



Jo Ann Gora: Defining a 21st Century Education

Much can happen over the course of five years – especially if you’re a university president. Since Jo Ann Gora took the helm of Ball State University in 2004, the school has updated its motto, added hundreds of millions of dollars in new and remodeled buildings, increased admission standards and emphasized immersive learning.

“I feel it’s an amazing campus that provides a really unique educational experience for students,” Gora shares. “When we say we redefine education, we really do.”

BizVoice®: You’ve described immersive learning as the cornerstone for Ball State. Talk about why that’s important for the university.

Jo Ann Gora: “Immersive learning is the cornerstone for our strategic plan because it really offers students a 21st century education. It is the way we’ve redefined education, because it offers students the opportunity to get out into communities and businesses and solve real-world problems and provide solutions that have lasting value. So we’re really excited about the opportunity to give students an education that will give them a step up in the marketplace when they graduate.

“Last year we had 2,700 students who were involved in 160 different immersive learning projects. We’ve done projects in 55 different communities in Indiana. We’re excited about the opportunity for our students to work not only around Indiana, but we’ve had students involved in projects from Indianapolis to Hong Kong and Minneapolis to Vietnam.”

BV: When current building projects are completed in 2012, the campus will feature \$320 million in newly constructed or remodeled facilities in eight years. Talk about how these projects are changing campus.

JG: “I think the campus has really been transformed over the course of the last six years. We have new residence halls; we have a newly renovated student center. Next fall we’ll be opening a 400,000-square-foot wellness and recreation center. We’ve opened academic buildings like the David Letterman Communication and Media Building, which is state of the art and LEED certified. So we’re really excited about the opportunities for students to work and play on a truly

By Candace Gwaltney

beautiful campus.”

BV: Ball State, like all state schools, faced decreased state funding. How does that affect your goals?

JG: “Well, we’ve been prudent in our stewardship of state and student funds. I think the university is on very solid financial grounds. We were happy to be able to keep our tuition increase at a very moderate level and be able to accommodate an increasingly growing freshmen class, which has been very exciting for us.”

BV: Ball State is the largest employer in Delaware County. What are some of the ways you strive to be involved in the community, particularly with economic development?

JG: “We go out of our way to be a partner with any business that moves into the community. We played a role in bringing the two most recent new employers to the community – Brevini and VAT. I know personally the CEOs of both organizations, and we always reach out to the community when it is cultivating a new employer so that they’re able to tell future employers about the advantages of being in a college town and the ways Ball State can be helpful to that particular industry.

“It’s helpful that my husband (Roy Budd, executive director of Energize-ECI) is responsible for bringing economic leads to East Central Indiana, so we do work hand in hand to try to present the strongest possible profile to prospective employers.”

BV: The state of the city impacts recruitment for both faculty and students. Looking at opportunities and challenges, what would you like to see develop in Muncie?

JG: “We’d like to grow the population base. I think the city leaders and I share a common interest in growing Muncie and increasing job creation there. So anything we can do to bring in new employers – which will then provide the basis for new retail, more restaurants – ultimately increases the quality of life for everyone.

“We try to work hand in hand with the city to do a wide range of projects, everything from health and wellness audits of local businesses to enhancing community attractions like the children’s museum. ...

“We just got a \$5 million gift from the Glick family to develop a glass art program. That will enable us to build a glass art workshop, which we think will be a tremendous community attraction. We’ll be blowing glass night and day, offering a bachelor’s and master’s degree.”

She notes the glass art workshop’s proximity to other campus attractions: Christy Woods, the Wheeler Orchid Collection and the Ball State Museum of Art. “It’s a wonderful opportunity to enhance the university’s

contribution to the community and bring visitors to Muncie to show them really some spectacular cultural avenues.”

BV: You recently marked five years with the university. What has been the most memorable experience?

JG: “I guess there are two experiences that really stand out. One is, when I came to the university, deciding not to have an inauguration and offering alumni the opportunity to help fund 25 full scholarships to the university to really mark my presidency, and the outpouring of support from alumni that that brought.

“Bringing David Letterman back to campus was a moment we’ll all remember. Dave was so engaging, charming, interested in talking to our students and wanting to hear more about the university. (He was) also impressed with the changes that have taken place over the last 40 years since he had been there.”

BV: Are there areas in which you are a little frustrated or disappointed that progress has not taken place as fast as you would have liked?

JG: “You know, not really. We’ve been excited about the initiatives that have taken place at the university.” She points to the emphasis on digital media, which involves more than 100 faculty (members) from all seven colleges and “the way immersive learning has really captured people’s imagination.”

BV: Where do you see the university in the next five years?



Jo Ann Gora welcomed David Letterman to campus in 2007 for a dedication ceremony naming a new communications and media building after the famous alumnus.



Ball State's strategic plan calls for efforts to increase diversity in the student body and faculty.

JG: "Well, our strategic plan tells us where we are going to be five years from now. ... We hope to see even more of our programs achieve national rankings. ... We hope to have 25 nationally ranked academic programs in five years; we're now at about 19.

"We hope to finish our capital campaign with great fanfare. We are now at 88% of goal, which is just remarkable in this economy. We've raised about \$178 million toward our \$200 million goal.

"The university has become increasingly selective. Our goal is to have 80% of the freshmen class come in with the academic honors diploma, and we're closing in on that goal.

"We're on track to meet the more than 100 goals of our strategic plan, and (we're) really pleased about that."

BV: Think you'll still be president in five years?

JG: "Oh yes, I certainly hope to be."

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