BALL STATE UNIVERSITY
Office of the President

GEOFFREY S. MEARNS
FALL OPENING CONVOCATION REMARKS
EMENS AUDITORIUM
AUGUST 17, 2018
9:00 A.M.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a privilege to serve as the president of Ball State University, and it is my pleasure to welcome you—our faculty and staff—to our 2018 Fall Convocation.

Before we begin our program, please rise and join Kelci Kosin in singing our National Anthem.

Thank you, Kelci. And thank you to our Beneficence Brass quintet. All of you represent the quality of the students who study and perform in our School of Music.

Kelci, I look forward to you returning to the podium at the conclusion of our program to lead us in the singing of our Alma Mater.

Today marks the beginning of my second year as your president. I am fortunate to have the opportunity to serve with you and for you.

Now, we typically have the provost provide the welcome at this event. But our new provost, Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills, has only been with us for a few weeks. So, instead of her introducing me, I have decided to assume the privilege of introducing her.

Susana has a distinguished academic record. She earned her bachelor's degree and her master's degree at the University of Iowa, and she earned her Ph.D. from the University of New Mexico. Susana was a dedicated teacher, and she is an accomplished scholar.

Susana also is an experienced, effective administrator. She has been a department chair, an associate dean, and a vice provost. In these roles, she has developed and implemented programs and support services that have enabled students—all students—to succeed.

This commitment to success is the product of her professional experience. It is also reflective of her own life experience.

When Susana was only 12 years old, she and her family fled the violence in El Salvador and emigrated to our country. Like many of our students, she is a first-generation college student.

Susana understands the value of education, because education transformed her life. Education changed the trajectory of her family. She is the embodiment of the transformative power of education.

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome the new provost of Ball State University—Dr. Susana Rivera-Mills.

Thank you, Susana.

And to all of this year's award recipients, congratulations. And thank you. Your contributions to this University are valued and appreciated. Let's take another moment to express our appreciation and admiration to our colleagues.

Now, to you—our faculty and staff—thank you for joining me this morning. I am grateful for your continuing commitment to our University.

Last August, when I walked to this podium, I had one principal objective. My goal was to demonstrate to you that, notwithstanding a protracted transition in leadership, this University is strong—and that we are getting stronger.

So, I talked about our enrollment growth and the rapid, sustained improvement in our on-time, four-year graduation rates. I talked about the various honors and awards that our students have received. I reminded you that our University is distinctive, because our faculty and staff are committed to the success of our students. And I told you about several of our graduates—women and men who are using the knowledge and the skills that they have received here to have successful careers and to lead meaningful lives in service to others.

After the convocation, I was gratified that many of you expressed your appreciation for my having returned your focus on our sustained success, not on a

temporary distraction. I was particularly pleased that some of you told me that my remarks that morning renewed your pride in Ball State. You told me that my observations also encouraged you to be optimistic about our future.

In my view, that pride is well founded. You are the reason that all of us should be proud to be members of this university community. And you are the reason that I am optimistic about our future.

Today, I will share with you why I am increasingly optimistic. I will share with you why my pride and my enthusiasm continues to grow as we embark on the second century of Ball State University.

One significant source of that pride comes with the physical growth and transformation that is visible to anyone who comes to our campus.

The realignment of McKinley Avenue is now complete. We've added a traffic circle to the north side of campus to make that area safer for pedestrians. This project also enables us to prepare for the construction of two residence halls as part of our new North Residential Neighborhood. The first residence hall will accommodate 500 students in a STEM Living-Learning Community. This residence hall and a new dining facility will be completed in 2020.

Then, after demolishing Carmichael Hall next Summer, we will build a second new residence hall, which will be completed in 2021. These two new residence halls and the new dining hall will allow us to complete the demolition of the LaFollette Complex.

Right across the street from this auditorium, we are building our East Quad. Next year, we will complete construction on our new Health Professions Building. This facility will include classrooms, labs, and clinical spaces for students, faculty, and staff from our College of Health. We formed this college in response to the growing need for health care professionals in Indiana and across the nation.

Just to the south of our new Health Professions Building, we will build our new foundational sciences building. This facility will allow us to continue to expand our biology and chemistry programs. The new science building will be completed in 2021.

I am grateful that the General Assembly has provided us with the funds to complete these two major projects.

Because of the state's investment, we can use our resources to build the East Mall. The new East Mall will connect the new East Quad and the Student Recreation and Wellness Center. This pedestrian and bicycle-friendly path will run from Ashland Avenue in The Village to Neely Avenue. The path will alleviate congestion on McKinley Avenue, and it will provide new places for our faculty, staff, and students to gather.

To create the East Mall, we will construct a new garage just to the south of the Studebaker Complex on the eastern edge of campus. Once this parking structure is completed, we will demolish the Emens Garage and replace it with a Grand Lawn.

On the western border of this lawn, we will build a new $4-million Multicultural Center. The new Multicultural Center will be in the heart of campus, where it belongs.

I remember the first time I saw our current center. I was walking my dog on a Saturday afternoon last Summer, and I saw an outdated sign in front of a small white house. The sign said that this modest structure was our Multicultural Center.

I had been the president for a few months, and no one had suggested that I tour the Center. And that day, I had just discovered why. I then found out that, during our campus tours, we don't take prospective students and their families by the Center because it might send the wrong message. The wrong message, indeed.

That is why I am proud that, in just a few years, our new Multicultural Center will be located in the center of our campus. That is the message we want to send—that diversity and inclusion must always be at the center of all that we do.

I'd like to take a moment to thank our outstanding staff—the women and men responsible for the design and maintenance of the facilities on our campus. Every day, they make Ball State a clean, beautiful place to work, to teach, and to study. Let's express our gratitude to them for their dedicated service.

Our beautiful facilities and our affordable tuition attract exceptional students to our University. And our enrollment continues to be strong.

Last Fall, we enrolled 22,513 students—the largest student headcount in our history. We enrolled more than 4,000 new freshmen, three shy of our all-time record. Our freshman class was the most academically qualified and diverse ever.

This year, our freshman class will be a little smaller. And our total enrollment won't break last year's record. But yesterday, I received some good news: This year's freshmen class will be as qualified and as diverse as last year's class.

Now, we want to build on these successes.

A few weeks ago, we announced an important change in our admission policy. This change makes submitting SAT or ACT scores optional for most students seeking undergraduate admission for Fall 2019. Research shows that public colleges see applications increase 11 percent after they become test-optional.

This policy will also attract a more diverse student population, because we know that standardized tests often constitute an unwarranted barrier for some students. I am proud that we are the first large public university in Indiana to remove that unwarranted barrier to access and success.

New buildings and more flexible admissions policies help us to enroll more students who will succeed. But the most important factors contributing to our success is the quality of our academic programs and the dedication of our faculty and staff.

Let me tell you about one of these programs. Our Emerging Media Design and Development Program is an interdisciplinary master's program focused on strategic communications. The program launched in Fall 2015. In just three short years, the program has grown to 57 students. Our EMDD students have worked

on nationally and internationally recognized projects with partners that include the USA Men's Olympic Volleyball Team, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Vatican, the Professor Garfield Foundation, and David Letterman.

This Spring, one of our EMDD graduate students, Erika Espinoza, became the first Ball State student to win a Pulitzer Prize. Erika, who also earned her undergraduate degree here, was part of a team from *The Arizona Republic* and the USA Today Network that won the prize for its in-depth reporting of the border wall between our country and Mexico.

Erika credits the professors she met at Ball State for pushing her to seek opportunities to grow as a professional.

In her own words, she said, "I used to be an introvert and a quiet student. But professors like Ryan Sparrow and Jenn Palilonis come along and they take you in. Ryan pushed me to take risks. And I met Jenn when I joined the Digital Publishing Studio. I used to be scared of her! If you've met Jenn, you would know what I'm talking about. Not only did she shape my design skills, she taught me to speak up and be proud of the work I produced. Both Ryan and Jenn saw the potential in me. I'm blessed to have met both of them."

Let's take a moment to recognize this significant accomplishment for Erika and for our colleagues in the College of Communication, Information and Media. Erika, would you please stand?

Let me tell you about a few more of our talented faculty.

Dave Largent is an associate lecturer in our computer science department. Dave was recently named a senior member of the Association for Computing Machinery. Dave and his CSH colleagues are now working with faculty in our Teachers College to create a new undergraduate degree in computer science education. The new degree will help prepare more teachers with computer science training. These graduates will then be able to provide quality STEM instruction in Indiana's K-12 classrooms.

Our new masters degree in social work is also addressing critical needs in our state. I am grateful to Dr. Greta Yoder Slater in our College of Health; she is directing this new program. The program will help ease the demand for well-trained social workers who can address societal challenges ranging from the opioid epidemic to the care of aging baby boomers.

I celebrated another birthday last week. I have a personal interest in ensuring that there are more trained professionals to care for "aging baby boomers," like me.

Four graduate students from our School of Kinesiology won the 2018 College Sport Research Institute Graduate Case Study Competition. This is the third time in the past six years that Ball State has taken top honors at the annual event.

In the College of Architecture and Planning, Professor Walter Grondzik received the 2018 Passive SOLAR Pioneer Award from the American Solar

Energy Society. The award recognizes Walter's lifelong contributions to the field of sustainable design.

And the construction management program in CAP, led by Professor James Jones, placed a record 73 interns in industry settings this Summer. For the fourth year in a row, every one of our construction management majors secured a job before he or she graduated.

Professor Steve Avila was honored by the American Risk and Insurance Association with the 2018 Excellence in Teaching Award. Under Steve's leadership, our risk management and insurance program was ranked in the top 15 by Best's Review, and it was designated as a Global Center of Insurance Excellence by the International Insurance Society.

Many of our graduates from the Miller College of Business use their education to excel in various businesses. But some of our graduates from that college use their training to lead non-profit organizations.

David Northern came to Ball State from Gary, Indiana. He wanted to play football and to get a degree in accounting. He thought that his education would help him become a CEO in a corporation.

But his abilities and ambitions have led him to pursue a different path. David was the first African American to become the chief executive officer of the Lake County, Illinois, Housing Authority, one of the leading public housing authorities in the country. David says that, as a result of his experiences and his education at Ball State, he has "an intense drive to create a better quality of life for others."

Our programs in the business college continue to receive financial support from our alumni. This past year, the college completed a $3 million fundraising campaign that resulted in renaming the Department of Accounting in honor of Professor Paul Parkison. This campaign follows on the heels of the successful $1 million fundraising campaign for our Weidner Center for Residential Property Management. And we have almost completed a $1.5 million campaign for what will soon become our new Kent C. "Oz" Nelson Logistics and Supply Chain Management Center for Excellence. Oz Nelson, a Ball State graduate, is the former CEO of UPS.

These campaigns have succeeded because we have so many loyal and generous alumni and friends. In fact, this past year, our University generated $21

million in contributions and another $21 million in future financial commitments. Those numbers far exceed any fund-raising totals from the past five years.

We are fortunate to have Foundation board members who support our efforts to raise donations that provide critical support to our University. I am also grateful to the staff of our Foundation—the men and women who engage, identify, and inspire these generous benefactors.

This past year has also been a good year for our colleagues in the College of Fine Arts.

Brad Conde, who is a professor of animation, produced a short film entitled "A Drawing." His film has been accepted into 40 film festivals and won 11 awards, including best animated film at the Breckenridge Film Festival, one of the oldest film festivals in the nation.

While I have not yet seen David's film, Jennifer and I did enjoy attending several concerts on campus this year, including the President's Concert in September, the Holiday Choral Concert in December, and the Showcase Concert in April. Simply put, our School of Music is outstanding.

Jennifer and I also enjoyed visiting the David Owsley Museum of Art. Jennifer was honored to serve as a guest judge for the museum's annual Art in Bloom fundraiser in May.

The quality of our arts programs continues to soar. And we are gaining more national recognition every year. One fact demonstrates my point: last year, more than 1,500 prospective students from across the country auditioned for only 40 available openings in our BFA in acting and musical theater programs. Congratulations to our colleagues in the Department of Theatre and Dance for this remarkable achievement.

One of the department's transformative educational experiences deserves special mention. Last November, Sutton Foster, who has won two Tony Awards, returned to campus to work with our students to record her latest album.

In the liner notes of her new CD, Sutton included a photograph of herself with our cabaret students. She thanked our faculty, staff, and students for being so welcoming, referring to Ball State—and Muncie—as her "second home."

Obviously we are grateful to her for this national exposure. But it's a testament to the quality of the programs in our College of Fine Arts that someone

of her talent and international profile would want to associate herself with us—and perform with our students.

Our graduates have also earned national awards. You may have heard about Doug Jones. While majoring in broadcasting at Ball State, Doug also minored in theater, and he regularly performed as Charlie Cardinal at men's basketball games.

Since graduating, Doug has appeared in dozens of movies and many television roles. And this past year, Doug played the humanoid amphibian in "The Shape of Water," a film that won four Academy Awards, including Best Picture.

At Ball State, We Fly. Apparently, we also swim.

Another program that continues to draw national interest is our digital sports production concentration in the Department of Telecommunications. In June, students participating in SportsLink won four more regional Emmys, led by Tyler Bradfield, who won in the feature/segment category for the third year in a row.

Tyler is a talented storyteller who deserves the national recognition he has received. One of the profiles he created with Connor Nichols, another Ball State student, is entitled "Dear Teddy." It is the story of Teddy Williamson, a Ball State graduate who finished his football career as team captain. At the same time, Teddy was mending his fractured relationship with his incarcerated father.

Another one of our student-athletes whose compelling story has been featured by SportsLink is Alyssa Heintschel (HIGHN-chul), who graduated from our College of Sciences and Humanities last May. Alyssa earned a perfect 4.0 GPA, and she became only the second Cardinal soccer player to be named a first-team Academic All-American by the College Sports Directors of America.

Alyssa and Carley Shannon, a graduate of our College of Health's exercise science program, both received prestigious NCAA Postgraduate Scholarships to continue their graduate work this Fall. Eleven NCAA Postgraduate Scholarships have been awarded to student-athletes in the MAC in the past two years. Five scholarships have gone to Ball State athletes. That's an achievement we all should be proud of.

Indeed, I am very proud that our student-athletes perform very well in the classroom. They also compete for national championships.

Regan (REE-gan) Lewis, a nursing major from our College of Health, became the first Cardinal track athlete to compete in the NCAA Track & Field Championships in more than a decade. Regan is a high jumper. She cleared 5 feet, 10 inches—that's nearly as tall as I am! With that performance, Regan placed 10th in the nation. Regan's athletic achievements and her 3.78 GPA were why she was named to the U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association All-American Individual Team.

I'm proud of the achievements of our student-athletes. But I want to share the accomplishments of a different competitive team—achievements that impress me just as much.

Under the leadership of Mary Moore from our Department of Communication Studies, our speech team has won 32 individual national titles and eight consecutive state team titles, and we have placed in the top ten teams nationally for the past six years. And thanks to Mary's guidance and inspiration, 15 Ball State graduates are coaching other college teams.

One of Mary's students was Kaitlin Gavenda, a wildlife biology major. Kaitlin is minoring in communication studies, because she wants to learn how to communicate wildlife research effectively to the public. Earlier this year, Kaitlin and her classmate, fellow junior Maddie Clark, were selected as Udall Scholars—two of only 50 students nationwide to receive the award.

Abby Waggoner is a recent Honors College graduate who earned her degree in chemistry. Abby received our University's second graduate research fellowship from the National Science Foundation. And Robin Klause, an Honors College student majoring in physics, received a prestigious scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service. This scholarship funded Robin's summer internship conducting research at a lab in Dresden, Germany.

We all know that our faculty play a key role in the success of our students. As teacher-scholars, our faculty educate, support, and inspire our students. But I want to take a moment to highlight the importance of our staff as well.

Coralee Young began working at Ball State 36 years ago this month. She started out typing menus for Dining Services. In 2011, after working in the Career Center, she became secretary to the dean of the Honors College.

This past year, Coralee received the National Collegiate Honors Council award for administrative excellence. Coralee was surprised to be chosen the best among her peers from other colleges and universities across the country. She

said, “I just do my job day after day, treating people the way I would like to be treated, doing my best to meet deadlines, and always trying to improve processes for students and efficiency.”

Coralee, congratulations on receiving this honor. As Dean Emert shared with me, “You bring out the best in everyone who works with you.” Please stand so we can acknowledge you.

I met Coralee during a meeting with Honors College faculty and staff. I also met many more of you this past academic year during my walking tours of campus.

Jennifer joined me for several of these tours. Over the course of more than 30 hours, I visited more than 50 buildings and more than 240 offices and departments. I have one last tour scheduled for September.

These tours helped me—both of us, really—to learn so much about the people of Ball State. Your skill, your experience, and your dedication are the reasons for our success.

I want to thank Stephanie Arrington, Breanne Holloway, and Angel Tuttle for coordinating and staffing the tours. And I am grateful to Jennifer Palilonis and Kourtland Koch for joining me as my guides.

Along the way, we had a one-man security detail: Officer Terrell Smith. I have come to accept that I am just the president of our University. And Terrell is clearly the most popular person on our campus. Terrell, please stand and take a bow before your many fans.

Thank you for your service. I look forward to seeing you again this Fall at the dunk tank.

Last November, I stood before many of you on the stage of Sursa Hall and revealed our University’s plans to launch a more visible marketing campaign. Our goal was to tell your stories with the passion and the pride that they deserve.

I am grateful that our new marketing campaign coincides with the celebration of our Centennial. It is a historic time for our University as we remember how our campus has grown and how our University has served Muncie and the state of Indiana. Our Centennial theme, “*Beneficence*: Proud Past and Bright Future,” honors the accomplishments of our faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

I look forward to seeing all of you on September 6, which is the public kick off of our yearlong celebration. The night will begin with a "Cardinal" red carpet. Then we will show our student-produced Centennial documentary, *From Normal to Extraordinary: Ball State's First Century*. After the film, we will have a street party on Riverside.

On your way out today, please pick up your ticket for the event. And if you haven't already, please also pick up your Centennial T-shirt and lapel pin.

As we celebrate our proud past, it is imperative that we plan for our second century—for our bright future.

Last January, I appointed a small, but representative committee of faculty and staff to engage in a consultative process to develop that ambitious plan. The members of the committee are: Jennifer Blackmer, Delaina Boyd, Jean Crosby, Linh Littleford, Jim Lowe, Susan McDowell, Jennifer Palilonis, and Ro Anne Royer Engle.

Jacqueline Pozadas is the student member on our committee. Jacqueline is a first-generation college student who, as a member of SGA and Latinx Student Union, is making the most of her leadership opportunities in preparation for a career in law.

Sue Hodges Moore, our new Chief Strategy Officer, has done an excellent job guiding the strategic planning process.

When we embarked on the process, we distributed a survey to faculty, staff, and students. We received more than 1,480 responses. We also had eight open forums for faculty and staff. Approximately 300 of you joined us for one or more of those forums, each of which focused on a different strategic theme.

We had a special forum for the Ball State University Foundation and our Alumni Council. The members of our Alumni Council are passionate supporters of our University. As the governing body of our Alumni Association, they represent more than 190,000 graduates of Ball State.

Our final forum took place in June. We invited community partners to join us at the Horizon Convention Center. More than 100 people from the community shared their opinions about what we are doing well and what we can do better. They also offered big, bold ideas for our future.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and your aspirations with us. The committee is evaluating all of this input.

But I want to share an extraordinary experience from one of the two student forums.

During the forum, I told the students that we believe that our faculty and staff are personally committed to the success of our students. I indicated that this distinctive attribute of our academic culture was a point of pride that we share with prospective students and their families.

Then I asked the students to raise their hands if, based on their experience on our campus, this representation was an accurate one. Every student—every student—raised his or her hand. That was impressive. That was gratifying.

I then gave the students an assignment. I asked them to stop by a faculty member's office—a professor whose teaching and mentoring had contributed to their growth and development. Or they could take a moment to speak to a staff member whose support had contributed to their success. And I told these students to tell you and your colleagues simply: "Thank you. Thank you for caring about my success."

Well, I don't know how many of them completed the assignment I gave them. But on behalf of our students and our graduates, I will say "thank you." I am grateful for your service. You make all of us proud.

I shared this memorable experience with our trustees last month. And the strategic planning committee provided them with the summaries of all of the input that we had received throughout the Spring.

The committee is discussing all of this information, so that we can draft a strategic plan that will enable us to fulfill the exceptional potential of our University. We will disseminate this draft for your review and feedback in a few weeks. But I thought I would take a few minutes this morning to give you a preview of what the committee will propose.

Every good strategic plan includes a mission statement—a clear, concise articulation of our fundamental purpose. Why we exist and what we intend to achieve. Our proposed mission statement will not surprise you.

It will affirm our historic mission: by engaging our students with dedicated faculty and staff in teaching, research, and creative activities, we empower our

graduates to have fulfilling careers and to have meaningful lives. Our mission statement also recognizes that, in order to honor our promise, we must inspire our graduates to be lifelong learners and to serve others, so that we may enhance the vitality of our region, our state, and our world.

That last part—"our world"—may seem a bit audacious. But it's accurate. Hayat Bedaiwi is an example of how our University's impact can extend far beyond the borders of our State.

Hayat is a student in our English department's doctoral program. She was born and raised in Saudi Arabia. In high school, she told her classmates that she wanted to become an English teacher. They laughed—but she persisted.

Hayat earned a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in English literature at King Saud University. In 2014, she moved to Muncie with her husband. She has said that, "It is here at Ball State University that I finally found myself, embraced my identity, and excelled in my field."

When Hayat completes her dissertation and receives her degree here, she will return to Saudi Arabia to become a full-time professor. She may also pursue a career in politics. She wants "to advance women's causes in my country."

Hayat personifies the span of our University's influence and impact—the broad scope of our mission.

To achieve this mission, we must be guided by certain core values. The committee will propose that we retain our commitment to the enduring values that are articulated in our Beneficence Pledge: Excellence. Integrity. Inclusiveness. Social responsibility. And gratitude.

The committee will also propose that we add two additional values to this list.

Consistent with our culture, we will recommend that we include Innovation—that is, a commitment to being even more creative, responsive, and progressive.

To meet the challenges we face and to seize the opportunities those challenges present, we will also recommend that we add Courage—that is, a commitment to set ambitious goals and to take the risks necessary to achieve them.

While we may be expressly articulating these two values for the first time in a strategic plan, these values have been firmly rooted in the Ball State experience for many years. And we have been instilling and nurturing those values in our students for a long time.

To illustrate this point, let me tell you about Grace Hollars, a Ball State undergraduate student who was recognized as the Indiana College Photographer of the Year.

In 2016, as part of the immersive learning experience "BSU at the Games," Grace travelled to Brazil. During that trip, she took photographs of the Olympic competition and the athletes, as well as Rio de Janeiro. As she described in an essay in our alumni magazine, she "became addicted to the rush—a photography high."

So, this past February, she traveled to South Korea to take photographs of the Winter Olympics. One of her photographs—a photograph of snowboarder Shaun White taken right after he won his third gold medal—was so powerful that it was displayed among photographs that had been taken by some of the most accomplished sports photographers in the world.

Here's how Grace described the moment when she saw this display: "Sinking to the floor, I felt a warm rush of happiness as my eyes filled with tears. I was looking at my dream, hanging on a wall, right in front of me."

Grace credits our University with helping her achieve that childhood dream:

"I remember the first time I walked through the doors of the Art and Journalism Building and realized I had come to Ball State University in search of something. I couldn't tell you exactly what it was, but I promised myself I would find it here. After capturing images of so many remarkable people and places, near and far, I realized the possibility that one day I will find what I began as a little girl's search through the viewfinder of her father's camera. After all, I was told I could be anything when I was growing up. Instead of fearing the fire, I decided to become it."

Ladies and gentlemen, Grace is living proof of the values of innovation and courage.

Inspired by Grace's story and our many successes, the committee will propose four ambitious, long-term goals.

The first unifying goal relates to undergraduate excellence and innovation. We will propose that, by 2040, our University will provide the best on-campus undergraduate educational experience in Indiana.

We are already on the path to achieving this ambitious goal. For example, in less than ten years, our on-time, four-year graduation rate has improved more than 21 percentage points. That progress is reflective of the collective commitment to student success.

It's also reflective of the distinctive experiences that we provide to our undergraduate students on our campus. For example, every year we provide more than 4,000 immersive learning opportunities to students like Grace.

We also provide many opportunities for our undergraduate students to conduct meaningful research with our outstanding teacher-scholars. Those experiences inspire our students to design their own research projects.

Let me tell you about Hannah Fluhler, who worked with Renee Twibell. Renee is a Ball State nursing professor and a researcher at IU Health Ball Memorial Hospital.

Hannah is an Honors College student majoring in nursing. Her pilot study will soon be submitted for approval by the hospital. The study will examine the effects of movement and music therapy for newborns suffering from drug withdrawal. According to Hannah, there has been no published research on whether this type of treatment helps newborns with these symptoms. Her work has the potential to be groundbreaking, and it is the result of a first-of-its kind fellowship.

In order to make measurable progress toward our 2040 goal, the committee will propose a comprehensive array of strategic imperatives that should be developed and implemented by 2024. One of our proposed strategies will be to provide more research opportunities for our undergraduate students with our teacher-scholars—faculty members like Renee Twibell.

The second unifying goal that the committee will propose concerns advanced and lifelong learning. We continue to increase our online offerings for both undergraduate and graduate students, and we have a robust portfolio of graduate programs.

Some of those graduate programs are growing. For example, enrollment in the master's degree in Applied Behavior Analysis within the Department of

Special Education has grown 145 percent in just five years. The program has now established a partnership with the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum to train their staff to work with individuals with autism. And a group of faculty have travelled to China to recruit more students and to develop partnerships with hospitals, universities, and treatment centers in that country.

Now, we need to develop a strategic approach to develop, grow, and, where necessary, sunset graduate programs.

We also need to do a better job of serving adult students throughout their lifetime educational journey. Let me share the experiences of two of our students. Their stories will illustrate the impact of our work.

Sunni Matter earned her first degree from Ivy Tech. She spent 10 years working before she felt called to pursue a career that would allow her to work with under-served populations here in Muncie, the community she calls home.

In 2015, Sunni walked into Melinda Messineo's office and knew she was where she needed to be. Sunni felt welcomed by our sociology department. More importantly, she felt a connection to our campus.

A year later, Sunni graduated with her bachelor's degree. She then applied to graduate school at Ball State. This past May, Sunni earned her master's degree in sociology. She credits the support of her cohort and family, her campus experiences, and her "phenomenal professors" for driving her passion to succeed. And, over the Summer, Sunni's dream of working with under-served populations came true. She is now the school pantry program manager for Muncie's Second Harvest Food Bank.

Then there is Cameron Gonzalez.

When Cameron decided to go back to school, she was in her fifth year teaching for the Department of Defense Schools in Korea. What she was unable to find looking into programs elsewhere she found at our University thanks to a unique program offered by the Department of Educational Leadership in Teachers College.

Cameron's professors and advisors designed a program that enabled her to succeed without stepping foot on our campus until her graduation days. Yes, I said "days." Because after Cameron was hooded as an education specialist in 2014, she returned to Ball State a year later and was hooded for her doctorate.

Cameron credits the flexibility of our online programs and the responsiveness of her doctoral advisor for allowing her to complete her degrees. They prepared her for the rigor of her work as an adjunct professor for the University of Phoenix and as a gifted resource specialist in the Clark County School District in Las Vegas, Nevada.

These stories demonstrate the ongoing impact—the sustained, transformational power—of an educational journey that extends over a lifetime.

The third unifying goal that the committee will propose concerns community engagement and impact. We are very engaged with our community, and for many years, that engagement has had a significant, positive impact.

We will propose that our campus build on this legacy of service. We will challenge ourselves to become internationally recognized for mobilizing and leading community partnerships that will revitalize Muncie and our region. Our sustained effort will ensure that this prosperity and good fortune will extend to all of our neighbors in the years to come.

This work is well underway. This past year, more than 4,000 Ball State students donated approximately 80,000 hours of service to the community.

Our faculty are also engaged in a variety of organizations and initiatives that are improving the lives of the people in the communities that we serve.

For example, Professor Josh Gruver worked with a team of colleagues, students, and volunteers to establish the Muncie Food Hub Partnership. This partnership is supporting local farmers while providing fresh, healthy food to people in our community who are food insecure. Josh worked in the Peace Corps for two years. But he says that, "I have found my purpose in Muncie."

Braydee Euliss is a Muncie native and a Ball State graduate. Braydee is the new executive director of the Muncie Arts and Culture Council. She believes that local arts and culture fuel community growth and transformation.

Braydee has chosen to stay here in Muncie, because it has given her an opportunity at a very young age to be connected to meaningful work. She said that living, working, and leading in a city like Muncie provides "the most emotional return on investment." I agree.

Our most ambitious community initiative is our new MCS partnership.

In May, we accepted the responsibility to appoint a new school board to manage the Muncie Community Schools. That new school board began governing MCS on July 1. I am confident that the new board members will do the hard work that is needed to transform our public schools into a thriving system that provides an excellent education to every child in Muncie.

I am equally confident in our University's ability to embrace the challenges of this new partnership with optimism, tenacity, and humility. This confidence is due in large part to Ball State's existing involvement with MCS.

For many years, our faculty, staff, and administrators have consulted with MCS on a variety of issues. Our graduates teach in MCS schools. And our Schools Within the Context of the Community has been deeply embedded in several MCS schools.

Earlier this year, we learned that this innovative teaching model had received a 2018 W. K. Kellogg Foundation Community Engagement Scholarship Award. This national award recognizes programs that demonstrate how colleges and universities have redesigned their learning, discovery, and engagement missions to become even more involved with their communities.

Let's congratulate Professors Eva Zygmunt and Pat Clark on this remarkable achievement. And let's also congratulate those faculty members who have contributed to the success and evolution of the Schools Within the Context of the Community program: Kristin Cipollone (CHIP-ALONE), Jon Clausen, David Roof, Serena Shim, Dorshell Stewart, and Susan Tancock.

What is extraordinary about the Schools Within the Context model is that it gives our students confidence in the classroom by immersing them in the communities their students call home. Senior Sadie Matchett is a Muncie native who said the program challenges our elementary education majors to confront their own unconscious biases. In her own words, she said: "I'm scared to think of what kind of a teacher I would have been without it. This program creates great teachers. It has made me a better person. It's phenomenal."

We have other programs that are benefitting our public schools. I'd like to tell you about one more.

Rona Robinson-Hill is an assistant professor in our biology department. She had a long career in research and secondary education before coming to Ball State. When she arrived here, she wanted to have a greater impact in the community by providing supplemental science lessons to students enrolled in

MCS, where almost 40 percent of students are minorities and almost 80 percent receive free or reduced-price lunch.

Her program is called "We Can Do Science." The program helps our students create and implement lesson plans for elementary school students in afterschool programs. And it helps our students overcome their anxieties of interacting with children from different backgrounds.

These are just two exemplary programs that illustrate how expanding our partnership with MCS isn't a diversion. To the contrary, our partnership with MCS is an extension of our mission.

Our fourth and final unifying goal is institutional and inclusive excellence. We will propose that, by 2024, our University design and implement a comprehensive array of strategic imperatives to ensure that, throughout our institution, we encourage and reward innovation, effectiveness, and individual and collective responsibility.

Some of these strategies are important, but somewhat impersonal. For example, based on the substantial feedback that the committee received from our colleagues, we will recommend that we develop more effective and efficient business processes and governance structures, and that we develop a new incentive-based budget model.

But some of the other strategic imperatives will affect our faculty and staff more directly. For example, the committee will recommend that we develop and implement more intentional programs that promote the professional development and personal wellbeing of our faculty and staff. Our mission is to empower our students to have successful careers and to lead meaningful lives. In order to achieve that mission, we must also enable our employees to lead engaged and meaningful lives.

When the committee releases the draft, you will see that the first strategic imperative under this unifying goal is about inclusive excellence. Throughout the planning process, we heard from you that we must do more to embed cultural competencies in curricular and co-curricular experiences and that we must provide more extensive training for faculty and staff.

We know that a commitment to diversity and inclusion is critical to the education of our students.

We also know that, when we embrace diversity and inclusion fully, the impact is powerful. Let me share an example of just how powerful that impact can be.

Twanda Williamson Young was born and raised in Darlington, South Carolina. While in college in her home state, she signed up for the ROTC. She wanted to be sure that she had a job after she graduated, so she wouldn't have to move back home with her parents.

Tawanda stayed in the United States Army, because it was very rewarding. During her military service, she earned a master's degree in adult education and executive development for public service at Ball State. She said this graduate education provided her with the skills "to teach, coach and mentor others."

Her education also enabled her to overcome a personal challenge. See, 30 years ago, an Army battalion commander told Tawanda that he would make sure that she would never be promoted to first lieutenant, because he thought that women had no place in the Army. She responded, "Sir, I will be here when you retire." She fulfilled that promise.

In fact, in December, long after he retired, our alumna—Tawanda Young—was promoted to brigadier general. She is presently one of only a few female African-American generals in the United States Army.

As you know, diversity and inclusion is more than preparing underrepresented minorities for the challenges they continue to face. Indeed, our University has a proud history of being a leader in educating students with disabilities. While we are effective in graduating students with disabilities, national statistics indicate that 50 percent of college graduates with physical disabilities are unemployed. To address this issue, our Disability Services partnered with Eskenazi Health in Indianapolis to create internships for students with physical disabilities.

Since the program began in 2013, it has provided 67 internships—and 28 of those opportunities were offered to Ball State students with physical disabilities. The program has grown every year. It has become so successful, that a new initiative was created to expand its reach.

The Initiative for Empowerment and Economic Independence starts students with physical disabilities down the path to gainful, equitable employment. Luke Labas earned two degrees from Ball State. He was one of the interns who benefited from the program. In his own words, Luke said, "You're

not stuffing envelopes. You're not going to get coffee for office workers. You're doing really meaningful work that is changing lives."

I want to commend Courtney Jarrett, our new Director of Disability Services; Greg Fehribach, an alumnus and former trustee; and Larry Markle, our University's outgoing disability director, for their commitment to this important program.

Now, I have just two final, but important comments about our new strategic plan, and both relate to implementation and execution.

First, during my description of our goals, I used the phrase "measurable progress," with the emphasis on measurable. Successful implementation of our plan will require us to develop appropriate metrics and to set aggressive targets. We must also regularly assess our progress towards those measurable targets.

Second, when we distribute our proposed plan, you will quickly see that it's different than some previous plans. It is not a long list of 100 discrete tactics. It is not a task list.

To the contrary, it is an ambitious plan with bold, high-level strategies. During the implementation phase, each college and each division will be responsible for developing its own strategic plan. You will be entrusted—you will be empowered—to determine how each one of you can best contribute to our success. I believe it is only with your continuing input and expertise that we can realize our great potential.

Now, I would like to share a personal reflection—a personal observation.

Throughout my presentation, I have identified many reasons why I believe our University is poised to thrive. I told you that I am confident in a bright future because of our beautiful facilities, our outstanding academic programs, our courageous students, and our dedicated faculty and staff.

But I would like to share one final reason why I am confident about our future—it's the character of the people on our campus and in our community.

Jennifer and I have lived in a lot of different cities over the course of our lives. When we were children, our families moved around a lot. And after we were married, we moved our five children several times—from Brooklyn, New York, to Raleigh, North Carolina, to Shaker Heights, Ohio, to Northern Kentucky, and now to Muncie, Indiana.

Every community is different. People come from many different cultures. They have different accents. They cherish special foods—like soft pretzels, or Skyline Chili. Or, here in East Central Indiana, deep-fried pork tenderloin sandwiches.

But Jennifer and I have come to know that, notwithstanding these cultural differences, people are generally kind, generous, and welcoming. Yes, they're kind even in Brooklyn, New York—in their own way.

But Jennifer and I have noticed something special here on this campus and in this community. As we have walked across campus and as we have walked the aisles in our local grocery stores and when we sat at the bar at the Elm Street Brewery, so many people have said to us, "Thank you for coming to Ball State." Or, "Thank you for coming to Muncie." "Thank you."

You and your colleagues and your neighbors have not simply welcomed us to the area. You and so many people have expressed your gratitude for us having decided to come to this university and to this community. In our experience, that expression of gratitude is unusual. It's special. And it has inspired us to embrace this opportunity with a deepened commitment to serve you—our colleagues and our neighbors.

I will share one memorable experience to illustrate my point.

After our Convocation last year, several people told me it was the first time that they had heard the president publicly acknowledge at this Convocation the hard work of the women and men who make our campus so beautiful.

And a few weeks after that program, I was walking from the parking lot to my office in the Bracken Administration Building. One of our staff colleagues who is a landscaper drove over in her green truck to speak with me. Her name is Marci Sharp.

Marci told me that she had heard about my remarks from someone else. She wasn't here with us that morning, because she was working on the grounds.

As she began to tell me that she appreciated my remarks, Marci became emotional. She paused to regain her composure. And then she said, "Thank you. Thank you." Then she drove away to go back to work.

Well, Marci Sharp is here with us this morning.

Marci, thank you for your dedicated service to our University. Your hard work contributes to the success of our mission. You inspire me. Thank you.

Marci, please stand so that all of us can express our appreciation to you.

Inspired by Marci and so many others, I ask that you take a moment today to express your gratitude to your colleagues for their contributions.

Over the weekend, please also express your appreciation to your family and friends. Their support gives us strength and courage.

And then on Monday, when we return to this beautiful campus, let's go to work. Guided by Beneficence and her enduring values, let's continue to build the bright, bold future that is worthy of the women and the men who had the vision and the generosity to found our University 100 years ago.

Now, before I conclude, I would like to say a few words about the debate involving John Schnatter. Even before our Board released its statement two weeks ago today, I anticipated that I would be expected to talk about the issue at this event.

Over that following weekend, I continued to think about what I should say to you this morning. These issues are complex. And in our polarized society, our discussions about racial justice often generate more heat than light. I believe that understanding is much more likely to occur when we gather in small groups for courageous conversations, as opposed to when someone like me makes pronouncements from a podium.

So, over that weekend, I called Bill Jenkins to share an idea and to ask for his assistance. I had spoken to Bill on Friday afternoon, the day the Board's statement was released. Bill was disappointed and frustrated. Nevertheless, I thought that he might be willing to help me.

I told Bill that I was searching for the right words to communicate my thoughts to all of you. I told him that the lyrics to a song written and performed by James Taylor best captured my hopes and my emotions. The song is called, "Shed A Little Light."

The song was written as a tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in recognition of the national holiday celebrating his birthday. Here's the first verse:

Let us turn our thoughts today to Martin Luther King,

And recognize that there are ties between us,

All men and women living on the Earth.

Ties of hope and love, sister and brotherhood.

That we are bound together, in our desire to see the world

Become a place in which our children can grow free and strong.

We are bound together by the task that stands before us

And the road that lies ahead.

We are bound.

And we are bound.

That Sunday evening, Bill said that he would consider my request and get back to me.

Bill called promptly on Monday. He told me he had spoken to several colleagues and some students, and they would be willing to perform for us.

And then Bill called me the next day. He told me that the students would prefer to perform a different song—the song "Glory" from the movie "Selma." Bill said that the students felt that "Glory" better captured their perspectives and their thoughts.

Initially, I hesitated. I preferred my selection, because I wanted a song that communicated my thoughts. My sentiments.

But I quickly realized that the students' selection was the better route.

I realized that it was time for me to do more listening.

Indeed, as we search for a passage through the darkness and the mist, I suggest that all of us should do more listening—more listening with an open mind and with an open heart. With an open heart.

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome students from the Ethnic Theatre Alliance, our colleagues, and our alumni guests as they perform “Glory.”