potential, and relate it to the realities of the economic world. What is more, you know yourself. You've made some personal discoveries about yourself, about your hopes, and your disappointments, and how you relate to friends and strangers. Whatever the world throws at you, a few fast balls, maybe an occasional curve, you can handle it. This is a meaningful and quality education.

Low Cost Means Opportunity

In order to provide it to the largest number of people, state colleges and universities strive to keep their tuitions low. A low cost expands opportunity. It means more people can take advantage of the meaningful education.

That is the goal of state colleges and universities. The development of the University of North Florida was aimed at this goal. In 1964, the Florida Board of Regents found that a need existed for a public institution within Jacksonville. The need was the number of junior college graduates and adults who wanted more education. More education in order to become businessmen or teachers. Or education to become better businessmen or teachers. Or maybe they just wanted to know more as people. And they needed the education at a price they could afford. They couldn't afford to travel to learn, nor could they afford the hardship of high tuition. The University of North Florida was the answer.
State colleges and universities are able to provide meaningful educational experiences because of their educational philosophy. Philosophy may be the wrong word because for you it probably conjures up images of Plato and Kant and Hume and trees falling in the forest. There is nothing metaphysical or theoretical about why and how state colleges and universities teach. It is a very down-to-earth, grass roots kind of concept. They teach people. They teach what people need to know, what they want to know, and when they want to know it.

State colleges and universities are in the continual process of evaluating program content and program method. Evaluations which lead to new programs and new instructional techniques. The colleges ask a lot of questions. Questions such as: is this program still useful to students or should it be dropped? Questions such as: are there some professions developing in the community that we should be teaching? Questions such as: are there some people in the community that we aren't reaching?

I would be willing to bet you, and I only make safe bets, that when you come back to campus in five years, things will have changed. That course you took in vocational education, or in consumer behavior, or in child psychology will be modified. It might not even exist. You may find new programs in consumer advocacy, or in psychology of the aging. You may find that your courses have a regular series on television. I can picture Telly Savalas teaching criminology. These kinds of changes will occur not because the university was looking inward at what it wanted to do to enhance its reputation in research or other pursuits. But because it was looking outward at the people of the community and asking the right questions about what the people wanted and needed to become better professionals and better citizens.

Constantly assessing needs, and responding to those needs is what makes state colleges and universities innovative. They aren't afraid to change. People change, and state colleges and
universities are, above all, people's colleges. The University of North Florida, although it is a new university built along the fairly new lines of the upper-division institution, is part of an on-going tradition. It is the third or fourth generation people's college, upholding the century-old concept of service.

You can look at innovative programs in this university and in other state institutions, and you can see immediately what need they meet. You can classify the programs according to their response to people.

One of the major responses has been the recognition that people must be served frequently as individuals, not as groups. As students you learned at different speeds, began your education at different levels of knowledge and experience, and related in differing degrees to methods of instruction. State colleges and universities recognize this. Many of the recent innovations have been efforts to fit programs to students, rather than fitting round students into square programs.

This is being done in many ways. Many of you probably participated in the academic practicum program. You as an individual served an internship, worked in a youth program, or some other highly personal experience which became an integral part of your academic program.

The University of North Florida also has responded to concerns about time. It has challenged, very rightly, the idea that it has to take four years to get a baccalaureate. Four is not a magic number. Some of you here today may have decided that you could earn a degree in less than four years. Maybe because of finances you felt you had to do it in less than four years. The University of North Florida did not say, sorry, it is traditional that baccalaureates are earned in four years. Its response was go ahead and try it. Take the departmental exams, the CLEP tests, and course overloads and see if you, as an individual, can do it.

In the tradition of the people's colleges, the University of North Florida has reached out to indi-
individuals--to individuals of all ages, not just the 18- to 21-year olds.

On this campus there are as many students attending classes at 8 o'clock at night as there are at 9 o'clock in the morning. The average age of the student body is not 19 or 20, it is 29. This graduating class includes not only young adults getting started in life, but a mother with a family of 12. A policeman earning his degree after many years out of school.

Access for All

The pioneers of the past century built state colleges to give access to the children of farmers, sod-breakers and frontiersmen. The people of Jacksonville have been pioneers in their own right, building this university to give access to the adults, to the workers, and to the housewives who never had a public university in the community.

The recognition that just giving college opportunity to the young is not enough has been a second major response to people's needs. Opportunity also must be given to people whose personal employment or family responsibilities may preclude them from regular class attendance. The opportunity for equal access gains in importance with the increasing enrollment of students past the traditional college age of 18. The part-time enrollment in our colleges and universities is growing at a much more rapid rate than our full-time enrollment. Full-time enrollment in the nation's baccalaureate institutions increased 1.8 per cent for fall, 1973. Part-time enrollment increased 5.9 per cent for the same period.

The needs of part-time students are different from those of the traditional 18- to 21-year old full-time student. One major difference, of course, is that many of them cannot attend classes from 9 in the morning until 3 in the afternoon. For these people, the barrier to access is a clock. That is a very frustrating thing to have standing between your desire for advancement and enrichment, and the college that can give it to you.
The University of North Florida has responded to the needs of these older and working students. It has scheduled classes according to the available learning time of students, rather than forcing students to adapt to the university's schedule. The fact that 55 per cent of the students enrolled here are part-time means that the University of North Florida has conquered the clock. The people of Jacksonville have taken a great step forward by providing equal access, and they should be proud of it.

Related to access, I'd like to mention the university's rather unique role as an upper-division university. There are other states besides Florida which use the upper-division concept. But, basically, upper-division institutions still are breaking ground.

Part of this ground breaking is the ease with which students here transferred into the university. The university has worked hard to build up cooperative relationships with other institutions, and has worked hard to assure that the transition is an easy one. Unfortunately, this is not the rule. I look to the University of North Florida to provide leadership in the area of student transfer, an important response to the needs of our highly mobile society.

One more point about innovation in state colleges and universities. That is the realization that education does not end with a degree. When you take off that cap and gown, it doesn't mean that you have nothing left to learn. The process of education is life-long, and so must the educational process be life-long.

The expansion of access and the increasing sophistication of continuing education programs are a partial answer to the life-long education process. Ten or fifteen years from now when the changing technology and revisionary history makes it necessary for you to learn more, or to relearn, you'll have that opportunity. I realize that today is the day you're thinking of leaving, not coming back. But the rapid pace of change in our post-
industrial society books pretty good odds that some day you'll be able to take advantage of UNF's adult learning programs.

The rapid pace of change also makes it imperative that the foundation for life-long learning be a strong one. If it isn't, it may crack under the stress of change. A strong foundation is a good basic undergraduate education. One which prepares people to be able participants in the life-long learning process. Without it, graduates become pawns, moved about at random by the forces of change.

A strong foundation is basic, rudimentary knowledge which can be applied problematically after graduation. Cognitive learning it is called. The ability to perceive relationships between old answers and new problems. The ability to apply basic facts to a problem you've never seen in the classroom. Jobs change, problems change, but the ability to reason does not.

The University of North Florida has given you the opportunity to learn the basic fundamentals of communication, of economics, of social and cultural interaction. Basics upon which you can build through experience. The University of North Florida has responded not just to your present needs, but also to your future needs. It has taught you how to think, not what to think.

I would be willing to venture a guess that your education here has taught you how to look at the world in a different and broader light. Your perspectives on world problems, on social problems, and on political problems are probably altered. Today's innovative basic education is an interdisciplinary one. It teaches us to realize that world problems and national problems are not easily isolated into neat little boxes, easily explained.

Interdisciplinary studies such as UNF's Venture series are becoming vital as tools to our understanding of the world. We must be able to relate causitive factors, to sort through seemingly unrelated facts. The Venture series is an innovative response to the future, to your future,
which is vitally necessary if we are
to direct and channel change to the
benefit of society.

We cannot resolve what we cannot
understand. We cannot understand
unless we can perceive and reason.
And the degree of our perceptions
depends upon our opportunities to
learn and to study.

The University of North Florida
is more than a physical place. It is
opportunity. It is the opportunity to
learn. To perceive and reason. To
understand and to resolve. To grow
as a person.

It has given you the opportunity
to understand and resolve the change
which will affect your status in the
economic world. To understand the
changes that will affect your civic
responsibility in the community, your
participation as a citizen in our
democracy, your role as a person
reaching out on a personal level to
people of other cultures and other
countries.

This opportunity is a necessity.
It is a necessity for you graduates
who must assume all the responsi-
bilities, the headaches, and the
rewards of a generation of leadership.
It is a necessity for the community
of Jacksonville. Jacksonville benefits
from the trained and educated manpower
that the University makes possible.
This increases the level of produc-
tivity and economic stability. It
benefits from the resource pool of
trained technicians and knowledgeable
theoricians available within the
city limits. The opportunity to
advance skills and enrich lives
increases the quality of life in
Jacksonville.

The opportunity that is the
University of North Florida is a
priceless community and state resource.
As a public university the University
has a commitment and responsibility
to serve the public. Through its
attention to the individual, its
efforts to expand opportunity for
adults, and its emphasis upon a solid
basic undergraduate education, it
has served the community and the
state well.
UNF Needs Support

The University cannot provide this service and this opportunity without support from the community and the state. The people’s colleges must exist on reciprocal agreements. The universities can only serve the people if the people support the universities. This University needs the advice, suggestions and encouragement of people in order to develop new programs which benefit the community. It needs participation from people in community-campus programs, cultural events, and public lectures and exhibits.

It needs voluntary contributions from people who wish to supplement university programs which benefit the students and the community. I am impressed with the volunteer alumni program of the University. It is an excellent example of how valuable and how important voluntary support is to furthering the goals of the university. Without the contributions from the volunteer alumni, more than 200 students might not have been able to attend UNF. I would hope that the present volunteer alumni would encourage other members of the community to contribute. Thereby increasing the number of students enrolled who might otherwise have been denied the opportunity because of finances.

Keeping the doors of opportunity open is the most important support that the public can give. Public universities are, above all else, universities of opportunity. Historically, public institutions were built to give the children of lower and middle income families the opportunity for an education. An opportunity which the children of farmers and laborers did not have prior to that because they could not afford the private schools. That historical commitment to equality of opportunity is well over a hundred years old, but it is still valid. Without public universities, many lower and middle income families could not afford to send their children to college. They could not afford the opportunity for a better and richer life.

During the past year, some economists and policy makers have challenged
the ideal and the fact of public universities. They have challenged the idea that students should have part of their college costs paid for by the public. They have challenged the fact that the public benefits from the flow of college graduates into society. They have challenged the democratic ideal that all people, regardless of income, family background or status, must have an equal opportunity to advance themselves through education.

What they propose is that the students in public universities should pay a much greater proportion of the costs of college. They propose that tuitions in the public universities be raised, anywhere from 30 to 50 per cent. The proposal is a direct contradiction of this country's historical commitment to opportunity. It is a threat of the lower and middle income families of this country. It is a threat to your future children, and to yourselves. If tuitions were doubled, how many of you think you would be able to come back to school? How many adults with the responsibilities of feeding and clothing a family, paying for a house and a car could afford to enroll, even on a part-time basis.

Increased tuitions would give most people two choices. One, they could try and apply for student aid. However, present student aid programs provide adequate student aid only for the very poor. At the middle income levels the amount of student aid available is practically non-existent. Applied to tuitions which are doubled or tripled, the money gap becomes the Grand Canyon.

The second choice is to take out a loan. The difficulties of obtaining a long-term loan now are enormous. Even if a student can get a loan, by the time he repays it plus interest, his education may end up costing him $25,000. Try and visualize a whole new kind of graduate—one with a heavily mortgaged future. Even worse, try and imagine the financial burdens of a college graduate who marries a college graduate. It is a dowry in reverse with a combined debt of
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