

President's Spring Address

April 21, 2016

Good Afternoon.

I am honored to be here today in historic Stephens Hall to offer my first address to our campus community.

The campus is beautiful, blooming and buzzing with students, faculty and staff enjoying the sunshine and warm weather after—as I have been told—an unexpected and uncharacteristically cold Maryland spring.

Now with my first 90 days under my belt, I'm even more excited for what's ahead.

To begin, I want to thank everyone I have met and worked with over the past 12 weeks. Everyone on campus, in the Towson and Greater Baltimore community and around Maryland has been most kind and most welcoming to me and my husband, Trevor.

We both feel very much at home, feel new roots growing very quickly and are looking forward to moving into our new home just a few miles from campus on May 6. You might have seen the license plate frame on my car that says "Towson Tiger for Life." Well, Trevor and I mean it.

To begin, I want to share some important updates and news about the campus.

As many of you know, most of my first week on campus was overtaken by a blizzard, but my second week went as planned and I spent a great deal of time in Annapolis getting to know our state leaders and garnering support for our legislative priorities this year.

In the recently completed session, for the FY17 state operating budget, the General Assembly approved the University System of Maryland's budget with a 6 percent increase over last year.

For TU, that results in a \$115 million state appropriation, which is an \$8.5 million increase over last year. This increase will primarily cover the increased cost of health care benefits, retirement expenses and merit pay adjustments. In other words, it is already spoken for.

The state also provided funding to limit a tuition increase for in-state undergraduate students to just 2 percent.

As many of you are aware, our top priority this legislative session was to gain approval for the \$183 million new science building.

To give you an illustration of our dire need for this new facility, when the current science building was constructed in the 1960s, the university had a total of 3,537 students.

Yes, I did say a total enrollment of just over 3,500 students.

Fast forward to today. Our STEM programs alone enroll more than 3,800 graduate and undergraduate students.

So, after a two-year deferral, Governor Hogan and the General Assembly appropriated \$6.15 million in planning funds to put us back on track to open the new science building in four years, in fall 2020. The governor was here visiting campus this week and I have already invited him to the groundbreaking and the ribbon cutting for the new science building. And he very enthusiastically accepted my invitation to both events.

I want to thank Provost Chandler, Dean Vanko and the entire TU team of faculty, staff, students and alumni who have offered their relentless support of the science building.

I also want to add my sincerest appreciation for the support Chancellor Caret, the governor and the General Assembly have shown to higher education in our state and, more specifically, to the needs of Towson University.

Now, our focus turns to the proposed College of Health Professions Building, which was unfortunately deferred from FY18 to FY20.

The State of Maryland has over 20,000 unfilled health professions jobs, but fortunately for Maryland, TU has the largest health professions enrollment in the state and 85 percent of our graduates stay in Maryland after graduation. We are uniquely positioned to fulfill the state's workforce needs in this industry with the sheer quantity and quality that no other university can match.

We will continue to advocate for this building throughout this summer and fall

I believe we have been making, and will continue to make, a very solid case, but just as we did for the science building, we will need the entire campus's support behind us. So stay tuned during the months ahead as we expand our efforts to advocate for the health professions building to learn how you all can help!

Finally, during my visits to Annapolis I had the opportunity to see our very own TU alumni and staff in action. We have many legislators with seemingly unlimited TU degrees of separation.

One person I got to know this past year was a TU staff member in the Division of Student Affairs and director of our Veterans Center, Delegate Patrick Young. In a very short period of time, Delegate Young has earned the respect of his colleagues in Annapolis and is seen as one of the rising leaders in the Capitol.

When our faculty, staff and alumni are recognized for their excellence, we all benefit and rise with them. I know we will continue to give these leaders our support as they work to advance our university, the USM and our great state.

I hope you have found this brief update helpful. I plan to increase our communications regarding our legislative priorities in this upcoming year and will invite everyone to join us and advocate on Towson University's behalf.

Now moving on past the update.

With this address, I hope to accomplish three important goals.

First I will share what I have learned from my 90 days of listening.

The intent of this listening tour was to discover the common themes about Towson University arising from these diverse, as I call them, focus groups. I want to thank everyone who met with me and shared his or her thoughts, dreams and critiques of and about TU.

I learned much from many, and will share those themes with you this afternoon.

My second goal is to share what priorities, in my mind, are reaffirmed or reinforced by these reoccurring and widely shared themes.

Finally, my third goal is to talk about what we can all expect to happen regarding those priorities. Simply put, what action will be taken and how will the campus be changed to realize those priorities?

As I shared during my recent listening tour, I met with dozens of civic, business, nonprofit and governmental leaders from across our state. I spoke with alumni as well as members of our various boards.

Additionally, eight town halls over the course of February, March and April were held where I was asked over 140 questions from faculty, staff and students, and reviewed an additional 82 questions and comments via yellow cards distributed and collected at the sessions.

What I learned is that there is an incredible consensus at Towson University among all of us about our significant strengths as well as areas where focus and investment of time, money and purpose are needed.

As I considered the notes from those meetings and studied what your diverse voices shared with me, the following conclusions and observations took clear shape.

- People told me about the growth of the campus over the past decade—how proud they were of it but that they were concerned we were still doing things the same way as when we had an enrollment of 10,000 students instead of almost 23,000.
- People told me—often alumni and those from the community—that they had recently visited campus and had no idea how much the campus had changed and how amazing it was.
- I often shared with people I met that TU was the second largest and fastest growing campus in the state, had the only computer science cybersecurity program certified by the NSA, and that TU produces the majority of health professions graduates for Maryland. They often said, “I didn’t know,” or “I had no idea.”
- People told me they were graduate students, international students and transfer students, and felt that the university paid less attention to them than traditional undergraduates and did not seem to understand nor act responsively to their unique needs.
- People told me they were thrilled with our faculty and their classroom experience but needed more help in getting an internship, identifying a career path and a job after graduation. The job part came from many parents as well.
- People told me this was a most welcoming campus and their wife, daughter, co-worker or brother-in-law got a great education here that prepared them for lifelong success.

- People told me they came to Towson expecting a diverse and inclusive campus but instead found one that was unwelcoming to someone of their race, religion, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation or able-ness.
- People told me that they were excited to, and wanted to, try new classroom technologies coupled with exploring new and innovative pedagogies. But they didn't have the resources or the time to do so.
- People told me that we had a tremendous opportunity to fundraise and create a culture of philanthropy in support of TU and its future.
- People told me that they were unsure how our vision, Strategic Plan, Master Plan for the campus, and allocation of resources would be reconciled, and how the priorities of academics and athletics would be considered.
- People told me that we were doing amazing work in Greater Baltimore with business and community partners—most of which was going unrecognized—and they wanted to expand these important partnerships even more, but didn't know how.
- Oh, and finally, everyone complained about the parking.

What I heard from all these diverse groups was that Towson University is indeed at an important inflection point. We are so proud of what we have achieved and become, especially in the last 15 years when our growth has been extraordinary and our reputation for excellence and impact has soared.

What I came away with in the simplest of terms is the strong belief that TU is indeed positioned for a very bright future building upon the past decade of enormous growth and achievement.

But this optimism is coupled with genuine concerns about the strength and the stability of the foundation that we as a university are currently sitting on.

The priorities I will discuss next are ones that will not be new to most listening here today. They will not be unexpected. They have often been discussed before and they are at the core of advancing our vision and strategic plan.

But most important they will provide a determined focus on our bright future and the building of a new and better foundation for TU to get there.

Remember I said that many folks didn't know about the TU of 2016.

I heard too often "I had no idea TU was not still largely a teacher's college." "I had no idea most of your students were not commuters." "I did not know TU had such a large enrollment." "I had no idea that you had so many graduate programs."

"I had no idea." "I did not know."

These comments—from alumni, community and business leaders, and state legislators—mean that the story of Towson University needs retelling.

Simply put, although we are indeed a respected and nationally recognized public university, the reality of what TU has achieved, what TU is doing, what impact TU is having in Greater Baltimore and across Maryland is too influenced by where we have been in the last 150 years versus where we are in 2016.

To address this, TU will begin a new university-wide initiative that will retell our story—our identity in a much more compelling and distinct manner that is reflective of the Towson University of today.

Many groups I have spoken with, alumni—faculty, staff and students—have all clearly expressed they want the university to make a priority of retelling TU’s story.

This retelling will result in a new and invigorating strategy that will communicate effectively to all audiences what makes TU distinct, valuable and, why in 2016 and beyond, TU matters to Maryland.

This retelling of a contemporary TU story is even more critical as universities face more and more competition for students, faculty, research funding, alumni, corporate and foundation support as well as funding for operating budgets and key capital projects from the University System of Maryland and our state.

The initiative that will be called “TU Matters to Maryland” will begin this fall with an identity audit of how we are currently perceived and how we are positioned versus other institutions within our state as well as regionally and nationally.

“TU Matters to Maryland” will take at least two years to complete from starting the identity audit this fall to the rollout of a comprehensive communication strategy.

I ask for your support and involvement with this important university-wide project that will align our historic reputation with our 2016 reality and build a better and stronger foundation for our future success.

As you recall, many members of our campus community shared with me that their time on campus was often welcoming and nurturing.

But many others also shared that they were subjected to racist comments and actions in the classroom and on the campus. Many shared that they were made to feel unwelcome on campus or in the residence halls due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Many students, faculty and staff spoke with me and told me that this was not an inclusive and welcoming campus if you are black, Hispanic, Native American, genderqueer, trans, gay, bisexual or had differences in your able-ness.

This list is not intended to be complete but it clearly demonstrates this is not the inclusive university we aspire to be—and can be.

In the past 12 weeks I have spoken widely of my uncompromising belief that a diverse and inclusive campus is a prerequisite for achieving a high quality university education. I have stated that hate speech and behavior will not be tolerated at Towson University.

A diverse and inclusive classroom and campus provides that our graduates have learned to both thrive and support others to thrive in an environment inclusive of race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation and able-ness.

In a global economy increasingly characterized by multiculturalism, Towson University graduates who thrive and support others to thrive in a diverse and inclusive environment will leave our campus better prepared, and thus advantaged, for the world of work and graduate education.

But in the 12 weeks I have been on campus, in addition to the clear need for a major revision to our hate/bias reporting process, I have learned about the lack of institutional support to expand the hiring of women, and minority faculty, staff and administrators

I have learned about the lack of institutional support for our minority faculty in developing a successful path to tenure and promotion.

I have learned about the lack of transparency and consistency surrounding public safety presence and procedures at student events on campus.

This list is not intended to be complete but does represent the kind of work that must be done to achieve the significant change necessary for Towson University to move toward our stated goal of an inclusive campus.

I want to be clear that these inadequacies are indeed being addressed and much progress is being made, but due to the scale, scope and importance of these issues, it has become clear to me over the past 12 weeks that more resources and more funding is needed to move this initiative a mile versus an inch.

Making serious and substantial change will require that we restructure and invest in resources aimed at advancing diversity and inclusion, within and across divisions, in a manner that supports a campus and student body of our size.

To accomplish this, resources and expertise at the university level to convene faculty, students and staff for their input and ideas, to implement best practices, to report in a transparent manner the results, to drive cross-divisional strategies, and to provide accountability are needed.

My experience at previous institutions and at many other universities across the country, such as Johns Hopkins, provides that the creation of an Office of Inclusion and Institutional Equity, headed by a vice-president reporting to the president, with the funding to accomplish this work is needed here at TU.

This office and this individual, a chief inclusion and institutional equity officer, will provide senior leadership and strategic vision for the design, promotion and delivery of best-practice diversity, inclusion and cultural competency efforts across this campus and throughout our community.

In the coming days and weeks we will begin our search for Towson University's first chief inclusion and institutional equity officer.

I will be meeting with groups of students, faculty and staff to ask for their service on a search committee to commence work this fall. The search will be highly inclusive and include open forums and many opportunities to meet and provide feedback on the candidates from all members of our campus. My goal is to have this office and this individual in place by early next year. When the call comes to participate, I ask for everyone to make it a priority.

My town hall meetings with faculty, staff and students always included comments by the faculty about the pride we as a university have in the success of our students, and the commitment we have as an institution to teaching excellence.

Those thoughts were validated and strongly reinforced by the 100s of students I have met and spoke with over the past 12 weeks. They so value the small learning environments and the focus on teaching excellence that TU's mission statement strongly emphasizes.

However, integrating technology and innovative pedagogy into their classroom and coursework was described by many faculty as daunting, and some suggested a greater consistency in our classroom technology would be very helpful as well.

These ideas were also brought to me by the provost soon after my arrival on campus. He wisely advised me that we have invested in classrooms and academic facilities but our investment in infrastructure and facilities to directly support the faculty in their teaching has not keep pace at all.

As a president who truly values the advice of her provost, I listened hard to his ideas as well as the ideas of the faculty about the need to build a better and stronger foundation for the future.

Beginning this summer I will ask the provost to work with the deans, chairs, and most important, our faculty on a multiple-year plan to create a world-class Faculty Development Center that will include the Office of Academic Innovation. The plan will include specific funding requirements for facilities space, technology, collaborative space, seminars, teaching workshops and other resources such as staff and stipends to support faculty and promote academic innovation, such as flipped classrooms and problem-based learning in course redesign.

I also know that the biggest obstacle for most faculty is just having the time. So included in the plan, I ask that we look at expanding a teaching fellows program where faculty could receive leave to work on teaching innovation within the center and then return to their classroom and their college to share their new knowledge and skills.

I hope to have the plan finalized by the end of the fall semester so the funding for it can be included in next year's budget and implementation of the Faculty Development Center can begin next fall.

I have mentioned several times over about our future and the better foundation that is needed to get us there. How do we tie our vision, strategic plan, the strategic plans of our divisions and colleges, and the Campus Master Plan together? And how does that inform and direct the allocation of resources to those priorities?

Well, as at many universities, we do not have a deliberate, programmatic, transparent means to do that and I don't think I have surprised anyone by saying that.

That is a gnarly task, but I will make sure we focus our resources of time and money on those strategic goals to give them much greater purpose and make sure our strategic plan is not simply a book that sits on a shelf gathering dust, or in today's world, a link on a website that very few click through to view and read.

This summer we will begin the significant task to align the university's vision, strategic plan, the divisions' and colleges' strategic plans, and the Campus Master Plan with annual operating plans and our overall budget process.

This will be, as I said, a gnarly task, but one that will be a priority for my office to lead.

Outcomes of this process—and it will take a year to build a foundation to accomplish and several years to complete—will include the beginnings of an operating plan and funding model to support strategic goals such as a financially stable, gender-equitable and competitive athletics program, and expanding—not just maintaining—our national and international reputation in arts and communication.

Aligning the vision, the various plans and our resources together is very difficult. We will find—and this will not be much of a surprise to anyone—that at the university, college and division level we are simply not “walking the talk.”

That is, what we say are in our strategic goals for the future have often not informed the foundation we have invested in.

The work to create this alignment will begin this summer and I will take a personal lead on it. My chief of staff, Jennifer Gajewski, will direct the effort, and all the vice-presidents and deans will be deeply involved as we indeed commit to “walking the talk.” I will be emphasizing this priority effort in my next address to campus this fall, so everyone stay tuned.

Two weeks ago, I attended *Paws For Thanks* where Presidential Ambassadors are building our culture of philanthropy by raising awareness of how donor contributions advance Towson University.

It has been almost 10 years since our university conducted a major capital campaign, and another is long overdue. Our alumni giving rate and annual development funds, though improving, are simply not where they need to be to support the need for private monies for our scholarship programs, faculty development needs, library resources, athletic teams and facilities, as well as our physical plant supporting academic and student affairs divisions.

Additionally, legislative leaders have clearly stated that those universities that can match, on some level, state funding with private monies will have their capital projects move up to the head of the queue. This in fact occurred with our new science building when we committed to raise \$5 million as part of the overall funding model.

I expect this funding model will only become more widespread and more stringent over time.

So it is time to launch a new capital campaign and as part of this effort, as a first step, we will be conducting a campaign feasibility study this fall. The study will determine the campaign’s potential as well as provide a strategy for its achievement. I will ask many of you to participate in focus groups and roundtables this upcoming year as we begin this important initiative.

As I spoke with graduate, transfer, and international students over the last 12 weeks they told me they were very very happy with TU and the high quality education they were receiving here.

But they often felt that the university’s emphasis on traditional undergraduates left little for their unique needs. Understanding how we respond to this really starts with what enrollment model we are committed to.

Are we committed to having about 17 percent of our enrollment being graduate students? And in what programs do we expect those graduate populations to be enrolled?

What percentage of our undergraduates will be transfers—currently it is hovering around 50 percent. Yes, that is a big number.

How many international students, who greatly add to the diversity of a campus, do we wish to enroll?

Simply put, we don’t have a plan regarding an enrollment model that will inform and guide what we fund to better support those students.

I have already asked the provost, CFO Joe Oster, and VP Josianne Pennington to begin work on an enrollment model for our future so we can better plan to support our entire student population, traditional undergraduates, transfers, international and graduate students. That plan is expected to be ready this fall.

I have also asked the provost and Joe Oster to work with the divisions and colleges to examine the numbers and allocation of graduate assistants on campus that would adequately support our graduate population, including an examination of the competitiveness of our stipend both in terms of the amounts and the duration of our commitment.

A one-year package commitment does not seem to make sense if it takes two years to complete the degree. Support for faculty and graduate scholarly and creative work will also be an outcome of that effort.

We need to take a look at advising overall but more specifically at college-level advising, like the pilots we are running in the College of Business and Economics and in the College of Health Professions.

College-level advising supports all our students but can really make an impact on transfer students as they have already decided their major, are bringing credits to campus and really need to get very specific degree plans that will support their degree completion in a timely and efficient way.

Having student affairs professionals assigned to each college is a best-practice used in many universities to connect with students, and I think it is time to consider that at Towson.

Studies have shown that college-level advisors and student affairs professionals positively impact the success and satisfaction of all students, but the impact on transfer and international students is extraordinary. Such investment will also free up faculty to focus on the type of mentoring about career and graduate school that they are best positioned to do.

I want to package all these discrete efforts in a more deliberate way. It will be TU's Transfer, International Graduate Enrollment Resource Initiative or because that is way too long—the TIGER Way for short.

This initiative will provide us with a detailed enrollment model to inform programs and priorities for investment to better support these important student populations that mean so much to TU's success and the vitality of our campus. We will be reaching out to all of the campus community for ideas and involvement as we move forward on the TIGER Way initiative in the months and years to come.

Finally, I talked about the need for a world-class Career Center. Such a resource to students and alumni was a priority that came up time and time again with our students, and is a means to connect our university to the Baltimore and Maryland business community in a very concrete way. Not only will it enhance our career advising and job placement of our students after graduation, but it will also make a strong connection to the business community and establish another and more direct linkage of TU's impact on the workforce and economic development of our state.

Also I can tell you that for our parents and families, it is very much about jobs, jobs, jobs for their students.

It will be a priority for me to work with Vice President Moriarty, Provost Chandler and their divisional teams on a plan to realize for Towson University and Maryland a world-class Career Center. We will need the involvement of all our students, faculty staff and alumni to ensure its success. So when you are asked to participate, please say, "Yes."

I am nearing the end of my address and you might be wondering when I will talk about our efforts as to advance our community and business engagement—an attribute of our campus that we are nationally recognized and lauded for by the Carnegie Foundation.

I can share that I am holding back on this topic until next Tuesday when I will share my thoughts and vision about TU and Greater Baltimore working together to create a brighter future for our region and state at the TU Partnerships Showcase. So mark next Tuesday at noon in the Minnegan Room on your calendars.

In the past 12 weeks I have talked about how all of us in higher education have an opportunity each and every day to support a wonderful new opportunity.

We take on new priorities but never take anything off our already overflowing plate. This is why we in universities often move 20 things an inch instead of five things a mile.

Today I have shared with you what the campus, business, Greater Baltimore and Maryland communities told me about what Towson University needs to focus on.

Those priorities, and there are seven not five, are, as I have said, probably not a surprise to anyone sitting here today. They are not unexpected and are at the core of TU's vision for the future and its strategic plan.

I have learned much in the past 12 weeks. I have been embraced by this campus and this community. I have had my firm belief that this is a great university with a great future that will only be strengthened.

With these priorities at the center of who we are, and informed by our vision and strategic plan, we will achieve what I think I know is right for this university.

TU does not need to change its path. TU should not fall into the trap of mission creep. TU needs to stay true to its DNA and, simply put, Towson University needs to be more Towson. We need to shout loudly and often that "TU Matters to Maryland."

Thanks you all for being here today, working together and with me to lift up this amazing university. There is much to be proud of at Towson University and there are great things ahead!