

# *The Investiture Ceremony*

PENNSYLVANIA WESTERN UNIVERSITY



## *The Inauguration of* **Jonathan R. Anderson, Ph.D.** *as Pennsylvania Western University's Second President*

### INAUGURAL ADDRESS

#### *Nurturing Our Stewardship*

Good afternoon, honored guests, colleagues, students, alumni, and friends of Pennsylvania Western University. We welcome those who are in the audience today and those who are watching from the Clarion, Edinboro and Global Online campuses.

I extend a special welcome to my parents Scott and Angelle Anderson, our oldest son Scott Anderson, and my wife, Kristy, who are in the audience today. I am thankful for parents who valued education. I remember as a 4- or 5-year-old, attending teaching practicum courses with my mother so she could finish her degree in education. I also remember my father buying our first home computer so he could work on something called a Ph.D. dissertation. I am grateful for their example of the opportunities that education can provide.

Also traveling from across the country are colleagues from Southern Utah University, Dr. Mary Pearson, Daneka Souberbielle, David Grant, and President Emeritus Steven Bennion. Thanks to each of them for making the trip East. When I was 18 years old, I enrolled in a private junior college in Rexburg, ID, to play football and learn. When I enrolled, Dr. Steven Bennion was serving as the president of that institution. He later served as the president at Southern Utah University. Through a series of very fortunate events, two of our children married two of his grandchildren and Kristy and I now posterity with Steve and his wife Marjorie. It is an honor to have President Emeritus Bennion with us for today's events.

## INTRODUCTION

PennWest friends, today we gather to celebrate the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Pennsylvania Western University and to reaffirm our shared commitment to the values and legacy that define this remarkable institution. PennWest is a community-based university where students succeed, innovation thrives, diversity enriches, and opportunities abound.

Chair Shapira, Interim Chancellor Fiorentino, Chair Pape, and members of the Presidential Search committee: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to work with our more than 1,400 faculty and staff to serve the nearly 11,000 students who call PennWest home.

I extend my personal gratitude to PennWest's founding president, Dr. Dale-Elizabeth Pehrsson, and interim president, Dr. Laurie Bernotsky. Each of them, through their leadership, vision, and dedication, laid the foundation on which we stand today.

To the members of the Council of Trustees, Student Governments, Faculty Senate, members of the Presidential Transition Committee, Union leadership – including 22 chapters of APSCUF, AFSCME, Coaches, SCUPA, Police and Police Supervisors, Nurses and SEIU – Cabinet, Campus Leadership Teams and Campus Leadership Councils and all who have shared their time in helping welcome my family: thank you. It is a privilege to share this moment with all of you.

As we look ahead, there are challenges we must tackle together, but there are many, many more opportunities in our path. This university has always been a beacon of hope and a catalyst for change, and together, we will build on that proud legacy to nurture the stewardship with which we have been entrusted.

## OUR STEWARDSHIP

This afternoon, we mark the next phase of PennWest's journey—building a next-generation institution of higher education. Many here today have been architects of this vision, shaping PennWest from its inception in 2022. We owe gratitude to those who laid the groundwork, building on the proud legacies of three great institutions.

It is now our turn to own and nurture the stewardship that we have been entrusted to hold.

Every classroom, technology, office space, sidewalk, and tree across our campuses in California, Clarion, and Edinboro needs to be cared for and nurtured. Every student, every teaching moment, opportunity for student support is also a stewardship to be nurtured.

At PennWest, each of us is a steward, entrusted with caring for and strengthening our part of this institution. The resources we manage and traditions we keep are not ours forever, but they are ours for a time. By fulfilling our roles and nurturing our stewardships, we honor the PennWest legacy and ensure its continued excellence.

Nurturing our stewardships is the work of PennWest's people. Let's commit to each other to strengthen this institution of higher learning and ensure it becomes more complete than it is today. Caring for our individual stewardship may be the best way we can respect this institution's history and build the PennWest legacy.

## OUR RICH HISTORY

In fact, this is the PennWest way. For more than a century and a half, our campuses have continued to deliver high-quality academic instruction, even as our country and communities experienced significant upheaval and daunting challenges.

Not many miles from here, in 1863, Abraham Lincoln reminded the world that this country is “dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” At that time, our institutions were delivering instruction in Edinboro and California. Instruction in Clarion began a few years later.

Throughout the Reconstruction Era, the Great Depression, two world wars, the Civil Rights Movement, the dot-com bubble, 9/11, the housing bubble, and even a global pandemic, our institutions remained open, serving as access points for students, promoting upward mobility and acting as local economic hubs that respond to regional workforce needs and community development.

This core mission—to meet the higher education needs of the surrounding communities and contribute to the intellectual, cultural, civic, and economic development of the region—has remained consistent.

Founded in 1852 as the California Academy, the California campus later became known as Southwestern Normal School, California State Normal School, California State Teachers College, California State College, and California University of Pennsylvania.

The Edinboro Academy was established in 1857 by the region's original Scottish settlers as a private training school for Pennsylvania. It would later become the Northwest State Normal School, Edinboro State Normal School, Edinboro State Teachers College, and Edinboro University of Pennsylvania.

Operations began in 1867 at the Carrier Seminary of Western Pennsylvania. The campus later was known by several names including Clarion State Normal School, Clarion State College, and Clarion University of Pennsylvania.

PennWest's fourth Global Online campus embodies our commitment to bringing innovative, flexible educational opportunities specifically designed to meet the needs of today's learners, wherever they may be in their educational journey.

It is now our time to serve as stewards of PennWest and shape an institution our alumni, students, faculty, staff, and communities will seek to engage with. As we begin this next phase in PennWest's future, we have a unique opportunity to redefine what a university can be and as we nourish our individual stewardships, our collective effort will create a PennWest people will flock to be a part of.

## OUR BRIGHT FUTURE

As a proud member of Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education, PennWest is built, funded, and operated to serve the higher educational needs of the Commonwealth. Specifically, the regions in western Pennsylvania that we serve. Regional institutions provide students with personalized holistic academic experiences, allowing them to learn from faculty who have intentionally selected to work at a student-centered institution. Our unique structure, spanning four campuses, allows us to adopt more inclusive and engaging administrative methods with a nimbleness not ordinarily found in higher education.

The future of PennWest will focus on three ideals. PennWest will be known for:

1. *Delivering high-quality mission-aligned academic programs in formats that prepare students for the future of work.*
2. *Being deeply embedded in and responsive to the educational needs of our students, communities, and local economies, and*
3. *Graduating students who stay closely connected to their alma mater, contributing to a lifelong cycle of institutional growth.*

As we seek to achieve these ideals, our students will continue to be the purpose for our work. Students are the reason our institution exists. Each PennWest student brings a unique perspective that enriches the university experience for each of us. Students also serve as the hub for building social capital inside and outside the institution.

Our commitment to student success shapes our mission, creating an environment where our students feel valued and empowered to achieve their goals. Their achievements reflect the quality of education we provide. Students challenge us to evolve and inspire us to stay current with trends to meet their needs and prepare them for the future they will create.

Our commitment to student success is embodied by our faculty, who are educators, mentors, researchers, and innovators who inspire our students, challenge them to think critically and guide them on their educational journeys.

Beyond the classroom, faculty contribute to our university's research initiatives, pushing the boundaries of knowledge and addressing pressing societal issues. Their work enhances our reputation and helps attract top talent to our institution. Faculty members serve as a bridge between our university and the broader community, engaging in outreach, collaborating with industry partners, and ensuring our curriculum remains relevant and impactful.

Our staff are essential collaborators in our student-focused mission. They help faculty to focus on teaching and research, assist students in navigating their academic journeys, and maintain the infrastructure that makes our university a welcoming and functional place. They build relationships with students and faculty, fostering a sense of community critical to the educational experience. Their hard work and dedication create an environment where learning and growth can flourish.

Important collaborators in this mission also include our more than 203,000 alumni. They are our greatest storytellers. Their successes help shape our reputation and attract future students and faculty. They exemplify the impact of our work and inspire others to pursue their goals and dreams. Their achievements and contributions to our communities and professions reflect the quality of education we provide and the transformative power of our programs.

Alumni provide invaluable support, from mentoring current students to offering internships and contributing to scholarships. Engaging with our alumni community strengthens our network and creates a vibrant ecosystem of collaboration, innovation, and support.

Together as faculty, staff, alums and friends of PennWest, we will leverage our strengths to help all students succeed in the classroom and in life.

## OUR COLLECTIVE EFFORT

It is now our turn to lead, and we will lead this effort together. We will transform PennWest's administrative processes into a seamless, efficient, and highly collaborative experience, known as a neural network. As we engage in this vibrant social network, our team will discover innovative ways to share information, work together, and achieve new levels of civility, transparency, accountability, and purpose.

This journey will require collective learning and a deep appreciation for one another's intentions. As we grow together organically, PennWest will continue to become stronger, more resilient, and even more capable as an institution. In all our work, let us remember that *consistency will always outpace intensity*.

Our shared work will become well known and respected because of the way we treat each other. The PennWest way is that every person leaves every conversation wanting to connect again. Let us live the PennWest Way in each meeting, each classroom, and each office. The PennWest Way will be the secret success for our administrative culture, ensuring that people feel heard, engaged, respected, and acknowledged for adding value to PennWest's progress.

The future for PennWest is bright, in large part because we will work together, the PennWest Way.

## THE PENNWEST WAY

In the spring of 1997, my wife, Kristy, and I were adjusting to the birth of our first child and preparing for our senior year of our bachelor's degrees. We both had received scholarships, but finances were tight. So, we decided to leave school and join the workforce. Yet, my inquisitive mind and eager sense of learning kept calling me back to my university experience. After several years of work in the finance industry, I wanted to return to a career in education and make a difference for students in the same way that faculty and staff had made a difference for me. But I was stuck with some college (actually a lot of college), and no degree.

With some reservation, I reached out to the same department I had left. Fortunately for me, I received a warm welcome and incredible support from several faculty, staff, and one incredibly thoughtful department chair, named Gary Kiger. With their guidance and support, I was able to complete my degree, and the rest of my future in education became a possibility.

Years later, Dr. Kiger passed away, far too early, from brain cancer. Among his mourners was one former student, working in higher education, very grateful for the way he nurtured his stewardship, by caring for me and my journey.

Like Dr. Kiger, each of us has been given a stewardship. As we embrace the PennWest Way, each of us will know and nurture our stewardship. We will meet every student where they are and help guide them to take their next step forward. As we place each student's journey at the heart of our efforts, we will have a strengthened sense of purpose and PennWest will be known for its uniquely shared civility, optimism, and student success.

The future of PennWest is bright and it will continue to shine brighter as we nurture the stewardships to which we have entrusted.

Thank you for being here today and for joining together for the journey that is ahead.

