

Good morning. Thank you all for being here in Comstock Hall or joining us remotely.

I want to thank Dean Theresa Reed and the School of Music for hosting us today in this beautiful facility. I also want to thank Louisville Brass for their performance today:

- Reese Land
- Alex Schwarz
- Brett Shuster
- Clinton McCanless

Great job. Thank you.

And thank you to Sonja Smith, our sign language interpreter today.

The Welcome Week video you just saw illustrates what the University of Louisville is all about.

We are indeed committed and proud of the outstanding scholarly and creative work of our faculty, the amazing excellence of our staff colleagues and the impact and influence of UofL as an anchor institution for the City of Louisville and the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

But at the center of our mission are our students.

Their returning to campus in full force is one of the top reasons that I truly love the opening of the academic year.

It very much reminds me of my feelings on New Year's Day – anticipation and excitement as we begin a new year full of promise and hope.

This is my first major campus-wide address as president, although there will be another one coming up pretty quickly.

In three weeks, the university will hold an inauguration ceremony to recognize the change in presidential leadership but more importantly the inauguration provides the opportunity for our community to come together and celebrate this great university.

I hope you will join me on Friday, Sept. 29, on the Oval for that celebration – a very special one - celebrating the beginnings of the University of Louisville in 1798.

But why are we here today? For this next thirty minutes or so I want to share some of the achievements of our faculty, staff and students ...

what we can look forward to this academic year ...

And to share with everyone what I heard from my over thirty listening sessions this past spring and how that has influenced my priorities as a new president.

To begin - I also want to announce -here and now – **that my first presidential priority** as a result of my listening tour during last semester – that so many of you participated in - will be to increase communication from me and from the university's senior leadership team.

This fall, I will begin holding regular town halls each semester that will be virtual and live-streamed so you all can more easily attend.

I will be joined in those town halls with leaders from various departments like academic affairs, research, finance, and human resources – to name a few – so they too can provide updates and answer questions regarding initiatives they are leading for the university. More details on the first town hall planned for early November will come later this semester.

And beginning this month I will be spending one week a month on the HSC Campus to learn more from our colleagues in the School of Medicine, School of Dentistry, School of Nursing and the School of Public Health and Information Sciences as well as the important partnership between the university and UofL Health.

So I hope to see many more of you either virtually or in person this fall semester.

But already, I have met many of you.

My husband, Trevor, and I want to thank each of you for welcoming us to this university, this great city of Louisville and Kentucky.

It has been seven months of firsts for the two of us – our first Derby, first commencement, first move-in, my first of many visits to meet with legislators,

business and community partners throughout the state and I so enjoyed my trips to Eastern and Western Kentucky.

We feel very much at home thanks to the kindness so many of you have shown us since we arrived here in February.

And let me be clear: We do consider this university, Louisville and Kentucky our home.

As I have said many, many times, I plan to finish my career here. In short: You are stuck with me. And I could not be more pleased, thrilled, and honored to be part of the University of Louisville community.

I want to take a moment now to recognize some successes from the past year. And there is **a lot** of success to celebrate.

First, I want to recognize those selected for the university's **Presidential Excellence Awards**. These are faculty and staff who were selected by their colleagues for their outstanding teaching, research and service to the university. Would any of these awardees in the audience please stand so we can celebrate you?

I also would like to give special recognition to one of our employees who celebrated 50 years of service to the university this year. **Rita Siegwald** of the Brandeis School of Law, would you please stand?

Thank you. Now let's talk about our incredible students. For the second straight year, UofL has set a record for First Year Enrollment, with more than 3,100 students entering the university. That tops by almost 200 students our previous record, which we set in 2022.

And the students on our campus continue to excel.

This year, UofL was home to the state's only Harry S. Truman Scholar, given to only 62 students nationally.

That student, **Klemmer Nicodemus**, of our JB Speed School of Engineering was joined by **Madeline Martinez** from our School of Nursing as they were selected for the highly competitive and very prestigious Goldwater Scholarship – two of only three students in Kentucky to receive this coveted award. Klemmer plans to study

the effects of climate change, while Madeline will research health disparities among minority populations.

And six of our graduates –

1. Madison Cicha
2. Eli Cooper
3. Christie Kremer
4. Bryan McLellan
5. Rawan Saleh
6. and Lucas Threlfall

-- won **Fulbright Awards** to teach and to conduct research abroad. UofL has been recognized with 168 Fulbrights since 2001, more than all of the other public universities in Kentucky ***combined***.

The University of Louisville is one of only approximately 146 U.S. institutions classified by the Carnegie Foundation as having R1 status – that recognition means that UofL is at the forefront of research and our faculty are dedicated to examining the greatest challenges of our time – such as climate change and population health – and creating new knowledge that benefits our nation and the world.

University of Louisville faculty are indeed conducting leading-edge internationally recognized research and receiving more funding than ever for these efforts. This past year, **research expenditures totaled \$229.5 million**, a record for the university.

**Dan Popa** of our Speed School of Engineering received a Department of Education grant to conduct **research in robotics**. His research will have applications in many areas, including elder care, health care, education and other areas in which humans interact with robots. Professor Popa was also recognized this year with Office of Research and Innovation's Catalyst Award for his leadership in building a culture of innovation at LARRI – UofL's Automation and Robotics Research Institute

The University of Louisville Christina Lee Brown Envirome Institute researchers **Brad Schuck, Rachel Keith, Joy Hart and Kandi Walker** released a study **showing the significant impact of workplace factors on human health**. The study is the

first to connect bio markers for chronic disease risk factors with the workplace environment.

In another study, Envirome researchers **led by Dr. Aruni Bhatnagar** teamed with colleagues from the University of Pennsylvania to conduct the first study that examines environmental factors **that lead to sleep deprivation** which is linked to heart disease, type 2 diabetes, depression and dementia.

And the U.S. Department of Commerce awarded the university \$13 million to launch the **Kentucky Manufacturing Extension Partnership**, which is expected to generate between \$150-\$200 million PER YEAR in economic growth across the Commonwealth.

And building on a discovery made while treating patients at UofL Health during the pandemic, UofL researchers led by **Dr. Jun Yan** received a \$6.1 million grant from the NIH to study and prevent immune system dysregulation responsible for acute respiratory distress, a leading cause of death among COVID-19 patients.

These are just a few of the examples of the outstanding research being conducted here at UofL and in partnership with UofL Health.

And **our outstanding staff** – our truly outstanding staff - continue to support both our faculty and our students in so many important ways and contribute greatly to the success of the university.

For example, our First-Year Experience Team, led by **Christy Metzger**, has undertaken several initiatives to support first-generation students succeed academically and cultivate their sense of belonging on campus.

**Chelsea Miceli** of the Trager Institute and Republic Bank Foundation Optimal Aging Clinic, led an important effort that embraced our entire university to provide food, medicine and other essentials for the victims of last year's devastating Eastern Kentucky floods.

Our Advising Staff throughout the university work constantly with our students – before they take their first class until they are ready to receive their diplomas. The counsel and support they provide is integral to our students' success.

And our Cultural and Equity Center staff provide a home base for so many students, offering support and programming so all our students – inclusive of all identities and demographics can thrive and reach their fullest potential.

And Trevor and I were thrilled to join our staff colleagues from Res Life and Housing, Student Affairs, and UofL PD – just to name a few – as we welcomed our new and returning students to campus during Welcome Week – it was incredible.

And this fall we welcomed two accomplished academic leaders to UofL as they begin their leadership as deans – **Dr. John Miller** at the Kent School of Social Work and Family Science and **Dr. Dana Touron** at the College of Arts and Sciences.

Finally, I was thrilled that **Brent Pieper** – after a national search that brought an incredible pool of candidates to consider – accepted my offer to join UofL as our VP of Advancement.

Brent has truly hit the ground running – and you have heard it here first – under his leadership we will be announcing a timeline for a comprehensive campaign for UofL – the first in over ten years – by the end of this academic year.

This list is of course woefully incomplete but for more about this past year of success for UofL and its people – including a report out on the amazing year our Department of Athletics AD Josh Heird, coaches, staff and student athletes had - I invite you to review my end of the year summary report that I presented to the Board of Trustees at their July meeting. It is housed on the Office of the President website.

I am also especially excited about some milestones coming up this year that indeed point to the great future of our university and our unwavering commitment to Louisville and the Commonwealth.

This October, we will cut the ribbon on our new **Center for Military Connected Students**. UofL is already recognized as one of the nation's very best universities for military connected students and their families.

But this center will lift up that work even more as we expand and enhance support services and a first rate gathering place, all aimed at continuing UofL's commitment to the individuals who serve our country or are veterans, and their loved ones.

And early this spring semester we will break ground on a new \$80 million building that will expand our J.B. **Speed School of Engineering** and anchor its position as a national leader in engineering education and research.

This new building will further UofL's position as a key talent pool provider to Kentucky and the nation and a source of innovation for its engineering and technology-based industries.

On behalf of **Dean Collins** and his faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community and business partners – we look forward to inviting our entire community to the groundbreaking ceremony later this spring for this incredible and important new academic building.

Continuing to look ahead - the work to advance the university's strategic plan - that was approved by the Trustees early this year - means that much planning and implementation has already taken place and will continue throughout the year.

I want to highlight three of these plans that will be especially impactful for our university.

### **First is the Undergraduate Success Plan –**

The Undergraduate Success Plan is a 5 year plan aimed at advancing inclusive student success and raising our 6-year undergraduate graduation rate from 62% to 70% - and importantly –

... eliminate completion gaps for several demographic groups including Pell eligible students who currently graduate at a rate approximately 10 percentage points below our overall student population.

Much work has already been done across the campus community to determine strategies and tactics to increase those rates.

In fact, best practices are already in place within various departments and colleges across the university.

But now the focus will be about completing a comprehensive and programmatic student success plan that includes the ENTIRE community, continue its implementation and realize those results – success for ALL UofL students.

This important initiative is being led by interim provost Gerry Bradley.

**Second is to complete and begin implementation of an Institutional Equity and Inclusion Plan** – spanning 5 years - that emphasizes our commitment to diversity and our commitment that all members of our community – inclusive of all identities, demographics, life experiences, abilities, and ideologies – will be welcomed and supported so they can thrive and reach their fullest potential.

As I shared with Trustees at the July Board meeting – this will be a relentless pursuit -

And have my commitment that not only will we be relentless, but we will also be transparent and accountable to our community and each other.

I also want to offer my deep and sincere gratitude to CODRE and COSW for their ongoing leadership and for laying the foundation from which this plan will be built.

I want to emphasize my great appreciation to the members of CODRE and the wider university community who worked tirelessly to develop the Cardinal Anti-Racism Agenda or CARA.

That work is so very important and fundamental to the Institutional Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and it WILL deeply inform its priorities.

During my listening tour this past spring it was very very clear that there has been much serious frustration across our university community about the lack of response to CARA – THIS PLAN - to be completed and its implementation begun this spring – is intended to correct that.

I want to thank **VP Lee Gill** for his leadership of this most important university-wide effort.

As I shared UofL is an R-1 Doctoral Institution with very high research activity and one of only 146 universities out of the 1580 that the Carnegie Foundation classifies to have that designation – or just 9%.

It is truly a designation that sets us apart and deeply impacts our mission, structure, curriculums, faculty, staff, students, and facilities.



It is also an outcome that requires intentional and ongoing investment and a purposeful and comprehensive strategy to be maintained and advanced.

At many meetings over the past 7 months I have talked about the AAU – the Association of American Universities – that is comprised of our nation’s 71 leading research universities – and how we might use them as a tremendous benchmark to inform efforts as we determine what actions and what investments must be made to continuously improve our research enterprise.

This upcoming year Executive Vice President Kevin Gardner will be leading a university-wide effort to address this priority via **creating and beginning the implementation of a 5 Year Research, Scholarship and Creative Activity Plan.**

As a university... We have a lot to be proud of and have made much progress that needs to continue.

But we are also facing some serious challenges

Within our university community, there is low morale especially amongst our staff colleagues, a lack of trust in leadership often exacerbated by instability in key positions and the lack of a long-term commitment and accountability. The compensation study was pointed to and asked about numerous times throughout my listening tour by many staff members but also by faculty.

If we look externally - within our nation – by some – the value of a liberal arts education – in fact the value of a college degree is being questioned,

In fact in today’s New York Times, it was reported that the percentage of young adults who said a college degree was very important fell to 41 percent from 74 percent just a decade ago.

One of the reasons for that decline is the cost of college is increasingly being labeled too high but calls to further reduce state support for higher education continue.

None of these challenges -internal or external - are easy to respond to or solve. But I am confident that working together as a university community we can indeed make progress – significant progress - in addressing them.

When I arrived on campus seven months ago, I promised to have open eyes and fresh ears, to learn more about our campus community and its culture before making any decisions.

I promised to hold a series of listening sessions to help familiarize myself with the UofL community, and I asked you to give me a gift – the gift of your experience at the university, your concerns, your thoughts and your ideas on what I needed to know more about.

I held more than 40 sessions – about twice what I had originally planned – because they were so beneficial to me and because I wanted to make sure that each of you had the opportunity to share.

More than 1,200 people – students, staff, faculty, alumni, donors, business and community partners, legislative leaders in Frankfort and DC – participated in those sessions.

This is what I heard:

- There is an overwhelming **sense of pride** and great love for this institution. Time and again, I heard from folks who couldn't wait to tell me what a difference UofL made in their lives and the lives of their families and friends. This came from students, faculty, staff and particularly from alumni and community members. Many of our staff and faculty colleagues proudly shared that their partner and their child sometimes more than one child had a UofL undergraduate or graduate degree.

Many from our community shared that their family was a Cardinal family for many generations and across many family members – sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, grandparents and of course children. Love and loyalty to this university was a strong bond for everyone.

- You believe – as do I – that this university is underrated and underappreciated by many on and off campus. You understand the university's importance, and you wish more people got that message. In short, you believe **we don't do a good enough job sharing our story** not only with our neighbors in Louisville and the Commonwealth, but on a national level. I can tell you that our national reputation is better than most of you think. But we need to do more and retell the contemporary 2023

story of UofL – not the small commuter school from 1970 – but a research powerhouse, with outstanding degree programs and student life, and Athletics that is second to none, that deeply impacts the city of Louisville, Kentucky and our nation.

- You made sure to tell me that, in so many ways – too many ways, **UofL is stuck in the past**. You said we dwell too much on previous scandals, financial woes, and lack of commitment from past administrations. And that pulls us back – time and time again - from the further greatness we can achieve.
- You shared that we have not invested properly in our faculty and staff or our infrastructure – like classroom and laboratory equipment and IT systems and tools – as well as facilities. Certainly not enough to advance our status as a premier metropolitan research university. You shared that you know that the university until just recently was under serious financial challenges – just 4 years ago with less than 30 days cash on hand. But you shared we need – desperately need - a significant and continued effort – not a start and stop effort – a plan that is transparent to renew investment into UofL and its people. You shared you knew this would not be easy – not at all easy – but we need to do it and start now.
- And this is probably the most common concern I heard: You feel that the **culture of decentralization** at UofL has led to redundancy and inefficiency, confusion over roles and responsibilities, at times overwhelming bureaucracy and unresponsiveness, poor communication, inequity in compensation and, in many many cases, poor or avoidance of decision making. Due to this decentralization everything is exceptional – everything is an exception. This means that folks said they needed to talk to three people to get something done and often got three different answers to their questions. It is especially exhausting for our staff as they try so very hard to do excellent work to support faculty and students.

I have shared those concerns widely with my leadership team and I hope you have already heard from me commitments – **my first four presidential priorities** - that I have spoken of today.

The first priority is to vastly improve communication on our campus and trust within our community,

The second priority is to significantly enhance our research and innovation enterprise,

The third priority is to focus relentlessly on advancing inclusion and institutional equity so that all members of our community can thrive and reach their fullest potential, and

The fourth priority is realize student success inclusive of all our students

But there are **four more presidential priorities** that I wish to share -

As I noted earlier, the concern I heard most often in listening sessions – from staff, faculty, and students – emphasized our decentralized culture and inefficient use of resources in our day-to-day business practices.

In short, we had no consistent and easy to use university systems in several key areas.

UofL is a very decentralized institution – the most decentralized university I’ve seen. Units operate independent of one another, and that leads to significant confusion among our faculty, staff and students. The processes in one unit may be markedly different than the processes in another.

By standardizing and in some cases centralizing key systems and processes across the university we can eliminate frustration, improve efficiency and further ensure quality outcomes.

The two areas that kept coming up as areas of opportunity during my listening tour were procurement and pre and post grant support.

In the listening sessions folks offered that they knew that the people in these areas were working hard and were very helpful, but they seemed to be seriously

hampered by confusing processes, and often did not have the technology tools or the staffing they needed to do their job.

This leads me to my fifth presidential priority – to establish ‘systemness’ to support critical and common university-wide business processes. This will be a joint effort by CFO Dan Durbin, Interim CIO Brad Anderson and EVP Kevin Gardner to achieve.

In my sessions, as I shared, I heard great passion for the university.

Many of our colleagues remarked on its rich history and cited many points of pride that have made UofL stand out through the years. But the university has grown and evolved.

We are no longer a commuter school, instead we are a vibrant, R1 university with international impact and influence, an anchor institution for Louisville and Kentucky, and renown for our excellence in collegiate athletics.

It is time to retell this contemporary story of the University of Louisville and how it matters to our city, our commonwealth, our nation and the world.

This sixth priority – to retell this remarkable 2023 contemporary story of our great university and in doing so positively impact its reputation and rankings will be led by VP John Drees and his team in OCM.

As we know UofL is one of only about 80 universities nationwide to hold both Carnegie R1 and Community-Engaged University designation. This is a great source of pride and distinction for our university.

UofL currently partners with hundreds of organizations – within the City of Louisville and throughout the Commonwealth - including more than 140 in our Signature Partnership footprint of West Louisville.

But often our efforts are scattered and could be more effective if they were more intentionally coordinated. We have expertise and skills that not just anyone can provide. We need to continue to seek opportunities and community needs, and then focus our efforts on those areas where we can make the most impact.

For example access to quality health care is not just a serious concern for the citizens of some Louisville neighborhoods but also with families from communities in Harlan and Clay counties – that I visited with earlier this summer.

This effort – the seventh presidential priority - to create a coordinated community engagement plan that lifts up, connects and further supports the impact of our current efforts will be led by VP Douglas Craddock and will be foundational to the university's application for recertification as a Carnegie Community Engaged Institution in 2024.

Finally, we need to successfully complete the implementation of the compensation study for staff and for faculty.

In the past few weeks since the results and actions from the initial phase of the Staff Compensation Study were announced I have heard from many of our colleagues as well as Staff Senate about their frustration and distress about the study's results.

I have shared via emails to the campus community to remind ourselves – but not to make excuses - that the compensation study was the very first time the university conducted a review and formalization of jobs descriptions, a review and creation of market-based competitive wage structures, and the establishment of career laddering pathways. It was indeed a mammoth and a pioneering task.

As part of the initial phase of the Staff Compensation study just completed, job description templates were created for all staff positions, a set of comparative universities was used to develop market-based pay ranges for those positions, and pay adjustments were made to correct the salaries for folks that were indeed below the pay range minimum of 80% of market median, equity concerns that were identified, as well as salary compression that resulted from these two prior actions.

In total on July 1 about 20% of our staff colleagues received a salary increase due to those actions and - university-wide - staff compensation is at approximately 91% of market median.

But I have heard from many during the listening tour and from Staff Senate in the past few weeks, great concern about what issues were not addressed in this initial phase and how these first set of actions actually negatively impacted some of our staff colleagues.

Two concerns were especially highlighted. I heard from many that despite years of service - often more than 7 or 10 years - in their current role - coupled with good performance reviews each year, that their salaries were still below the market median.

As I shared addressing that issue was never part of the initial phase of the compensation study. I know that is very hard for those affected to hear – but it is unfortunately the truth.

The second concern involved non-exempt employees whose staff colleagues were adjusted upwards when the university adopted the \$15 minimum wage – but as they were making more than \$15/hr their salary remained unaffected.

Just a few weeks ago in an all-campus email I promised that the university would issue a plan to address those concerns by October 1 and I remain firmly committed to that deadline.

Despite how we got here, addressing these concerns is now MY responsibility – I want to make that clear.

I also want to make sure that I don't create unrealistic expectations as to what corrective action may result. In the past few weeks and during the listening sessions I learned from many that is unfortunately what has happened with regard to the compensation study in the past.

To be clear I take this situation very seriously and am very much involved in determining a solution to it.

I also want to remind everyone that the training of supervisors with regard to the compensation study is underway and planned for completion this semester and that an improved communications plan and micro site for the staff as well as the faculty compensation study underway will be launched in mid-October.

I am committed to ensuring transparent inclusive and complete communications regarding both of these important efforts going forward and I appreciate the patience of everyone as we prepare to do just that.

The compensation study – whose goal is to create and implement a market-based competitively positioned compensation program for UofL faculty and staff – is my final and eighth presidential priority.

I hope that you take away from my remarks that I did not just listen but heard from many of you during my listening sessions. And that I am committed to these eight presidential priorities. I also know and hope that we share the understanding that these priorities will not be realized in a day, a week, or even a year. But we will make progress – serious progress – and that I will make sure to update our community regularly and with transparency regarding that progress.

I also hope that you take away from my remarks here today that this is indeed one of the greatest universities in the nation and has created tremendous opportunity for thousands of students through the transformative education UofL offers,

this university is about leading-edge discovery and creating new knowledge that addresses the greatest challenges facing our nation and our time,

and that the City of Louisville and the Commonwealth of Kentucky and their communities have been touched by our university in so many ways – UofL graduates are our teachers, police officers, doctors, legislative leaders, entrepreneurs, pastors, engineers, accountants, artists, and farmers - our neighbors.

UofL with 140,000 alumni - with 22,000 students and - with UofL Health the largest employer in the largest city in Kentucky – indeed matters and has and will continue to make a difference in the lives of so very many.

I am blessed to serve this great university and its people. There is much to be proud of here at UofL and – working together - there is indeed further greatness in our future.

Thank you for all you do to support our students and each other. Thank you for welcoming Trevor and me so warmly.



Thank you for your support – it means much to me - and thank you for sharing this morning with me.

**Go Cards!**