

THE BUFFALO NEWS

City&Region

[Front Page](#) > [City&Region](#) > [Buffalo](#)

UB's growth key to joining realm of great universities

President outlines 15-year agenda

By JAY REY
News Staff Reporter
9/29/2006



Dennis C. Enser/Buffalo News
UB President John B. Simpson outlines his ambitious growth plan Thursday in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery.

The University at Buffalo needs to grow by 10,000 students, add 750 new faculty and devise a master plan for its campuses if it's going to become a top institution over the next 15 years, its president said Thursday.

UB President John B. Simpson outlined his vision Thursday in the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, where he delivered his first major community address since he was recruited as UB's 14th president three years ago.

While his ambitious plan for one of the region's most powerful institutions was well received by some 200 local business executives, elected officials and

neighborhood leaders in the audience, the question remains: How to pay?

Part of the answer is what Simpson was doing Thursday - talking up UB, garnering a backing in the community, building a broader fundraising base, and developing support among local leaders and policy makers who serve as advocates in Albany.

"We cannot do this alone," Simpson said.

A bigger, stronger UB that brings in more students, jobs and research funding means a stronger Buffalo region, he said.

"Our university and our community are in this - whatever this might be - together," Simpson said. "There are no great American cities without a great hometown university."

Simpson was recruited in 2003 from the University of California, Santa Cruz, where he was the No. 2 official. Since then, he has set a goal to build UB into one of the top public research institutions in the country, and has focused on playing to the university's academic strengths to bring in more research dollars.

But UB isn't among the nation's top 50 public universities in size, and simply needs to get larger if it's going to rise "into the realm of great American universities," Simpson said.

"We're not there yet," he said.

While UB is the largest school in the State University of New York system, Simpson wants to grow enrollment from 25,000 full-time students to 35,000, over the next 15 years. He also wants to add another 750 faculty members to the roughly 1,900 full- and part-time instructors now teaching.

Simpson knows of no other university taking on such a complete transformation, and aspires for UB to be in the same league as schools like UCLA or the University of Pittsburgh.

"It's exciting," said the Rev. Sarah Buxton-Smith, director of St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in University Heights. "Buffalo has been trying to redefine itself, and I think this leadership can help us with that."

In the meantime, Simpson wants to take a fresh look at needed facilities, infrastructure and design of the campuses in Amherst, on Main Street and downtown, where UB has the Center of Excellence in Bioinformatics and Life Sciences.

He announced the university has launched its first master plan since the North Campus in Amherst was built, and freed up Robert Shibley, professor in the UB School of Architecture and Planning, to oversee the task. A draft probably won't be ready for another year and a half.

One of the priorities, Simpson said, will be to make sure the campuses are more "thoughtfully linked" with their surrounding neighborhoods.

Shooting for a 40 percent boost in enrollment intrigues Newell Nussbaumer.

"How can you not be excited about that?" said Nussbaumer, founder of Buffalo Rising, a popular blog.

Nussbaumer, however, wants the university to do a better job connecting its students in Amherst with the city.

"It has been major concern for so long," Nussbaumer said. "I'm really hoping that's going to be part of the plan down the road."

Assemblyman Sam Hoyt, one of those advocates UB needs in Albany, agreed with many points Simpson made Thursday, but also wanted to know more about how this transformation was to take place.

If Hoyt continues to like what he hears, he'll help champion the cause for UB.

"There wasn't a lot of detail," Hoyt said, "I'm hoping that some more, exciting details and specifics are presented to the public in the near future."

Simpson also said UB needs to do a better job communicating with the broader Western New York public. He brought aboard former KeyBank President Marsha Henderson last year to help improve community relations and oversee the offices of advancement, alumni relations and government affairs.

Jim Anderson hopes this dialogue between the community and UB continues.

"I'm enthused by the conversation, and I'm willing to join with them on this," said Anderson, a representative from the Alliance for Quality Education. "But we've heard this before."

e-mail: jrey@buffnews.com