Good afternoon everyone.

I want to begin by offering my warmest welcome and thank you to all the faculty, staff, students, alumni, business and community partners who carved time out of their very busy schedules to be here today.

With construction for the new Science Complex underway, we needed to temporarily move here from our traditional venue in Stephens Hall Theatre. So for the first time ever, this address is being held in our beautiful Harold J. Kaplan Concert Hall in TU’s Center for the Arts. It truly is a most beautiful hall.

To begin I want to recognize members of the university’s senior leadership team in attendance here today—Interim Provost and Executive Vice President Dave Vanko, Vice Presidents Marina Cooper, Leah Cox, Brian DeFillips, Daraius Irani, Ben Lowenthal, Deb Moriarty, Sara Slaff and Athletics Director Tim Leonard.

I would like to acknowledge the deans of our six colleges—Terry Cooney, Shohreh Kaynama, Laurie Mullen, Susan Picinich, Lisa Plowfield, and acting dean Vonnie Shields, as well as Janet Delany, dean of Graduate Studies and Deb Nolan, dean of University Libraries.

I want to extend a special thanks to the many board members from the Alumni Association, the Towson University Foundation, and Board of Visitors who are all joining us today.

To our board members and those who serve on the college advisory boards, as well as our generous supporters in attendance today—thank you.

Your contributions have helped advance Towson University as a nationally-recognized first-choice institution, and your support will continue to be critical as we lead this university together towards an even greater success and an even brighter future.

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I want to begin by saying it is a great time to be a Towson Tiger.

This fall, Towson University welcomed an incoming class that is one of the largest, most academically prepared and most diverse in TU’s 152 year history.

Our 3,000 talented freshmen were selected from nearly 13,000 applications. They come to TU from across the globe, representing 29 states and 19 nations.

Forty-six percent of the students within this historic class identify themselves as racial or ethnic minorities, and 25 percent are African-American—the largest percentage ever for an incoming class.
The Class of 2022 has an average high school GPA of 3.6 . . . and they own an average of two Keurig machines per room. I witnessed that firsthand at move-in.

Nearly one in five of these new TU Tigers are first-generation college students. The TU degree they will earn in four years will not just be an important milestone for them but it will also be a milestone for their entire family.

In addition to our approximately 3,000 new freshmen, this fall we also welcomed 2,200 transfer students and 750 new graduate students, bringing our projected enrollment to nearly 23,000—the largest in Towson University’s history. This again positions TU as the second largest university in the state and the largest university—public or private—in Greater Baltimore.

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This past year the excellence of our faculty was acknowledged and celebrated with many prestigious recognitions.

During my address last spring, I asked everyone to join me in celebrating the awarding of the USM Regents’ Faculty Awards—the highest honor presented by the Board of Regents to exemplary faculty members within the University System of Maryland—to five TU faculty: professors Pamela Lottero-Perdue, Clare Mulhoro, Marlene Riley, Vera Smolyaninova, and Sidd Kaza.

They join several other of our colleagues whose significant contributions to their fields were also recognized this past year.

Among them is Leslie Harrison, a professor of English within the College of Liberal Arts. In addition to her work inside the classroom, she also spent several years mentoring and advising students outside the classroom as the faculty advisor for Grubstreet, TU’s award-winning literary journal.

I had the opportunity to get to know Professor Harrison a bit better this past year. She shared with me that the life of a poet is not at all a usual one. Often at gatherings she draws blank stares when, asked what she does, she answers “I am a poet.” I shared with her that I much admire poets.

This past year, Professor Harrison’s second book, entitled “The Book of Endings,” was a finalist for the most prestigious National Book Award—a great achievement made even more notable as poetry is not usually selected for this recognition.

Stephen Spender, the 17th Poet Laureate of the U.S., once said “great poetry is always written by someone straining to go beyond what they can do.”

Professor Harrison would you please stand so we can recognize you for your outstanding professional achievement, as well as for your excellence as a teacher and mentor to our students. Thank you.
I also want to recognize Professor Linda Cooper. Over the past six years, Dr. Cooper was instrumental in creating, from the ground up, a program to fill the statewide gap of high school science and mathematics teachers.

As co-director of that program, Towson UTeach, alongside master teacher Christine Roland, Dr. Cooper and Ms. Roland led the development of 11 new courses for the program, established recruitment strategies with four community colleges, and worked with her colleagues to revise TU’s secondary education major to improve the successful transfer of credits from community colleges.

Also, a summer externship program has been created in which Towson UTeach financially supports its students to work with local school districts to assist in writing curricula and modifying software applications.

These efforts have resulted in Towson University tripling the number of science and mathematics educators we graduate each year and having TU be one of just 12 institutions nationwide that produces five or more physics teachers in a single year.

In recognition of her excellence and contributions to math and science education, Maryland’s Council of Teachers of Mathematics awarded Dr. Cooper their 2018 Outstanding Mathematics Educator Award.

Dr. Cooper is here with us this afternoon, as is Ms. Roland, and we would like to recognize their dedication to make science and mathematics teacher preparation accessible to our students, and for training and mentoring Maryland’s much needed next generation of science and mathematics educators. Thank you Dr. Cooper and Ms. Roland.

These accomplished women are exemplars of faculty excellence in scholarly and creative work, coupled with a deep commitment to support student success.

Susan Willemen also makes an extraordinary impact on student success through her leadership of our Office of Disability Support Services.

As a staff member for the last 20 years and as director of the office for the last 12, Susan has led the university’s efforts and commitment to make TU’s campus inclusive and supportive of success for students with differing levels of ableness.

And that is a presidential priority for TU.

Under Susan’s tireless and talented leadership, TU’s testing services has become a statewide model replicated by DSS counterparts from across Maryland.

Most recently, Susan partnered with the Office of Academic Innovation to support our institutional adoption of the Universal Design for Learning. A recognized best practice in education, UDL provides a framework for designing learning environments that gives all individuals an equal opportunity to learn.
Just a few weeks ago on this campus, Susan was recognized by the Board of Regents with the Regents Staff Award for her efforts on behalf of students with disabilities. It is the highest honor bestowed on staff at USM institutions, and Susan is the very first to ever receive the award in the category of Inclusion, Multiculturalism and Social Justice.

Susan, will you please stand? On behalf of the 1,800 TU students you serve each semester, and the many more students across our institution and across the state who benefit from your leadership, thank you.

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What is also important about the significant accomplishments of our faculty and staff is the opportunities they create for our students.

Here’s a great example.

Last year, Professor John Sivey received a $500,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to study brominated disinfection byproducts in drinking water, wastewater and pool water.

For those of us without a chemistry degree, he is studying how traditionally safe water additives like chlorine can interact with the natural organic compounds in water to create toxic byproducts that can be dangerous to our health. Did I get that right, Dr. Sivey?

With this funding Dr. Sivey recruited three current TU students, a recent TU alumnus, and fellow chemistry professor Keith Reber to collaborate on the research program. Professor Reber, in turn, recruited his research group to synthesize compounds for this NSF-funded project.

Their work was selected as the lead article and recently published in the journal *Environmental Science Water Research and Technology*.

Dr. Sivey is with us today, as is senior Marella Schammel, who is one of the students who co-authored the paper. My congratulations on the terrific journal hit, and Dr. Sivey, my thanks and appreciation for offering our students such a remarkable opportunity to collaborate on important research.

Just this past September professors John LaPolla and Faith Weeks received a $730,000 grant from the National Science Foundation. They are acting as co-PIs, along with TU alum and USDA research entomologist Scott Schneider and Dr. Sean Brady, chair of the Department of Entomology at the Smithsonian Institute National History Museum. Their project studies the symbiotic relationship between Acropyga ants and mealybugs and also includes both graduate and undergraduate students participating in the research.

Dr. Weeks will work hand-in-hand with students in our biology and education programs to assist with Dr. LaPolla’s research, and then she will help them turn their research into lesson plans for K-12 classrooms. Some of the lesson plans will be developed by future science teachers, and
some will be crafted during workshops with current middle and high school teachers who will immediately put them to use in their classrooms.

Dr. LaPolla, please share with Dr. Weeks our congratulations for receiving support from NSF to advance your important research agenda and for bringing innovation and inspiration to Maryland’s K-12 classrooms.

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It is clear that it is a great time to be a Tiger in the classroom. And I gotta tell ya, it’s a great time to be a Tiger fan too.

This spring our women’s lacrosse team made it to their third straight NCAA tournament. This fearless team has won seven of the last 14 CAA championships and made 10—yes, 10—NCAA Division I championship appearances. This year’s team racked up 15 wins, one shy of a school record, and I can’t wait to see what these women do next spring.

Many of you know of another female team that dominates the nation. This spring our TU dance team won their 18th national championship. But now that team has some serious competition for the national spotlight. Because senior Jack Saunderson is taking the swimming world by storm.

This summer, Jack sent commentators into a frenzy when he posted one of the fastest 100-meter butterfly times in the world. Of course, he had already been dominating here at TU and across the CAA. (But we won’t say I told you so!)

And just last month Jack earned a spot on the 2018-19 USA swimming national team roster, which is composed of the top swimmers in each individual Olympic event. His position on the team may enable him to compete internationally on behalf of our country.

Jack is with us this afternoon. Jack, I believe there was another Baltimore swimmer who grew up just a stone’s throw from here, but let me tell you, you are the one we will be cheering for!

Underscoring these successes on the field, on the court and in the pool are academic success rates that lead Maryland and the Colonial Athletic Association.

Last year, five of Towson University’s athletic teams boasted the highest Academic Progress Rate in the CAA, and 12 of our teams had the highest APR of all Division I universities within the University System Maryland.

I know you all join me in being proud of what our student-athletes achieve in competition, in the classroom and in the community.

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I hope that by the examples I have given over the last several minutes it is clear that the state of Towson University is indeed stronger than ever.
That strength is evident in national rankings that signal TU’s noteworthiness as a nationally-recognized first-choice institution. This fall, TU was named:

One of America’s Top Colleges by Forbes;
One of the best colleges in the Northeast by Princeton Review;
One of the top 12 public regional universities in the North by U.S. News & World Report;
One of the top 50 master’s universities in the nation by Washington Monthly;

And one of the top three universities in Maryland by Money Magazine, a recognition which placed Towson University alongside Johns Hopkins University and the University of Maryland College Park as providing the best return on investment for students.

However, what I am most proud of is that several of the rankings noted greater levels of diversity, inclusion and internship experience as reported by TU students themselves.

All over our campus you can see cranes and cones which signal the tremendous forward momentum of our institution.

This fall, we opened a completely renovated Residence Tower that is now home to 400 students. And we completely transformed the former TU Marriott into the first dedicated residence hall for students transferring into TU.

Together, the Residence Tower and The Residences at 10 West Burke Avenue bring Towson University’s on-campus population to more than 5,600 students, yet another historical high for our university. Today 91 percent of freshmen live on campus. TU being a commuter school is truly a thing of the past.

I want to thank the incredible teams who made both of these projects a reality, especially the Facilities, Public Safety and OTS team who converted the former Marriott into a residence hall in just 46 days.

This team, led by Project Manager Nick Gingue, installed more than 10 miles of CAT cable to give students access to the technology they need for academic success. They also removed more than 23,000 hotel items—from towels to telephones—and donated them to local organizations in need. So to Nick and his team, including Kevin Petersen, Warren Riefner, and Rebecca Arnold: You did it! Thank you.

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Just down the street from the new residences, we are seeing TU’s new home of scientific research and discovery rising out of that “big hole” along York Road. Our new Science Complex will be the largest academic building on campus—yes, even larger than CLA. And it needs to be, because one in five incoming undergraduate students are STEM majors. As Interim Provost Vanko will gladly tell you, that demand shows no signs of slowing down.

Farther west we are putting the finishing touches on our new field hockey complex as part of a $3 million commitment to transform our south campus athletic fields. The new fields will provide five times more playing capacity and ease scheduling for practices and games, especially for our women’s
sports. Turf has being laid and the stands are ready. I hope many of you will join me on October 28 for the women’s field hockey complex ribbon cutting.

Just across the street from this building, work is underway on our “Brand New U.” This complete renovation and 85,000-square-foot addition to our University Union will double the student activity space in the heart of campus, which is making Vice President Moriarty very happy.

It will also give us an expanded home for our world-class, lifelong Career Center, which will become even more accessible to students and alumni throughout their careers. The food court is designed to look like R. House in Hampden and it will also house the very first Dunkin Donuts on campus.

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Our capital priority for the 2019 legislative session is informed by this key fact: Towson University produces the most health profession undergraduate degrees for any university—public or private—in the state of Maryland.

Maryland has more than 25,000 unfilled positions in the health professions. The new College of Health Professions building will help TU fill that workforce gap for the state, and help Maryland meet its need for highly qualified nurses, speech pathologists, occupational therapists and other health professionals.

This upcoming spring I will ask each of you join me as I advocate for a new College of Health Professions building in the 2019 legislative session. Working together we can make this building a reality for our students and our state.

The projects I’ve just mentioned, as well as others including future renovations to the Glen Dining Hall and Glen Towers, add up to a $700 million investment that we are making to Towson University’s physical campus over a period of seven years. That is more than has been invested over the past 20 years.

And there is even more investment being made when you look at development just north of TU’s campus, including projects at 101 York, Towson Row and Towson Circle.

When you take a wider lens and consider the development on Towson University’s campus as well as near campus, like the three projects I just named, there is more than $1.7 billion in public and private investment happening in Towson—a truly historic revitalization that is arguably the most investment per square foot happening right now in Maryland. And it is driven by TU.

I want to thank Associate Vice President of Facilities Management Kevin Petersen, as well as David Mayhew, and the entire Facilities Management team for helping to plan and create the future vision for Towson University’s campus.

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Driving development and educating highly qualified graduates are just two ways TU supports Maryland’s economy.

Another is through our TU Incubator.

The TU Incubator is located in our 7400 York Road building just south of campus. In the last 10-plus years, the TU Incubator has supported more than 100 member companies. They have raised $30 million in venture capital, driven more than $150 million in economic impact, and created more than 1,000 jobs. Much of that work has centered on TU’s core competencies, like cyber security and educational technology.

One of those companies is Motifworks.

In 2013, Nitin Agarwal launched Motifworks in the TU Incubator, which he selected because of its access to insightful, experienced mentors, student interns, and networking opportunities. During his time at the incubator (a period of five years), Nitin utilized all of the incubator resources to grow Motifworks’ revenue by five times and build it into a global company with nearly 100 employees. And its headquarters are right here in Towson.

This summer, Motifworks was named to the Inc. 5,000 list of fastest-growing companies in America. We could not be prouder of their success and of the economic revitalization that they and dozens of other Incubator companies like them bring to Greater Baltimore.

Joining us today is Executive Director of Entrepreneurship for Towson University Dr. Nick Hammond. Dr. Hammond will have responsibility to integrate, unify and strategize business, technological and social entrepreneurship activities across our campus, provide support and oversight to the director of venture creation and the director of TU’s Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship.

Dr. Hammond joined our campus just a few weeks ago and brings with him the experience of founding several companies, establishing the Harbor Launch incubator in Baltimore, as well as working with a wide array of faculty and students throughout his career. Welcome, Nick. And I know he looks forward to working with many of you here this afternoon.

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Now I’d like to share our progress in achieving a few of our Presidential Priorities. We regularly post updates on all eight priorities through a dedicated microsite, towson.edu/priorities. I invite you all to visit the site to learn about the great progress being made.

The priorities are no exception to the momentum happening all over our campus.

Our TIGER Way Presidential Priority is about providing dedicated services to meet the unique needs of our transfer, international and graduate student populations and support their success at TU.

When we announced this priority in 2016, we knew that almost 50 percent of our students transferred to TU from another institution of higher education.
Through the TIGER Way priority and the partnership of departments across the university, in the past two years we have established 18 additional 2+2 programs to give students at Maryland community colleges a clear path to their degrees. In fact, we now have 80 2+2 programs with a wide range of community colleges across the state.

And just this fall two positions have been repositioned towards making the transfer experience more seamless for TU students. For the first time on our campus, a dedicated transfer student evaluator and a dedicated transfer student advisor are in place to support and advise our incoming students about their best options for getting the degree they want, in a timely fashion.

We have also taken these services on the road to provide evaluations and advising to students where they need it—at community colleges they currently attend—so they take classes that will transfer to the four-year degrees they’re seeking, as easily as possible.

Soon we will open Towson University’s first dedicated Transfer Student Center, where prospective students can call, email or walk in to get on-demand course evaluation and advising before they enroll. The center will open this spring located alongside our Admissions Office in the Enrollment Services Building so that students touring TU’s campus can conveniently obtain pre-transfer advising and evaluations during their visit. Best of all—with the new evaluator and advisor already hired—the Transfer Student Center will be fully functional from day one.

I would like to thank Alicia Arkell-Klice, our associate director for transfer services; Lori Herring, the senior director for transfer services; and Vicki Cohen, the director of the Academic Advising Center, as well as the tremendous staff in both those offices for making the TU experience more straightforward, welcoming and effective for our students transferring in.

These highly focused advising and evaluation services are just one part of the progress being made on our TIGER Way priority.

When you consider the new Residences at 10 West Burke Avenue, which provide dedicated housing for students transferring in, as well as our winter and summer transfer orientation programs, it is clear that Towson University is now doing much more to support the success of these new Tigers and welcome them to campus.

When I say it’s a great time to be a Tiger, it is because of strategic initiatives like these that launch all of our students into college and careers; innovative programs that power new ventures and drive Maryland’s economy; and important partnerships that anchor our region and make our community more vibrant for all its citizens.

I invite you to visit towson.edu/priorities to learn about the important work being done in each of these areas, as well as the progress being made towards the establishment of a lifelong Career Center; a Development Center to support our world-class faculty; and a diversity strategic plan that will guide our efforts towards a more inclusive campus where all members of our community can thrive.

There is so much work being done that we can be proud of.
And now there is one last thing I want to share with you today.

I want to share an update on my presidential priority, TU Matters to Maryland.

As you know when I came to campus in early 2016 I took a listening tour and learned that far too few of our alumni, legislators, and business and community partners from around the state knew the contemporary story of TU. The TU that they thought of was the small, largely commuter, teacher preparation college we were 50 years ago.

“TU Matters to Maryland” is a comprehensive communication strategy that is aimed at retelling the contemporary story of TU and what makes Towson University distinct and valuable to the state of Maryland in 2018 and beyond.

Today, I’m proud to share with all of you an important update on the progress of this presidential priority.

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Starting this January, Towson University will launch a campaign to communicate that 2018 contemporary identity that nods to our history, but also clearly states what TU is today.

I hope each of you will proudly wear and share this new TU brand mark as we boldly tell the contemporary story of TU and together write the next chapter of TU’s story.

Thank you to all those across campus who shared feedback, ideas and opinions as we developed the contemporary story of Towson University.

And a special thanks to those who worked on the university-wide Brand Team: Assistant Vice President of Creative Services Rick Pallansch, Senior Director of Marketing and Brand Strategy Timm Baldwin, our creative partners, and all our colleagues working in the University Marketing & Communications division who listened and refined this retelling of TU’s contemporary story and its contemporary identity.

I greatly appreciate everyone coming here today and look forward to joining you at the reception.

There is much to be proud of at Towson University, and there are truly great things ahead!

Thank you.