For our faculty, the fall is a time of optimism and excitement. Our residence halls fill. They pulse with the hopes and dreams of new students. Faculty members, eager to try new learning approaches in class and test novel ideas in their laboratories, also share their work with the community and colleagues in similar disciplines. The campus, as it fills again with people, hums along in an efficient and caring way, thanks to the diligent work of our faculty and staff colleagues.

As we embark on a new academic year, there is more reason for optimism at our University than ever before. Our institutional achievement, by practically every metric we use, is at record levels. This is a good thing. Here is why:

Gov. Brian Sandoval has spoken often of a “New Nevada,” a state which puts emphasis on K-12 and higher education as a way to diversify the economy. This New Nevada economy requires new approaches and new businesses based on innovative, modern technologies that will provide new jobs and economic development.

If we are to truly realize these exciting possibilities, the University must become a high-impact research university.

What exactly is a high-impact research university?

It is an environment where high-achieving undergraduate and graduate students receive the finest instruction and experiential learning opportunities to further their academic goals.

It is a place where faculty produces transformational and nationally recognized work, whether it is in the classroom, or in research, and in the pursuit of excellence in their scholarly and artistic activities.

It is an institution that connects and engages with its community through spillovers of activities, ideas, knowledge and know-how that generate a sense of belonging, interconnectedness and common vision.

In many ways, we are already doing the work of a high-impact university, which stresses a free and continuous flow of knowledge and ideas, and emphasizes the critical role that human capital must always play. In fact, a high-impact research university is ultimately about its people: How students, faculty and staff connect with one another, and with the community at large, to create the context for our collective future.

We are expanding the reach of our talent, through increasing numbers of graduates – more than 4,400 in 2015-2016 alone, a record – and through hiring faculty in key “cluster” areas where this vast array of knowledge and skills can have a profound impact on Nevada’s new businesses and emerging industries. This building of critical mass in key areas, such as unmanned autonomous systems, cybersecurity, biomedical research, neuroscience and dryland agriculture, to name just a few, will ultimately help us define and realize the “New Nevada.”

Our high-impact research University is uniquely positioned. We will be producing the products, processes and people that our state needs.

Optimism is high on our campus this fall, and for good reason. The potential for our University to have a major impact on our state has never been greater.

Marc A. Johnson
President