Vision is what leadership is all about.
Leadership is how you bring that vision into reality.
If you want people to go with you, you have to share a vision.

Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.,
President Emeritus, University Of Notre Dame
In looking at leaders in higher education who best exemplify Father Hesburgh’s shining example of visionary thinking, integrity, and a selfless commitment to the greater good, one name becomes clear: Dr. William E. Kirwan.

TIAA-CREF is proud to salute Dr. Kirwan as the 2010 recipient of the TIAA-CREF Theodore M. Hesburgh Award for Leadership Excellence.

Over his nearly half-century as an educator, administrator, and community leader, Dr. Kirwan has been a passionate advocate for a broad spectrum of major issues facing higher education. He gives selflessly of his abilities and energy to encourage the sharing and shaping of ideas and practices across Maryland, the United States, and beyond.

Dr. Kirwan became chancellor of the University System of Maryland in 2002. Prior to that, he served as president of The Ohio State University (1998–2002), and as president of the University of Maryland, College Park (1988–1998). Prior to his presidency, he was a member of the University of Maryland faculty for 24 years.

Dr. Kirwan is a sought after speaker on a wide range of topics critical to higher education, including diversity, access and affordability, cost containment, accountability, economic impact, gender equity, financial aid, partnerships, and innovation. Along with his national and international presentations on key issues, Dr. Kirwan has authored numerous noteworthy articles and has been profiled as a national education leader in academic and mainstream publications.

Dr. Kirwan received his bachelor’s degree in mathematics from the University of Kentucky and his master’s and doctoral degrees in mathematics from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. He is a member of several honorary and professional societies, including Phi Beta Kappa, Phi Kappa Phi, the American Mathematical Society, and the Mathematical Association of America.
Determined to maintain the University System of Maryland's momentum, Chancellor Kirwan spearheaded a bold and comprehensive initiative aimed at containing cost increases wherever possible. Its focus is on protecting quality and keeping tuition affordable; streamlining the academic processes to reduce students' time-to-degree; and expanding capacity by targeting growth at lower cost institutions and regional higher education centers. Today, faculty classroom contact hours across USM are up by 10 percent on average from five years ago, and the average time-to-degree has been reduced to 4.4 years, its lowest level ever. In addition, graduation rates are at an all-time high.

“We did some fairly obvious things that, for whatever reason, had never been done before in Maryland, nor dare I say at most other universities in America. We began using the System as a universal purchasing agent rather than leaving that function to individual campuses. You would be amazed about how much this “strategic sourcing” was able to drive down the cost of software products, computer equipment, and much more.”

Chancellor Kirwan has demonstrated a strong sense of service and determination in challenging the status quo. During difficult financial periods, he has led institutions to find different and more effective ways to achieve success. As co-chair of the Knight Commission and chair of the NCAA Division 1 Board, he has taken bold stances on controversial issues. Chancellor Kirwan is dedicated to establishing and sustaining a higher education landscape that allows students, faculty and staff to realize their full potential for success. This is, and has always been his agenda as an administrator, as a chair or member of national groups, as a writer, as a teacher, and as a speaker and advisor to countless local, regional, and national organizations.

“I see in this generation of graduates the seeds of a renaissance of community consciousness. Their demonstrated commitment to public service, their spirit of volunteerism, their concern for the common good offer great hope—our best hope—for the future of our nation and the planet.”

While maintaining a focus on the University System of Maryland's ongoing goals of quality, access, and affordability, Chancellor Kirwan also has positioned the University System to play a key role in addressing emerging issues impacting the larger society. He has identified three overarching goals vital to the future well-being of the state: closing the achievement gap, strengthening Maryland's competitiveness, and addressing the challenges of climate change. The University System's Board of Regents and the state have embraced these goals and they have become integral components of the Governor of Maryland's agenda.

“Closing the achievement gap is not just a competitiveness issue for our nation, it is also the civil rights issue of our day. In an era where a college degree is the path to a meaningful career and a high quality of life, we simply must make an affordable higher education readily available to more low-income and underrepresented minority students.”
At 92, Father Theodore Hesburgh is considered one of the most influential figures in higher education in the 20th century. Father Hesburgh became president of Notre Dame at age 35, and served from 1952 to 1987, at that time, the longest tenure among active presidents of American colleges and universities.

In 1964, Father Hesburgh received the Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor, from President Lyndon Johnson. In July 2000, Father Hesburgh’s public service career was again recognized when he became the first person from higher education to be awarded the Congressional Gold Medal. Leadership of the Senate and House of Representatives gathered in the rotunda of the Capitol as President Clinton presented the medal.

In addition to serving four popes, Father Hesburgh has held 16 presidential appointments over the years, involving him in virtually all major social issues—civil rights, peaceful uses of atomic energy, campus unrest, treatment of Vietnam offenders, and Third World development and immigration reform, and many more. At the same time, he remained a national leader in the field of education, serving on many commissions and study groups.

His stature as an elder statesman in American higher education is reflected in his 150 honorary degrees, the most ever awarded to one person. He was the first priest elected to the Board of Overseers at Harvard University and served two years (1994 – 95) as president of the board.

“I’ve never been one to look back. I think it is important to always be looking ahead, and to do so with great hope.”

Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.,
President Emeritus, University Of Notre Dame
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