



**BALL STATE
UNIVERSITY**
Office of the President

BOARD OF TRUSTEES
COMMENTS BY GEOFFREY S. MEARNS
MAY 4, 2018

I am pleased to report that we have hired several new key academic leaders this Spring. On July 1, we will welcome Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills as our new Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs. Susana joins us from Oregon State University, where she has taught and served in various administrative roles, most recently as Vice Provost for Academic Programs and Learning Innovation.

In my conversations with Dr. Rivera-Mills, I was impressed by her life story. She is a native of El Salvador, and she came to the United States as a young girl, not knowing how to speak English. Her experiences as an immigrant and first-

generation college student shaped the trajectory of her career. They also illustrate the transformative power of education, which is at the heart of our mission as an institution.

I am also pleased to confirm that Dr. Paaige Turner will become our new Dean of the College of Communication, Information, and Media on July 15. Dr. Turner brings to Ball State extensive experience coordinating graduate and undergraduate programs, managing budgets, and implementing strategic initiatives. This experience will prove vital to our University's ongoing strategic planning process. She joins Ball State from Webster University in Missouri, where she was Associate Dean of the School of Communications.

As our Spring semester draws to a close, we look forward to kicking off the yearlong commemoration of our 100th anniversary with our Centennial Birthday Celebration on June 15. The University will close early that afternoon, so that our faculty, staff, and students can join us for cake and ice cream on the Quad. The date of this event was chosen to recognize June 17, 1918—the day Ball State first accepted student registrations.

I am honored that I am able to serve as President during such an exciting time in Ball State's history. Our Centennial allows us to remember how our campus has grown and how our University has served Muncie and the state of Indiana. Our Centennial theme, "*Beneficence: Proud Past and Bright Future*,"

honors the accomplishments of our faculty, staff, students, and alumni. It also recognizes the enduring values our University is committed to—excellence, integrity, social responsibility, respect, and gratitude— as symbolized by our iconic *Beneficence* statue.

All stakeholders of the institution—faculty, staff, students, alumni, legislators, donors, and members of the community—will be part of our ongoing celebration, beginning with our September 6 public kick off event at Emens Auditorium. During this event, we will premiere the Centennial documentary our students have produced as part of an immersive learning project. I am grateful to the members of our Centennial Committee who are hard at work on these plans.

Our Centennial comes at an opportune time in our history as we proceed with the planning process for our strategic plan, “Spreading Our Wings”—a plan that will shape the vision for what Ball State will become in our second century.

Throughout the Spring semester, we held eight open forums on campus. More than 300 faculty, staff, and students attended these forums, each of which focused on a different strategic theme, including diversity and inclusion; administrative effectiveness; clarifying our mission, and putting students first. Our ninth and final forum will be for community partners.

In addition to the insights we’ve gathered from our forums, we have been pleased with the feedback we’ve collected from our survey. More than 1,480

faculty, staff, and students responded. A second, external survey will be sent to the Muncie community next month. Our Strategic Planning Committee also launched a crowdsourcing website, which provides additional, ongoing opportunities for our campus community to contribute to the plan.

As we make progress in shaping the future of our University, I am pleased to share an update about our enrollment for next Fall. Our admissions process for our incoming freshman class continues throughout the Summer. We expect another academically prepared, diverse class, much like the last two years. Our projected enrollment for the freshman class is expected to be similar to Fall 2016. And while it is still early in the transfer recruitment process, we expect to meet our target goal of 750 students.

As we prepare for our next freshman class, we are actively planning for future years. Our strategic enrollment planning process is entering its final phase. We anticipate the final plan will provide us with a roadmap of action plans and recommendations that will guide our enrollment strategies for the next several years.

We continue to attract students to Ball State because we empower them to excel—to fly. And we do so by providing them with exceptional opportunities that lead to remarkable achievements in and out of the classroom.

Professor Chris Flook from the College of Communication, Information, and Media is involved in a new immersive learning project in partnership with WIPB-TV. Chris began working with telecommunications students this semester to create short films and documentaries for the television station. This semester, the students produced original work that will be showcased in two themed episodes that air this evening, beginning at 9 p.m. The first episode explores art and includes a biopic of Ball State alumnus Jim Davis; the second episode explores the power of narrative and includes two student-produced original short films.

This year, we have two Udall Scholarship winners: junior Maddie Clark, who is majoring in landscape architecture, and junior Kaitlin Gavenda, an Honors College student majoring in wildlife biology and conservation. Maddie is dedicated to helping create ecological infrastructure that connects people to the environment in urban settings, and Kaitlin intends to become a research biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Only 50 students nationwide are selected each year for the Udall, which is the country's most important scholarship for undergraduates interested in environmental issues. Both women will participate in Udall Scholars Week in Phoenix in August, and they will receive \$7,000 each toward their studies.

I am also pleased to share that, for the first time in Ball State's history, we have a student who has won a Pulitzer Prize. Erika Espinoza is a journalism

graduate student who, while earning her undergraduate degree at Ball State, was part of a team that won the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Reporting. Erika was one of two designers working for The Arizona Republic and USA Today Network on a website design for “The Wall,” a 2017 special report about President Trump’s proposed border wall. Her achievement is a testament to the exceptional education she’s receiving from our Department of Journalism, which is preparing her for a career that already includes having received one of the most prestigious awards in her field.

And finally, it is an exciting week to be at Ball State as we look forward to tomorrow’s Spring Commencement ceremony—my first on the Quad. Thank you for approving my recommendation that we honor Robert Hunt with an honorary degree. Mr. Hunt is one of our own, and we are proud of his successful career at the helm of his family’s construction management firm. Through his involvement in various immersive learning projects, and through his gift of the Robert G. Hunt Center for Construction Management, he has proven himself an exemplary role model for our students and a loyal friend and supporter of Ball State. It is our privilege to recognize his success as an alumnus, a business executive, and a compassionate and effective humanitarian.

It is also a privilege to recognize those graduates who have completed their degree requirements this Spring. Tomorrow we will honor more than 3,300

candidates for doctoral, master's, and bachelor's degrees. I am proud of their accomplishments and offer them best wishes for their future endeavors as alumni.

It is a privilege and an honor to serve as the president of Ball State University.

Thank you.