

Thank you, Mandy.

It's my good fortune to serve as the president of Ball State University, and it's a pleasure to join you for this special celebration to mark the end of our University's observance of International Education Week.

I understand that our activities this week have been part of a broader nationwide observance—one led by our Department of State and Department of Education—to formally recognize the benefits of international education.

Here on our campus, I am grateful to my colleagues in the Rinker Center – women and men who are dedicated to enhancing our University's commitment to international education today, tomorrow, and for many more years to come.

I especially want to thank Mandy Brookins, who serves as our University's executive director for global affairs. Mandy, I know you just joined our University in July, but already your enthusiasm, experience, and leadership are benefiting the Rinker Center – and our University – in new and exciting ways.

And Shane Lanning, I am grateful for your service as our director of international student success. You provide the crucial support our international students need to thrive on our campus despite being so far away from their homes in countries around the world including Ghana, China, India, and Nepal.

[PAUSE]

Many of you know that the COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected our University's ability to enroll new international students and to provide study abroad opportunities for our domestic students.

But I am pleased to report that our numbers are recovering from this unprecedented challenge—a challenge that affected all colleges and universities nationwide, not just at our University.

This Fall, approximately 400 international students enrolled on our campus. And approximately 350 of our students studied abroad this past year, which is 250 more students than just two years ago.

These trends are a positive sign that more of our students want to experience the benefits of an international education—both on our campus and abroad.

[PAUSE]

Each of the students we serve—whether they are from Mexico or nearby Marion County— each student has a story to tell about the impact that our Rinker Center has had on them.

One of those students is senior Audrey Wallen.

Audrey has not had the opportunity to study abroad yet. But she was recently accepted into a semester-long program in Chengdu [CHUNG-DOO], which is the capital of China’s Sichuan province. And so, we are excited for her and the transformational experiences that await her there soon.

[PAUSE]

Prior to coming to Ball State, Audrey said she had only a nominal commitment to international education. In her own words, she said: “My priorities at the time were in the wrong place: I wanted to learn more about

the world around me so I could feel smarter, not because I felt compelled to learn from people who walked different paths to get here than I did.”

The moment Audrey began working for our Rinker Center, those feelings changed. She went on to say: “I embarrassed myself my first day on the job because I did not know how to spell “Azerbaijan.” [AHZER-BYE-JOHN]. My initial self-consciousness—brought about by the sudden realization there was so much I did not know—was soon washed away by the sense of fulfillment I felt once I began connecting with international students through the Rinker Center.”

Audrey, I appreciate all the ways your experience working for the Rinker Center has opened your eyes to the people and places around you. You have connected with many of our international students, and those connections have gifted you a more well-rounded and mature view of the world.

[PAUSE]

I shared Audrey’s story with you because I think it exemplifies some of the ways in which our Rinker Center empowers – and inspires – our students.

With the support of Mandy and her team, Audrey has learned more about our international students—about who they are as individuals and how they embrace their vibrant and distinct cultures. And soon—very soon—she will experience an international education of her own.

[PAUSE]

Audrey’s story also demonstrates how the support that our colleagues provide in our Rinker Center—work that is once again expanding in scope and creativity—can change the lives of our students for the greater good.

I know that this vital work will continue for decades to come, improving the lives of countless more future Ball State students.

To everyone here this afternoon, helping us to celebrate the mission of our Rinker Center and the benefits of international education, I say thank you. I’d now like to ask Mandy to return to the podium to continue with our program.