



*Ohio University:  
Charting a New Direction  
in Redefining 21st Century  
Public Higher Education*

*M. Duane Nellis, Ph.D.  
October 18, 2017*

DR. M. DUANE NELLIS  
*Ohio University's 21st President*



Dr. M. Duane Nellis was named the 21<sup>st</sup> president of Ohio University on February 22, 2017. As an internationally recognized scholar and national higher education leader, Dr. Nellis brings nearly four decades of experience in academia as a president, provost, dean and professor to Ohio University.

Prior to arriving at OHIO, Dr. Nellis was president of Texas Tech University from 2013 to 2016. While at Texas Tech, Dr. Nellis was committed to enhancing the University's presence as a top tier national public research university. He led Texas Tech to designation as a Carnegie highest research activity national research university. The institution was also designated nationally as an Innovative and Economic Prosperity University and received special recognition for university engagement during Nellis' tenure.

Before he was president of Texas Tech, Dr. Nellis was president of the University of Idaho (2009-2013) where he led the university toward record enrollments and record levels of fundraising. He also served as provost and senior vice president at Kansas State University from 2004 to 2009 and dean of the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences at West Virginia University, the institution's largest academic college, from 1997 to 2004.

He is recognized nationally and internationally for his research that utilizes satellite data and geographic information systems to analyze various dimensions of the Earth's land surface. This research has been funded by more than 50 sources, such as NASA, the National Geographic Society, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. His research has led to more than 160 articles and reports in a wide range of professional journals, and over 20 books and book chapters, and his selection as a Fellow of the prestigious American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Dr. Nellis received his bachelor's degree in earth sciences/geography at Montana State University in 1976. He received his master's and doctoral degrees in geography from Oregon State University in 1977 and 1980, respectively. He and his wife, Ruthie, have two adult sons.



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PRESIDENTIAL INVESTITURE ADDRESS  
OCTOBER 18, 2017

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*Dr. M. Duane Nellis*

**O**hio University Trustees, faculty, students, staff, alumni, friends and other honored guests. I am extremely honored and humbled to serve as the 21<sup>st</sup> President of Ohio University—an institution that Ruthie and I have come to love and feel privileged now to call our home. I truly consider this the capstone of my career.

Ohio University's third president, Robert G. Wilson, understood well the responsibility that rests on my shoulders. In his inaugural address in 1824, he said this job "requires extensive learning and daily watchfulness, and that it must unavoidably involve me in perplexing toil and great responsibility." Having been a university president before, I know he is right. But rest assured, I am up for the daily perplexing toil and great responsibility.

My pursuit of this academic experience would not have been possible without an amazing person by my side. To my wife, Ruthie—thank you for your tremendous support of me throughout my career. From the moment that we met as undergraduates, you have been with me throughout the rainbows of experiences that reflect our lives together. You are truly my best friend—Ruthie—thank you!

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Trustee Emeritus David Wolfort and members of the search committee, as well as Madam Chair King and the Ohio University Board of Trustees, who have given Ruthie and me this special opportunity to serve this great institution.

Sitting in the front row is a very special group of students that I would like to recognize. This is their first public appearance as a group so this is a very special moment! Please stand, members of the Presidential Leadership Society.

These students were selected after a University-wide, two-week application process that yielded more than 150 submissions from all colleges and most regional campuses of Ohio University. The result is a diverse group of 21 talented undergraduate students—a magical number—right? 21 for the 21<sup>st</sup> President? In addition we have four graduate students and one from our Ohio University regional campuses. The Presidential Leaders will give their time and talents to advance my priorities and initiatives for the betterment of this fine institution.

They each possess a passion for Ohio University and I look forward to working with each and every one. Thank you!

As we all know, we are living in the age of knowledge. It is marked by dramatic and far-reaching social, political, and economic changes—redefining in many ways the redistribution of ideas, capital, goods, labor and services. We are now in a world where most of our students have only known the global dimensions of the internet—where technology has changed much of what we do—and where these students must be prepared for and contend with unprecedented change as they strive to find new ways to prosper and enhance their quality of life. We must prepare our students not to just survive in this world, but to THRIVE and LEAD in this world.

According to *The New York Times* bestselling author Jeffrey Selinger, human knowledge is doubling every 13 months. As the pace of technological change is reaching exponential levels, we must be prepared to provide our students with the ability to address changes that do not yet exist and to solve problems yet unknown, likely using technology yet to be discovered. All the while, we are living at a point in time where there is less support than ever for higher education, even as the need and demand for college are at their highest levels.

As Cathy Davidson recently stated in her book, *The New Education* (2017), we know from numerous studies that the expansion of college beyond educating the elites has provided a pathway to the middle class and has been crucial to our democracy. In a world of social media, “fake news” and “alternative facts,” where more and more people are questioning the importance of a college degree, I feel called to defend higher education and its role in upholding our democracy. When the history of this era is written, I think we will all be remembered for how we responded when our central mission to educate the people of the world was dismissed as simply a “waste of money.” Knowledge is priceless. Wisdom is invaluable. Love is essential.

*“So enter that daily thou mayest grow in knowledge, wisdom and love.”*

As many of you know, this message is inscribed on the Alumni Gateway and greets all who enter the College Green. As we consider our individual and collective responsibility to support our students' personal, professional, and scholarly growth, we must also consider the present moment and opportunity to chart a new path to redefine public higher education.

We at Ohio University are a national leader in experiential learning—a national laboratory for engaged learning. In so doing, we are continuing to demonstrate that we *are* our nation's best transformative learning community. Our students have unique and unparalleled opportunities for learning that extends the classroom to our community, this special region, and the world.

We understand that opportunities for research and creative activity should be offered starting at the undergraduate level. Distinguished Professor John Kopchick has inspired more than 350 undergraduate researchers in his lab over the last 30 years. But he is not alone in his commitment to providing our students with rich opportunities for discovery and creative activity.

It is a devotion to our students' intellectual growth, like that of Dr. Kopchick and the many, many other faculty and staff engaging students in scholarship, that is going to elevate Ohio University to become a highest level research and creative institution. I have seen our labs, music and art studios, and innovation spaces. I have talked with the brilliant minds who work and study there, and I can feel it; we are on the cusp of achieving higher levels of research success as we aspire to the highest of Carnegie Foundation Classification that I know so many of you, including me, believe we deserve. Through our efforts, as we strive for even higher levels of excellence, we *will* build on this institution's tremendous spirit of innovation.

So much of what I am going to say today is drawn from what I have learned since June 12, the first official day of my presidency. Since my arrival, I have visited all the regional campuses, the Dublin and Cleveland campuses, and all the colleges as well as the library. Over the past four months, I have gained insights through public forums and informal gatherings with thousands of faculty, students, staff, alumni, and friends of this great university. And through this input and my commitment to shared governance, I have developed key strategic pathways that reflect the diverse voices I have heard.

I wanted to make these visits because I will be a visible leader with a real presence on our campuses and because I will build strong relationships with the deans, the faculty, our staff, and our students, all of whom contribute to the academic excellence that is a signature of Ohio University. So let me thank all of you for being such welcoming, gracious hosts the past few months and for allowing me to learn from you. As someone who is proud to be an academic and an academic leader, being able to serve this exemplary institution means more to me than I can say. I have truly enjoyed interacting with all of you.

What I have learned from my conversations in the state and region is that there is no other place I would rather be than here. This is a transitional moment in history, at this great university surrounded by the Appalachian foothills, where we are deeply involved in this singular place committed to community—a scholarly community, dedicated to making progress in the areas of teaching, research and creative activity, sustainability, connectivity, innovation, entrepreneurship, and service to our global society.

I have come to realize from our discussions that this great institution is poised to reach higher levels of excellence. I believe that we can do so through strategic pathways and priorities—pathways and priorities that will continue to redefine Ohio University as a leading-edge, public research university. We will bolster our tremendous legacy of serving our region, our state, the nation, and the world in new and dynamic ways. Clearly, now more than ever, we must commit to articulating our value proposition as Ohio’s first and finest university.

The first key strategic pathway is our continued and bolstered efforts to be a **national leader for diversity and inclusion**. We must establish an environment at Ohio University where difference in all of its forms is welcomed and celebrated. We must be proud of the progress we have made thus far, while still not losing sight of the work that is yet to be done.

After I started my presidency in June of this year, Interim Executive Vice President and Provost David Descutner and I made the decision to appoint Dr. Jason Pina as Interim Chief Diversity Officer (in addition to his duties as Vice President for Student Affairs). It was our intention that Dr. Pina’s appointment would further strengthen the collaboration between the Division of Student Affairs and the Office of Diversity and Inclusion during this interim period, paving the way for a deeper

bond in the future. We are now studying, with input from our constituencies, where we are as an institution relative to diversity and inclusion; what we learn from this effort will inform our strategic thinking about how to strengthen this important dimension of our University.

Today, I am pleased to announce that I have made the decision, with the strong support of my colleagues, to elevate this Chief Diversity position from Vice Provost to a new Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion. We will begin a national search in the near future to find the right person to help us become the national model for diversity and inclusion. This person will directly report to me in my role as President of the University.

With this new title will come additional support and recognition of this important leadership position in our University, which will define our University as a place of excellence in the areas of inclusion and social justice. We again need to be a national leader in this area as we were in 1824 when we admitted the first African-American student to Ohio University—nearly 40 years *before* the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

I am challenging each of our deans, other administrative chairs and directors, faculty, student, and staff leaders to enhance our efforts in this area and specifically to focus on recruiting a more diverse faculty, staff, and student body while ensuring there is a supportive, inclusive environment across all the campuses of Ohio University. We all are responsible for this very important work and a new Vice President will help us get there!

The second strategic pathway is an **elevation of our student recruitment programs, our academic success programs, our initiatives to enhance teaching, and our overall academic quality as an institution.**

Each college and campus visit revealed a consistent and ongoing commitment to high-achieving student recruitment, success, and access to excellence. It is clear we take great pride in these initiatives at Ohio University. We celebrate student success in its many forms—from improving our retention and graduation rates, to students receiving national and international recognition and competitive awards. And trust me when I say that during each college and campus visit, I was never asked to do



*less* in these areas but rather that we do *more* by exploring fresh ways to create more opportunities for engagement and learning. So that is what I intend to do.

The Ohio University Honors Tutorial College, one of our nation's top honors programs, is a hallmark for engaged learning. And it provides a unique experience—one unlike any I have witnessed at any other public institution in the United States. We want to ensure that students in that college have ever increasing opportunities for learning and engagement.

Today, with the strong endorsement from our University community, I am pleased to announce the creation of a task force that will be charged with developing expeditiously a pathway to a sustainable, robust, and **expanded University-wide Honors Program**. I envision this program as NOT replacing the Honors Tutorial College but complementing and enriching our efforts to enhance our ability to attract the best and brightest students to our University. Part of enhancing our student's academic experience is a recognition of the state of the art learning paradigms that engage students in new ways and across multiple disciplines of study.

As I mentioned earlier, Ohio University has a strong tradition of providing students with service learning and experiential learning opportunities in diverse communities, both nationally and internationally. Our University College, with help from every other college, has in place a Center for Campus and Community Engagement that has been very successful, but building a University-wide academic culture that celebrates experiential learning in its wide range of forms must be part of today's student experience.

Therefore, **building a University engagement ecosystem** is my third central strategic pathway. Ohio University's geographic location—at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains—is distinct compared to other colleges and universities in the country. I believe we can be a model in our nation for being a positive catalyst of economic and quality of life change for Appalachia. We have the opportunity to make a real difference in this region, through the combined efforts of virtually every one of our colleges and schools, as well as our regional campuses. We must lead through helping to coordinate work with communities throughout our region to develop approaches that look to a new and sustainable economy through innovation and other strategic support.

The new engagement office will report to the Provost. This office will build upon the great work occurring in the Center for Campus and Community Engagement and elevate the ongoing efforts, strengthen our ability to expand opportunities, build a database to capture the work of our faculty, staff, and students, and by so doing help to create an engagement ecosystem. This office will poise us to more effectively build new partnerships across the University community and extend the work of our faculty, staff, and students into our regional communities, our state, nation, and world.

Just one week ago, we were honored to have *Dreamland* author Sam Quinones as the Grover Lecturer. In his talk, he said “We go to college to be disrupted.” And that leads me to the fourth strategic pathway. We live in intriguing times, not only because of the pace of change, but also because of the clash and convergence of ideas, values, and issues. It matters how we, as an intellectual community, talk about these ideas, values, and issues. My aspiration is that Ohio University becomes known as a place where dialogue and rigorous, civil debate are institutional hallmarks. To that end, I intend to create a campus wide lecture series around difficult dialogues. I am framing this pathway as “**The OHIO Challenging Dialogues on Contemporary Issues.**”

We need to build on our rich history at Ohio University of activism and thought-provoking dialogue and debate to create an environment where we are comfortable with conflicting viewpoints on a range of issues and always act respectfully and in a civil way towards people with different points of view. We learn together from such challenging conversations and thereby affirm our commitment to intellectual diversity. I will work with our Ohio University Foundation to identify funds to support such a lecture series.

In addition to these four strategic pathways are ten other strategic priorities that I believe will build on our strengths. I will comment briefly on each. They include:

- The strategic need to **strengthen our global engagement efforts**. This includes creating more opportunities for students to study abroad as well as recruiting more international students to Ohio University. In fact, today, one of our key strategic friends in this global endeavor is with us. I am honored to have the new president of Chubu University with us, Dr. Osamu Ishihara. Let’s please recognize him for being here and thank his predecessor for what

we celebrate each spring on our campus through the beauty of the Cherry Blossoms that were a gift of the president of Chubu University to Ohio University on our 175th anniversary.

- We must also **enhance support for our outstanding faculty and staff**. We value *all* people who are employed at Ohio University. Appropriate compensation and benefits are important, and I believe that leadership is not just about position—all of you in our University family are our leaders through performing the great work you do with the responsibilities you have—from our groundskeepers to our office support staff, to our distinguished professors, chairs, and directors. We must continue to invest in our outstanding faculty and staff. And we must find effective ways to retain faculty and staff as they commit their careers to us, and we commit the institutional support to them.
- Then there is the strategic need to **enhance graduate student stipends and related benefits**. It is imperative that we address this issue over the next few years as we demonstrate our support for this critically important group of students. I will work with the Ohio University Foundation and members of my leadership team to identify new resources to address this important need.
- We also need to **strengthen our public service mission**. Today, I endorse our *OHIO for Ohio* efforts, but with a strategic priority that **focuses on the integration of our campus locations and networks**. We need to support more fully invigorated partnerships for regional success. These partnerships will support lighting up the broadband for Southeast Ohio, for example. They also will help us breathe new life into The Ridges by continuing our partnerships and collaborating with our University community, but even more importantly, with our Athens community. We will also engage with our regional campus-affiliated communities to support new ways to jump start economic development and quality of life for this entire region. We will do so to create greater synergies and efficiencies, and as a result, better serve the statewide umbrella that is Ohio University. We have seen how such efforts can be successful. Consider how our partnerships with OhioHealth and the Cleveland Clinic, as well as in Dublin, have benefited our Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine and our College of Health Sciences and Professions. We will be a national model for synergistic opportunities as celebrated by the

great work of our University through the Colleges of Fine Arts, Business, Arts and Sciences, the Patton College, the Voinovich School, Scripps College, the Russ College, our regional campuses, University Libraries, our Innovation Center, and our other colleges.

- Directly related to these integrative efforts is our need for strategic support to **incentivize inter-disciplinary collaborations**. Our faculty and students are asking for us to move more fully into this arena, and we have witnessed the success of these initiatives. Consider how effective our inter-disciplinary collaborations have been in addressing regional, state, national, and global issues related to sustainability, protection of the environment, and health and wellness. A prime example here are the inter-disciplinary collaborations across multiple colleges around health systems and wellness that are seeking solutions for the population's health problems tied to obesity, diabetes, and opioid addiction.
- Next, we must seek a more robust OHIO Online Engaged Learning enterprise. Currently over 6,000 students are taking online courses. As a cornerstone of our strategic enrollment plan, we seek to increase that number even as we dedicate ourselves to the highest quality educational experience for those students. A strategic priority forward is **expanding our Worldwide OHIO Web-Learning (WOW-Learning)**, which builds on our recent success in this area.
- We must remain vigilant and strategic **in enhancing our campus infrastructure and ensuring a sustainable financial model**. In this context, we must support all that is Ohio University—from the fine arts, arts and sciences, to engineering, medicine and places in between. It is crucial that we develop a funding model that not only sustains the financial health of the University but also allows us to invest strategically—in people, pedagogy, research, creative activity, and infrastructure—in order to advance our University to new levels of national and international prominence.
- We must **enhance our national position as a leading edge national learning laboratory for sustainability**. The efficacy of our innovative efforts around sustainability cannot be overstated—in just the last four years,

for example, we have seen a 300 percent increase in sustainability courses or components of courses. We also now have a more efficient campus with a commitment to LEED certification as we renovate older buildings and erect new buildings; and we have the largest, in-vessel compost facility of any university in the country.

- For too long, we have been a “best-kept secret.” It is time for us to **take our branding and marketing efforts to greater heights** and find new, strategic, consistent, and rhetorically powerful ways to talk about this amazing institution. In partnership with Renea Morris, our Chief Marketing Officer, our deans, Vice Presidents, faculty, staff, students, alumni, and others, we will develop a brand that resonates with national and international audiences; one that speaks to how we are leading the way and providing access to excellence. We have great stories to tell! Such as Drs. Nancy Stevens and Pat O’Connor and their colleagues’ recent fossil discovery in Tanzania that reverberated throughout the scientific world this summer. Also reverberating in a quality way, is our Marching 110, celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, who will be performing in the *Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade* in New York City and showing the world who is the “best marching band in the land.” And just Monday, astrophysicist Ryan Chornock was one of a group of international scientists who made the first visual observation of a confirmed neutron star merger and have documented a visual counterpart to a gravitational wave detection. These are international news headlines coming out of Ohio University and just a few of the big stories that have recently received media attention; there are many others that have not. We need to more effectively tell our story.
- Finally, we need to **strategically reconnect with our 232,000-strong alumni base**. In all my experience in higher education, I have never encountered more passionate alumni! We must engage them throughout their lives in a commitment to Ohio’s “First and Finest.” I look forward to continuing to work on this goal with Perry Sook, Chair of our Ohio University Foundation Board, and with Ron Teplitzky, Chair of the Ohio University Alumni Association Board of Directors, along with many others. Together, we will make new strategic investments for offices in Columbus, Cleveland, possibly New York City, and other locations to strengthen our philanthropic efforts. Together we will reach new levels of success that will allow us to secure ever-increasing private support of our key strategic pathways and priorities.

As your 21<sup>st</sup> President, I am humbled by the legacy I am inheriting—a legacy that began some 213 years ago on the frontier of a vast wilderness. Fundamentally, our legacy is one of academic excellence as we have graduated some of our nation’s and world’s leading journalists, businesspersons, engineers, writers, scientists, artists, sports administrators, medical doctors, nurses, educators, ceramicists, musicians, political leaders, just to mention a few of the fields in which our graduates excel.

I challenge all of you here today to work with me in the years ahead as we take this shining star on the banks of the Hocking River to new levels of national and international prominence. From the Ohio Company Associates’ drafting of the *Northwest Ordinance of 1787* in Boston that set the stage for our beloved Ohio University through our founding fathers Manasseh Cutler and Rufus Putnam, and building on the legacy of academic excellence that many of you here today helped create—including past presidents like Vern Alden, Charlie Ping, Bob Glidden and Rod McDavis—I am honored and humbled to serve as your 21<sup>st</sup> President.

But I can’t help feeling a sense of urgency. We have to get this right, no matter what challenges or barriers we encounter. As an institution of teaching, learning, research, and service, we have an obligation to future generations. The new world of Ohio University starts here. We must succeed and be the model, not only for our nation, but the generations that will come after us. We must embrace the individual and collective work that will be necessary to advance the distinctive legacy of this singular place.

*“So depart that daily thou mayest better serve thy fellowmen (and women), thy country and thy God.”*

Thank you.





*Ohio University*



*Office of the President*