

*President Dennis Assanis
University of Delaware
Inauguration — Dec. 7, 2016*

Chairman Cochran, Trustees of the University of Delaware and Distinguished Guests: Thank you for entrusting me with the high honor and responsibility of serving as the 28th president of this fine institution.

Esteemed faculty and staff colleagues, and our wonderful students and alumni ... Thank you for the confidence and encouragement you have shown me as we embark on this journey together, as well as your warmth and affection to me and my family.

It's a pleasure to be here today in the Roselle Center for the Arts, and even more so because we have here with us today, President Emeritus David Roselle, who served our institution with distinction for 17 years, and our beloved former First Lady, Louise. Let's give them a special recognition.

We are deeply honored to be joined today by the Vice President of the United States, Joe Biden, as well as the Second Lady of the United States, Dr. Jill Biden — the kind of couple we refer to around here as “Double Dels” — and also our outstanding alumna Valerie Biden Owens. The Biden family often tell us their hearts belong to the University of Delaware, and I can assure them they are first in our hearts. Please join me in giving them a warm Delaware welcome.

We are also honored by the presence of the political leaders of our fine state — Governor Markell and the many members of our General Assembly and local governments. Welcome, and thank you for your invaluable support.

Dr. Coleman — thank you for your inspiring words this morning. As a University President, you have been an unbelievable role model for me and so many other academic leaders — you personify excellence!

Tunde — I am deeply touched by your lovely poem, your generosity and your commitment to this University. You truly exemplify the renaissance engineer of the 21st century.

Former colleagues, students and friends from the University of Michigan and Stony Brook University — it has been a privilege for me to cross paths with you over the years. It is gratifying to have in the audience four of my former students who are now professors at prestigious institutions, John and Bev Holt who had endowed my professorship at UM and have been dear friends to our family ever since, and President Stanley from Stony Brook University — Sam, thank you for the incredible opportunity to work together and learn from each other in building a great University.

And thank you, of course, to my family — my first lady of 36 years, Eleni —my partner in everything we have accomplished together, and our wonderful sons, Nicholas and Dimitris. Your love and support inspire me every day as a reminder of the purpose and achievement that define a meaningful life. And to my late father and mother ... who is with us today ... for their unconditional love and for enabling me to follow my ambitions.

And from my entire family and myself, a big thank you to all who helped make this great day for our University so memorable.

Words cannot fully express how deeply honored I am that *all* of you have come together to celebrate this next chapter in the proud and remarkable history of the University of Delaware.

For more than 270 years, this institution has brought forth knowledge and enlightenment ... has contributed scientific achievements and profound ideas ... has transformed lives and changed the world. Indeed, UD has grown into one of the top academic institutions in the country, one that now educates more than 20,000 students annually and enjoys the support of more than 175,000 alumni worldwide.

This ... is a special place ... this university *and* the state of Delaware.

Thomas Jefferson once called Delaware “a jewel among the states,” recognizing that its small size is an essential element of its strength.

Few other states can so easily bring key leaders of government, industry and community around a table to solve problems, seize opportunities and advance the interests of their people. It's big thinking on a human scale.

And the University of Delaware is a major hub in the rich network of talent that canvasses our state. No matter where I go, I meet alumni, parents, friends of UD — *everyone ... and I mean literally everyone ...* has a connection to this University!

This state's culture of connectivity is one of its most significant assets. As human beings, that's why we are all here – to become connected to something far more powerful than ourselves – and I'm honored to be part of those connections here and now, at this great hub of knowledge and discovery, our University of Delaware.

We have come a long way since 1743, when Reverend Francis Alison founded our school.

In his day, Reverend Alison was considered “the greatest classical scholar in America.” He believed that a broad and rigorous education in languages, literature, mathematics, science and the arts was essential if one aspired to become a productive citizen of the world. We continue to share that belief.

Three young individuals in his first graduating class — George Read, James Smith and Thomas McKean — went on to become leaders of the American Revolution and signed the Declaration of Independence.

George Read also helped draft the Constitution and urged his fellow Delawareans to ratify it. They did so — exactly 229 years ago *today*, making Delaware the first state and a leader in our young nation's pursuit of a more perfect union.

So ... it is fitting that we are gathered here on December 7th — known as Delaware Day — to honor the past, celebrate the present and imagine the future of this venerable institution.

Throughout our history, Reverend Alison's belief in the power of knowledge to prepare us for the future has been our guiding mission. As the first university in the first state and the eighth oldest institution in our country, we have a strong history of commitment and focus to build our nation.

To educate our citizens, create knowledge and improve our world, we became a land-grant university in 1870 — and, as we have furthered our mission, a sea grant and space grant institution, as well.

To build bridges of peace and global understanding, we launched the nation's first study-abroad program in 1923.

To defend our country, our students answered the call to action following Pearl Harbor 75 years ago today. Serving our veterans — through education, as well as through research that improves the lives of those wounded in battle — has long been a proud mission of the University of Delaware.

To lead in scientific discovery and better serve society, we diversified our academic and research enterprise. For instance, a century ago, we helped develop the new field of chemical engineering and built our program into one of the world's finest, thanks to the close partnership with DuPont.

Today, UD is driving global energy solutions, developing new materials, defending critical cyber systems, preserving the world's priceless antiques and photographs ... and so much more.

To educate a diverse community, we opened the University's doors to all students, thanks to the tireless advocacy of Louis Redding Jr. As Delaware's first African-American lawyer, Mr. Redding greatly influenced our University to live up to its stated ideals.

Ultimately, the contributions we make to society are about people.

I often think about our outstanding faculty — exemplified by Nobel Prize winner Richard Heck and all the fine professors we have inducted into the Francis Alison Society over the years — such inspiring people; they personify the mind and spirit of UD. They are prolific scholars and researchers. They are devoted teachers who believe in the power of active and experiential learning. And they are a powerful magnet for excellent students and staff.

Please join us this afternoon for our inaugural academic symposium, where five extraordinary faculty members will share fascinating insights about their work and the ideas they are driving forward that dare to change the world.

And our students, who create possibility through the rich pursuit of knowledge and the active exchange of diverse ideas. They come here to learn, and yet so many of us actually learn from them. Many are dedicated to building a more sustainable and socially responsible world. They bring rigor to the classroom and beyond, whether it's an art studio, a research lab, or a volunteer program.

And excellence comes in many forms. I am truly energized by the spirit and potential of our students. This is particularly evident in the values and performance of our student athletes. They cherish and cultivate a sense of pride in our Blue Hens... they're all champions ... on and off the field ... because UD is a community of winners. In fact, I'd like to recognize the achievement of our spirited Field Hockey team, who last month won the NCAA Field Hockey national championship!

Of course, one of the most visible — and valuable — manifestations of the University's contributions to society are our alumni, people like Daniel Nathans, Bob Gore, the Bidens, Susan Stroman, Terri Kelly, Chris Christie, Anne Barretta, John Carney, and Elena Delle Donne, who continue to achieve greatness long after they have left our institution.

So now, as I stand before you as the 28th President of the University of Delaware, we must all ask together, "What's next?" How do we take this rich legacy of discovery, progress and people forward? How can we impact a new generation? How can we ensure that our University not only endures, but thrives, for centuries to come?

As a philhellene, I'm reminded of a word often used by Homer: "arete," meaning *the constant drive for virtue and excellence*. This drive captures our shared aspirations, defines our shared goals, and shapes our ability to meet the next great challenges of our future.

Our first and most important priority is to ensure the success of every student. This is the fundamental theme to everything we do, and one that will continue to define the direction of our institution for years to come. As educators, we have the responsibility to engage and cultivate knowledge among our students, not only in school but throughout their lives, as they encounter a connected and increasingly more complex world.

This work begins even before students come to UD. Through partnerships with the K-12 systems, we're helping to close achievement gaps and to strengthen and expand the pipeline of college-ready students.

And our commitment carries forward to our campus, where we ensure that all our students are supported for the academic rigors of higher education *and* have the financial aid they need to complete their UD degree.

Education is the primary vehicle for upward mobility in society. And I believe that our society is only as strong as its weakest link. Education is crucial to bridge socio-economic divides and racial tensions. If we aspire to go far, we must go together. So we have a responsibility to keep education affordable and accessible to everybody in the State of Delaware and the world.

And I believe every undergraduate student, with the right guidance, support and analytical tools, can earn their degree in *four* years. Our graduation rate is already in the top quartile among the most prestigious public universities in the nation, and we will continue to strive to be among the very best.

The promise for student success is strengthened by a broad-based education in the arts, humanities and sciences. The Greek culture employs the term "paideia," meaning the education of the well-rounded citizen. I learned early to value the inspirational power of the arts, the keen insights of the humanities and the formidable strength of the sciences, especially when we are able to communicate our stories effectively and address policies and human dimensions.

So is the path to success a journey towards academic excellence? Yes!

Is it a time for personal enlightenment? Absolutely!

It is imperative to prepare our students for careers that are both satisfying and meaningful. So we must embrace academic disciplines that are robust *and* integrated as cross-disciplinary connections to advance knowledge and meet the needs of the modern workplace.

Our evolving classrooms, libraries and learning commons, leveraging new technologies, online tools and hybrid pedagogy, will expand the use of problem-based learning, a concept that has been one of the cornerstones of the UD experience over the past two decades.

We will continue to promote our students' awareness of the role that creative thinking plays in understanding, expressing and improving the human condition. And this means translating the ideas from a textbook into the insights of an experience ... the interest in a particular field of study into an awareness of its potential.

We want our students to actively participate in their learning, and we must provide them with opportunities to do so. From engaging in research and experiencing first-hand the thrill of discovery to benefiting from study-abroad programs, they will enter the world prepared to be competitive, curious, informed and inspired.

All of these efforts help to create the necessary foundation of focus and enlightenment for our students to succeed. But these future leaders will truly flourish only if we cultivate in them our core values.

Diversity, equity and inclusion are absolutely core to our institutional character and our educational mission at the University of Delaware. Our students must know how to live and work in a society that is increasingly more diverse. And I view diversity broadly, from gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic background, sexual orientation and religion, to physical ability and intellectual perspectives. Building and celebrating diversity is crucial in enabling collaboration, openness, trust and cohesive communities.

I am very passionate about embracing diversity and inclusive excellence, and thankfully, so are my colleagues on our faculty, staff and Board of Trustees.

While building on academic excellence, we are working diligently to recruit and retain students and faculty from underrepresented groups. For example, we will further strengthen UD's prominence in African American material culture studies and public humanities, as evidenced by the prestigious grants and awards from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Modern Language Association and the Luce Foundation.

We are also enhancing our multicultural curriculum to raise students' consciousness as human beings who can lead and contribute to the opportunities of a society that is diverse, inclusive and creative.

Valuing diversity is about appreciating the dignity and worth of every single human being. It's about ensuring an open and welcoming atmosphere, a campus environment in which we respect the unique voice that each of us brings to the conversation.

UD and other institutions must ensure that civility, free speech and diversity coexist and even flourish in our society. In this way, we can be a model for moving our nation — and our world — forward, together.

Our future is a shared one, and it's one that will depend on minds that are open and collaborative. With this in mind, we have an obligation as an institution of higher education to develop in our students a strong interdisciplinary and global perspective.

The most complex problems we face — such as climate change, energy and sustainability, global health and quality of life — do not adhere to national borders or the boundaries of single disciplines. Nor can our attempts to address them. We need economists to work with geologists, artists to work with engineers and designers,

teachers and nurses to work with philosophers. Every field must contribute its unique expertise in an integrated manner to address our greatest challenges.

Working together ... we will promote a greater collaboration among our schools and colleges. To that goal, we envision the launch of a graduate college to act as a catalyst for working effectively across disciplines, promoting the development of new and exciting degree programs, and pioneering interdisciplinary discovery, creativity and scholarly achievement.

Indeed, a stronger investment in graduate education is key to advancing the University's research and scholarly excellence. Within 10 years, we will have doubled the size of our graduate student population and our impact on the world.

An integrated approach to education will allow the existing strengths of our undergraduate programs to inform our newly developed graduate programs and vice versa — the additional resources afforded by these graduate programs will benefit all our undergraduate students.

Our approach to building new globally-recognized programs will necessitate investment and expansion of our school of public policy and administration, a pivotal area in creating real world solutions to real world problems. And while we reach out to our biggest assets for this pursuit – our invaluable alumni – I would like to leave you with a thought worth pondering. Wouldn't it be great if we could name the school after one of our University's, State's, and Nation's most distinguished public servants with a lifelong record of governmental stewardship and global leadership?

We'll also continue to strengthen our existing graduate and professional-education programs to meet the needs of workers and employers. Already, our graduate Physical Therapy program is the nation's best, thanks in part to our clinic on the STAR Campus, and we aim to reach that level of recognition and excellence with many other programs.

We also recognize the transformative impact that travel and global study of diverse cultures can have on our students. UD invented the study abroad program nearly 100 years ago, and we have so much opportunity to strengthen strategic partnerships in education, research and engagement around the world.

So we will continue to bring UD to the world, and bring the world to UD. In that spirit, we will redouble our efforts to grow our international student body so as to enhance the educational experience of all our students.

By developing a holistic understanding of our world, our students will become the next change agents in whatever paths they choose to take.

Our world needs creative thinkers and big dreamers — new leaders — so we must nurture our students' imaginations through cultivating a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship, another key institutional priority.

Whether launching their own ventures, developing novel solutions to social problems or joining existing organizations, our graduates must be able to introduce entrepreneurial thought and approaches in everything they do.

Right now, more than 1,000 students from a wide variety of majors at UD are benefitting from our entrepreneurial programs. Some find knowledge, skills, connections and access to critical resources through the Horn Program for Entrepreneurship or the Delaware Innovation Fellows program. Some are earning a master's degree in Entrepreneurship and Design, a program that's the joint product of three of our colleges. Still others pursue start-up funding in our annual Hen Hatch, Pitch 90 or First Step competitions.

It is critical to our future that we expand these opportunities to draw in every student and college at UD.

This innovative spirit is also crucial to the University's fundamental role as an economic engine for our state and region. As the Delaware economy continues to evolve, UD is committed to attracting world-class talent, producing cutting-edge technology, and driving meaningful partnerships with scalable impact. We are in the unique position to enrich Delaware with a fresh culture driven by people who innovate, create and take risks.

As a catalyst for public and private innovation, we have recently expanded our Delaware Technology Park by launching its new site at STAR, our hub for science, technology and advanced research. DTP@STAR is fully occupied by 11 start-ups performing cutting-edge work in pharmaceuticals, cancer treatment, nanotechnology and many other fields. I like to say that we put the "STAR" in "start-up."

And we will not stop here. We have big plans to develop additional innovation spaces across our campus and throughout our State that complement our existing efforts to attract partners.

Towards that goal, we are in continuous dialogue with the State, DuPont and other industries to expand opportunities for start-up businesses and collaborative R&D.

The opportunities are virtually endless — and endlessly exciting.

Think about our long history and extensive resources in manufacturing innovation. Exemplars include our Center for Composite Materials, the Institute for Energy Conversion, the Catalysis Center for Energy Innovation, and the Delaware Biotechnology Institute. These university-led, industry-driven consortia are poised to make significant contributions to the new manufacturing partnerships being forged through the federal government's Manufacturing USA program. As we revolutionize manufacturing, we can also educate the workforce needed to run 21st century factories.

This is what we've always been about ... activity that is revolutionary. From Richard Heck's pioneering work in catalysis to the invention of our doctoral student Wayne Westerman and his advisor John Elias, who laid the foundation for the touchscreen technologies that are used in most smartphones today, the University is opening doors — doors to new research, doors to new collaborations.

Earlier this year, we were honored to host U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz to explore partnerships with national laboratories to contribute our substantial resources to today's most important fields of research and to transform fundamental discoveries into innovation. I believe we'll see more dynamic unions of educational and government leadership at the local, state and national levels — all coming together to create and articulate visions for the future.

This University and this state can be at the nexus of such activity. As we collaborate across geography, skill sets and innovation networks, now is the time to think of "Greater Delaware" — a region encompassing Philadelphia and parts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Washington, DC, and even a bit of New York.

These cross-cutting themes — inclusive excellence, an interdisciplinary and global perspective, and a spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship — will define our students' success.

But to make this possible, we must fulfill our aspirations by investing heavily in our intellectual and physical capital.

While continuing to grow the faculty in signature areas of strength, we will build clusters of excellence that lift the entire University. From Digital and Public Arts and Humanities to Computational Social Sciences, from Cybersecurity to Environmental Science and Engineering, and from Microbiology to Rehabilitation Science our faculty will work together to answer the grand challenges and elucidate the great debates.

In expanding our faculty body, we will cultivate an ethos that values education, research, scholarship and engagement, as well as their integration across the University.

We envision breathing new life into our storied buildings on the Green as well as creating new buildings. Just this year, we added two outstanding facilities: the Nanofabrication Facility in the Harker Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering Laboratory and the Center for Biomedical and Brain Imaging, which houses the latest functional-MRI technology.

We will enable interdisciplinary science and policy connections. We will also bring the physical and humanistic worlds closer together. And our students will develop the vital skills of communication, leadership and critical thinking.

Beyond Newark, we will continue to expand our footprint, our programs and our impact on our campuses in Dover, Georgetown, Lewes and Wilmington.

I cannot tell you how excited I am about our vision for STAR. The STAR Campus is a field of dreams — a nearly blank canvas to build the university of tomorrow, where the needs of society drive our education, research and engagement. And a place where discoveries are translated into practice. It will become a hub of innovation, the beating heart of our state's economy.

I'm pleased to announce today that our development partners will soon break ground on the new 10-story STAR Tower.

A bustling mix of students, faculty, clinicians and community members will work in an environment that fosters collaboration through transparent design and shared spaces. By enabling creative collisions, unique solutions will emerge to help solve some of the world's grand challenges relating to communication disorders, neuroscience, disabilities and behavioral health.

We expect the development of the STAR Campus to accelerate in the coming years. Think about an Innovation and Entrepreneurship Building to connect our ideas and our people with the energy of private companies to help drive the region's economy ... or a Graduate City, providing homes and a community for our growing number of master's and doctoral students, as well as for entrepreneurs and employees of the many companies located at STAR ... and all served by the Newark Rail Transportation Center that will open in 2018 to leverage our central location in the mid-Atlantic region.

Building our intellectual and physical capital is crucial work and essential in ensuring the success of our students. This overarching goal will continue to guide our work and define our institution in the years ahead.

We are proud of the University of Delaware as a place of intellectual transformation and enlightenment.

And I fully embrace the motto of our great University: *Knowledge is the Light of the Mind.*

This is a place where we have both the obligation and the privilege to make a difference, to stimulate minds, to always learn, explore, wonder and persevere.

With knowledge comes insight, and with insight ... an opportunity to connect values with vision to create positive change for society.

Ahead of us lie infinite possibilities. Drawing on the endless inspiration of my colleagues and the limitless potential of our students, I believe we will continue to build a University that defines success by the values we shape, the intellectual curiosity we cultivate, and the courage we inspire to make a difference in our world.

As President of the University of Delaware, I am committed — with my whole heart and soul — to making our shared vision a reality.

Thank you.

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