



**Speech:** Faculty and Staff Convocation  
The President's State of the University Address  
**Date:** Tuesday, September 18, 2018

## Welcome/Acknowledgements

Good afternoon! And welcome to Ohio University's 2018 Faculty and Staff Convocation. I'm so pleased that you have chosen to attend our celebration of the new academic year.

Thank you for those kind words, Dr. Susan Burgess. We are honored to have you amongst our most distinguished group of faculty. Let's have one more round of applause for Dr. Burgess.

I would like to extend a special welcome to any new faculty and staff members who may be with us this afternoon. Would the newest additions to our faculty and staff please stand? Welcome to our OHIO community. We are very pleased to have you here!

I also want to recognize my wife, Ruthie, who is here with us today. She is a valuable member of our team and her contributions to OHIO and the Athens community are numerous. She continues to stand by my side... through moves around the country, thousands of engagements, and many missed dinners over the years. A university president's schedule is a demanding one and too seldom does my partner get the recognition she deserves for being supportive of me, in addition to all of her own personal accomplishments.

Thank you, Ruthie, for being OHIO's first spouse.

I also would like to welcome the newest members of Ohio University's leadership team:

- Dr. Chaden Djalali, Executive Vice President and Provost
- Dr. Gigi Secuban, Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion
- Mr. Nico Karagosian, Vice President for University Advancement and President and C.E.O. of The Ohio University Foundation

And, I would like to acknowledge those who have taken on new leadership roles this year:

- Dr. Elizabeth Sayrs, Dean of University College and Senior Vice Provost of Undergraduate Education and Student Success
- Dr. Joe Shields, Interim Dean, College of Arts & Sciences
- Dr. David Koonce, Interim Vice President for Research and Creative Activity and Interim Dean of the Graduate College
- Dr. Bob Klein, Interim Dean, Ohio University-Eastern
- Kerri Griffin, Title IX Coordinator and Interim Director of ECRC
- And Dr. Carey Busch has been named the University Americans with Disabilities Act Coordinator

And, to recognize those deans who have announced their retirements this year:

- Mr. Scott Seaman, Dean of Ohio University Libraries, will retire December 31, 2018
- Dr. Dennis Irwin, Dean of the Fritz J. and Dolores H. Russ College of Engineering and Technology, will retire June 30, 2019
- And Dr. Bill Willan, Executive Dean for Regional Higher Education, will also retire June 30, 2019

I want to recognize and thank our senate chairs, some of whom are with us today, for their collaboration this year:

- Faculty Senate Chair Dr. Joe McLaughlin
- Student Senate Chair Madison Sloat
- Graduate Student Senate Chair Maria Modayil
- Classified Senate Chair Amanda Graham
- And Administrative Senate Chair Tim Epley

And a special welcome to the newest members of the Ohio University Board of Trustees:

- Trustee Eileen Sheil
- Student trustee, Austin McClain
- And Ms. Casey Christopher, Alumni Representative

## Introduction

It is my distinct honor to stand before you, my most respected colleagues, and report today on the state of Ohio University.

But first, I want to say something that if you remember nothing else from this speech, I hope you retain these two words: THANK YOU.

Thank you for your collaboration. Thank you for your passion. Thank you for honoring me with the opportunity to serve as your president.

So truly, *thank you*...

... Because today is about all of you! Today, I will share some of the progress we have made related to our strategic pathways and priorities, highlighting some of our more notable achievements that have propelled us forward, and begin to lay the groundwork for the year to come.

Impact.

Often, I talk about the impact of Ohio University. This is a common theme in my conversations with faculty, staff, prospective and current students, parents, senates, alumni, lawmakers, and partners. I talk about this often because I think it helps put things in perspective: After 214 years, what is our impact?

Impact is not always easy to explain and it is nearly impossible to quantify.

Have you seen this?

On the cover of the National Geographic this month is the photo of a young woman who has undergone a groundbreaking face transplant, and been given a second chance at life. It is a difficult story to read, and I won't ruin it for anyone who has not yet seen it... but do you know who the veteran plastic surgeon is who led this effort?

Ohio University alumnus and Medal of Merit recipient Dr. Frank Papay who is currently the chair of the Cleveland Clinic's Dermatology and Plastic Surgery Institute... Also deemed a "health hero" by WebMD for his work treating "cluster headaches."

THAT is what I mean when I say "impact."

We have an internationally renowned expert, working at an internationally renowned medical facility, changing a woman's life... changing a field of medicine... changing possibilities for others... changing the world.

And he is one of ours.

There are thousands more out there like him. Alumni who took their Ohio University degree and went out and made the world a better place.

Impact.

The students whose lives are intersecting with those of our own choose to come here. But it is the guidance we share, the readings we assign, the way we open their minds, that helps set the trajectory for all their days forward.

How are we inspiring the next generation?

How are we providing them with the tools they need to succeed?

How are we creating more Dr. Frank Papays?

## **Public Service**

As I walked through Walter Hall this afternoon, I once again admired the beautiful stained-glass windows that line the hallways. Last year I learned those windows were salvaged from Ewing Hall before it was demolished and it started me thinking about what those windows represent. They too represent IMPACT.

Ewing Hall was named after one of Ohio University's first graduates, Thomas Ewing. Ewing left Athens and devoted his life to public service, serving as a U.S. Senator, Secretary of the Treasury, the first Secretary of the Interior, and advisor to four United States presidents.

Impact.

Thomas Ewing used his Ohio University education for public service. And Joseph Carter Corbin did too.

Mr. Corbin received his undergraduate and two graduate degrees from Ohio University and used his experience here and his love of learning to inspire free-African Americans in the post-Civil War south. He left Athens to move to Arkansas where he was elected state superintendent of public education and served as principal of Branch Normal College, which later became the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff. Last summer, we unveiled an Ohio historical marker for Mr. Corbin on our Chillicothe campus.

Impact.

Joseph Carter Corbin used his Ohio University education for public service. And geologist Marie Tharp did too.

As you know, my specialization is in GIS, remote sensing and GPS. My entire career, I have been utilizing the revolutionary work of an Ohio University alumna and never even realized the connection.

Marie Tharp earned her bachelor's degrees in English and Music with four minors in 1943 from Ohio University but it was a geology class right here in Athens that first ignited a spark that would forever change the course of my profession. Ms. Tharp used her liberal arts education from Ohio University to enter a male-dominated field where many of her discoveries were initially dismissed, even mocked, and famed ocean explorer Jacques Cousteau actually launched an expedition to prove her wrong.

Nevertheless, she persisted, believing her maps of the ocean floor were the only argument she needed, and in the end, she was right. She mapped the ocean floor during a time when superstitions and sexism prevented women from even stepping foot on a ship. Her work confirmed the theory of continental drift and plate tectonics. Her work mapped 70 percent of the Earth's surface at a time when no one fully understood what lay beneath the ocean depths. The Library of Congress named her one of the four greatest cartographers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Impact.

Marie Tharp, much like Joseph Carter Corbin, Thomas Ewing and Frank Papay, used her Ohio University education for public service. To leave the world a better place than it had been when they arrived. To impact future generations.

I believe this ethos of service is ingrained in our university culture. For further, more recent, evidence, I cite the sustainability efforts at Ohio University for which we are nationally recognized ... our efforts to address the looming, nationwide physician shortage or the opioid epidemic... the thousands of hours of service our students contribute each year towards the betterment of the Athens community... our Basic Needs initiative and the expanding food pantry in Baker Center that has been recognized in national media as helping to address the needs of not only our students, but the surrounding area... and the grassroots efforts that are happening at this very moment, in large part led by Student Senate President Maddie Sloat and her fellow students, in response to a tragic string of sexual violence that has occurred on and around campus.

Bobcats care. Bobcats act. And Bobcats impact.

## **Pathways and Priorities**

It's hard to believe that it was nearly a year ago that I stood before many of you in the Templeton-Blackburn Alumni Memorial Auditorium at my investiture ceremony and charted a new direction... laying out the pathways and priorities – the culmination of months of a listening tour that included engaging more than a thousand internal and external stakeholders both inside and outside the great state of Ohio.

The goals we outlined together as a community that day were ambitious. Becoming a national leader for diversity and inclusion. Attracting the best and brightest students and increasing the overall academic quality of the institution. Building a University Engagement Ecosystem with enhanced levels of regional, national and international impact and visibility. Strengthening the University's public service mission.

Ambitious, yes; but attainable.

Over the past year, we have worked together to move these pathways and priorities forward. Signs of progress are visible everywhere.

At this time, I would like to detail some of our key accomplishments thus far.

## **Become a National Leader for Diversity and Inclusion**

The first step to becoming a national leader for diversity and inclusion was in finding a true visionary to lead us in our stalwart commitment. I believe we have found such a leader in Dr. Gigi Secuban.

Joining us in June, Dr. Secuban has held over 100 meetings with community and campus groups. Based on those conversations, she has already begun to develop and analyze appropriate metrics for each major unit within the University. We have set a five-year goal of increasing the number of diverse faculty and staff at Ohio University. She has begun to develop strategies that will target under-represented populations in student recruitment and retention efforts. And she has extended the sphere of influence outside of the Athens campus to the regional campuses.

For example, she is working with the regional campuses to establish lactation areas; Southern, Zanesville and Eastern have already created such areas. There are also plans to install a portable lactation room in the Convocation Center so new moms can nurse during athletic, commencement and other major events.

And she plans to create a committee that will meet regularly to discuss diversity and inclusion efforts on the various campuses and discussions are already underway regarding joint programming between the campuses.

Last week we announced that Ohio University has received the national 2018 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award! Congratulations to Dr. Jason Pina who served as Interim Chief Diversity Officer much of last year and the D&I team who submitted the award application. This is an incredible honor for Ohio University, but it does not mean we have solved all our problems. There is still much work to be done.

Today, it is my honor to announce that we are creating a Presidential Commission on the Status of Women. This effort, being led by Dr. Secuban, will centralize and catalogue the work already being done at Ohio University and develop new strategies to identify key issues and solutions concerning women.

Keep in mind, all of this progress and she has only been on the job since June 18<sup>th</sup>! Happy three-month anniversary, Gigi! Way to hit the ground running!

### **Enhance the Overall Academic Quality of the University**

Enhancing the overall academic quality of the university was a tall order as well and another endeavor that required strong leadership. We are so thrilled to have Dr. Chaden Djalali leading our efforts in this area.

This semester saw the first cohort of our brand-new OHIO Honors Program and I want to thank the members of our OHIO Honors Task Force, including Interim Dean Cary Frith for getting us to this point. I look forward to seeing this program grow in the years ahead.

The OHIO Honors program will strengthen a university-wide academic core and culture that celebrates interdisciplinary and experiential learning in its wide range of forms. This must be part of today's Ohio University student experience.

The program will offer faculty members fresh opportunities for intellectual exchange. Teaching in Texas Tech's honors college was a source of energy and inspiration for me, and

it is my desire for the faculty here to also experience the deep rewards of involvement in an honors program.

At Ohio University, we also hold all our students, including our student-athletes to high standards when it comes to academics. I am so proud to report that this year, ALL 16 of our intercollegiate programs had an NCAA Division I Academic Progress Rate, or APR, above 970. This is a first in program history! Three of our programs -- Women's basketball, Women's cross country and Women's golf – even earned national recognition for having a perfect one thousand! Go Bobcats!

This year, a number of our academic programs received high rankings... including our sports administration program that was ranked #1 in the world for the fourth consecutive year and our ceramics program, ranked #3 best graduate program in the United States to name a couple.

The Russ College of Engineering and Technology placed 36<sup>th</sup> in the nation for best online graduate engineering programs in 2018. Our Voinovich School of Public Affairs, celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, jumped from 96<sup>th</sup> in the 2018 U.S. News and World Reports Best Graduate School Rankings to 77<sup>th</sup>. Patton College's Online Master's in Reading and Literacy Education Degree Program has been ranked among the top 25 for 2018 by Best Value Schools. And our Scripps College of Communication has now had over 40 Pulitzer Prize winners; an extraordinary record.

Regardless of whether we agree with the various methodologies or not, these rankings and other national recognitions can be indicators of progress if used carefully.

### **Elevate Our National Profile**

And I believe the success of increasing student recruitment and retention is elevating our national profile. As I said in my investiture address, we need to better tell our story and define the distinctive value of an Ohio University education.

Media recognition is important. Each mention builds our national reputation, enhances our position as a national research institution, and reminds readers and viewers the world over that this is a place that is teaching people to make a difference in the world.

Last year, our faculty experts were highlighted in various publications in almost every state in the country and six of the seven continents—we're still working on Antarctica.



In the coming weeks, we will launch a national search for a new leader for University Communications and Marketing who will further advance our efforts to build our national reputation and visibility in today's multi-dimensional, complex media world. This person will lead our efforts to speak with one voice. We are a national research university and we need a leader to help our name get on more lips and in more minds.

### **Become Known as a Place Where Dialogue and Rigorous, Civil Debate are Institutional Hallmarks**

But the reality is, we cannot control the news cycle. There are days our world feels almost volatile, our national discourse rancorous. As educators, we need to help the next generation navigate the public dissonance and arrive at their own conclusions, able to articulate those opinions in a civil and respectful manner.

For it is in the discussion of our differences where true wisdom can emerge.

For the past year, our University community has joined other colleges and universities around the country to engage in a robust dialogue about the fundamental concept of the free and open exchange of ideas across Ohio University's campuses. Throughout these conversations, students, faculty and staff all held firm to one central tenet – that freedom of inquiry and expression is the foundation of an Ohio University education and is essential to our shared mission of discovery and dissemination of knowledge.

At Ohio University, we don't shy away from the difficult conversations. Which is why I also created the OHIO Challenging Dialogues Task Force this year to create a campus-wide lecture series around difficult dialogues. Thank you to its co-chairs Dr. Jenny Hall-Jones and Dr. Theodore Hutchinson, and other members of the task force, for their commitment to this important pathway.

### **Enhance the Campus Infrastructure and Ensure a Sustainable Financial Model**

Perhaps one of the most challenging discussions we have had this past year is that of financial sustainability. Since the earliest days of my presidency, we have held countless conversations regarding the financial challenges facing our institution. These challenges, while protecting and enhancing our academic core, have influenced most every decision we have made.

This past academic year I started our Breakfast for Progress events to bring more than 120 leaders from every facet of the University's shared governance structure to address challenging issues and enable Ohio University to emerge as a leader in critical national dialogue. One issue that dominated not one, but two of our sessions this year was ensuring a sustainable financial future for Ohio University.

Being one of the first public land-grant universities in the country, we pledged long ago to be good stewards of the public trust. This is not a responsibility I take lightly.

So, we have to get this right. It is crucial that we develop a funding model and university budget that not only sustains the financial health of the university for the long-term, but allows us to invest strategically – in people, pedagogy, research, creative activity, and infrastructure – in order to better serve our students and to advance the academic core of our university to new levels of national and international prominence.

I appreciate all of you who have had to make some very tough decisions this year. I do feel good about the future and with our talented and capable Vice President of Finance and Administration Deb Shaffer at the helm and with people like Associate Provost for Academic Budget and Planning John Day and our University Budget Planning Committee, I know we are in the best of hands.

### **Enhance Graduate Student Stipends and Related Benefits**

The investments we have been able to make have been strategic and purposeful, often centered around student success. Some examples include: investing in graduate student assistantships, creating two new Presidential Medal awards for master's and doctorate students, increasing the subsidy for student health insurance for graduate students or creating a parental paid leave of absence policy that became effective this fall. I have greatly appreciated the partnership with Graduate Student Senate President Maria Modayil for ushering graduate student concerns forward as well as the idea for the Presidential Medals.

The intent is by investing in this critically important group of our students we will improve their quality of life and free them of financial stresses, enabling them to focus on their research and scholarship.

## **Strategically Position OHIO for Higher Levels of National Visibility in Research and Creative Activity**

In my investiture address, I said I believed we are “on the cusp of achieving higher levels of research success as we aspire long-term to the highest of Carnegie Foundation Classification that I know so many of you, including me, believe we deserve.”

While this is aspirational... our current focus is on bolstering and supporting research, scholarship, and creative activity.

This year we have many research and creative successes to celebrate... far too many to list right now... but I wanted to highlight a few:

- John Kopchick, a distinguished faculty researcher with the Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine, was just honored by the Endocrine Society with one of its prestigious 2019 Laureate Awards, considered the top honors in the field of endocrinology.
- Several of our assistant professors received career grants from federal agencies.
  - Zhihua Hua, an assistant professor of environmental and plant biology in the College of Arts and Sciences, received a five-year, \$1.09 million National Science Foundation CAREER Grant for his work on how plant cells remove old or abnormal proteins, with implications for crop breeding and seed production.
  - Zachary Meisel and Hee-Jong Seo, assistant professors of physics and astronomy in the College of Arts and Sciences, each received U.S. Department of Energy Early Career Research Program awards (\$150,000 per year for five years) for their research in nuclear and high-energy physics. They were among 84 scientists from 47 U.S. universities and 13 national laboratories to receive such significant research funding in 2018.
- Several faculty affiliated with the university’s Diabetes Institute received grants to support research and health services in the last year.
  - According to the American Diabetes Association, one in 11 Americans has diabetes. This is a perfect example of Ohio University faculty rising to solve a real-world problem for the betterment of society.
  - Congratulations to Heritage College Professors Vishwajeet Puri, Elizabeth Beverly, Emily Guseman, Sonia Michael Najjar and Kevin Lee for securing funding to support their research in this area.

- And I also want to lift up Guy Riefler, chair of the Russ College Department of Civil Engineering and John Sabraw, chair of painting and drawing in the School of Art and Design, for breaking ground in Perry County this past December on an acid-mine drainage remediation pilot-scale plant that will use the pollution from the area to create paint pigments. A fine example of cross-disciplinary collaboration for the betterment of our planet and society. Great work!

Let's give all these faculty a round of applause.

This year, Ohio University's internationally recognized paleontologists are helping to redefine the field of paleontology and our understanding of the past. Dr. Nancy Stevens, for example, is among the authors of a new research paper that may prompt scientists to change their long-held views on the evolutionary history of the island of Madagascar.

It was Ohio University paleontologists who helped to discover what the Washington Post referred to as the "holy grail of dinosaurs": a well-preserved, school-bus length, long-necked plant-eating dinosaur. This discovery revealed an ancient link between Africa and Europe. And it was Ohio University paleontologists who also found another new species of sauropod dinosaur in Tanzania.

We are a hotbed of paleontological research and our researchers are bringing international acclaim to our institution. We are so very proud. Bravo!

### **Build a University Engagement Ecosystem**

During a time when the state of Ohio is estimating that two-thirds of Ohio jobs will require a postsecondary certificate or degree by 2025, higher education is the most vital component to strengthening the state's workforce and the state's economy.

Ohio University is invested in the economic growth of the region and state and we are dedicated to building upon this university engagement ecosystem that was created long ago by forward thinking Ohio University leaders. Leaders like Dr. Wilfred Konneker and Dr. Charles Ping, who in 1983 set the stage for more intentional economic development through the creation of the Innovation Center, the first university-based incubator in the state and just the 12th in the nation.

Since that time, the Innovation Center has supported the creation of nearly 300 businesses and 3,000 jobs and was recently named the Top Rural Incubator in the world by the International Business Innovation Association.

In 2016, our Innovation Center received a multimillion-dollar, multi-year grant through the Appalachian Regional Commission to launch the LIGHTS Regional Innovation program to support product-based regional economic development in coal-impacted communities. Led by Jennifer Simon, LIGHTS is for individuals who live or work in a 28-county territory of Ohio, West Virginia and Kentucky with an interest in building a product and/or creating a business. In the past few years, LIGHTS has assisted 90 startups and small business clients. Those businesses employ 122 people with total annualized wages of \$2.83 million. The businesses have also achieved \$50.9 million in revenue and have attracted \$22.9 million in private investment.

Building upon the momentum created 35 years ago, university leaders secured Ohio Third Frontier funding to launch TechGROWTH Ohio, Ohio University's 20-county Appalachian entrepreneurial service provider whose mission is to significantly increase revenue growth and capital investments in technology-based businesses. Since its inception 10 years ago, TechGROWTH has assisted 1,800 entrepreneurs to generate more than \$460 million in economic activity. For every \$1 the state has invested in TechGROWTH, we generate \$21 in return – a remarkable return on investment for the region.

To gauge our progress in 2018, we conducted a comprehensive economic impact study. The numbers confirmed our suspicion that Ohio University has a significant positive impact on the state, region and Athens community. The University's total economic impact of \$2.9 billion supported 40,021 jobs, which represents 1 out of every 174 jobs in the state.

Fostering and furthering student thinking, creativity and innovation has been at the heart of Ohio University's academic mission for more than 200 years. That's why today, I am very excited to announce a new space within Alden Library that will unite students from all majors and backgrounds thereby encouraging cross-disciplinary conversations and collaborations.

The "Co-Lab" will enable and empower students to make their own aspirations possible. I want to thank everyone who has had a hand in its development, and the list is lengthy. A special thank you to Trustee David Pidwell, students Faith Voinovich and Drew Stroud, and to Dr. Luke Pittaway for leading these efforts. This was a big year for Dr. Pittaway personally too! He was named the Entrepreneurship Educator of the Year, a lifetime

achievement award, by the United States Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship. Congratulations, Dr. Pittaway!

Our success as a university is completely intertwined with the success of Appalachia. For 214 years, we have been proud inhabitants of this region and I believe we can be a model in our nation for being a positive catalyst of economic and quality of life change for Appalachia. This year, I created the OHIO Opioid Task Force to leverage our experts and develop a strategic plan that creates synergies to combat the opioid crisis. I want to thank Deans Ken Johnson and Randy Leite for their leadership with the Opioid Task Force. The group is currently undertaking an audit of all the work that is being done around the University and developing a website. One example of the good work that's being done in this area by the College of Health Sciences and Professions is the possible repurposing of the Hocking County Correctional Facility to offer a range of recovery services to treat drug addiction. A much-needed response to the current crisis. Good work.

### **Strengthening the University's Public Service and Outreach Mission**

As we strive to strengthen Ohio University's public service mission, we have a great example to emulate in our first graduate, Thomas Ewing.

In my earliest months as President, I sought to better understand the footprint of Ohio University and the impact our regional campuses have on their respective communities. This summer, I held business roundtables on all five of our regional campuses with business and community leaders throughout the state.

To take these conversations to the next level and expand opportunities with corporations, I will soon announce the creation of a Corporate Engagement Task Force. This group will work with our alumni in these industry/corporate entities to build a strong sense of ties to those corporations and create a sense of advocacy and awareness about Ohio University and our unique strengths within these corporations. It is our intent that building industry partnerships through joint research and creative activities will enhance opportunities for more internships and related opportunities for our graduates with key industry groups. The new career and services fee allows us to strengthen and complement such relationships.

The integration of our campus locations and networks is vital to regional and statewide success and I want to thank Ohio University Southern Dean Dr. Nicole Pennington and Dr. Brad Cohen for co-chairing the Regional Higher Education Study Committee. In the coming

months we will learn more about their recommendations as we seek to elevate Ohio University to serve as a national model for delivering an OHIO education for life.

### **Strengthen Global Engagement Efforts**

But our engagement efforts extend beyond the geographical boundaries of Ohio and even the United States.

This year, we have welcomed delegations from Chubu University for my investiture, the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador during International Week and also our partners from Leipzig and UiTM, our partner university in Malaysia. This December, I will travel to Malaysia to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Malaysian government and attend a lecture where the keynote speaker, our own College of Fine Arts professor Dr. John Sabraw, will discuss his innovative process that converts acid mine drainage into paint to an international audience. Congratulations, Dr. Sabraw!

The educational experience at Ohio University is greatly enhanced by the diversity of our campus community. We want to increase our international student recruitment and retention and have strategies that will yield such successes. I am pleased to report that we are up slightly in international enrollment despite many universities nationally experiencing significant declines. And that is something to celebrate!

### **Strategically Re-Connect with OHIO's 237,000-Strong Alumni Base**

With approximately 237,000 loyal and passionate alumni scattered around the world, we have increased our efforts in the last year to engage with these powerful and passionate audiences. Our new Vice President for University Advancement Nico Karagosian is leading the way and I am so thankful for his leadership. Nico has also hired Erin Essak Kopp as the leader of our Alumni Association and she too brings a record of innovation and strategic engagement with alumni that will poise us to make greater advances in connecting with our alumni in new and meaningful ways.

Last fall, I launched a monthly communication that goes out to our current students, faculty, staff as well as alumni called the "First Friday letter." This email is centered around a specific theme and provides recipients with "News to Use" so they can spread the good word of all the great things that are happening at Ohio University.

At my investiture address, I announced the creation of the Presidential Leadership Society – a group of high-achieving students who attend alumni gatherings with me as well as other engagements. These students attended a total of 22 meaningful events and engagements throughout the last academic year, including several regional admissions events. This year, we expanded the program to include 23 undergraduate students and created a new Presidential Graduate Student Leadership Society cohort of six students to better focus on their leadership needs.

It is important for us to maintain ties to our alumni, because this group is some of our most ardent supporters. You have probably heard me comment before that I have never encountered such a loyal and passionate alumni group than I have here at Ohio University. I believe it is incredibly telling that so many of our faculty and staff are also former Bobcats themselves! This is a testament to the lure of this singular place.

Would the faculty and staff in this room who are alumni of this great institution please stand? Thank you for your passion and continued connection to OHIO!

## **Conclusion**

In summation, the state of our university is strong. And the future of our great, national university is very bright. And that is because of you.

I know the talent that permeates through our campuses. I've met many of you --- those I haven't met, I know we will cross paths soon.

I've witnessed your engagement with our students and how invested you are in their success.

I've cheered you on as you make discoveries, find answers to questions that plague our human condition, or received an award for your work.

I've engaged with you and listened to your thoughtful ideas about how we can achieve financial success and sustainability.

And what is very apparent is that you are the OHIO difference. I hope you realize the impact you are making in the lives of our students, in the vibrancy of our region, and in the betterment of our society.



And our society is calling on us to continue to be the difference and make an impact. Higher education has perhaps never faced as severe a test as it does today; maybe not since the beginning of our republic, when the very notion of public education for all citizens was too progressive for many to accept. At its best, higher education produces not only skilled additions to the workforce, but more importantly, lifelong learners and engaged citizens in our democracy and in their local communities.

Engraved into the Class Gateway are the words of the United States Northwest Ordinance of 1787: "Religion, morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged."

Our Founders understood our impact on society. They cared deeply about higher education as a means to shape the future leaders of the republic. They recognized the necessity to have a more educated citizenry, capable of self-governing, in order for our nation to survive.

The onus of this now lies with us.

Who among us can refuse such a calling?

Not I.

Thank you all for joining us this afternoon. And thank you for the tireless work you do each and every day.

Please hang around for a bit and enjoy some refreshments as we reflect upon our collective successes and strive to make this the best year yet!