



# THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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Dear Friends,

Summertime at UofL always allows for celebration and reflection, but this year especially gave us reason for both. Our spring semester ended on a historic note with commencement ceremonies for 2020 and 2021 graduates conducted outdoors at Cardinal Stadium. Because last year's ceremonies were virtual, we promised 2020 graduates they could have their moment to shine when it was safe to do so. Getting to personally congratulate all of these students and their families was such a wonderful experience. It was a powerful reminder of the Cardinal spirit and that we are a vital ecosystem that creates thriving futures for students, the community and society.

As I said last year when the pandemic first took its grip, these are times that certainly have and will continue to challenge us, change us and define us. Despite the uncertainties of this past year, our students continue to earn national and international awards, scholarships and recognition. Our faculty made a tremendous impact through their teaching, research and community engagement. And our staff provided the leadership, support and encouragement necessary to move the institution forward. You can get a glimpse of the changes and challenges our campus community overcame this past year by watching [this video](#). At every level, I'm so proud of how Cardinals have demonstrated our principles of Agility, Leadership and Community of Care.

I know that you and your families have undoubtedly been impacted by the difficulties of this past year. Thank you for your crucial, ongoing support and assistance to UofL. We could not have succeeded during such an unprecedented year without you. Go Cards!



Neeli Bendapudi  
President, University of Louisville



## COMMENCEMENT CEREMONIES BRING BACK A SENSE OF NORMALITY

During three outdoor ceremonies over two days, approximately 2,400 graduates crossed the stage for the first in-person commencement ceremonies since 2019. The ceremonies, which took place on May 7 and May 8, were held for the first time at Cardinal Stadium. They included not only Spring 2021 graduates but members of the class of 2020, whose commencement exercises had been canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each graduate was allowed to invite eight guests, whose seats were scattered around the stadium to allow for recommended physical distancing. Graduates sat on the field in chairs set 6 feet apart.

Planning for the outdoor ceremonies began in January. The Commencement Planning Committee met weekly to ensure the ceremonies would celebrate achievements while adhering to safety standards recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. All plans were approved by Governor Beshear's office.

Although there was no student procession and no handshakes were allowed, graduates and their guests cheered, waved and took photographs to mark the occasion. Graduates were individually recognized as they walked across the stage, many flashing their "Ls" and waving at the livestream camera that allowed the ceremonies to be broadcast around the world on UofL's YouTube channel.



## UofL JUNIOR IS KENTUCKY'S ONLY 2021 TRUMAN SCHOLAR

University of Louisville junior Lexi Raikes was the only recipient of the Harry S. Truman Scholarship for the commonwealth of Kentucky in 2021. The award, valued at \$30,000, is given to only 62 U.S. college students annually. It is the premier graduate scholarship for aspiring public service leaders in the United States.

Fourteen UofL students have been Truman Scholars since 1977, the year the national program was launched. The last UofL student to win a Truman Scholar was in 2017. There were more than 800 applicants for this year's Truman Scholarship from more than 300 colleges and universities. Raikes was announced as one of the winners on April 14, 2021; I was fortunate to share this news with her over a video call. Lexi represents the best of the Cardinal Spirit. She has persevered through an extremely challenging year to earn this prestigious scholarship.

Raikes, a Campbellsville, Kentucky, native, plans to use the scholarship toward her goal of attending Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., to earn a law degree and a Master's of Science in Georgetown's Addiction Policy and Practice program.



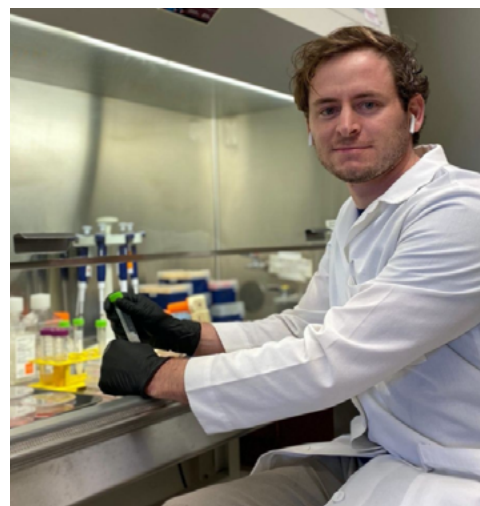
## STUDENT CANCER TECH STARTUP WINS INAUGURAL INNOVATION COMPETITION

A University of Louisville student startup aimed at fighting cancer has won the inaugural CardStart innovation competition. CardStart is a two-pronged, student-led event. In fall 2020, teams spent a whirlwind virtual weekend finding innovative solutions to health care problems and building startups around them.

CardStart is backed by the UofL Office of Research and Innovation, Forcht Center for Entrepreneurship, the Louisville Healthcare CEO Council and the XLerator Network, an NIGMS-funded partnership that expands access and accelerates technology commercialization support to universities throughout the Southeast IDEa state region, which includes Kentucky, West

Virginia, South Carolina, Arkansas, Mississippi and Louisiana.

The winning startup was MAC-BIO, led by MD/PhD student Jordan Noe. The startup is developing a new cell-based therapy for the treatment of aggressive solid tumors. For winning the CardStart student innovation challenge, Noe will receive \$1,500 to help him get his startup off the ground and his technology to market. "CardStart has been an amazing experience in refining MAC-BIO's business pitch and vision as well as helping us connect with potential mentors and investors," Noe said. "CardStart's support will be instrumental in helping us further advance our technology through our current pre-clinical studies."



## DRIVING PROGRESS THROUGH OUR INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS



When UofL developed reusable N95 masks to increase personal protective equipment at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, our researchers partnered with

Advanced Energy Materials (ADEM), to develop and patent the technology to create the masks, and AdvhiQ, which manufactured and sold the finished products right on UofL's Belknap campus. This partnership is a shining example of how ideas and research at our university, met with industry capability, propel progress and improve lives here and beyond. There are many more examples of this important synergy happening at UofL.

- UofL researchers are teaming up with iTolerance Inc. to discover ways to help people with Type-1 diabetes stay off immunosuppressants and Senda Biosciences to deliver medicine in a less toxic way — by using the natural lipids in plants such as grapefruit and ginger.
- A partnership with startup BioProducts allowed researchers to develop technology that uses spent distillers' grains, corn and waste wood to create a low-calorie sugar substitute.
- UofL researchers and partners reimaged the newspaper printing press by using the same roll-to-roll technology to produce thin film solar cells and reduce the cost of solar energy.
- UofL researchers joined forces with Kentucky Advanced Materials Manufacturing (KAMM) to mine diamonds above ground. KAMM's Louisville facility is the foundation of a billion-dollar worldwide effort to grow large diamond stones, and one of only a handful of global facilities in this highly advanced field.
- UofL teamed up with IBM to create the IBM Skills Academy, which provides curriculum and educational tools concentrated on fast-growing technology areas, placing students at the forefront of the future workforce and boosting economic development in the area.

These collaborations and more help transform Louisville into a hub of innovation, inviting more industry leaders to invest in our community and boost the local economy.

## LORI STEWART GONZALEZ, UofL'S NEW PROVOST

On April 1, Lori Stewart Gonzalez, PhD, officially assumed her new role as executive vice president and university provost, overseeing UofL's undergraduate, graduate and professional education. A Kentucky native with experience in leading academic affairs on both traditional college campuses and health sciences centers, Gonzalez was previously vice chancellor for academic, faculty and student affairs at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center in Memphis. She succeeds Beth A. Boehm, who served as provost since 2018 and has returned to her role as dean of the Graduate School.

Gonzalez is currently focused on getting university members back on campus, safely, over the summer and by the fall as the pandemic lingers. She also wants to help the campus community rebuild its sense of belonging. For the long-term, Gonzalez wants to partner with the campus community on deciding how we will define and measure being a premier metropolitan university.

Reporting directly to the Office of the President, Gonzalez works closely with deans, vice presidents and other administrative officials to advance the teaching, research and service missions of the university. Dr. Gonzalez boasts an impressive resume of strong academic qualifications and administrative experience in the liberal arts and sciences and the health sciences. She brings high energy, a devotion to students, faculty and staff and a strong commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.



## MARINE CORPS VETERAN AND MOM OF THREE KEEPS A PROMISE TO HERSELF AS A UofL GRADUATE

Christel Blocker made a promise to herself that she would cross the stage at her college graduation before she turned 40. On May 8, the selfless veteran and mom of three did just that.

The Louisville native joined the United States Marine Corps directly upon graduating high school and two years later Blocker became a mom in 2004. Shortly after her son, Cameron, was born, he was diagnosed with autism and epilepsy, which inspired her to begin advocating for children and adults with autism and disabilities.

Throughout the years, the goal of ultimately getting a college education remained in her mind. Blocker took classes here and there, sprinkling them in where she could, but it wasn't until she got a job as a Program Assistant for Academic Services at UofL's Thorntons Academic Center of Excellence that she really made it a top priority. After realizing she was eligible to take six credit hours per semester at no cost through UofL's tuition remission program for employees, in January of 2020, she set out to obtain her degree.

She started building upon the courses she'd sporadically taken over the years to work toward a bachelor of Science in Organizational Leadership. Full of ambition and a realization that she could meet her self-imposed deadline of earning a degree before 40, Blocker doubled and even tripled up on her course load. With a busy schedule and lofty goals, UofL's online learning options were just what the working mom needed. Just 16 months after beginning her coursework, Blocker became a first-generation graduate and a proud member of the Dean's List.

