Speech: President’s Convocation for First-Year Students  
Date: Sunday, August 27, 2017

Thank you, Dr. Pina!

We are very proud to have such a distinguished freshman class. I would like to take a moment to introduce two very special guests with us here today: my wife, Ruthie, the first lady of Ohio University, and your Student Senate President, Landen Lama.

Welcome Class of 2021!!!!

This is a new beginning. This is a new chapter of your life.

[President discusses his first-year experience in college]

On this day, I want each of you to make a promise to yourself – the same promise I made to myself many decades ago. Aspire to be more than what you are today. Learn more. Explore more. Dream more. You will be better as a result and so will our society.

I don’t know how all of you spent your summer, but I spent mine falling in love. Don’t worry… my wife Ruthie already knows. In fact, she fell in love this summer too! We both fell pretty hard for Ohio University, and let me tell you how it happened.

Being a new president is much like starting a new job anywhere – you begin a bit unsure, but after a while, you find your way and it all clicks. Sure, I had been president at two other universities before coming to Athens, however, this was different. A different part of the country; a different culture; a different story.

In order to be an effective leader and determine our proper path forward, I knew I first had to understand and discover for myself what it means to be a member of the Bobcat family.
So, I had to learn my way around campus… Find the quickest route from Morton to Bentley… Figure out which dining halls were the best… Spoiler, they are all great!

In order to better understand the student experience, I toured Baker Center and Chubb Hall. I carried boxes on move-in day; visited Stroud’s Run. I walked uptown and enjoyed some of our unique Athens eateries, like Casa Nueva, Bagel Street Deli, Burrito Buggy, and Goodfella’s Pizza.

I held forums with faculty, staff and students on all of our regional campuses, and beginning this fall, I will also be meeting with every college to do the same. I hope to see many of you there.

I’ve sat in your classrooms and walked through your residence halls. I met many of your RA’s.

Who here lives on East? West? South? I loved them all!

In a way, my summer of exploration and engagement was much like the experience you all will have in the coming weeks as you, too, learn what it means to be a member of the Bobcat family.

So, take it from someone who has a two-month head-start on being the “new kid” around here – you are going to LOVE Ohio University!

[President list several reasons why he loves OHIO]

But most importantly, you will love Ohio University because of the people.

Our faculty are leaders in their chosen fields of study, and many are internationally recognized for their research. You see, I am president, but first and foremost, I am an academic. So, I recognize academic excellence in my colleagues, and rest assured, you will be learning from some of the best in higher education – right here are Ohio University.
At Ohio University, excellence is our hallmark. This is one of our core values - outstanding people, ideas, and programs drive our educational mission.

Our second core value – integrity, civility and diversity define our community. These values guide our leadership in a global society.

And our final core value – stewardship. Stewardship enhances our legacy. As Ohio’s first institution of public higher education, we are mindful of our accountability to the public trust.

Our founders, Manasseh Cutler and Rufus Putnam, believed that education was the key to opportunity. For more than 214 years, Ohio University has helped students achieve their dreams and goals.

We each arrive here with our own story. We all leave here as Bobcats forever. Always remember, you are a representative of Ohio University and a resident of Athens. You need to take care of yourself, take care of one another, and take care of the place where you live and call home.

Speaking of school pride, I would like to recognize a new university tradition that began just two years ago.

[Event Services cues projection of class photo. Dr. Nellis gestures to screen.]

Here it is... your official class photo! What a great looking group! We need to get that on twitter!

[Event Services cues projection of @OHIOPrezOffice, @jbpina and @JennyHallJones.]

I can always count on a retweet from Dr. Hall-Jones and Dr. Pina! Those two are very active on social media and it would be beneficial to you all to follow all three of us if you haven’t already.
I also hope to connect with you in real life too! On the street, on college green after this ceremony, and in other places around Athens…

Personal connections are at the heart of the Ohio University experience. And it is up to you to seize those opportunities… To engage with your professors…

To connect deeply with your peers… To immerse yourself – not only in your studies – but also in the community… In doing so, you will be transformed. That’s the promise of Ohio University.

Before I get to the most important moment in our program… officially inducting you into the Ohio University family… I want to use this occasion to make a very important announcement.

I am proud to announce a new presidential initiative that you will hopefully take advantage of next year - a premier student experience known as the Presidential Leadership Society.

Members of this volunteer group of students will be working alongside me, serving as official representatives of Ohio University at various presidential and University events throughout the academic year.

I have a lot of plans for the coming years… and I need a strong group of students to help me advance our university to even higher levels of distinction. That is the purpose of the Presidential Leadership Society.

When alumni, donors, and community members come to campus, they want to hear from YOU; students who have first-hand knowledge of the creativity and innovation happening in the classroom.

They want to hear about your favorite experiences you’ve had as a Bobcat, and how you are leaving your legacy at Ohio University. I want to know these stories too! I believe in shared governance, and the student perspective is an important voice I want to hear. The Presidential Leaders will have the ear of the president.
Since you all are still trying to find your way, we require that you have spent at least two semesters on campus before you can apply. But, I have chosen this event – first year student convocation – to break this news because I want you all to begin planning to apply next year.

Class of 2021, you are very special to me. You will be the first class I induct into the Ohio University family and I look forward to sharing this journey with you.

So, make sure you start getting involved in organizations on campus to find your passions, and develop your leadership skills to show why you should be selected as a Presidential Leader.

Soon, we will all walk uptown together to the campus involvement fair, where you will learn more about the many opportunities that are available. But for now, it is my great honor to officially induct you into the Ohio University family.

Will the Members of the Class of 2021 please stand?

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, the faculty, staff, and student body of Ohio University, I hereby induct you into this learning community, with all the opportunities, challenges, and responsibilities pertaining thereto.

Welcome to the Ohio University family, Class of 2021! Go Bobcats!