“Here At River’s Bend”
Terry L. Allison, Installation Address, October 9, 2013

Thank you to President McRobbie, Executive Vice President Applegate and the Trustees for placing confidence in me to lead this campus. Thank you to the university and community who interviewed me and brought me here. Thank you to friends and family for traveling here to South Bend. Among the guests are my parents, Betty and Frank Allison, married for 62 and a half years together with my two younger brothers, Curtis, and Eric. Long-time friends are here from several California State University campuses and many more recent colleagues and friends from Governors State University and my recent Chicago area connections.

My mentor and friend Alexander Gonzalez, President of Sacramento State University, and his wife, Gloria, wanted to be here but at the last minute were unable to attend. While I was a faculty member at California State University San Marcos, President Gonzalez began a fellows program to encourage faculty members to develop as university leaders. Without that program and without his guidance, I would not be here today. I have tried, in a small way, to emulate the mentoring role of Alex Gonzalez and am proud to have here today several individuals with whom I’ve been in a formal mentoring relationship. Just a few moments ago, you heard from one of those individuals, Dr. Sonya Baker. Thank you, Sonya, for learning a song that is special to me.

Mentorship, the relationship between the senior, more experienced individual, and the person eager to learn, is essential to the university. While contemporary universities serve thousands of students at a time, the most effective teaching and learning often occurs one-on-one. As I am formally installed as chancellor today, I remind myself, as I would like to remind you, to take the time to reach out to other individuals, to make time for the mentoring conversation that may change another person’s life. Every time that we overlook this obligation to stop, show our care, and to help a student find a solution, we fail as an institution, we fail as a university. Every time we fulfill a mentoring role, no matter how small, we are contributing to a healthy, vibrant university and community.

Connecting people committed to higher education, to Indiana University, to IU South Bend, and to the region served by our campus constitutes the central purposes of this ceremony today. Today we gather to form community, recommit to our long-standing values to teach, to advance knowledge, to serve, and to explore new directions for this outstanding institution. We gather in thanks to the South Bend community members who formed and who have sustained this university, and to thank our generous donors who have built this campus and a beautiful downtown educational center in Elkhart. We come together to appreciate the longstanding advocacy of our other surrounding communities and elected officials on behalf of IU South Bend. We are here to thank the faculty and staff, many who have committed their entire professional lives to this university. We are here to acknowledge the contributions of our alumni to their professions and communities and to celebrate this whole week long the dedication and creativity of our current study body. Thank you for gathering here today and this week to celebrate Indiana University South Bend.
As a literary scholar and a writer I couldn’t help searching for a central metaphor for my message today, and this metaphor refers to local geography. I am a lover of landscapes, and I have seen many in my life. Growing up in the US Navy, I was already crossing oceans before birth. Mt Fuji, Diamondhead, the Sierra Madres, Mts Temescal, Diablo, Palomar, and Wilson have all shaped my vision, as have the Gulf Coast, Waikiki, San Francisco Bay and the North Sea. So have the Chrysler Building, the Eiffel Tower, and the Hancock Center.

Here in the Midwest the landscapes may be quieter—they’re certainly quite a bit flatter—but they can be just as compelling. The St Joseph River runs right through the campus and through this city, providing a beautiful space to walk, cycle, or to sit and reflect. Bicycling along the river, I have spotted egrets, a sun basking turtle, and even two beavers scampering across the lawn of campus housing. The St. Joseph was the lifeblood of the Potawatomi’s, the ancestral peoples of this region, and it remains today a central life force of Michiana. As a celebration of this occasion, I share a haiku I wrote in honor of this place.

sing the wild grasses

a joy to enunciate

Potawatomi

In my introduction to this new landscape I had to take notice that this campus sits almost exactly at the bend of the river that gives this city its name. So, my metaphor for this address is the river’s bend. What meaning have I made of this? Together what meaning can we make of this special turning point?

Today Indiana University South Bend is at river’s bend. The campus has been moving along, and in many ways has grown stronger academically and in its capacity to serve students. We have wonderful new or renovated facilities, students now live on campus, more students work on campus, and we are creating even more new jobs for them. Faculty research is growing in importance while the dedication to excellence in teaching remains central to our purpose. The university’s engagement with the community in sustainability, in civic engagement, in entrepreneurship, arts, and lectures is growing. And yet… our students have not been progressing as we would like. IU South Bend serves a wide variety of students, and many have financial challenges as well as lack of preparation for university study. Even taking this into consideration, we would like our students to progress more expediently, and to remain for a second year of study. And we would like more of them, in fact the majority of them, to graduate from Indiana University South Bend. Here, today, we must make a significant turn towards student success. Here, today, I ask this community, gathered to celebrate IU South Bend, to recommit to student success. What do I mean by this?

As a public, regional, master’s university, IU South Bend provides a significant common good, a publicly assisted university education. Because we receive the public’s support we have a special obligation to work with the other major sectors of public education, from preschool to community colleges, to foster increased student preparation for college and for the professions. This is not IU South Bend’s task alone. Collaboration with our regional partners will be central
to our mission of student success. I am grateful that many of IU South Bend’s higher education and school partners are here with us today. We need to improve our coordination of community partnerships to form a more comprehensive approach to serving our shared communities in education, in sustainability, transportation, healthcare, hospitality, and in other sectors. I’d like to extend my hand in friendship to my fellow academic leaders while urging you to reflect each week on how we can better collaborate as a higher education community to foster student success and healthier communities.

On this campus, we must be more flexible and nimble; in other words, to foster student success, we need to bend! In my short time here, I have encouraged the plans underway for a new first-year experience, and I have suggested some innovative means to stretch the first college semester, providing underprepared students with more time to succeed. We need to re-invent our processes so that students can make a smoother transition from the highly structured environment of high school to the individual choice driven model of university study. Students do have to learn how to navigate bureaucratic technocracies and the increasingly complex environments of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. Still, we can construct their experience so that it is not an obstacle course that unintentionally places barriers to achievement. Instead, we might think of it as a par course, one of those well-designed paths in public parks that intentionally guide individuals through a set of healthy challenges. Here at IU South Bend, we need to bend our advising model into a new shape, one which is less about scheduling and more about student development, career, study, personal, and professional choices.

Two weeks ago, at St Mary’s College, I attended a lecture by the renowned journalist, radio host, and author, Krista Tippett. She spoke about endless debates in which there seems no common ground and suggested a new mode of discussion in which we change the initial questions we ask. Applying this approach, let’s put aside some questions like, “How did this student ever make it to college?” or “Why don’t our students study like they should?” and begin to ask a new set of questions. “What can I do to help this student?” “How can I help our students better manage their time and their other resources?” “What are the three most important things we can do together, students, staff, faculty, and community, to help our students succeed?”

Once we create a better start to students’ university careers, we need to continue to develop enriching educational experiences which have proven especially effective in retaining and graduating all students, particularly first generation and other underrepresented students. IU South Bend faculty are devoted to teaching and open to experimentation. This week’s conference, on Reacting to the Past, an engaged pedagogy in which students and professors play the role of historical figures, provides just one example. IU South Bend has strong programs and able leaders in honors, international study, and undergraduate research. We need to create opportunities for many more students to participate in these high impact practices where students work one-on-one or in small groups with peers, faculty, and the community. We need to develop much more structured approaches to service learning, the area of highest impact for first-year students, and to offering senior capstones, the highest impact for graduating seniors.

As I have met with regional leaders to talk about the cities, towns, and rural areas that IU South Bend serves, it has been gratifying to hear from employers that the liberal arts and sciences must remain central to our work. CEOs in agribusiness, banking, education, engineering, government
service, healthcare, hospitality, manufacturing, and other fields have all used similar terms. Please give us graduates strong in soft skills, graduates who can solve problems, read and think critically, write and speak well, and people who work well in teams that cut across cultures and national borders. At the same time, IU South Bend already has begun to engage in a new academic master planning process to see where our curriculum is not meeting regional needs for specific areas of expertise. While preserving the best of a liberal arts and sciences education, we will need to add programs in areas of growing regional strength such as advanced manufacturing management, health services, and hospitality. IU South Bend’s population of graduate students, much too small for a university of our type, must increase significantly to meet regional needs. In some cases, the regular 3-year implementation cycle for new programs is just too long. In academic planning, we must move much more quickly.

IU South Bend was founded to provide greater access to students in our region to a high quality public university education, but initial access that does not lead to graduation and meaningful professional work is, in reality, worth little. In fact it may prove very costly to students who have short academic careers followed by significant debt. I am both haunted and inspired by the work of Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson in Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America’s Public Universities. Among many significant findings, the authors discovered that family income is the most successful predictor of who will graduate from college. Sadly, the bottom 25% of high school academic performers in the top 25% of family income are more likely to graduate from college than the 25% of top academic performers in the bottom 25% of family income. A university like IU South Bend was designed to help turn around this picture, and to provide lower income students a greater opportunity to succeed. To achieve this mission, we must be fierce in our ambition, and relentless in pursuit of student success.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, used to cite an earlier American minister and abolitionist, Theodore Parker, who first coined the phrase, “the arc of the moral universe ‘bends towards justice’.” President Barack Obama recently refined this statement to say that “the arc of the moral universe may bend towards justice, but it doesn’t bend on its own.” Here, at river’s bend, I have to agree. Certainly students must take personal responsibility for their success—who would ever suggest that they do not have the primary role? But it does take a university to graduate a student. It takes a university of concerted action, a university of deep commitment and resolution, and a university that forms lasting community to support our students’ aspirations and their needs.

Here at river’s bend we are reminded of both continuity and change. The river flows on since time immemorial and yet it changes directions. The university goes on and yet it changes direction, sometimes more rapidly than expected. Today I ask you to flow with the river’s bend. We must acknowledge and preserve the continuity of our mission and purposes as a fine regional university. At the same time I ask you to commit to the changes needed to achieve our mission, and to turn our thoughts towards student success as the ultimate measure of our work.

Several times during my first few weeks at Indiana University South Bend, I stopped and said, “Oh my! What have I done?” Surrounded by boxes and the seemingly endless tasks of moving, it didn’t seem possible that I had relocated again. Three months in, I couldn’t be happier about my choice. Indiana University is an incredibly strong institution with an eminent history and bright
future. IU South Bend is a vibrant academic community, with excellent faculty and staff, and thousands of engaged students eager to learn. South Bend, Elkhart, and surrounding communities have opened their arms in welcome and I feel completely at home here. I have been here three months, but it feels like much longer, and that I’m really settled in.

Today, as I am officially installed as chancellor, I would like to publicly state my commitment to the university, its students, faculty and staff, and to the communities we serve. I promise to lead by example, share information widely, consult broadly, and share how I arrive at decisions that only I can make. I commit to be fully present and engaged. I will place all my energies into becoming an increasingly effective chancellor and leader within Indiana University and for the broader region this campus serves.

Finally, I want to thank my friends who continue to offer me well wishes as I assume my new duties. The Dutch have a beautiful custom at the time of dissertation defense. The scholar brings individuals, which they call “paranimfen,” to assist them in the ceremony. According to one online source, “This ritual originates from the ancient concept where obtaining a doctorate was seen as a de facto marriage to the university. Furthermore the paranymphs would also act as a physical shield in case the debate became too heated, or as a backup for the doctoral candidate to ask for advice when answering questions. Today their role is symbolic and seen as a position of honor similar to a best man at a wedding.”

Today in the audience, I have several close friends, including a Dutchmen who has served as paranimf and several faculty colleagues, who play this role for me today, who act as my “paranimfen”. Focco, Fran, Karen, Janet, Renee, thank you for supporting me through many twists and turns in my professional and personal life. I thank my absent friends, notably Gary, Anne, and Janet, from the San Francisco area, who could not be here today. Thank you to my colleagues here who are also new presidents and chancellors. I look forward to our collaboration. Again, thank you to my family members here today. And I thank each one of you who have helped me to begin my term as chancellor. Let’s work together—and let’s have fun—as we seek to strengthen Indiana University South Bend.