Dear Friends,

At long last, the start of the fall semester is here and campus is once again alive with the return of our students and faculty. I have to admit I feel a little bit like a freshman myself as I begin my first academic year as president of the University of Louisville.

The jitters and the anxiety that many of our students likely faced on their first day are very similar to the emotions I experienced as classes began this fall. But I’m happy to report the year is off to a positive start with lots of energy, enthusiasm and high expectations for what lies ahead.

Speaking of our freshmen, I’m so excited about this class, which is large, diverse and has a high percentage of students from outside of Kentucky. Nearly 73 percent of the freshmen will live on campus, which we all know helps with acclimation, retention to college life.

About 1,800 of our students arrived on campus on Aug. 16 alone. Yes, we had heavy rains that day—I’m told that is a UofL tradition—but the weather did not dampen the mood. Kudos to our offices of student affairs, housing and first-year initiatives for ensuring the move-in event went smoothly.

Many of these students embraced the Cardinal way of doing things immediately. I was so proud to see more than 400 of our freshmen participate in the Student Outreach Uniting Louisville or SOUL, event. Our students spent several hours on a Saturday performing various service projects at about 20 sites throughout the community. SOUL is our students’ love letter to the city of Louisville and it was uplifting to see.

In August, we also welcomed Gov. Matt Bevin to campus for our Belknap Academic Building grand opening. This wonderful, $80 million structure—built entirely with state money—addresses our longstanding need for more and better classroom space and provides a one-stop shop for student services. It’s quite a marvel.

As we kick off the year, the positive momentum the university is experiencing is evident. I encourage all UofL supporters to come to campus and check it out. We’re not the school you may remember. Much has changed, and for the better. Yes, we’ve got work to do. And, yes, we need your help. But all of the pieces are starting to come together, and it’s great time to be at UofL.

Neeli Bendapudi
President, University of Louisville

Ribbon-cutting heralds new academic building

An Aug. 14 ribbon-cutting ceremony marked the grand opening of the Belknap Academic Building, a 165,000-square-foot building that addresses a longtime need for classroom space.

“UofL had the most critical shortage of classroom space of all Kentucky public schools. This building changes all of that,” said President Neeli Bendapudi.

Kentucky Gov. Matt Bevin, who took part in the celebration, called the facility an “incredible resource” that will change people’s lives.

The four-story, $80 million facility contains more than 50 classrooms, laboratories, seminar rooms and group study areas. It also includes common areas where students can interact with their classmates.

Additionally, the building houses the university’s Student Success Center, where students receive services that will help them thrive in the classroom and beyond.

The ceremony, which was held less than 48 hours before freshman move-in day, represents a new beginning, said Student Government Association President Jonathan Fuller.

“I think I speak for the entire Cardinal family when I say this building couldn’t come at a better time, when we’re starting fresh and refocusing on our mission,” Fuller said.

SNAPSHOT: OUR FRESHMAN CLASS

At nearly 2,800 strong, UofL’s incoming freshman class is 5% larger than the previous year and represents a growing number of out-of-state students. Although numbers are preliminary, here’s a snapshot of the incoming class:

- 55 percent have some college credits
- 15 percent are African American
- 6 percent are Hispanic/Latino
- 73 percent will live on campus
- 16 percent are first-generation college students
- 25.6 is the average ACT score, well above the 2017 Kentucky average of 20
- 3.6 is the average high school grade-point average, based on a 4.0 scale
- 78 percent are Kentucky residents
- 22 percent are from out of state
- 12 foreign countries are represented
- Engineering, biology, business, education and nursing are the five most popular majors.

Jim Begany, vice provost for enrollment management and student success, said his enrollment team was pleased to see positive trends in overall growth, academic preparedness and diversity.

“The class is 5 percent larger than the previous year. Plus, the ACT scores and high school GPAs continue to tick upward,” said Begany. “Those are trends we like to see.”

As part of the university’s ongoing efforts to boost enrollment and improve college affordability, Begany said the university also launched a new need-based scholarship program specifically for Kentucky students. The grant provides $3,000 per academic year. UofL has awarded the grant to 670 students so far this year.

Further, a new scholarship for first-generation Kentucky college students kicked off this semester funded by a $2.5 million gift from Carl F. Pollard, the former Humana executive and Churchill Downs Inc. chairperson.
**Promise Zone: Summer Camp Inspires Students from High-Poverty Areas**

Eighteen-year-old freshmen Ryan Shackleford and Katherine Grace Whitaker live some 150 miles away from UofL’s Belknap Campus but both got an inside look at engineering careers during a summer camp at the J.B. Speed School of Engineering.

Shackleford, a graduate of Corbin High School, and Whitaker, who graduated from Whitley County High School, live in a high poverty area the federal government has declared a “Promise Zone.”

There are 22 Promise Zone communities nationwide in a mix that includes urban, rural and tribal areas. In Kentucky, the targeted areas include parts of Bell, Harlan, Letcher, Perry, Leslie, Clay, Whitley and Knox counties. The program seeks to improve quality of life and opportunities.

The engineering school hosted Promise Zone to broaden interest in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) careers. The 23 Promise Zone students who attended over the summer learned about 3D printing by designing and manufacturing small products at Speed’s Rapid Prototyping Center. They presented their products in a “Shark Tank”-like competition held on the final day of camp.

“It blew my mind what a 3D printer can do,” said Taylor Hall, 16, a Letcher County Central High School junior, whose team worked on a laser surgical cutting device that would replace the scalpel. “We had the best time ever. ... I would love to come here.”

Hall and his teammate, 15-year-old Logan Thornton of Somerset High School, said they also enjoyed the extracurricular visits to Shakespeare in the Park and Louisville Mega Cavern, along with living in a college dormitory for a week.

“There are many students in this part of the state that are very intelligent and have a lot of potential, but do not get the opportunities that students from larger areas may receive,” Shackleford said. “This camp gave students the opportunity to visit a large university outside of our local area.”

**Bendapudi Goes to Washington**

President Neeli Bendapudi spent a few days in Washington, D.C. this summer to meet with Kentucky’s congressional representatives. She discussed higher education issues with Representatives Andy Barr, James Comer, Brett Guthrie, Thomas Massie, Hal Rogers and John Yarmuth, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Senator Rand Paul.

**Feeling Good in Rural Kentucky**

Rural Americans often face a shortage of behavioral health practitioners.

To address this problem in Kentucky, UofL’s Institute for Sustainable Health and Optimal Aging is placing dozens of behavioral health students in rural areas throughout the state.

“Older adults are particularly affected by the lack of behavioral health practitioners,” said Anna Faul, the institute’s executive director. “Isolation and depression are common issues for older adults, with 20 percent of rural older adults diagnosed with depression. Furthermore, mobility limitations can make it difficult for older adults to drive long distances to get the care they need.”

A primary goal of the program is to increase the geriatrics behavioral health workforce in rural communities. Both undergraduate and graduate students across multiple disciplines are involved in the initiative.