



**BALL STATE
UNIVERSITY**

Office of the President

**GEOFFREY S. MEARNES
FALL CONVOCATION
EMENS AUDITORIUM
AUGUST 16, 2019
9:00 A.M.**

Thank you, Susana. In just one year serving as our provost, you've had a significant, positive impact on our University. I look forward to working in partnership with you for many years to come.

To this year's award recipients, congratulations. Your contributions to our University are profound and enduring. Please join me in once again expressing our admiration for our valued colleagues.

Did you notice that three of our award winners are faculty from the Department of English? I was an English major. I guess that answers the question—what can you do with an English degree?

In her introductory remarks, the provost welcomed several new deans and our new faculty members. I would like to welcome several other new members of our University community.

In June, Governor Holcomb appointed two new members to our Board of Trustees.

First, the Governor appointed Henry Hall. Henry is a Ball State graduate. He is the president of Skytech Products Group, a leading manufacturer of control systems for the hearth and HVAC industries. Henry earned his bachelor's degree in finance and accounting, and he was a co-captain of our Cardinal football team.

The Governor also appointed Ms. Rebeca Mena. Rebeca is a junior studying chemistry and Spanish. Rebeca was raised in Venezuela, and she brings a global perspective to our Board.

Mr. Hall and Ms. Mena, please stand so that we may recognize you.

I would also like to welcome several new members of our University's leadership team.

Sonia Brandon is our new associate vice president for Institutional Research and Decision Support. She joined us on May 1 from Colorado Mesa University.

Marsha McGriff also joined us on May 1. She is our new associate vice president for Inclusive Excellence, and she came from Indiana University—Bloomington.

Jake Logan is our new Vice President for University Advancement and President of the Ball State University Foundation. He joined us on June 3 from the University of Missouri—Columbia.

Haven Fields is our new Deputy Director of Athletics. Haven joined us on August 5 from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

And Alan Finn is our new Vice President for Business Affairs. Alan joined us from Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon. He started just yesterday.

Would you all please stand so that we may welcome you to our University.

And to all of you—our faculty, staff, students, and friends. Thank you for joining us this morning. I am grateful for your continuing commitment to our mission.

Today is the beginning of my third academic year as the president of Ball State University. Today, and every day, it is a privilege to serve as your president.

Two years ago, when I first spoke to you from this stage, I said that it was my goal to demonstrate that our University was strong—and that we were getting stronger every day. I shared some facts about our programs, our facilities, and our finances.

But I think that I achieved my principal objective by providing several examples about how the work that you do every day is transforming the lives of our students and elevating our communities.

Last year at this Convocation, I then discussed how we were preparing to build upon this historic legacy of success and impact by developing an ambitious, long-term strategic plan.

This morning, I want to talk about how we have already begun to implement this plan. I will also celebrate your contributions and your accomplishments, because you deserve this recognition.

Indeed, as I prepared my remarks, I was not simply impressed with the results of your work. I was inspired. And if I do my job well enough this morning, you will be inspired as well—inspired to believe that our best days are yet to come.

But we know that, along the flight path to our bright future, there will be some obstacles. In our work, just as in our lives, there are some disappointments and some challenges.

There will also be some sadness. This past year, we lost some colleagues and some friends: Dave Powell, Ed Shipley, Steve Bell, Mary Jane Sursa, Wayne Estopinal. And many others. Their memories serve as a source of inspiration for all of us.

We also faced some challenges on campus. For example, we had to defer some expenses last year, so that we could eliminate a projected operating deficit. And to prepare a balanced budget for this year, we had to reallocate and reduce some recurring expenses so that we could keep our tuition affordable for our students.

I know that the decisions that we made were not easy ones. And I know that the decisions we made affected all of our faculty and staff. You shouldered the sacrifices.

But I also know this: All across this campus, you rose to the challenge. You tackled this task with discipline, with determination, and with courage. And that's why—because of you—I am confident that we will conquer the challenges that we will inevitably face in the future.

In fact, I am enthusiastically optimistic because, in so many respects, we have positive momentum. We are taking flight.

On Sunday afternoon, in this same auditorium, we will welcome the largest freshman class in the 101-year history of Ball State University. More than 4,050 young women and young men have decided to pursue their educational aspirations right here, because of you.

As a result of coordinated and innovative recruitment strategies, we received nearly 28,000 applications for admission. That's also a record—by far.

This freshman class is academically well prepared. The median high school GPA for this class exceeds 3.5. And that's an all-time record, too.

This freshman class is also the most diverse in our history. More than 20% of the incoming class self-identify as minority students.

I am grateful to Kay Bales and her team for their good work. Thank you.

Kay and her colleagues have a compelling story to share with prospective students and their families.

According to U.S. News & World Report, Ball State is one of the 100 best public colleges or universities in the country. That's a prestigious list that includes Indiana University and Purdue University.

In CAP, the Department of Construction Management has maintained a 100% placement rate for graduates for five consecutive years.

In the Miller College of Business, our undergraduate program in entrepreneurial management is ranked 12th in the country by both Princeton Review and Entrepreneur magazine.

In CCIM, the Department of Telecommunications was named the Indiana Association of School Broadcasters Television School of the Year.

In the College of Fine Arts, our students in the School of Art are taught by faculty who, just last year, participated in 37 national exhibitions and 84 international exhibitions.

Our student athletes compete and win on the court and on the field. They also excel in the classroom. Last year, across all sports programs, our student athletes earned a median GPA of 3.27. That's the best collective GPA on record here at Ball State.

I could continue, but I think you get my point.

Ambitious students are also attracted by our outstanding facilities. If you walk on our campus for just a few minutes you can see that we are committed to excellence in all that we do. And we continue to enhance and expand our facilities.

Our colleagues in the College of Health are moving into their new home in our Health Professions Building. This new building includes many flexible classrooms and a large number of simulation spaces. These advanced facilities will enable our faculty and our clinicians to prepare our students to work collaboratively as members of interprofessional teams. That's the future of healthcare.

Directly behind the Health Professions Building, we've begun to construct our new foundational sciences building. When this building is completed in the Summer of 2021, it will provide modern teaching and research spaces in chemistry and biology. Then, we will be able to renovate the Cooper Science Building, a project that was fully funded by the General Assembly in its most recent budget session.

These three projects combined total approximately \$210 million. That's an extraordinary investment in our University. It's a testament to the confidence that our elected officials have in us.

We are also investing our own resources to enhance the residential neighborhood on the north side of our campus. The construction of a new dining hall and a new residence hall are well underway. Both buildings will be completed by next Summer. And now that we've demolished Carmichael Hall, we will begin construction of the second residence hall, which will be completed in the Summer of 2021.

By that time, we will have demolished the Emens parking garage. That aging structure will have been replaced by a new parking garage that is being built on New York Avenue. And where the Emens garage now sits, there will be a new grand lawn. We will have transformed a crumbling, cement parking garage into more green space for every member of our community to enjoy.

Very soon, we will be able to access this lawn by walking or riding a bicycle on the new East Mall. This pathway will run north from The Village, across Riverside Avenue, and past Emens Auditorium to the Gora Recreation Center on Neely Avenue. You can already see one of the first phases of this mall between the Honors House and the new East Academic Quad.

In a few months, just to the west of the new lawn and along the path of the new pedestrian mall, we will break ground for our new Multicultural Center. This new facility will allow us to expand programming for all of our students. And this building will be located in the heart of our campus, where it belongs.

We have the capacity to make these substantial capital investments because, for many years, a dedicated group of women and men has strategically managed our finances. They work behind the scenes—or behind computer screens surrounded by spreadsheets. All of us are fortunate to be the beneficiaries of their expertise. Thank you.

I am also grateful to Jim Lowe and to every member of our facilities staff. These women and men work very hard every day—and every night and every weekend and every holiday—to design, to construct, and to maintain our buildings and our beautiful campus. Their selfless service makes it a pleasure for all of us to come to work. Please join me in expressing our appreciation to our colleagues.

Our beautiful campus is a source of great pride for every member of our University community.

That pride has been fueled by the more visible marketing campaign that we launched 18 months ago. That campaign has included banners on campus and a large banner in the most prominent location at the airport in Indianapolis.

Through this campaign, we have been telling your stories with the passion and with the pride that your stories deserve.

Last year, we also celebrated our Centennial. We had informal picnics on campus, and our University was honored at a formal gala in Chicago. We had lectures and concerts on campus, and we had roadshows in cities across Indiana. We also had alumni gatherings all across the country. And we honored the members of the extended Ball family for their extraordinary and sustained generosity to our University.

Our Centennial celebration required substantial planning by a large committee. I am grateful to the members of this committee. I am especially grateful to Stephanie Arrington and Kathy Wolf, who led this effort. Thank you.

This marketing campaign and our Centennial celebration enabled us to engage our alumni and our benefactors in creative and more effective ways. On April 9, we held our first One Ball State Day. On that one single day, we received \$425,000 in donations through more than 4,100 gifts. I am grateful that more than 900 faculty and staff made gifts that day. Thank you for your generous support. And thank you to everyone who developed this creative event. I'm looking forward to April 7, 2020, when we celebrate our second One Ball State Day.

The gifts we received last April contributed to a very successful fundraising year. We typically raise between \$15 million and \$20 million in new philanthropic commitments each year. Last year, we received more than \$30 million in new commitments.

I am grateful to our partners in the Foundation who helped us generate this support. And I am profoundly grateful to the alumni and benefactors who made very generous philanthropic investments in our students and in our mission.

It was a good year. It was a very good year.

All of these achievements provide positive momentum as we embark on another year. But we cannot be complacent.

In fact, this remarkable progress increases expectations. It raises the bar for all of us.

We will meet and exceed these expectations by continuing to implement the imperatives in our new strategic plan. I want to talk about how we have already begun that process.

The first unifying goal of our strategic plan relates to undergraduate excellence and innovation. Several of the strategic imperatives for this goal address our responsibility to recruit, retain, and educate our students—to help them discover their strengths, their interests, their passions, and their purpose through experiential learning opportunities.

This effort begins with our innovative strategies to recruit high aptitude students who represent diverse communities. And it extends to ensuring that all students are successful right out of the gate. This Fall, to ensure student success, we will begin using a new software tool called AVISO.

AVISO employs predictive analytics to ensure that we are engaging our students and optimizing their opportunities to succeed. The first five weeks of college are critical in determining whether a student

persists and graduates. With AVISO, we can identify students who aren't showing obvious signs of duress, so that we can intervene promptly.

We will supply AVISO with data from various institutional systems, like Canvas, to help us identify those risk factors. That's why it's crucial for all of us to contribute to these systems, so that AVISO can provide our faculty and our advisors with the most current information about our students.

Let me take a moment to communicate how important this issue is to all of us. Over the past ten years, our retention rates and our four-year graduation rates have improved significantly. In fact, our on-time graduation rate has improved faster than any other public university in Indiana.

But over the last two or three years, our retention rate has declined. I have asked our provost and vice president Ro-Anne Royer Engle to lead a task force to develop a comprehensive set of strategies to reverse this trend. They will present their recommendations to the campus community in September.

Let me speak frankly. We are not serving some of our undergraduate students as well as we can. That's disappointing. That's also having an adverse impact on our operating budget. And this declining metric is a blemish on our institutional reputation.

Simply put, this challenge is a professional, financial, and moral imperative for each one of us. Let's go to work.

To ensure that, over the course of their academic experience, our students are prepared for fulfilling careers, we are going to help them translate the foundational skills they are learning in your classrooms into a common language of competencies that they can communicate to future employers.

This objective will be difficult to achieve. But we will execute this strategic imperative by expanding our Skills Infusion program.

The Career Center launched this program in Spring 2018. Since then, 32 faculty have used this innovative process to revise and reinvent their curriculum. Working together with alumni partners, these faculty are weaving workplace competencies—like problem solving, leadership, and digital technology—into learning outcomes outlined in their syllabi.

This Fall, our colleagues in the Career Center will expand the program with a pilot workshop for faculty from CCIM and from our Honors College. These new faculty will be mentored by previous faculty participants. Eventually, we will scale the program to include courses in our core curriculum.

We want all of our students to understand that the critical skills they are acquiring are the skills that they will use throughout their lifetime—in their careers and in their service to their communities.

Alumni will continue to play a crucial role in this work. Their professional experiences are vital to the success of our Skills Infusion program—and to other programs for which they provide valuable mentoring to our students.

Let me tell you a story that illustrates how an engaged Ball State graduate can change the life of one of our students.

Five years ago, Kyle Callahan met SoVonna Day-Goins. Kyle was the president of the Finance Society, one of the student organizations affiliated with our Miller College of Business.

SoVonna, who graduated from Ball State in 1988, was on campus as part of the Career Center's Visiting Practitioners Program. She spoke to students about her role as a managing director of Credit Suisse, a global investment banking and financial company. She offered advice to Kyle and his peers about applying for internships at her firm.

Kyle gave SoVanna his resume, and SoVonna recalls how Kyle stood out to her. She said: "Kyle exuded professionalism and a positive attitude. He was someone you would want to work with."

SoVonna encouraged Kyle to apply for a finance internship at Credit Suisse in New York. The application process pitted Kyle against students from more than 200 universities from across the country, including several Ivy League institutions.

SoVanna mentored Kyle every step of the way. Kyle didn't land the finance internship, but he captured the attention of the hiring managers at Credit Suisse.

So, they offered Kyle a new internship in the company's risk management department. It was an internship tailored just for him. After proving his abilities, Kyle was offered a full-time job at Credit Suisse as a risk analyst.

Today, Kyle and SoVanna are close friends and colleagues dedicated to recruiting more Ball State students to Credit Suisse.

Kyle's connection to SoVanna was a crucial factor in landing a job at Credit Suisse. But he wouldn't have the fulfilling career he has today without participating in several immersive learning experiences.

These high-impact experiences enhance student success, and they help our students stand out from their peers as graduates.

Our University has earned a national reputation for immersive learning. This past academic year, our students participated in more than 4,000 immersive learning experiences, spanning 36 departments.

One of the students who participated in an immersive learning course was Lydia Kotowski, a senior in our Honors College.

As a Medallion Scholar, Lydia is pursuing her own course of study in political science and health policy. In the Summer of 2018, she was an intern at the Family Scholar House in Louisville. During this internship, Lydia saw firsthand how this nonprofit organization was improving the lives of local families by offering single parents and their children academic coaching, affordable housing and childcare, and career development.

Based on this experience, Lydia had the audacity to believe that she could create a nonprofit organization similar to Family Scholar House right here in Muncie. So, last Fall, she emailed Jason Powell, one of her favorite professors, to see if he was interested in supporting her dream.

Jason wrote back two simple words: "I'm in."

Three days later, Lydia sent Jason a 16-page proposal that detailed her aspirations for the project. Jason was approved to pursue the concept as a seminar at our Virginia Ball Center for Creative Inquiry.

Jason and his students spent this past Spring laying the groundwork for Beneficence Family Scholars—a new nonprofit organization that will serve single-parent families in our community by empowering them to overcome generational poverty through education.

At a launch party in April, the group raised \$8,000 to support their efforts. Today, Beneficence Family Scholars leases office space in downtown Muncie, and it is an official affiliate of Louisville’s Family Scholar House.

Lydia serves as the president of the organization. She and her fellow board members are working with six families, two of which are led by single parents who will attend our University this Fall. In the coming months, this new organization hopes to be able to provide housing and childcare for their scholars.

Let’s take a moment to recognize this significant accomplishment. Lydia and Jason, would you please stand?

In addition to serving as the president of the organization, Lydia has another title: Chief Possibility Officer. Isn’t that a great title? Chief Possibility Officer.

That is what each one of us is called to be—a chief possibility officer. We are blessed to be able to support and to encourage the hopes and dreams of our students, our colleagues, and our neighbors.

Let’s follow Lydia’s lead—let’s all become Chief Possibility Officers.

The second goal of our strategic plan is to serve our graduate students and other adults throughout their lifetime educational journey. This goal complements our University’s continuing commitment to undergraduate excellence.

Adult learners are a fast-growing market for new students. These women and men often juggle multiple roles at work and at home. When we offer them flexible options to complete any one of our graduate programs, we accelerate their career fulfillment and enhance their personal wellbeing.

One of the ways we are making progress toward this goal is by providing innovative delivery methods in disciplines that are designed to meet emerging needs.

Last year, I told you that our colleagues had developed a master's degree in social work that would address a critical shortage of social workers in the state. This Fall, more than 70 students are enrolled in this new program, which will be delivered via a hybrid format, with classes both on campus and online.

Another emerging need we are addressing is for workers knowledgeable in "big data." This phrase describes experts who extract actionable insights from large amounts of information.

With support from our colleagues in the Division of Online and Strategic Learning, faculty and staff from our College of Sciences and Humanities are developing a new online graduate program in data science. This new program will encompass coursework from several colleges, making it a truly interdisciplinary degree.

As we strategically expand our online offerings, our existing online graduate programs have grown 35 percent over a five-year period. This achievement is particularly impressive when you consider the national average for growth in online programs is just four percent annually.

One program experiencing rapid growth is our master's degree in interior design, offered by CAP. The program is all online—and it has doubled in size in the past two years.

Our colleagues in CAP are also playing an important role in expanding our commitment to sustainability.

Our University is a nationally ranked model of sustainability. We have built a legacy of incorporating sustainability into our operations, as evidenced by our geothermal energy system. We have also embedded sustainability into our student activities, our outreach, and our academic and research programs.

Our new graduate certificate in sustainability consists of stackable credits—12 one-credit hour courses, each five weeks long, and all online. The program will cover a range of topics related to sustainability, from water and soil resources to business ethics. This certificate will appeal to many working professionals, especially those seeking a new kind of job: green officers who manage their company’s sustainability initiatives.

We have much more work to do to achieve the ambitious aspiration that we articulated in goal two. But we are on our way.

The third goal of our new strategic plan focuses on our work as a community-engaged institution. This past academic year, we received several awards for our efforts to revitalize and sustain our city and our region.

Our “Schools Within the Context of Community” in Teachers College received many of those awards, including the Community Engagement Scholarship Award from APLU. As an institution, we received the 2019 Engaged Campus of the Year award from Indiana Campus Compact.

Last September, more than 600 Ball State faculty, staff, and students volunteered for the United Way Day of Action.

We also significantly increased our overall participation in the annual United Way fundraising campaign. Last year, our faculty and staff donated \$182,000—an increase of 14 percent over what our faculty and staff contributed in the 2017 campaign. With a matching grant from the

Ball Brothers Foundation and another matching gift from United Ways of Indiana, the University's 2018 employee campaign generated more than \$267,000.

As a result of your service and your generosity, we were named the 2018 Volunteer of the Year by the United Way of Delaware County.

I am grateful to all of our employees who contributed last year, and I hope that even more of you will donate to this year's United Way campaign, which will kick off next month. I also hope you will participate in the United Way Day of Action on September 6.

Following today's program, we will hand out Beneficence t-shirts to those of you who did not receive one at our closing Centennial picnic in June. If you don't have one, please get a t-shirt, and wear it for this year's Day of Action.

As you know, our University has a long history of engagement in the community. We encourage our faculty and staff to build upon existing strategic partnerships by expanding their research efforts to increase our University's impact in Muncie and beyond.

As part of our city's comprehensive Muncie Action Plan, our urban planning studios have created plans for a dozen different neighborhoods. Under the guidance of faculty, our students have met with hundreds of Muncie residents. The students cataloged existing conditions, and they provided action steps for neighborhood improvements.

Our urban planning students will soon replicate this effective community engagement on a larger scale through our new Center for Civic Design. The center will be in the new home of our CAP: Indy program, which moved this month to the site of the former Angie's List campus.

The expansion of our CAP: Indy program, and the creation of our new Center for Civic Design, is a good example of how what we do in our community—in design, in business, in the arts—can serve as a laboratory of success in generating outcomes that can benefit our city, our region, our state, and our world.

A few minutes ago, I mentioned that our Health Professions Building will enable our College of Health to enrich the curriculum. The new building will also be home to the second location for our Healthy Lifestyle Center.

This free community-based center is managed by our faculty and our students in partnership with medical students from IU School of Medicine-Muncie.

All of us play a role in the important work that is underway to improve the health and wellbeing of our state's citizens, especially here at home. And the need is urgent.

Delaware County ranks 85th out of Indiana's 92 counties in overall health outcomes. This sobering statistic was a catalyst for Lenny Kaminsky, who decided to lead faculty, staff, and students from our College of Health in launching the Healthy Lifestyle Center.

The center is supported by a grant from the Ball Brothers Foundation. Since last Fall, more than 400 people have visited the center's first location on the campus of Meridian Health Services. This Fall, the Center will also begin operating a 16-week, National Diabetes Prevention Program from its second home in the Health Professions Building.

Let's take a moment to recognize Lenny and his colleague, Nicole Koontz, for the vital role they play as directors of the Healthy Lifestyle Center. Lenny and Nicole, would you please stand?

Thank you. And thank you to all faculty, staff, and students from the College of Health who enable their patients to live healthier, happier lives.

As you know, one of the more bold and visible imperatives of the third goal of our strategic plan is our University's innovative partnership with the Muncie Community Schools.

I am proud of the progress that we have made during the first year of this partnership. This past academic year, the new school board, led by Jim Williams as its president, stabilized student enrollment. Last Winter, the school board provided stipends for MCS teachers and staff.

And a few weeks ago, the school board approved a new plan to provide recurring salary increases for MCS employees. It will be their first raise in eight years. These dedicated professionals deserve this compensation—and our respect.

The school board also attracted talented new leaders to serve our public school students and their families.

The school board hired Bradley DeRome as its chief financial officer, Chuck Reynolds as an associate superintendent, and JoAnn McCowan as a director of career curriculum and assessment.

Then, on July 1—the one-year anniversary of our partnership with MCS—the school board appointed Dr. Lee Ann Kwiatkowski as the new director of public education and CEO. Lee Ann is an innovative leader. She is passionate about putting students first. That is why it is my honor to introduce her to you today.

Lee Ann, would you please stand so we can recognize you?

I also want to acknowledge a new MCS employee who is a graduate of our Teachers College: Anthony Williams.

Anthony earned both his bachelor's degree and his master's degree from Ball State.

Anthony began his administrative career as a principal at Allen Elementary School in Marion, Indiana. In his first year at Allen, the school recorded more than 200 student suspensions, resulting in thousands of lost instructional hours.

Anthony knew things had to change. In his own words: “We were sending kids home and they were coming right back with the same behaviors. It was a lose-lose situation.”

So, Anthony and his colleagues created an alternative-to-suspension program called New Beginnings. In this program, students who misbehave meet with an interventionist. Together, they use innovative techniques to create constructive outcomes.

The next academic year, with New Beginnings, there were only 16 suspensions at Allen. The program garnered national attention, including a feature on the Today Show.

In 2016, our Alumni Association honored Anthony for his outstanding professional accomplishments. He personifies how our alumni are making a difference in their professions and in their communities. That is why I am grateful he has chosen to begin the next chapter of his career with MCS as the new principal of South View Elementary School.

Anthony, would you please stand so we can welcome you back to Ball State?

Anthony's innovations will help us achieve our ultimate goal: to provide an excellent educational experience for every child in our community.

A few minutes ago, I spoke about our commitment to academic excellence. I shared how immersive learning is a distinctive way in which we enhance the learning experience for our students. Another method is to engage our faculty with students in scholarship and research, which is the focus of the fourth goal of our strategic plan.

This past year, we significantly increased funding for our ASPIRE internal grant program, which funds research and travel for approximately 160 graduate students. Our Graduate School also sponsored its first three-minute thesis competition, which attracted approximately 40 students.

Our Applied Anthropology Laboratories secured more than \$920,000 in grants and contracts, while our colleagues in the departments of biology and chemistry received a combined total of \$3.7 million in external funding.

And in our Teachers College, with support from the Lilly Endowment, faculty and staff are developing a comprehensive counseling initiative to enhance our school principal and counselor preparation program.

We know that the size of our institution—and the dedicated commitment of our faculty—provide our undergraduate students with research opportunities that they don't normally get until graduate school.

Last year, I told you about how Hannah Fluhler was conducting groundbreaking research at Ball Memorial Hospital, studying the effects of movement and music therapy for newborns suffering from drug withdrawal. Hannah graduated with honors in May, shortly after learning she had received a prestigious Fulbright scholarship.

Two other graduates, Kellie Suttle and Zach Wishart, also received Fulbright Student Awards this past Spring. Their awards will enable them to teach English in South Africa and Vietnam, respectively.

Last May, we also learned that Alex Quillin had become the eleventh Ball State student in university history to receive a Goldwater Scholarship. This award is the country's most prestigious scholarship for undergraduates pursuing research-focused careers in STEM fields. Alex was selected this year from a pool of more than 1,200 students nationwide.

As a chemistry major, Alex is researching a protein in the mitochondria of a cell that could play a role in diabetes. Her mentor is Professor Mary Konkle, who is helping to shape Alex's career aspirations.

I am grateful to Mary and all of our faculty and staff who engage our students in valuable scholarship and research. The outcomes of this labor-intensive endeavor are powerful and positive. To illustrate my point, I want to share a story about Jeffrey Dick.

Jeffrey enrolled at Ball State in 2009 with plans to become a high school chemistry teacher. But it wasn't long before Jeffrey fell in love with research. His strongest influence was Jim Rybarczyk an associate professor in our chemistry department.

Jeffrey recalls how, as a first-semester freshman, Jim spent two hours—*two* hours—talking with him after class about their mutual love of chemistry and about potential career paths for Jeffrey. Jeffrey can't recall the question he asked that prompted their discussion that day, but what he remembers is Jim's encouragement.

Jeffrey graduated from our University in 2013 with his bachelor's degree in chemistry. He earned his doctorate from the University of Texas at Austin. Today, at just 28 years old, Jeffrey is an assistant professor at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

Last year, Jeffrey was named to Forbes magazine's list of "30 Under 30 for Science" in recognition of his cutting-edge research. Jeffrey says the key to scientific innovation is "staying creative and persistent in the face of failure."

It was here, in the labs of our chemistry department, where he spent countless hours running electricity through chemical solutions, that Jeffrey learned those crucial skills.

Jeffrey is on his way. And so are we.

The fifth and final goal of our strategic plan relates to our University's commitment to institutional and inclusive excellence. There are a lot of imperatives under this goal, but I would like to mention just a few of them.

Some of these imperatives relate to our financial resources, like our new incentive-based budget model. Other imperatives relate to our people and culture. These imperatives include empowering our faculty and staff through new professional development and leadership programs, like the management and executive development series our colleagues from the Division of Human Resources are currently designing.

At the heart of this goal is our commitment to recruit, to support, and to retain a diverse population of students, faculty, and staff.

Some people still view diversity and inclusion through the lens of race, ethnicity, and gender. But we know that diversity and

inclusion have broader meanings. They encompass a range of factors, from age and sexual orientation to religion and political perspectives. In many respects, we are already doing a good job of fostering a broader, more meaningful appreciation of diversity and inclusion.

For example, this past Spring, we were recognized by College Magazine as the best campus in the country for students with physical disabilities, a ranking that builds upon our legacy of being a leader in educating students with physical disabilities.

One student who personally benefited from this long-standing commitment is Jude Irving, who graduated from Ball State in 1998.

Jude was born with diastrophic dysplasia, a genetic disorder responsible for her short stature. Growing up, Jude was diagnosed with a learning disability. She was told she would be lucky to get into college. But Jude persevered, and she was accepted into our University, where she became the president of Disabled Students in Action.

At Ball State, Jude learned through personal experience, and through the classes she took in CAP, that good design is inclusive. She carried this lesson into her professional career.

For years, Jude worked for a British engineering firm as an inclusive design consultant. She helped with the renovation of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon and London's 2012 Olympic Park.

Today, Jude is enjoying her second career as an elementary school art teacher. Her son, Christian, will follow in her footsteps. On Monday, he will pursue an architecture degree from Ball State.

Jude's story is a powerful example of how physical accessibility is an important dimension of inclusion on our campus.

As important as it is to make our University a place where students, faculty, and staff interact with people who reflect our global reality, we must also foster a culture on our campus where we encourage diversity of thought.

Maegan Pollonais is a doctoral student from Trinidad. This opera singer admits that she has grown tired of stereotypes about the music of her home country. In her own words, Maegan said: “People think you’re from the Caribbean, and all you sing is ‘Daylight come and me wan’ go home.’ But it’s not like that. We sing Beethoven. We sing Handel. We sing Mozart.”

When Maegan graduates from our School of Music in December, she wants to begin her singing career in the United States. But her life mission involves more than the opera. Eventually, she wants to return to Trinidad to develop a performing arts program for children from underserved communities.

Maegan says: “My ultimate passion is to help people find their voice through music, but also in the sense of: What is it that you want to say in this world?”

Maegan’s words are the essence of inclusive excellence: empowering our students to express their thoughts and opinions as they seek to find their own voices in this world. And we hope to inspire them to use their voices to unify all people—to create a world that is more peaceful and more just.

To guide them on this flight path, we must remind our students that we are lifted by our enduring value of inclusiveness—a commitment to respect and embrace equity, inclusion, and diversity in all people, in all perspectives, in all ideas, and in all opinions.

I’d now like to speak for a few minutes about our enduring values. These values are integral to our ability to fulfill our mission.

For us to fully embrace these values, we must first remember them. So, we’ve printed them on the back of the Beneficence t-shirts we’re handing out this morning.

We must also find ways to bring these values to life. I want to recognize a few individuals whose actions embody the values that are represented by our beloved *Beneficence*.

Our first enduring value is excellence.

In April, I received a copy of an email from Dave Seaton, the father of one of our prospective students.

In his email, Dave explained that he and his daughter, Lita, had recently driven to our campus for a tour. Prior to coming here, Dave wasn't optimistic. As much as he hoped that his daughter would choose Ball State, Lita had been accepted by five universities, and she was determined to attend IU.

That was before they visited our campus.

What transpired that day moved Dave to write an email to our admissions staff. Here is how Dave described how the student who was their tour guide inspired Lita to attend Ball State.

Their tour guide was a freshman. As Dave wrote, "She was outstanding in her knowledge and enthusiasm in presenting Ball State." Dave said that he and the other parents had lots of questions, and their tour guide had answers to virtually everything—including a few questions he prefaced with the comment, "You probably won't know the answer to this ..."

In Dave's own words: "About three-quarters of the way through our tour, my daughter looked at me, smiled, and said, 'I think I know where I'm going to school!'"

Dave continued, "My daughter has withdrawn from those other four schools and is now Ball State bound."

Dave's words are a vivid reminder that, when we commit to excellence in everything that we do, each one of us—no matter what our job—each one of us has the potential to change the lives of other people. Every day. Each one of us.

Last month, I received another email, this one from a graduate named Hart Boesel.

Hart recently earned his master of arts in digital storytelling from CCIM. Hart told me about how, over the course of his graduate school experience, his life had been transformed by Benjamin Strack, a lecturer in our telecommunications department.

Hart described Benjamin as the most influential person he's ever met.

Hart said that he would evaluate Benjamin with a 10 out of 10 in the following categories: intellect, attitude, mentoring, imagination, communication, and patience.

These same qualities define excellence for all of us.

Hart asked if I would recognize Benjamin's contributions to Ball State, and this morning I have an opportunity to honor his request.

Benjamin, would you please stand so we can acknowledge you?

This morning, I have given you several examples of how our University is committed to innovation, from new programs and new partnerships to creative strategies to recruit and retain our students.

But sometimes innovation can be summed up by a single innovative idea—like the origin story of an Indianapolis nonprofit organization that is benefitting from the creativity of a few of our graduates.

Jessica Bricker and Emma Hagenauer both work for People for Urban Progress— PUP for short.

PUP's mission is to find new uses for discarded materials—like salvaging seats from an old stadium in Indianapolis and reinstalling them at bus stops throughout the city.

Jessica is PUP's director of design and fabrication, and she uses the skills she learned as an interior design major at Ball State to help

her envision new items for the company to create. As PUP's brand manager, Emma is responsible for marketing these items.

Emma interned for PUP while she was a senior at Ball State. After Emma graduated, she applied for a job with PUP because she was interested in finding a position that aligns with her passions for social justice and community service.

One of PUP's latest projects has a Ball State connection. Earlier, I showed you a photo of the original "We Fly" banner we hung over the Indianapolis airport. PUP helped us repurpose the material for travel bags.

As you can see, PUP's work encompasses innovation, creativity, and social responsibility. These ideals are the enduring values that distinguish our University.

Permit me to tell you the story of another young graduate who, within her own profession, is equally committed to our enduring value of social responsibility.

Shelby Looper was the first in her family to go to college. She never looked anywhere else but Ball State.

At first, she tried journalism. But she decided to major in criminal justice and criminology after she established an instant bond with her classmates and professors in the department.

During her senior year, Shelby was an intern with the local Victim Advocate Program. Having grown up in Daleville, she knew that crime victims in Delaware County's smaller towns often don't get the help they need. She contacted police officers in these towns to educate them about how the Muncie Police Department could offer services to victims in their communities.

Shelby's leadership skills explain how, within a year of graduating from Ball State in 2016, she went from interning for MPD's Victim Advocate Program to becoming its director. Only two years later, in 2018, the United States Department of Justice recognized Shelby with its "Tomorrow's Leaders Award".

Shelby gives credit to her professors, Michael Brown and Brian Byers. But this is a young woman who has, for as long as she can remember, lived by a code to "treat people right."

Here's how Shelby describes her dedication to act for the benefit of society: "I've always had the personality of, let's help everybody, even though that's impossible. I know that now. And knowing that can be frustrating, but it's just important to remember your 'why,' the reason you're doing it.

"Because I always say if you help one, then you've done your job."

If you help one, you've done your job.

Those are words we can all live by.

A few moments ago, I shared with you how Jude Irving is a success story who embodies our enduring value of inclusiveness.

Jude shares this distinction with another graduate—a distinguished veteran whose personal story exemplifies our enduring values of integrity and courage.

In 2005, Jeff Mittman was a 35-year-old master sergeant with 16 years of military experience. He was serving his fourth combat tour when he was caught in an ambush by Iraqi insurgents.

The IED that exploded near Jeff's Humvee sent shrapnel through the window. Jeff was so severely injured that he was transported to Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C. More than 40 surgeries were required to reconstruct his face. The surgeons did their best to reconstruct his body, but it was up to Jeff to rebuild his life.

In 2008, Jeff was speaking to a group of veterans in Indianapolis when he was approached by our veteran affairs coordinator. With that encouragement, Jeff earned his master's degree in executive development from our Teachers College.

Another chance encounter with a different administrator prompted Jeff to pursue his MBA from Ball State. Because Jeff's vision was greatly impaired by his accident, Jeff found the math and statistics courses to be especially challenging.

Now, I've heard it said that integrity is doing the right thing, even when nobody is watching. If that's the case, I'd say that courage describes a young man so determined not to let his blindness slow him down that he stayed up all night to study, and then went to work the next morning without any sleep.

Jeff said his academic challenges were not unlike the challenges he learned to overcome in the military. He said, "When you have an obstacle, you have to go around it, through it, or over it."

Jeff's graduate education at Ball State prepared him for his new role as the first legally blind CEO of Bosma Enterprises. Bosma is an Indianapolis company that teaches life and job skills to blind or visually impaired Hoosiers.

I admire Jeff's service to our country every bit as much as I admire his commitment to set ambitious goals for himself—and to take the risks to achieve them. That's how we define courage.

The last story I want to tell you about also begins in Iraq and ends at Ball State.

This past Spring, I met Safwan Malasalih.

In April, Safwan and his wife, Saja, were guests at a reception for our international faculty and staff that Jennifer and I hosted at Bracken House. In the short time we visited with them, Safwan told us how his family came to America.

Safwan was born and raised in Iraq. In 2000, he earned a master's degree in linguistics and translation studies. When the war broke out there in

2003, he was teaching at the University of Mosul. As you know, Mosul was ground zero for extreme violence. Safwan received death threats. The office of his department head was showered with bullets. He lost relatives to the terrorism that ensued after the war began, including two cousins who died in a suicide car bomb.

In 2009, Safwan contacted the American Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq. He worked with these officials to bring several projects to his university, including the American Corner, which provided public programming about English language learning and information about the United States. For the next three years, Safwan managed the facility in conjunction with the United States Embassy in Baghdad.

In 2011, Safwan was awarded a Fulbright scholarship. He came to America for the first time that year.

But he returned home to a city under siege. Every day, Safwan and Saja worried about the safety of their three children, all of whom were young at the time.

Nightly explosions made it unsafe for them to live in Mosul. Safwan said that they kept food and water in the trunk of their car, because he never knew the moment that they would have to flee.

That moment came on June 9, 2014, when ISIS took over the city.

Do you remember where you were on the night of June 9, 2014?

Safwan does. He and his family were part of the mass exodus out of Mosul. His memories of that night are vivid: thousands of people fleeing and screaming, children crying, the sky lit up with so many explosions that night became day.

To escape, Safwan, Saja, and their children drove for 14 hours. They were stopped at several insurgent security checkpoints along the way.

In the months that followed, Safwan applied for many jobs abroad.

Because of his Fulbright connections, Safwan discovered the Scholar Rescue Fund. It's an international program that provides fellowships for scholars whose lives and work are threatened by violence in their home countries.

Safwan was elated to receive his letter of acceptance for the program. But his fears quickly resurfaced when he realized that his youngest child didn't have the necessary documents to travel outside of the country. To get the documents, Safwan had to travel back to Baghdad. He had to endure another round of harrowing ISIS checkpoints.

But once they received the visas, Safwan and his family flew to America on November 26, 2014. They arrived in Muncie on Thanksgiving Day. On Thanksgiving Day!

Safwan recalled one of their first nights in Muncie: "I took my wife grocery shopping at Walmart. And as we were leaving the store, she cried. She said, 'I miss home.'"

But as the family made more connections in Muncie, with their neighbors, with Safwan's colleagues, with friends in our Muslim community, they began to feel like they belonged here in our city. Safwan says, "Now my wife is like, 'I love Muncie, it is my home.'"

After his fellowship ended, Safwan accepted a permanent position to teach English as a Second Language for our Intensive English Institute.

Although the family left Iraq behind, the violence followed them here. In April 2017, Safwan lost a sister and several nieces and nephews in one of the raids carried out to reclaim the city from the Islamic State.

"It was a devastating moment in my family's life, but people here were so caring and understanding. Many came knocking on our door. Many I didn't even know."

Safwan felt that same support during his family's two-year journey to become American citizens, a process that successfully concluded in January 2018.

Now, it's not just Muncie that Safwan and his family call home. It's also our University—an institution that Safwan believes truly lives its values.

In his own words, Safwan said: “Beneficence is not just a slogan at Ball State. Or a motto. She is a reality. The faculty, the staff, the people here ... they demonstrate the true essence of Beneficence. How many other universities would take on the risk of helping a threatened scholar whose family was in distress?”

Safwan answered his own question this way: “I don't know, but Ball State did.”

Ball State did.

To give back, Safwan shares his testimony with all who will listen. Doing so is his way to demonstrate his gratitude for the people in our community.

He said, “We cannot put a price tag on what we have been given. We are forever grateful.”

Safwan, thank you for sharing your story with all of us. You are our colleague. You and your family—you are our friends. You are our fellow Americans. This is your home. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in affirming that we are grateful that Safwan and Saja are here with us today.

Safwan and Saja, would you please stand so we can recognize the journey that has brought you and your family to our University and to our community?

People often say to me that I have a “thankless job.” That's just not true.

Every week—sometimes every day—someone stops me on campus or stops me on the street, or someone sends me an email. And they express their appreciation for the impact of our University on their lives or

on their community. They give me credit for the work that you do—for the work that you do.

Thank you for your many contributions. And thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve with you. I am grateful for this privilege.

When we articulated gratitude as an enduring value, we said that it is necessary, but not sufficient to express our appreciation to others. We defined gratitude as requiring us “to demonstrate our gratitude through our actions.”

And so, I have a request: I ask that you join me on our flight path to a bright future—to a bright future as we elevate this excellent university into an extraordinary one. Let’s go to work.

We are on our way. Oh yes, we are on our way. Thank you for your service and for your support.

Now let’s conclude our program with a musical performance, like we did last year. It was a memorable moment, so I thought that we should continue this tradition.

Like last year, I called Bill Jenkins and I asked him if he would assemble a group of students and faculty to perform for us. And like last year, Bill accepted my invitation.

But unlike last year, Bill actually agreed that they would perform the song that I selected.

Our performers include students in the BFA graduating class, some faculty from the Department of Theatre and Dance, and several of our graduates.

They will perform a song arranged by Professor Michael Rafter. I call him “professor,” because Michael just became a full-time faculty member here after an extraordinary career on Broadway.

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome to the stage our students, our colleagues, and our alumni, who will perform “I’m On My Way.”

