



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

**Geoffrey S. Mearns, President**

**Fall Address to the Ball State University Campus**

**Emens Auditorium**

**August 18, 2017**

**9:00 a.m.**

Thank you Marilyn.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a privilege to serve as the president of Ball State University, and it is a pleasure to be with you as we prepare for another productive and promising year.

This morning, I will share with you some of the impressions that I have gained during my first three months as your president. Simply put, in a short period of time, my appreciation, my respect, and my admiration for you and my admiration for your work have grown significantly. I am proud to be a member of this University community.

I will also talk today about our future—a future that poses some challenges. Our future, though, also presents many opportunities. And I am energized and optimistic about our future.

But before I share my observations and preview our opportunities, I need to express my appreciation to several groups of people.

First, I want to thank the members of the presidential search committee. This committee, which was led by Trustee Matt Momper, developed a compelling presentation of this University. During our discussions, the members of the committee asked some good, probing questions, which were appropriate. Yet they also communicated their passion for our mission, and they embodied the gracious charm of this University's culture. Matt, I am grateful to you and your colleagues for helping to give me this special opportunity.

I also want to express my appreciation to all of the members of the Board of Trustees, many of whom are with us this morning.

I know that you are individually and collectively committed to the mission of Ball State. And I have come to know very well that you have entrusted me with leading an institution that you cherish so very deeply. I will honor that trust with my best efforts.

Finally, I must thank the members of the presidential transition committee. This committee was led by Tom and Sheila Bracken. The committee developed a comprehensive plan to guide my first few months as the new president of Ball State. This extensive plan has enabled me, in a short time, to meet so many people—both on campus and in the community. This solid foundation has been valuable to me, and I am grateful to you for your good counsel.

And to all of you, thank you. Thank you very much for welcoming me and my family into your community—and to our new home.

When my appointment was announced in January, I told the people who gathered that afternoon in Sursa Hall that my first task—my first responsibility—was to learn more about the people and the programs here at Ball State. I know from experience that, if I am going to be able to lead effectively, I must have a greater knowledge and understanding of your perspectives, your past contributions, and your aspirations for our future—your dreams for Ball State University.

Between February and May, I visited campus on several occasions to meet with members of the leadership team and with other members of our University community. I read briefing memos, and I reviewed several reports.

In March, I participated in a meeting with Governor Holcomb and the presidents of the other public universities in Indiana. And, in April, I spent a day meeting with the members of the General Assembly.

During these meetings and conversations, I was able to hear what our elected officials expect from our universities. And I took advantage of the opportunity to tell them that, in Indiana, we are fortunate that they continue to invest in public higher education. And I urged them to sustain and increase that critical investment.

I began my official service as your president on May 15. That day, I visited a few classes. It happened to be National Chocolate Chip Cookie Day, so I handed out chocolate chip cookies to students, to faculty, and to staff. That was great, because I love chocolate chip cookies.

I also visited the Human Performance Lab that afternoon. I watched a graduate student be subjected to a grueling endurance test administered by Professor Scott Trappe, who received an award this morning. I was impressed—and a little intimidated.

Nevertheless, I decided to share some of my thoughts about exercise and nutrition with these experts. I told Scott and his colleagues that, not only did I love chocolate chip cookies, I also loved chocolate chip ice cream. And they assured me—they said—that these two foods constituted a balanced meal—a virtual diet of champions.

That's what they said. But I knew what they were thinking. They were thinking, "At your age, it doesn't really matter what you eat." Ouch. That hurt as much as a muscle biopsy—when they stick a big needle in your thigh to obtain a specimen.

At the end of my first day on the job, I also got a chance to meet a couple of our campus police officers. See, when I went out to my car around 7:00 that evening, I realized that I had left both my car keys and my office keys in a drawer in my office. That's right, on my first day as president, I locked myself out of my office and my car. So I had to call the University Police.

But it's gotten much better—after that somewhat awkward start.

In June, I attended my first meeting of our Board of Trustees. At that meeting, as you know, our Board approved the smallest undergraduate tuition rate increase in more than 40 years. That decision reflects our collective commitment to provide an outstanding education at an affordable price.

In June, I attended my first meeting of the Ball State Alumni Association Board and my first meeting of the Ball State University Foundation. The members of the Alumni Association Board are passionate supporters. They are enthusiastic about helping us to achieve our mission—and to elevate the profile and prominence of our University.

We are also very fortunate to have a Foundation board that consists of our graduates and other friends who contribute and help raise private donations to support our University. These philanthropic investments are our margin of excellence. I am grateful for this critical support. And I am grateful to the staff of our Foundation—the men and women who engage, identify, and inspire these generous benefactors.

During the past few months, I have also met with our academic deans and other faculty and staff.

And, several weeks ago, I had the good fortune to have breakfast with Dr. Kortland Koch, the president of the University Senate. If you know Kortland, you know that it was a lively, entertaining discussion.

Kortland, I promise, I won't tell anyone, especially your faculty colleagues, that you paid for the meal. That's our secret.

During these first few months, I have also had the opportunity to meet people in the local community and throughout the state.

In May, I went on a bus tour of Muncie with the members of the Board of the Ball Brothers Foundation. This tour was illuminating and encouraging. I am convinced that we have all of the necessary resources, the financial and the human capital, to spur the revival and rejuvenation of Muncie, Delaware County, and East Central Indiana.

In June, I attended a joint meeting of the Muncie Chamber of Commerce and the Delaware Advancement Corporation. That conversation was also instructive and enlightening.

In May and June, I also attended three alumni events—in Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, and Washington, D.C. Then, last Friday evening, I attended a small gathering of our alumni at Lake Tippecanoe. And on Wednesday evening, we hosted a large event for our graduates who live in the Muncie area.

We have more than 190,000 living alumni, and I've already met hundreds of them. They are proud. They are loyal. They are grateful. And they are yearning to become more deeply engaged in the future of our University.

And, finally, four weeks ago, on July 22, I attended my first commencement as your president. Three times each year, we gather to celebrate the success of our students and to recognize the collective contributions of our faculty and our staff—significant contributions that made those individual achievements possible.

It was a great day. I love commencement. And I look forward to many more as the president of Ball State University.

So, what have I learned during these first three months?

Our University's financial condition is very sound. For many years, we have managed our resources prudently and strategically. As I mentioned a moment ago, this practice enabled our Board, to approve the smallest undergraduate tuition increase in more than 40 years.

We have also benefitted from the state's sustained investment in public higher education. That investment has not been increasing as rapidly as it did in past decades. But we are fortunate, because Indiana is one of only a small handful of states in the country that is now investing more money in public higher education today than prior to the Great Recession.

We will continue to ask the Governor and the General Assembly for additional increases in our operating appropriation. Our students deserve that support. But we should—and we will—begin that appeal with an expression of gratitude.

We are also benefitting from the state's significant investments in our facilities. Two years ago, we received \$62 million to design and build a new Health Professions Building. As you can see right across the street, that construction project is now underway.

This past Spring, the General Assembly appropriated an additional \$87 million to allow us to design and build a new foundational science building, also on the new East Quad. I expect that, as we are opening the new Health Professions Building in 2019, we will begin construction on the new science building, which will be completed in 2021.

These state-funded projects will continue the physical transformation of our campus. And, because of the state's investment, we will be able to use our resources to build the first two phases of the East Mall Greenway. This pedestrian and bicycle-friendly path will eventually run all the way from Ashland Avenue to Neely Avenue.

Our careful, prudent fiscal planning has also enabled us to build and maintain our residence halls. I toured a couple of the halls last week, and they're outstanding. I've moved my children into many dorm rooms on several college campuses, and I can assure you that none of those dorm rooms or residence halls was even remotely as nice as the ones that we have on our campus.

I have been asked a few times over the last few weeks, what has surprised me the most since I arrived at Ball State. Near the top of that list is the campus.

See, before I was selected by the Board, I had only visited the campus once—in January, a few weeks before my appointment was announced. Perhaps it goes without saying, but this campus looks a lot better on a sunny afternoon in May than it does on a dark, cold night in January.

And no matter the weather and no matter the season, the men and women who maintain our campus provide us with a clean, beautiful place to work, to teach, and to study. Let's express our appreciation to them for their dedicated service.

Our affordable tuition and our beautiful, modern facilities attract outstanding students. And our enrollment has grown the last few years.

In Fall 2012, we enrolled approximately 3,600 new freshman. Last Fall, we enrolled more than 3,900. That was the second largest freshman class in 15 years.

Here's the really good news: we are presently projecting this year's freshman class to be even larger. In fact, as of yesterday afternoon, we are projecting that more than 4,000 new freshman will begin classes on Monday. More than 4,000 freshman. Although we have to wait 10 days to confirm the final census, this Fall we may enroll the largest freshman class in our history. And these new students will be as well qualified and more diverse than last year's class.

More good news: our total enrollment this year is presently projected to exceed 22,000 students. And it's very likely that we will enroll more students this year than in any year in our history. That's something to celebrate.

These achievements are due, in part, to our affordable tuition and our excellent facilities.

Our success is also the product of several notable programs that identify students who may not realize that a college education is within their grasp.

For example, this year we resurrected our Dream Makers luncheon in partnership with the Center for Leadership Development. This program is designed to recruit first-generation students of color in Indianapolis.

One of these students is the daughter of a single parent who works three jobs to support her family. They couldn't afford a television, so this young woman spent her free time dreaming—and drawing buildings that she hoped someday that she would design. And she got really good at drawing buildings.

So good, in fact, that one of her high school teachers saw some of her drawings and encouraged her to apply to our College of Architecture and Planning. This young woman applied to CAP, and she was accepted. She has also received a CAP scholarship.

Yesterday, she moved into her residence hall on our campus, and she starts classes on Monday.

She dreams of being an architect someday.

I think we are about to make this young woman's dream come true.

But the most significant reason that more and more excellent, ambitious students choose Ball State is because of our outstanding programs. We have an excellent reputation for academic quality, and that reputation continues to improve.

That reputation is driven by the work of our faculty. We celebrated some of their achievements earlier this morning. There are many others. Let me share a few of them with you today.

This Fall, Professor Mark Buselli will be inducted into the Indianapolis Jazz Hall of Fame. In addition to his own performances and recordings, which have gained national and international acclaim, several of his students have won international awards. This past Summer, Professor Buselli took 25 outstanding students to perform at the Montreux Jazz Festival in Switzerland.

Speaking of the arts, our Department of Theatre and Dance now has more than 450 students majoring in one of its programs. And, each year, more than 1,500 prospective students from across the country audition for one of only 40 slots in our Acting and Musical Theatre BFA programs.

Much closer to home, Professor Michael Doyle, in our College of Sciences and Humanities, continues to engage and inspire our students in an immersive learning project that will help us to celebrate our centennial. Professor Doyle is presently working on the second phase of an oral history project that chronicles the lives of African Americans who graduated from Ball State in the 1950's.

The faculty in Teachers College are also preparing for our second century.

For example, Professor James Flowers was recently recognized as the Technology and Engineering Teacher Educator of the year by an international teachers organization.

In our College of Communication, Information, and Media, our "Sports Link" program continues to receive national recognition. For example, Professor Chris Taylor, the executive director of Sports Link, recently received the College Sports Pioneer Award, which honors innovators in video production and technology at the college level. To date, Sports Link has received 16 student and professional Emmy Awards. No other program in the country has received even close to that number of awards.

In CAP, Emeritus Professor Tony Costello and five of his students were recently recognized by Architect Magazine for their innovative design work. They designed a "sunlight-powered kiln and a new concrete block shape that could be a solution for more resilient construction in Haiti." And graduates from CAP's Construction Management Program have now had a 100% placement rate for three consecutive years.

There are also many outstanding programs in our Miller College of Business. For example, our online MBA program is ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in the country by U.S. News and World Report. And graduates from our Logistics and Supply Chain Management Program have a 100% placement rate, because of our partnerships with industry and the exposure and experience our students receive as a result of the required internship.

The successful placement rates in CAP and the Miller College of Business—and across our University—are also the product of the support our students receive from the dedicated staff in our Career Center. In June, our staff received the Career Service Excellence Award for Large Colleges from the National Association for College and Employers. We were the only recipient of this prestigious award.

The College of Health also continues to bring us national recognition. As you heard earlier today, the Human Performance Lab was one of a small number of universities selected to participate in a \$170 million study commissioned by the National Institutes of Health. The other universities that were chosen to participate in this extraordinary study include Harvard, Stanford, and Duke.

All of these factors—these activities and these achievements—have contributed to the successful outcomes that you have produced over the past few years.

Since 1997, our critical freshman-to-sophomore retention rate has increased approximately 13 percentage points. During that same 20-year time period, the collective national retention rate for all college and universities has increased only two or three percentage points. So, our improvement has been truly dramatic.

In only five years, we have also increased our on-time, four-year graduation rate by 15 percentage points. Our rate now exceeds the Indiana state average by almost eight percentage points.

And during this time period, we have made great progress in closing the “achievement gap” of underrepresented minority students. Between 2011 and 2016, the on-time graduation rate for our minority students has increased by nearly 16 percentage points. That’s almost twice the statewide average.

Our student-athletes also excel in the classroom. Last Spring, the collective GPA for all sports programs was 3.2. The women’s swimming team earned the highest team GPA—3.65.

And this past year, three of our graduating seniors received prestigious post-graduate fellowships from the NCAA. The NCAA only awarded graduate fellowships to four student-athletes in the MAC, and our student-athletes earned three of the four.

More students, better completion rates, and better outcomes necessarily mean more graduates. And the numbers are quite impressive.

In 2010, we awarded approximately 4,800 degrees. This past year, our students earned approximately 5,800 degrees. That’s an increase of more than 20 percent in just seven years.

These impressive outcomes are a testament to the commitment of our outstanding faculty and our dedicated staff. Thank you all for your contributions to the success of our students.

Our success is also the product of our distinctive approach to education. At Ball State, we continue to value the partnership—the personal educational relationship—between an experienced teacher and a bright ambitious student.

Let me share with you a story that exemplifies this distinctive commitment—and that demonstrates the impact that you have on our students.

Arlesha Moore was a first-generation college student when she arrived on our campus a few years ago. She arrived with a dream, but with very little money. In fact, during her freshman year, Arlesha’s family lost their home.

But Arlesha persisted. And in May, she graduated with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and criminology. She graduated with honors. She is now pursuing a master's degree at a university in England as the recipient of a Fulbright scholarship. When she completes her studies, she plans to return home to get a law degree, so that she can become a civil rights attorney.

Arlesha credits the Honors College for changing her life. And she specifically identifies Dr. Michael Brown as her mentor—as the person who believed in her, when she had her doubts.

Professor Brown described Arlesha as “a quiet, confident student.” But he said that, “Hidden behind these attributes is a passionate desire to make a difference in society.”

When Professor Brown heard that Arlesha had received a Fulbright scholarship, he said it was very emotional, because:

*She's done everything that we tell our students to do: work hard, defer gratification, dream big, believe in yourself...and good things will come.*

Professor Brown is right. Each day, you share that motivational message with all of our students. Thank you.

Professor Brown's wise words apply equally to our mission. We must work hard. We must dream bold dreams. We must pursue those dreams with optimism. And, if we do these things, good things will come—for our students and for our University.

I suspect that you were already familiar with many of the facts and figures that I have cited this morning. And some of you may have read about Arlesha on our website.

So, why did I share this information with you today? Well, for several reasons.

First, I did it to reinforce an important point: our University is strong, and we are well positioned for the future.

Now, I know that you have gone through a protracted transition in leadership. I can appreciate that this transition has caused some uncertainty and perhaps some anxiety, as well. It certainly has diverted some attention from the fundamental strength of the University.

This protracted transition may have been a distraction. But it has not undermined the strength of this institution, and it has not impeded our progress.

Simply put, Ball State University is strong. And our University is getting stronger—day by day, year by year. That's just a fact.

I have also provided this information so that you can share it with others—with your colleagues, with our alumni and our friends, and with prospective students. During this protracted transition, we have not been as active in communicating our good news. Over the last few years, after a decade of effective marketing, we have retreated a bit. Some people have told me that we have once again become a hidden gem.



Well, that is about to change. Because over the next few months, we are going to reveal a refreshed brand, and we are going to launch a new marketing campaign. We are going to be more vocal. We are going to be more visible. We are going to tell the Ball State story with the passion and with the energy that it deserves.

Fortunately, the research associated with this campaign has demonstrated that people all across the state have come to appreciate the excellent quality of our programs and our people. So now, we are going to demonstrate that we are not just a viable option for students who want a good education at a reasonable, affordable price. Instead, we are going to prove that Ball State University should be—that Ball State must be—a student’s first choice—the best option for students who want an excellent education at a university that will prepare them to have a successful career and lead a meaningful life.

And, it’s the perfect time to launch this bold campaign because, next year, we will also begin to celebrate our centennial.

For several months, a large and diverse group of faculty, staff, and alumni have been developing a plan to commemorate this historic anniversary. I have had a chance to review a draft of this plan, and I can assure that it is creative and comprehensive. We will have many opportunities to celebrate our achievements and our collective impact.

I shared some information about the current strength of our University, because I hope that you will prepare for this centennial celebration with excitement and with enthusiasm. I also hope that you will embrace these activities with an abiding sense of gratitude for the women and men who founded this institution and for those people who helped transform it into the outstanding university that we have inherited.

This year, as we finalize the details of this year-long celebration, we will also develop a new strategic plan for our University’s second century. And that’s the final reason that I shared the information about the strength of our University.

Throughout the search process and during the past few months, many people have told me that it is imperative that I help to articulate a vision for our future and that I should do so very soon. That sentiment is understandable, given the protracted transition. It’s also expected, given the various external forces that are threatening to disrupt the traditional model of higher education.

But I ask that you pause for a few months to enable me to continue my orientation to Ball State. Let me explain.

A few years ago, I read an extensive report on the future of higher education that was written by a faculty committee at another university. The president of the university gave this committee two important tasks: first, to identify the major challenges that confronted higher education in America; and, second to develop recommendations to meet these challenges.

After extensive research, analysis, and debate, the faculty committee concluded that three major factors threatened to disrupt the status quo.

The first factor the committee identified was the “staggering expansion of knowledge produced largely by specialization.” In effect, the liberal arts were no longer valued, because graduates needed to be prepared for a specific job.

The second factor identified by the committee was the increasing number and kinds of institutions. The committee recognized that this growth was necessary in order to make higher education more accessible to people who had not previously been given the opportunity to go to college. But this growth also threatened enrollment at their institution and it might even diminish their university's prestige.

The third factor was the ever-growing complexity of society. According to the authors, this complexity was the product of technological advances and the increasing internationalization of business and culture.

The committee also recognized that colleges and universities were responsible for two overarching objectives that may be in tension with one another. Increasingly, we are responsible for preparing our students for a specific career. But we are also expected to educate our students to be informed, well-rounded citizens in our democratic society.

These factors and this challenge sound very familiar to all of us.

But this report wasn't prepared by the faculty of a public university in the Midwest. It was written by the faculty at Harvard University.

And, although I read the report five years ago, it wasn't drafted in the last decade. It was published as a book in 1945—more than 70 years ago.

Sometimes, we have a tendency to think that we are the first ones to encounter serious challenges. This study shows that we are not the first generation of educators to be confronted with these important questions.

Now, we all know that the pace of change has accelerated in recent years. And the adverse consequences of inaction are much more consequential for us than they were for Harvard 70 years ago. But this report proves that significant challenges can be overcome with careful planning, with bold, innovative solutions, and with disciplined, determined, and persistent execution.

At our University, our strong position gives us the opportunity to develop our next strategic plan thoughtfully and deliberately. Some institutions must respond to existential threats with desperate urgency. These vulnerable institutions must move quickly to shore up declining enrollments or to balance their budgets because of continued reductions in state support. In contrast, we're fortunate. We can plan with deliberate urgency.

But this opportunity to take some additional time imposes upon us a reciprocal obligation—an obligation to develop an ambitious vision for what our University should become, not just in the next few years, but in the next two decades. That should be our time horizon.

Here's the timeline for the strategic planning process that I have shared with the Board.

This Fall, rather than immediately initiating the process for developing a new strategic plan, I will continue to learn more about our programs and more about you, our people. I am looking forward to visiting with the faculty and the staff in each college, and I will continue to meet with the staff in the other divisions.

At the suggestion of the transition committee, I will also participate this Fall in several “walking tours” of the campus. These tours will help orient me to the buildings and facilities on our campus, and it will enable me to visit with faculty and staff—with all of you—where you work.

All of these activities will provide me the background and the context to develop our strategic planning process.

By the end of the Fall semester, I will appoint a strategic planning committee, consisting of a relatively small, but representative group of faculty and staff, as well as a student and perhaps a graduate of Ball State. If you are interested serving on this committee, or if you know someone who would contribute constructively, please let me know.

Beginning in January 2018, this committee will assess our strengths and our challenges in a thorough and systematic way. Throughout the Spring semester, the committee will also solicit input from the University community in various ways, including through surveys and open forums.

Next Summer, the committee will synthesize this information into a draft document that includes proposed mission and vision statements, a set of proposed core values, a concise list of overarching objectives, and a relatively small number of key strategies. Our plan must be truly strategic, not an exhaustive list of discrete tactics.

Next Fall, this draft will be circulated on campus in order to receive further input and suggested revisions. After considering and, where appropriate, incorporating these revisions, the committee will present a proposed final draft to the Board of Trustees for its consideration and approval no later than December 2018.

I intend to chair this committee, and I hope that all of you will participate in the process.

As you may have seen in an email that I distributed on Tuesday, I have restructured a presently vacant position in my office in order to create a new member of the University’s leadership team: a chief strategy officer. I anticipate that this person will play an important role in helping us to formulate our new strategic plan. I also anticipate that he or she will help to ensure that this plan is implemented effectively, across the entire university.

Of course, before we begin the strategic planning process, we won’t be treading water. To the contrary, I am confident that all of you will continue to do the good work that has enabled our University to thrive during this protracted transition.

We will also continue to work on the initiatives that I mentioned a few moments ago, including the new branding and marketing campaign and the centennial celebration. Our outstanding facilities staff will develop the designs for the new residence halls on the north end of campus and the new science building that will be constructed on the East Quad. And, next Spring, we will complete a strategic enrollment plan that will enable us to continue to attract and enroll a well-qualified and increasingly diverse new class of students each year.

Given this context, it would be premature and presumptuous for me to predict precisely what will be included in our strategic plan. But I do have some preliminary thoughts.

We should accelerate our transition from delivering content in the classroom. Because of technology, our students can obtain information much more efficiently in other ways than a traditional lecture. So, we should continue to use our classrooms to foster discussions about that information—to help our students better appreciate the critical difference between information, on one hand, and knowledge and discerning judgment, on the other hand. I know that this transition is well underway here.

We should expand our efforts to impart valuable skills—skills that apply to a student’s chosen discipline, as well as more universal skills that all graduates need in order to succeed in an economy and in a society that is rapidly changing due to technological advances.

We should increase the number and variety of opportunities for our students to apply the knowledge and judgment that they have gained and the skills that they have acquired to “real world” challenges and problems. With immersive learning, as well as internships and practicums, we have already demonstrated our commitment to such valuable, experiential learning opportunities.

We should also ensure that our students have many opportunities to meet and interact with people from different cultures or who have different perspectives and opinions. With freshman and sophomores, we do an excellent job of using living-learning communities to engage students with our University by assigning them to residence halls with other students who have similar interests.

Perhaps we should consider encouraging or requiring juniors and seniors to participate in structured seminars with students from different majors and with students who have different backgrounds and aspirations. These experiences may ensure that, after they graduate, our students will embrace the intellectual curiosity, the passion for lifelong learning that will enable them to thrive in an increasingly dynamic, interconnected world.

I believe that the entire learning experience should be more intentional. Presently, we require our students to complete a designed curriculum in order to receive a degree, and we offer a variety of other co-curricular and extracurricular options.

Perhaps we should require all students to complete a more structured program that requires skills-based and experiential learning opportunities. And, perhaps, all of our programs should be more strategically structured to lead students progressively through each phase, while still allowing some flexibility to respond to individual aptitude and ambition.

These are just some of my preliminary thoughts. Of course, you may have a very different view of our future. That’s the benefit of having a deliberate, consultative planning process—one where all voices will be heard and all opinions will be considered. I look forward to receiving your input and your guidance.

But there is one aspect of the next plan that I feel very strongly about. I have a firm conviction that our next plan must be grounded in certain core values—the enduring values of the Beneficence Pledge.

We must maintain our commitment to excellence—excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service.

We must maintain our commitment to honesty and integrity. Character matters.

We must treat every person with dignity and respect, irrespective of their race, their ethnicity, or their sexual identity.

We must listen actively and empathetically to people who have different opinions and ideas.

Permit me to say a few more words about these last two values.

Last weekend, we all watched the extraordinary—and the extraordinarily unfortunate—events in Charlottesville, Virginia. For me it was personal.

I was born in Charlottesville. At the time, my father was on the law faculty at the University of Virginia. As a child, I ran around on the lawn very near where white supremacists carried their torches last Friday evening. I was baptized in a church within a few blocks from the site where Heather Heyer was murdered on Saturday. My daughter Clare, who is here today, was baptized in that same church.

I earned my law degree from the University of Virginia. Members of my extended family have more than ten undergraduate or advanced degrees from the University of Virginia. My son, Geoffrey, who is also here today, is about to begin his sophomore year there.

His cousin, my niece, Olivia, will be a senior at the University of Virginia this Fall. My sister, Tracey, is Olivia's mother. Olivia's father, my sister's husband, my brother-in-law, is African American.

What happened in Charlottesville last weekend was very personal. It was profoundly disturbing. It was sad.

So what are we to do?

First, all of us must condemn—unequivocally—the racial hatred—the bald faced bigotry—that instigated the violent confrontation that led to the deaths of three people.

All of us must also continue to do the work to create a more inclusive culture on our campus. That work is hard. It requires us to engage in courageous conversations. It requires all of us to reflect candidly on our preconceptions and our predispositions. We must engage others with our open mind and with our open heart. And progress—real progress—requires a sustained effort.

But if each one of us, in our homes, in our neighborhoods, in our universities, in our companies, and in our other organizations—if we are all able to create more inclusive cultures with the people we meet each day, then I believe we can continue to create a more just society. We can form “the more perfect union” that our Founding Fathers envisioned.

This is my hope. And that should be our goal.

On a related note, we often talk about “shared governance.” I suggest that we should embrace a commitment to “shared responsibility.” Because if we are going to instill these enduring values in our students, we must model this behavior ourselves—every day, in every interaction, and in every activity. We should not be preoccupied with who governs this institution. Irrespective of our title, each one of us should strive to lead our University. Each one of us has the capacity—and the responsibility—to be a servant leader. Each one of us has the shared responsibility to put the best interests of our University before our own personal self-interest.

These enduring values have guided the faculty, staff, and students of this institution for nearly 100 years. These values have brought us to this place at this time. And I believe that these values will ensure that we deliver a bright, bold future for the women and the men who will succeed us in the years to come.

As we prepare to develop the plan for our future, let’s reflect on the transformative impact that a Ball State education has had on two recent graduates. Their experiences and their ambitions exemplify the transformative changes that we have on our students and the impact that our graduates then have on our communities and our world.

Sara McInerney graduated from Ball State in 2014. She earned a degree in communication studies. She grew up in Griffith, Indiana. She was an excellent athlete, and she played soccer at our University. She was also an excellent student.

But in her final semester, Sara wondered what she should do for her first job. She could accept a full-time job with a company based in Indianapolis. Or she could serve as an intern with the Finish Line Youth Foundation. This foundation is the philanthropic arm of a national retailer of athletic shoes, apparel, and accessories.

Sara chose the internship based on the advice of her mentor, Professor Laura O’Hara, who received an award today. Sara told Professor O’Hara, “In the end, my decision came down to choosing what I’m passionate about.” That’s pretty good advice from a very young woman.

During that summer, Sara knew that her position was only temporary. But she thought that, if she worked hard and built a network of relationships with other foundation employees, then they would help her find another job and someday—someday “another door would open that would lead me back to the foundation.”

But the foundation president had another plan. He and his colleagues were so impressed by Sara’s passion and commitment that the foundation created a position for her. In Sara’s words, “I nailed the job of my dreams right out of college.”

Now, Sara coordinates philanthropic events for Finish Line throughout the Northeast, and she coordinates the foundation’s involvement with the Special Olympics.

When she speaks to high school or college students, Sara sums up her advice in one, simple sentence: “Always follow your passion over a paycheck.” That’s also pretty good advice.

And Sara’s personal motto is: “What more can I do?”

As we prepare to develop and then implement our next strategic plan, let's ask ourselves that same question: What more can I do? What more can I do?

Now, let me tell you about Yosef Tekle-Wold.

Yosef was born and initially raised in a small village in Ethiopia. Like me, Yosef was the fifth of nine children.

I was fortunate. My parents had the capacity to provide exceptional educational opportunities to me and to all of my siblings.

Yosef was also fortunate, but in a different way. Because of financial constraints and cultural norms, most parents in Ethiopia are not able to educate all of their children. Only the oldest children are given these opportunities.

But rather than confining Yosef to working on the family farm, his parents allowed him to be adopted by Marta Gabre-Tsadick, Ethiopia's first female senator, and her husband, Demeke Tekle-Wold. This couple founded Project Mercy, a nonprofit, Christian organization that is based in Fort Wayne. The organization provides educational and economic development opportunities in rural Ethiopia.

Yosef has a straightforward explanation for why his Muslim parents decided to allow him to be adopted by a Christian couple: "The only explanation—I think it's just from God."

Yosef graduated in July with a master's degree from our Center for Information and Communication Sciences. I had the honor of handing him a Ball State diploma.

Yosef will now return to his village in Ethiopia. He aspires to use the education he received here in Indiana to help his friends in his home country. Here's how he describes his life's goal: "My legacy will be if I have the opportunity to help people—to empower others. That will be success."

I think that his words also sum up our individual and collective aspirations. Ours is a worthy goal—an admirable mission—to educate and thereby empower others.

When Yosef Tekle-Wold arrived on our campus, some students had some difficulty pronouncing his last name. He gave them a tip—it sounds like, "Take the world."

Yes, it does. And, because of you, I think, yes, he will.

In just a few months, we will embark upon a process to articulate a bold vision for our second century—for our future—for our legacy.

I suggest that we follow Yosef's lead. Let's dream big. Let's take the world.

As we begin another academic year, a year filled with great promise and opportunity, I hope that you share my enthusiasm, my optimism, and my ambition for our University. As you return to work today—as you return to your offices or as you go off to your college meetings—I have some suggestions. Actually, I have a few requests.

As you go about this busy day, please pause to reflect on your individual contributions to our collective success. I hope that these reflections will fill you with a sense of satisfaction—with a sense of pride.

Also, please pause to reflect upon our good fortune—on how truly fortunate we all are to be members of an institution whose mission is so fundamentally and intrinsically good. Our University changes lives for the better, and each one of us plays a role in that good work. It doesn't get much better than that.

And, in the spirit of Beneficence—of gratitude—please take a few moments during the day to express your appreciation to your colleagues. Please tell them that you are grateful for their support and for their encouragement.

Then on Monday, when we all return to this beautiful campus, let's go to work. Let's continue to dedicate ourselves to the success of our students. That is our core mission. And 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 nearly 100 years ago.

Thank you.

Have a good day and a great year.