2012 marks the 150th anniversary of one of the most important milestones in the history of higher education in America: the passage of the Morrill Act, which laid the foundation for the establishment of land-grant universities. Among the 70 colleges and universities that have their roots in the Morrill Act is the University of Nebraska – founded in 1869, just two years after Nebraska became a state.

This landmark legislation recognized that expanding access to higher education could give people the tools they needed to be successful and to help the nation grow – and that continues to be true, even in today’s dramatically different world. The act helped transform higher education from a privilege available only to the elite to an opportunity for citizens of widely varying backgrounds and circumstances to improve their quality of life, increase their earning power and expand their intellectual and cultural horizons.

Nineteenth century American leaders saw the borders of the nation moving rapidly to the west and south, and understood that one of the keys to prosperity for the growing nation would be education. Today’s leaders see national borders virtually erased by technology and understand that, more than ever, educational attainment is critical to the United States maintaining a leadership position in the world.

Through the vast social, economic, geopolitical and technological changes of the past 150 years, the role of the American public university has been to provide access and opportunity to the citizens of its state. But while the core mission remains unchanged, today’s public university has much broader responsibilities:

- To provide our students affordable access to a high quality education that prepares them not only to be personally successful but to be excellent global citizens;
- To leverage our resources to spur economic growth in the state and region, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship;
• To use our talents to help solve the problems of the 21st century – not just locally or regionally but as part of the global community; and
• To provide a great return on the investment the people of Nebraska make in their university.

And, as I reflect on the University of Nebraska’s accomplishments and strategic direction in 2011, and look ahead to the opportunities in 2012, I believe that we are exceptionally well-positioned to fulfill those responsibilities.

One of the hallmarks of a successful 21st century public university is its contribution to the economic competitiveness of its state and region. Increasingly – and not just in Nebraska, but throughout the world – leaders are recognizing that to compete successfully in the global economy, they must develop human capital, both by educating a higher percentage of their own residents and attracting talented people from other states and other countries. A recent report from Georgetown University found that to make up for lost ground, the U.S. needs to add 20 million more workers with postsecondary credentials to our economy by 2025. Nebraska was ranked seventh among all states in the need for education beyond high school.

We are fortunate that Nebraska’s robust economy and prudent fiscal management have put us in a strong position to meet the challenge of developing human capital. In 2011, many states made dramatic cuts to higher education, forcing some universities to significantly increase tuition or limit enrollment. Nebraska was able to sustain a steady level of state support and make an exceptionally enlightened investment of state funds in Nebraska Innovation Campus.

Although state funding has remained flat for five consecutive years, resulting in additional reallocations having to be made in our budget to meet our basic obligations, we have kept tuition increases moderate and predictable, averaging 5 percent annually for the past seven years. In 2011 we made the strategic decision to invest in a 2.5 percent salary pool for faculty and staff. We had not been able to offer general salary increases for the past two years and believed that was not a sustainable strategy if we want to remain competitive for top talent.

Thanks in part to federal ARRA funding, but in larger part to the initiative and talent of our faculty, external funding and expenditures for research remain strong, with growth of nearly 40 percent in combined research expenditures at UNL and UNMC over the past five years.
Our competitiveness has also been strengthened by private support. The University of Nebraska Foundation had a record year in fund-raising in 2011 – over $172 million, despite a difficult national economy – and is rapidly approaching the Campaign for Nebraska goal of $1.2 billion, well before the projected end of the campaign in 2015. The Foundation provided the University with nearly $60 million for capital construction, $30 million for academic programs and $23 million for student support, among other priorities, in 2011. More than 78,000 individuals – about 40 percent of those from outside Nebraska – have contributed to the campaign, including more than 35,000 first-time donors.

Clearly, the momentum that we have enjoyed over the past several years continues. Rather than limiting enrollment we are expanding access, with ambitious new goals for growth.

**New strategies for growth**

In 2011, we had the highest enrollment in 18 years, topping 50,000 students for the first time since 1993 and marking the seventh straight year of growth. That’s great progress – but as the need for a college-educated workforce increases, we must do more.

Both Chancellor Perlman at UNL and Chancellor Christensen at UNO have announced plans to grow enrollment by 5,000 students within the next several years. Growth will enhance both campuses’ ability to fulfill their missions and serve the state, but in a state with flat to declining numbers of high school graduates, the challenges are great. Meeting those goals will require new faculty and staff, new investments in facilities and new strategies for student recruitment.

One of our strategies is to increase efforts to attract minority students, first-generation students and lower-income students. These students often have a higher hill to climb to get to college and stay in college, and they have long been under-represented in college classrooms. Barriers of cost, distance, language and family tradition can all come into play. Students need a smooth transition from high school to college, with tutors, mentors, adequate financial aid and strong communication with families.

Among the programs that are most successfully addressing this need in Nebraska are the Collegebound Nebraska tuition assistance program, which now offers more than 6,000 students the opportunity to attend the University of Nebraska and pay no tuition; and, the Thompson Scholars Program, funded by the Susan T. Buffett Foundation. More than 1,800 students receive...
Buffett scholarships and more than 1,000 students are Thompson Scholars, who live together as freshmen, attend special seminars, and work with mentors and tutors; one result is a much higher retention rate from freshman to sophomore year than the overall student population.

Adequate need-based financial aid is critical to attracting more talent to the University, but we also know that we must start early in instilling in young people the idea that a college education is attainable. For several years, I have written to every 8th grader in Nebraska to encourage them to take rigorous classes in high school and participate in activities that will prepare them to attend college. UNL and UNK have both developed academy programs, now in North Platte, Lexington, Kearney, Grand Island and Omaha high schools, to identify promising first-generation students and work with them throughout high school to prepare them for success in college. Students who complete the program receive full scholarships for tuition, books, fees and room and board. This year, 32 promising students who completed the Kearney Bound program are on the UNK campus and 34 UNL students are graduates of UNL academy programs.

Increasing access to higher education is a key strategy of the Nebraska P-16 Initiative, which is chaired by Gov. Heineman and which I co-chair with Sen. Greg Adams (chair of the legislature’s education committee) and Liz Koop (CEO of EducationQuest Foundation). At our College Access Summit in May, we heard from Lumina Foundation CEO Jamie Merisotis who reinforced the need to improve the level of educational attainment in Nebraska and in the United States if we are to regain a leadership position in the global economy. He discussed the Lumina Foundation’s goal, which parallels that of President Obama, for 60 percent of Americans to have post-secondary credentials by 2020 – essential if we are to regain educational and economic leadership worldwide.

The Summit gave me an opportunity to introduce one of our Collegebound Nebraska students, Sadid Carillo, a first-generation student from Schuyler, Nebr., and the oldest of five children. Thanks to caring academic and financial aid advisors, Sadid went from nearly dropping out of college to choosing a new major, studying abroad in Italy and earning a 3.9 GPA. Instead of leaving college to help his family financially, he was able to stay in school and become a role model for his brothers and sisters. We need to ensure that Sadid’s experience can be repeated many times over, on each of our campuses.
Opportunities online

Another growth strategy is to continue expanding our distance education offerings through Online Worldwide, which brings all of the University’s online programs together under a virtual roof to provide greater access to a wide array of educational choices. We now offer more than 120 degree and certificate programs ranging from bachelor’s degree completion to Ph.D. In 2011, we delivered more than 108,000 credit hours via distance, a 15 percent increase over the previous calendar year.

New, collaborative online programs involving faculty from multiple campuses are creating opportunities for enrollment growth utilizing shared resources and providing students access to the expertise of faculty across the university. Under this model, we have expanded our offerings in high-demand areas such as criminal justice, communications and information assurance. We were fortunate in 2011 to hire a new director, Mary Niemiec, who brings extensive experience in distance education and who is leading a dedicated group of campus distance education directors in improving our online offerings and finding new ways to tap into this growing market. For many place-bound Nebraskans and other adult learners, online education is the key to new career opportunities and personal growth.

To further advance opportunities for online learning, the University of Nebraska joined with the Nebraska Department of Education and Nebraska Educational Telecommunications in August to form a “virtual partnership” dedicated to providing more online resources for high school teachers and students. Our Independent Study High School at UNL, which has been serving students for more than 100 years, is a key participant in this initiative.

To kick off the program, we offered to fund 50 “Virtual Scholars” – Nebraska students who wanted to take a course from ISHS. The response was excellent and we ended up funding 74 students from across the state. Many ISHS students are in smaller communities that may not have the resources to offer higher level or advanced placement courses. Others have athletic or performance schedules that make it difficult to take all of the academic courses they want. And some are home-schooled or unable to attend classes for a variety of reasons.
We must continue seeking out innovative solutions like the virtual partnership that provide educational opportunities to more Nebraskans. But we must also look well beyond our own backyard to increase enrollment and expand our workforce.

**A larger recruiting footprint**

Shifts in athletic conference alignments for UNL, UNO and UNK in the past two years have increased Nebraska’s visibility in new geographies and we can take advantage of that. But we have a long way to go. At the University of Iowa, for example, the number one feeder state is Illinois, which sends over 6,000 students to Iowa. UNL’s largest feeder state is South Dakota, and we have about 500 students from there. In our total undergraduate population of 32,000 only about 5,600 are non-residents.

We have great opportunity in the Midwest markets, and we need to be more aggressive in recruiting students to a university that offers both a tremendous value and a great education. One strategy is UNO’s plan to expand its “Metropolitan Advantage Program,” which offers reduced non-resident tuition to students from western Iowa. The program will grow from three counties to 14 over the next two years, targeting both recent high school graduates and community college transfer students. UNL has placed recruiters in Minneapolis, Chicago and Denver and has developed programs to connect alumni in those and other areas with prospective students.

We will also grow by increasing the number of international students – another area in which we significantly lag our peers. International students play an important role on a university campus. They create new cultural connections and expand the horizons of students who must be prepared to work in a global economy. We have about 3,000 international students this year and it is one of our key global engagement strategies to double that number this decade.

To that end, last summer I met with a number of educational and government leaders in Brazil to discuss the strengths of the University of Nebraska and areas for potential partnership. The day prior to my visit the new president of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff, announced a program called “Science Without Borders” which will provide, on a competitive basis, funds for 100,000 Brazilian students to study in the best universities in the world, with an emphasis on the science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields. It was my goal for the University of Nebraska
to be a leading host institution for those students, and they have now started arriving at universities throughout the world – with the largest single group at the University of Nebraska. I believe this program has great potential to grow.

We will return the favor beginning next June with a new study abroad and service learning pilot program that will take students from our campuses to Brazil. I am grateful for the leadership of Lourdes Gouveia and the Office of Latino and Latin American Studies at UNO who is coordinating the Brazil: Critical Issues trip in the summer of 2012. Brazil is an important country for us strategically, and one with whom we have long-standing research partnerships in agriculture and engineering. Leaders there share our commitment to solving critical issues in water, agriculture, energy, public health and early childhood.

**Demonstrating value**

As we seek to attract talent to Nebraska and grow the university, it is increasingly important that we are able to consistently demonstrate the value we bring. Over the past year, more than at any time in the nearly 25 years I have been in higher education, the question has been asked, “Is college worth it?” Parents, policymakers, community leaders and students themselves have questioned whether the investment in a college education will pay adequate dividends.

I believe that the answer is a resounding “yes,” but universities must demonstrate their value. Students who take out loans are leaving college with an average debt of more than $25,000 and total student debt now outpaces credit card debt. We must be sure that they are leaving with the tools they need to be successful – which may be specific skills or knowledge, connections with the business world, an understanding of the risks and rewards of entrepreneurship, hands-on research experience or an appreciation of their role as a global citizen – or all of those.

We also have an obligation to help students minimize the cost of attendance by decreasing their time to degree completion. Although four-year graduation rates at UNL, UNK and UNO have doubled or nearly doubled in the past decade, less than one-third of students graduate in four years. An additional year of school adds at least 20 percent to the cost of education and has the additional effect of limiting the amount of financial aid that is available to other students.
Several years ago we adopted a four-year graduation guarantee, promising students that if they took a full course load (15 credit hours) each semester we would make sure that the courses they needed to take to graduate in four years would be available. Over time, however, many programs have continued to add required courses that make a four-year degree nearly impossible to achieve. This year, the Board of Regents approved a new policy setting the basic graduation requirement at 120 hours – which should allow more students to graduate in a timely way and maintain a more predictable cost of attendance.

**Innovation and entrepreneurship**

Efforts to grow enrollment are just one tactic in a larger strategy of increasing the economic competitiveness of our state and region. To be successful will require new partnerships between the university and the private sector, a stronger emphasis on entrepreneurship in our classrooms, and support for faculty who have the talent and creative spark to develop new technologies and bring innovations from the laboratory to the marketplace.

The role of universities in increasing competitiveness is being explored on many fronts. The Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities has established a Commission on Innovation, Competitiveness and Economic Prosperity, which focuses on the expanding role universities play in local and regional innovation. I am privileged to have begun a two-year term as chair of that commission in 2012 – and especially pleased that my tenure coincides with Gov. Dave Heineman’s leadership of the National Governors Association. Gov. Heineman has identified “Growing State Economies” as his strategic priority for his year as chair of NGA, and there is great synergy between our agendas.

The stakes are tremendously high. One of the most compelling books I read in 2011 was *The Coming Jobs War* by Jim Clifton, an alumnus of the University of Nebraska and CEO of Gallup. His thesis, based on years of Gallop research and most recently the last six years of research through Gallup’s World Poll, is that the one thing that matters most in the world today is having a good job. He says the predominant force in the next 30 years won’t be military or political – it will be economic. The country that will lead the world in every domain will be the nation that wins the battle for creating the best jobs – and we are going to compete and win this competition only if we lead in innovation and entrepreneurship.
Clifton says that the next breakthrough, analogous to the information- and internet-based economy that has fueled so much growth over the last two decades, will come from the combination of the forces within our cities, great universities and powerful local leaders. He echoes the thoughts of many economic leaders who believe that the answers to our most vexing problems and the greatest opportunities are local. And universities, Clifton says, are the origin of most highly successful startups because they have, “by design, the best ecosystem for entrepreneurship and innovation.”

We have a great opportunity and an obligation to capitalize on the significant innovative activity that is already going on across the university, and to encourage more. In May, I asked Dr. Jim Linder – who has broad experience in the private sector and in academia – to lead our efforts to promote innovation, competitiveness and entrepreneurship. Jim brings tremendous talent and experience to this position, and he understands well how to bring university researchers together with the private sector to transform innovative ideas into products and processes that can be the foundation of new companies and new jobs in Nebraska.

Jim also now serves as president of the University Technology Development Corp., which acts as an umbrella for our technology development organizations – UNeMed, NUTech Ventures, the Peter Kiewit Institute Technology Development Corp., and the Nebraska Innovation Campus Development Corp. His efforts to encourage interested faculty to work with the private sector to capitalize on ideas with strong commercial potential are a critical step in building an environment and culture in which the university is viewed – both internally and externally – as an economic driver and a desired business partner.

Our efforts to expand partnerships with the private sector grew significantly this year through activities at Nebraska Innovation Campus. We took ownership of the property in January 2010 and have now cleared virtually all of the buildings except the 4-H and Industrial Arts buildings, both of which will find a new life as part of NIC. In February 2011 we signed an agreement with Nebraska Nova Development LLC to carry out the first phase of the development, primarily building roads, sewers and other infrastructure. Nebraska Nova was selected because they were willing to put their own capital at risk in the project, and because of their experience with tax increment financing and other financial strategies that allowed us to move the project.
In May, the Legislature approved a one-time investment of $25 million, as recommended by Gov. Heineman, to jump-start the development of new facilities. And in June we announced that we were able to leverage that into an $80 million development to include four buildings: a renovated 4-H building that will serve as a central commons area, as well as a 100,000-square-foot companion building; a $30 million research facility focused on our strengths in food, fuel and water, and a similar size life sciences research center. The first facilities will be ready for use in 2013.

We are grateful to the governor and legislature for their foresight and commitment to this project. We have always viewed Nebraska Innovation Campus as a partnership between the public and private sectors, and this investment is allowing us to move more quickly and aggressively to seek additional partners.

While Innovation Campus has received significant attention and investment, it is not our only innovation initiative. Over the next several years I expect to see developments on or adjacent to each of our other campuses that leverage partnerships with the private sector to achieve similar goals: engaging students, developing internships, building relationships between faculty and the business community, and developing new technologies that can lead to new economic activity.

Helping solve global challenges: The Daugherty Institute

As we pursue additional partnerships, we must maintain a sharp focus on a limited number of priorities. Of course, a large public university like ours offers a wide variety of programs. But if we want the University of Nebraska to be among the best, we need to prioritize and we need to put our talents and resources to work finding solutions to problems in our state and beyond. We’re doing this in several areas already, with one of the most notable being the sustainable use of water for agriculture, where we’re increasingly recognized as a global leader through the Robert B. Daugherty Water for Food Institute.

The Daugherty Institute has made great strides in the past year. In May, we hired one of the world’s leading experts in water management and development to serve as the founding executive director. Dr. Roberto Lenton, former chair of the World Bank Inspection Panel, helped establish and then served as director general of the International Water Management Institute in Sri Lanka, growing it into a major institute employing more than 300 people in 10 countries. He
shares our vision for the Institute and its potential impact on the world. Roberto will provide leadership for the annual Water for Food conference, which is becoming one of the leading international forums for discussions of food security and sustainable agriculture, and will also lead the institute’s efforts in developing new research and education programs.

One of those programs took root at this year’s Water for Food conference when we signed a memorandum of understanding with UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education in Delft, the Netherlands, for a research and education exchange program. The program will give international students the opportunity to study in Nebraska – to see production agriculture at its best, study the High Plains Aquifer and have as their field laboratory one of the world’s leading food producers. Our students will benefit from renowned IHE programs in water management, environmental science, water engineering and other disciplines. We plan to jointly develop a master’s degree program in water for food, short courses on irrigation and water use efficiency and collaborative research projects.

Our reputation in the water arena has led to some important new relationships and collaborations. In March, I co-hosted a symposium with M.S. Swaminathan in Chennai, India, on Managing Water Resources for Food Security, sponsored by the Indo-US Science and Technology Forum. Swaminathan is one of the world’s leaders in sustainable agriculture and food security, the first recipient of the World Food Prize, a member of the upper house of Parliament in India and the director of the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation. He has had a remarkable career and is one of the true giants in agriculture in the world. I was pleased that he subsequently accepted my invitation to come to Nebraska in October and deliver the first Heuermann Lecture, a new lecture series at IANR focused on agriculture.

The University of Nebraska will also have a presence at major international water conferences in Marseilles and Stockholm in 2012, focusing on the global yield gap atlas developed by Dr. Ken Cassman at UNL, and continuing to build relationships on behalf of the Daugherty Institute. Country-specific and reliable analysis of current and potential agricultural productivity. Ken’s research resulted in significant productivity increases in china, which also has implications for India. He has also received a major contract from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to help underwrite the gathering of yield gap info in vulnerable regions of Africa and South Asia. Our connections in is very important and has been well-received internationally.
The Buffett Institute

Early childhood education and development is another field in which we have an opportunity to direct our expertise toward finding solutions to difficult challenges. We will advance our position significantly through the Buffett Early Childhood Institute, which was established in February 2011 with a founding gift from Omaha philanthropist Susie Buffett. A search is underway for the founding director of The Buffett Institute, which has as its focus the education and development of children from birth to age 8, especially those who are vulnerable due to poverty, abuse or developmental challenges.

Like the Daugherty Institute, the Buffett Institute will draw on faculty from all four campuses in multiple disciplines. It will transform the approach to early childhood development, create a new model for the engagement of higher education in early childhood and improve the lives of children in Nebraska and throughout the world. The work of Buffett Institute faculty will be of great value to governments, educators and health care professionals struggling to deal with the challenges of rapid population growth in areas like India and China.

One of the signature programs associated with the Buffett Institute is Educare, an innovative research-based educational program for at-risk children. Educare Schools offer year-round, full-day education with highly trained teachers and a high level of family involvement. There are more than 25 such schools in the U.S., including two in Omaha; in October, we broke ground for Educare Lincoln, in partnership with Lincoln Public Schools, Buffett Early Childhood Fund and the Community Action Partnership of Lancaster and Saunders Counties. The lead gift for the center came from the Lincoln Community Foundation. When the center opens late in 2012 it will serve some 200 at-risk infants and young children and will be a classroom and laboratory for our students in the early childhood field. We are committed to expanding this concept in Nebraska.

Both the Daugherty and Buffett institutes are excellent examples of how a land-grant university can focus on its strengths and leverage the expertise of its faculty, the talents and wisdom of people across the state, and the generosity of visionary donors to address challenges facing the state and the world. There are many other examples across the University. The new College of Public Health, which this year earned full accreditation, is involved in wide range of research and initiatives that benefit Nebraska, the region and the world. Our continuing research in agricultural productivity and animal health makes important contributions to the conversation
about food security. Medical research in areas such as cancer, heart disease, neurodegenerative
diseases, vision loss, aging and obesity is providing new solutions that improve the quality of life
for people throughout the world. In many other areas, the University of Nebraska continues to seek
innovative solutions to global challenges.

**A global university**

I doubt that most American public universities would have described themselves as “global” 150
years ago… or even 50 years ago. Today, our world is increasingly interconnected: diseases
move across the planet in a day; violence is exported without regard to borders; and knowledge
knows no boundaries. Understanding the world—its markets, political systems, cultures and
challenges—is as important as understanding our own country. In addition, providing ample
international learning and research opportunities is essential if we hope to attract the best
students and faculty. As a result, global engagement is now central to every leading university’s
mission, and certainly to ours.

In the fall of 2011 I participated in a leadership network on global engagement hosted by the
American Council on Education in which representatives of both public and private institutions
explored strategies and opportunities for higher education blue ribbon panel issued report.

We have established a strategic plan for global engagement based on four broad goals: increase
the number of international students on our campuses; give every undergraduate student the
opportunity for a meaningful international experience; develop new international institutional
partnerships, and encourage faculty to develop international relationships. We have seen
promising developments and progress in all of those areas over the past year. Global engagement
is one of the priorities of the University of Nebraska Foundation’s Campaign for Nebraska, and
in August the Foundation awarded more than $1.1 million in grants to the campuses to support
and expand their global engagement initiatives. The grants will support programs like UNL and
UNK study abroad programs, UNO’s academic partnership programs in India, China, Germany
and Norway, and UNMC’s collaborative research studies in India and China.

I believe the opportunities for recruiting international students to Nebraska are significant. In
2011, the number of international students on our campuses reached a record high, with over
3,000 students or about 6 percent of total enrollment. More than one-third of those students are
from China. We lag behind many major universities in the percent of international students, but we are growing at about 7 percent per year and we intend to develop more strategic partnerships as we have done in Brazil to build a more robust student pipeline.

This strategy is important to achieving our growth goals, but also to enriching our campuses and communities with a more diverse student body. Some of these students stay in Nebraska when they graduate, bringing talent and diversity to the workforce; others return home and serve as leaders in their own communities and as our advocates with other prospective students. Whatever their path, their experience in Nebraska gives them a perspective that can only be gained through living and learning in our state.

Over the past year I’ve had the opportunity to meet students from a number of countries – some who are studying at the University of Nebraska and others who dream of coming here someday. When I see their passion for education and their commitment to making their world a better place – whether as teachers, doctors, engineers, farmers or in some other capacity – it gives me great optimism for our future. Increasing the number of international students on our campuses is one of our most important strategies for our state and for our students.

We are also developing new opportunities for students to study abroad and participate in service learning, research and other activities. University of Nebraska students travel to more than 50 countries each year, studying business, engineering, language and culture, social sciences and dozens of other areas of focus. Invariably, students who participate in study abroad programs identify it as one of the most important and meaningful experiences of their college years, shaping their world view and influencing their choices of where they will live and the work they will do.

One example is Ashley Schmidt, a UNL student majoring in biological systems engineering, who took a year off after graduating from high school to go to Mali, West Africa, to volunteer in a hospital. When she returned to the U.S. and enrolled at UNL, she developed a plan to assist health care facilities, schools and other institutions that had no reliable access to electricity. She set up her own not-for-profit organization, the Global Energy Project, and recruited other UNL students to return to Mali with her to work on sustainable energy projects. We are working with Ashley now to see how her program might support our health, water and agriculture interests in
other parts of Africa and other locations around the world. She plans to continue her education in Nebraska and go to law school at UNL with a focus on policies related to alternative energy.

Under the leadership of Vice Provost Tom Farrell, we have made a concerted effort to encourage and advise students to apply for Fulbright scholarships, and this year had a record number of students selected for these prestigious international awards. Eleven students from UNL, UNO and UNMC are traveling to nine countries this year to teach English, conduct research on a wide range of topics and study health care barriers. We also have more students winning other highly competitive scholarships for international study and research.

Many faculty members are helping to advance the goal of increasing international institutional collaborations, and there is considerable interest in working with the University of Nebraska, as we have found in visits to China, India and Brazil – our three strategic priority countries. One example is the College of Education and Human Sciences at UNL, where, under the leadership of Dean Marjorie Kostelnik, we worked to revive a long-dormant relationship with a leading education university in China, East China Normal University in Shanghai. We aggressively pursued a faculty and graduate student research agenda, inviting ECNU colleagues here for consultation and traveling to Shanghai for presentations and discussions. We are now working closely with ECNU on engaging the priorities of the Buffett Institute.

We were also successful in establishing an American Culture Center in China, similar in structure and purpose to the Confucius Institute at UNL. In October, we signed an agreement with Xi’an Jiaotong University to establish an American Culture Center in Xi’an, a city of 10 million in western China. The center is one of only 10 in the country to receive seed funding from the U.S. government. It will host a variety of programs to expose students and faculty to American history, culture, art, government, law and medicine.

We would not have been successful in opening this center without the long-standing relationships that UNL and UNMC leaders have built with Xi’an Jiaotong University and the leadership of Chancellor Perlman. The students in Chinese universities today will be the business and governmental leaders of China tomorrow, and cultural understanding is an essential ingredient to peaceful and constructive relationships. The center will sponsor reciprocal student exchanges to permit students from each institution to study at the other for a year, a semester or
shorter periods, and faculty and students from all four campuses will participate in research and other exchanges.

**A return on investment**

The people of Nebraska invest a great deal in their only public university. I believe they get a significant return. The initiatives I’ve outlined – Nebraska Innovation Campus, the Buffett Institute, the Daugherty Institute, global engagement, strategies for growth and others – each bring opportunities for economic return. These include new businesses that emerge from the public-private partnerships at Innovation Campus and from our faculty’s research and development efforts; external funding for faculty research; start-ups created by enterprising students like those from the Raikes School who just won a national competition to develop a stock-trading app; and new partnerships that prepare students for a far wider array of careers than ever before.

We consider ourselves a partner with the state in identifying workforce needs and proposing solutions. One example was an interim legislative hearing in November on the growing shortage of nurses, especially in rural Nebraska. We shared with the committee our strategies to expand nursing education programs, producing more nurses and nurse educators, include the new division of the College of Nursing in Norfolk and proposals to increase enrollment in the Lincoln and Kearney programs.

We take very seriously our obligation to use the resources provided by the state in ways that benefit all Nebraskans, and to be transparent and accountable in how we do business. We undertook a number of initiatives in 2011 to further ensure accountability, including an audit of our health care plan designed to remove any ineligible dependents from coverage, which resulted in cost avoidance of over $1 million. We have expanded our website to provide easy access to in-depth information about our budget and salaries. In the interest of increasing competitiveness and fairness as an employer, we made a recommendation to the Board of Regents to extend health insurance coverage to employees’ same- and opposite-sex partners, with specific criteria that must be met for eligibility. The Board will consider that proposal at a later date.

We are nearing full implementation of a new Student Information System, which offers students streamlined admissions, financial aid, course registration and access to student records both on
our campuses and in the state colleges, with whom we partnered to reduce costs. We have also implemented a new university-wide purchasing platform, eShop, to increase our purchasing power and gain better cost savings.

Our priorities and investment of resources are guided by a strategic framework that has as its foundation the mission of being the best public university in the country as measured by how we serve our state. We have kept the promise of the Morrill Act – to extend the benefits of higher education to the people of our state – and expanded on that promise to use our talents to help solve the problems facing our world.

**Milestones**

Late in 2011, Senior Vice President and Provost Linda Pratt announced that she would retire in June 2012 and return to the UNL Department of English to teach. Dr. Pratt has been a valued colleague for many years, and has been a great partner in helping lead many important academic initiatives. Her experience as a department chair and interim dean gave her a valuable perspective and insights, and I have relied on her wisdom countless times over the past six years. Linda led the implementation of a new Student Information System across all of our campuses and the state colleges, and was instrumental in the establishment of the Buffett Early Childhood Institute. She has also been a champion for the Programs of Excellence funding that supports outstanding initiatives on each campus. Linda has served the university exceptionally well and while I am sorry to lose her skill in the Provost’s office, it is fitting that she is going to finish her career in the classroom.

One of the tragedies of the past year was the sudden death of Dr. Rubens Pamies, vice chancellor for research at UNMC. Dr. Pamies mobilized medical support for his family’s native Haiti following the devastating earthquake there in late 2010. He returned a number of times to help rebuild medical infrastructure and provide training, and it was on one of those visits that he suffered a heart attack. Rubens was deeply committed to alleviating disparities in the delivery of health care and was instrumental in developing the Virginia-Nebraska Alliance to attract minority students to health care fields. You could not meet Rubens even once without getting a sense of his warmth, his kindness, his humanity. In an environment that is necessarily filled with
ambitious, bright people who are impatient to achieve very important agendas, Rubens’ deeply personal, genuine concern about the actual people we serve—and should better serve—came through above all else.

In April 2010, Robert Daugherty, chairman and founder of Valmont Industries made a visionary gift commitment, one of the largest gifts in our history, to establish a university-wide institute focused on water for food. In less than two years, we have begun to see its great potential to develop new solutions to global challenges of hunger, poverty, agricultural productivity and food security. Bob passed away in November 2010 and in March the Board of Regents approved naming the institute in his honor. The board further honored Bob’s family in July with the presentation of the Regents Medal, the highest honor given by the University of Nebraska. Our goal is for the Robert B. Daugherty Institute to be the premier interdisciplinary institute in the world dedicated to the use of water for agriculture. I think Bob would be proud of the progress we have made.