



Mississippi University

for Women

A Tradition of Excellence for Women and Men

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Dear Faculty and Staff,

While I hope that you were able to attend the Faculty/Staff academic year opening Monday morning, I realize that some of you were busy with other things that needed your attention. During the opening, I talked about the things that had been accomplished by us as a team during the past academic year. Then, I went on to highlight four special initiatives for the coming academic year.

Two of those initiatives involve special funds set aside by the MUW Foundation for further faculty development. One is a commitment of \$10,000 for each of five years or \$50,000. The second is a pilot project of \$10,000 for this year. I will ask Dr. Jordan to talk with the deans, department heads, and faculty about both funds and how they will be used.

The third initiative has to do with the fact that MUW will soon be celebrating its 125th anniversary. As most of you know, on March 12, 1884, a state college for women—the first such public institution in the United States—received legislative approval to open a facility on this site.

Today, as we walk around our beautiful campus, we are constantly reminded of our proud past. Some of our beautiful, historic buildings are named for specific individuals whose presence enriched this community and enhanced our mission. And, no matter where I look, I am constantly reminded of those individuals whose vision, tenacity, resourcefulness, and hard work led to the creation of this institution.

Our campus' rich history reminds us that we live within a continuum and that we advance an educational mission and learning community that has persevered through wars, economic depressions, political scandals, social upheaval, internal disagreements, external interference, natural disaster, and personal tragedy.

As a campus community, we will use the occasion of our 125th anniversary to reflect upon and celebrate our historic roots and honor those who have come before us.

While we know that there are several significant dates relating to the founding of our institution, we will use the date of legislative approval—1884—as our birth date and plan for a 125th Anniversary celebration in 2009. With that in mind, I have asked Dr. Bridget Pieschel to chair a special committee to be announced later. This group will be charged with coming up with a plan for ways by which we might appropriately honor our past.

The fourth initiative that I want to share with you will take us most of the coming academic year to accomplish. As we focus on ways to honor our past, we also need to focus on our future. It is my belief that we can't just allow the future to happen to us; rather, we need to actively plan for it.

Just as MUW has changed and adapted as an institution over our long history, our community, state, and nation have also changed and adapted. So the question becomes: In the future, how can we take advantage of opportunities before us and fulfill new or future needs?

As we prepare to celebrate our institutional past and the individual contributions that shaped us, we must also look with renewed energy and focus on the future. This institution (in fact, all public institutions of higher learning) currently faces many challenges—reduced financial support, changing student demographics, aging infrastructure, and greatly increased competition. It is imperative that we look squarely toward the future, face our challenges head-on, and determine which opportunities to embrace and how to do that most effectively.

Therefore, over the span of this academic year, we will undertake an exercise designed to help us fulfill the promise and educational compact implicit in our mission. We will call it "MUW 20/20: Envisioning Our Future/Fulfilling Our Promise.

As an academic institution, we do not typically do things without thinking and, I think that you would agree, that something as serious as one's future also demands a great deal of thought, thought that should not only involve the stakeholders from the campus community but also the stakeholders of our greater community, since we need to be both responsive to the needs of our greater community and be relevant to their success. We are tied closely together and that is the way it should be.

The process itself will be broad-based. We will begin in October with a professionally facilitated creative visioning process session that will involve representatives from each group of our stakeholders to capture outputs in a holistic way to build clarity and shared understanding. The process uses discussions and focused conversation at small tables as well as graphics and other creative tools. It will involve a large number of campus members as well as regional, local, and state leaders in education, government, business.

The recommendations for further reflection that flow from this group will then be passed along to smaller working groups. The smaller working groups will address the recommendations that have come out of the larger meeting of stakeholders. Our tentative timeline for this has the reports from those smaller working groups coming to me in late April.

Then there will be a follow-up letter to those who participated in the October meeting as to the results as well as follow-up announcements to the campus and media, perhaps by sometime next August.

I will be asking some of you to help with this very interactive, creative process, and I hope that you will step up to accept this very important challenge.

As we firm up plans, I will keep you up-to-date on where we are.

In the meantime, have a wonderful year and, if I can be of help to you in any way, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claudia A. Limbert". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

Claudia A. Limbert, Ph.D.

President