On behalf of UNI’s Professional and Scientific Council and all UNI P&S employees, I would like to thank the Regents for the opportunity to talk about UNI’s Professional and Scientific employees.

The UNI P&S employees are dedicated to the institutional mission to serve students and the state of Iowa. In virtually every environment at UNI, P&S employees help to facilitate and carry out the mission of the University in roles that range from providing academic and career advising, planning campus infrastructure, providing services that enhance and support academic research to coaching our student athletes. We are proud of UNI and all if its accomplishments this past year and will continue to strive to make UNI a better place.

As I look around our University, I see many academic and non-academic departments and programs struggling to stay viable in the higher ed realm. We continue to do “more with less”, a phrase that I heard Camille Schroeder from ISU say last year during our opportunity to meet with the BOR. This statement has rung true with me and many P&S employees this past year at UNI. Many P&S staff that participated in the early retirement program last year were not replaced, and the staff that remained were asked to “do more with less”. As P&S staff leave the University, positions are often not filled and the people that are left are asked to do “more with less”.

Unfortunately it seems that the people that work at UNI are the only ones that see that we are suffering. From the outside it looks as though everything is going well and that we continue to be a strong and viable university. But make no mistake, this trend of cutting higher education, is quickly changing the scope and the mission of the university. Morale is down. Recruiting for staff is becoming more difficult. We always knew that we could not offer competitive salaries in comparison to the business world, but we always had our benefits to rely on to bring in new staff. We are losing those benefits and are hence losing opportunities to hire great staff.

This past January, UNI’s P&S Council conducted a survey of the P&S staff. During this survey we asked the P&S staff questions regarding their benefits and salaries. Overwhelmingly the survey reported that P&S Staff felt that all benefits that they currently have were considered “important” or “very important”. Wages and retirement plans were also considered of the highest importance when it comes to financial benefits, but 27% of the voting members of the P&S staff listed their wage as “Dissatisfied” or “Very Dissatisfied”. From this we infer that quality staff are willing to work at UNI for less money if the benefits stay strong. Unfortunately during the past few years we have lost benefits in retirement, health, life insurance and accidental death
and dismemberment in addition to having furloughs. Here’s a recent email message from a P&S staff member that was sent to a Council member at UNI regarding this issue.

“I did read about the changes occurring with our benefits effective July 1 and was surprised about the life insurance and AD&D. When I started in Nov 2010, those two benefits were an important part of the package for me. My background includes a little benefit management so I know that the expenses associated with these policies are small compared to medical and dental insurance. The cost of term life insurance and AD&D is minimal compared to the impression made of "taking" something away. So why these two were reduced or eliminated does not make sense to me. My current salary is 36% less than what I made (in the private sector) before I started at UNI and every little benefit helped make up the difference. I am beginning to wonder why I decided to accept my position here.”

At UNI we have trimmed the fat. We are now cutting into the muscle that makes UNI strong. With every cut, we are disabling UNI from serving the people of Iowa and, more importantly the students, the future, of the state of Iowa. I am begging, pleading with the legislature to stop the cuts at UNI and to invest in the young people in the state. In return, history shows us that they will invest in us by keeping their talents here and contributing to workforce in Iowa.

I want to thank you for this opportunity to candidly talk to you today. And although I’m “preaching to the choir”, I am hopeful that this message will be heard by our legislature and by the people of Iowa and that they seriously consider what they are doing to our future by cutting higher education. Thank you for your time.