



Texas A&M University

State of the University Address

October 25, 2017

Howdy.

Thank you Abbey for sharing your wonderful story about you, your grandfather and Texas A&M.

Dr. Dethloff, we are so happy that you, Myrtle Ann and family can be with us today. We appreciate your contributions to Texas A&M, your service, your great scholarship on history ranging from pre-Columbian agriculture to NASA; and the extraordinary job you did in writing about the first 100 years of this great university – in two volumes, I might add!

As importantly, we thank you for your role in Abbey's decision to come to Texas A&M in her studies in biomedical engineering – class of 2021!

Reading your book on the centennial taught me about my predecessors – the challenges and opportunities they faced in building the foundation for a great university; the humor, insight, challenges and bold visions that they brought to their respectful roles.

Abbey, the fact that you are both a Presidential Scholar recipient and Henry's granddaughter is a happy coincidence! I know that you will do great things in life. We're proud to have you here at A&M.

The A&M family legacy of Henry, Abbey and her parents is something that many faculty, staff and students share. Whether you are part of a family lineage of people working or studying here, or you are brand new to Texas A&M, I hope that you feel that spirit of connection, our core values and the commitment to the success of each other that makes this university truly special.

2017 Achievements

Colleagues, Students, and Special Guests – I am happy to report today that the state of the university is strong. We have witnessed a tangible momentum these last 12 months, one that is set to continue well into the future. I share this not as my biased opinion but as fact.

Key performance indicators are up on nearly all counts. This has been a highly productive year to be sure – and not without challenges which I will also discuss today.

The mission of Texas A&M University is:

- to provide the highest quality programs that spark discovery, development, communication and application of knowledge in a wide range of fields;
- to develop new understandings through research and creativity;
- to maintain freedom of inquiry and an intellectual environment that nurtures the human mind and spirit;
- to prepare students to assume roles in leadership, responsibility and service to society; and
- to welcome and seek to serve all humankind from all backgrounds and walks of life.

This mission as outlined is both our benchmark and our aspiration. I want to discuss today areas in which we are hitting that mark in the face of challenges.

We know that rankings are the bane of our existence and thoroughly discounted – *unless* they are in our favor, in which case they are wonderful!



To me, the significance of rankings is found not in a single source but in the larger picture seen by looking across results from reputable sources for common themes that emerge, progress made in key areas. This year, three positive cross-ranking themes emerged:

Cross-Ranking Themes

First – Our *overall rankings and brand recognition* are significantly improved. We moved into the top 25 public universities for the first time in U.S. News and World Report and top 20 in Wall Street Journal. Our movement in these ranking is a product of movement in critical areas that reflect the genuine quality of the education we deliver and the research we do. Your scholarly output has increased and your work is being published much more often, not only in the most impactful professional journals, but also more through tools like “The Conversation” which is both a media outlet as well as a channel to reach many more people. Through our first ever national branding campaign, we are reaching far more prospective faculty, staff and students and boosting overall awareness, which, in turn, is attracting highly productive partnerships and resources. And most importantly you are delivering valuable education to students – students who are graduating with jobs and serving the state, the nation and the world.

Second – *Student engagement* is at an all-time high. Recently, Wall Street Journal reporter Melissa Korn called to find out why and how Texas A&M jumped to number three overall in student engagement, a totally unique accomplishment in her experience. Student engagement measures the quality and frequency of impactful student interactions with faculty and other students, the effectiveness of teaching, students’ perception of the overall professional and personal benefit of their education, and whether students would recommend their school. I told her I believe it comes down to high-impact learning opportunities, a relentless focus on students and the student experience – despite being a research colossus – and an abiding heritage in selfless service. Students at A&M seek out ways to serve each other and humankind, and faculty seek to serve students. Selfless service is our heritage and our future.

The third takeaway across rankings overall is *return on investment*. This year we ranked in the top 10 in the nation for starting salaries and also in a longer 20-year return on investment in salaries. Reputable sources all over the country are telling the same story – and that story is good.

Last year we introduced three core pillars: Transformational Education, Discovery and Innovation, and Impact.

It is great to see colleges and divisions incorporating these three pillars in strategic planning efforts. Indeed, they make up a three-part Commitment to Excellence by which we operate a world-class university. All we do is – and must be – built first and foremost on standards of excellence.

Transformational Education

First is our commitment to Transformational Education for all students. Texas A&M is ripe with high-impact learning opportunities. Let’s look at where we stand this year:

- More than 6,000 students – the most of any public university in the United States and perhaps the world – participate in study or work abroad opportunities. I think that bears repeating. We have more students than any public university who participate in credit-bearing study or professional work abroad programs. That’s an increase of fully 8 percent each of the last two years. What wonderful high-impact learning experiences;
- We have more than 5,500 undergraduate students participating in research – an opportunity afforded only to graduate students at many universities and one that is totally life-changing for our students;
- We have seen a significant rise in academic incubators, entrepreneurship and innovation contests such as “Aggies Invent” that have real results and impact;
- Living learning communities have expanded and give students an opportunity to complement their in-class learning with intense subject matter interaction out of the classroom as well, wrapping their educational activities into every part of their lives;
- Other high-impact learning experiences – which perhaps are often taken for granted – are the more than 1,100 clubs and organizations on campus that provide ample opportunities for leadership development;
 - I believe these organizations provide us unique opportunities to teach leadership in a much more intentional, systematic and self-conscious way, an opportunity we have not, to date, fully exploited, but which I will ask faculty to help us explore more thoroughly in the coming year.
- And of course faculty mentoring – that most special beyond-the-classroom connection that is appreciated for a lifetime. I can think of professors in my life whose impact continues to this day.

We are identifying and measuring these experiences and now know that four out of five – or 80 percent – of our students have two or more high-impact experiences during their college career. Our goal is to grow both the total percentage and number of high-impact experiences for students. We want 100 percent of our students to have two or more of high-impact experiences during their college career by 2020. We want 100 percent of our students to have three or more high-impact learning experiences by 2025. And we are getting there, fulfilling our mission of preparing students for lives of leadership and service. You are helping to facilitate these opportunities. Our students are benefiting.

Thank you for your contributions to this important part of our mission!

Discovery and Innovation

Discovery and Innovation is the second pillar in our focus on excellence. We have seen continued growth in research funding over the years. Funding agencies trust that their investment dollars are being put to work effectively at Texas A&M. The more we engage in discovery and innovation, the more others will invest in our ability to put these grants to good use. Research dollars grew last year from \$866 million to \$892 million. We are closing in on \$1 billion in research grants and many of our students, faculty and staff are responsible for that trajectory. Thank you!

There are thousands of examples since last year of how these dollars are being used to make great discoveries and facilitate life-changing innovations. Let me call out only a few examples of the thousands I could cite.

- In July, I read the news of Tom Patterson, himself a researcher and professor at UC San Diego School of Medicine, who was infected with lethal bacteria on a trip overseas. Antibiotics were useless. He later told a reporter that his pain and hallucinations were severe. "I thought I was on a spit, turning over and over, or in the desert drinking sand," he said. Desperate, researchers turned to our own Texas A&M Center for Phage Technology in the Department of Animal Science in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, which houses a library of bacteria-killing viruses. The concept of fighting infection with a virus seems counterintuitive, but our scientists created a custom infusion of bacteria-killing viruses known as bacteriophages and saved his life. We congratulate Dr. Jason Gill and the Texas A&M Center for Phage Technology on this work that continues today.
- This year we have completed work on The Human Clinical Research Facility within the College of Education and Human Development. This 21,000+ square-foot facility houses the Center for Translational Research in Aging and Longevity as well as the Exercise and Sport Nutrition Lab. Research with partners across colleges focuses on exercise, nutrition, metabolism, performance, rehabilitation and aging-related studies. This research and discovery changes lives.
- Another incredible discovery among so many worth mentioning was made by Texas A&M astronomer Dr. Jennifer Marshall, along with colleagues across the country, from the Department of Physics and Astronomy within the College of Science. Jennifer was among the first to witness the fiery aftermath of a recently detected burst of gravitational waves in her work in Chile. She personally recorded some of the initial images of the first confirmed explosion from two colliding neutron stars ever seen by astronomers.
- Professor Gabriel Eckstein of the Texas A&M School of Law presided over the 16th World Water Congress where experts collaborate on solutions in science and policy in global water management.

- Just this month, the contributions of Texas A&M biologist Dr. Paul Hardin regarding molecular mechanisms controlling circadian rhythm was reflected in the work of recipients of the first of the 2017 announced Nobel prizes;
- And Dr. Jamilia Blake, associate professor of psychology in the College of Liberal Arts, released conclusive research on the misperceptions that adults reflect in their treatment of young African-American girls. This story was shared widely and hopefully will influence a whole generation.
- While exploring a six-mile long underwater cave in Cozumel, Mexico, Texas A&M Galveston marine biologists Dr. Tom Iliffe and Dr. Pete van Hengstum discovered a rare, new crustacean remipede species.
- And at Texas A&M's Cyberphysical Systems Laboratory, Dr. P.R. Kumar and graduate students in the College of Engineering have applied the theory of dynamic watermarking of sensors in autonomous vehicles to prevent malicious hacks from happening. This can also help prevent collisions.
- Multi-disciplinary, cross-college work abounds, and I am so proud of professors' collaboration in this regard:
 - For example, the Texas A&M Superfund Research Center studies human health and environmental issues related to hazardous chemicals, with a goal of understanding the link between exposure and disease. Researchers represent the Colleges of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences, Medicine, Geoscience, Engineering, and Science, as well as the School of Public Health.
 - The Petroleum Ventures Program – announced last year – is off and running, helping business and engineering majors alike understand the full breadth of the oil and gas industry.
 - And of course EnMed and EnHealth announced last year is in full swing this year with new real estate in Houston recently acquired and a new CEO to lead it. More on this later.

I could go on about the thousands of discoveries and innovation underway at Texas A&M in the last year alone. It has been an extraordinary year of discovery and innovation and holds promise for even greater work in the coming year.

Impact

Impact is our third pillar. What we do matters. It is of consequence. What we do unravels mysteries for greater understanding and quality of life.

This was our first year to showcase Texas A&M at the South by Southwest Interactive Conference in Austin. More than 150,000 individuals from more than 90 countries, representing Fortune 500 companies, startups, academia and governments gathered in Austin in March. We were able to feature Texas A&M's work through thought leadership panels on topics such as academic incubators, the origins of the universe, and human biometrics. The College of Architecture hosted a visualization lab featuring the intersection of art and technology. We also featured 360-degree videos from around

the globe in a “24 Hours of Global Impact” series; no matter the time zone, there are always Aggies conducting impactful work.

Transformational Learning, Discovery and Innovation, and Impact – a commitment to excellence in all that we do.

Recruitment and Retention of Faculty

As I stressed last year – and reiterate this year – great faculty are the key to all of this. I promised more faculty recruitment which we have done and will continue to do. The sheer magnitude of top-notch talent joining the Aggie family is amazing. Professors, researchers and innovators want to be at Texas A&M to leverage resources and further their work.

New leaders like Provost Carol Fierke, who joined us last month. Dr. Fierke hit the ground running with new ideas for furthering existing programs. She brings great experience as a PI in biochemistry and an ability to listen and engage in dialogues about how we can best support faculty and unlock greater opportunities for enhancing Texas A&M. Carol welcome again!

Dr. Carrie Byington – Vice Chancellor for Health Sciences, Dean of the College of Medicine and Senior Vice President for the Health Science Center – joined us at the beginning of the year and has made great strides in her focus on military medicine, technology and greater access for rural populations. Dr. Byington was just elected into the National Academy of Medicine earlier this month and we are so very proud of her!

Former astronaut Col. Mike Fossum became the COO of Texas A&M University at Galveston and has been working hard to leverage the best-class work that we do there. With four on the faculty, I believe Texas A&M has more former astronauts than any other university in the United States: Col. Fossum, Nancy Jane Currie-Gregg, Bonnie Dunbar and Greg Chamitoff.

Another new recruit is Steve Cambone who joined Texas A&M thanks to Dean Kathy Banks to work on a larger cyber strategy and to help build the leaders of tomorrow in this vital field. Steve was the former head of intelligence at Department of Defense and brings a tremendous skillset to the role.

Andy Morriss changed roles, from being the Dean of the School of Law where he helped that school jump significantly in rankings, to becoming the first-ever dean of a new school – the School of Innovation, or I-School. The I-School’s charge is to find ways to help faculty and students alike connect their passions with others’ outside of their colleges or majors.

Finally, yet very importantly, two most helpful resources have been the Chancellor’s Research Initiative and the Governor’s University Research Initiative, relatively new programs that allow us to bring top-tier faculty – 17 in fact over the last 18 months.

We are excited about the latest addition of Dr. Roderic Pettigrew, the founding director of the National Institute of

Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering at NIH and a member of both the National Academy of Medicine and the National Academy of Engineering. Dr. Pettigrew will lead our new efforts in blending engineering and medicine with our EnMed and EnHealth programs in Houston.

We are grateful to Governor Abbott and Chancellor Sharp for these investments. These hires benefit all, and they arrive and stay because of the incredible faculty and scholarship that we enjoy here. Your work makes theirs better. They come to work with you. Thank you.

Initiatives

As I also made clear last year, recognizing and supporting our great faculty who are already here is absolutely critical as well. An initiative designed to do precisely that was the creation of the Presidential Impact Fellows program.

Under the rubric of that program, we designated 24 professors as Presidential Impact Fellows. Each fellow received the first of three annually recurring \$25,000 awards to accelerate learning, discovery and impact. The recipients were identified by their deans and confirmed by academic leadership.

One such recipient was Sam Brody, professor at Texas A&M University at Galveston, whose modeling software on flood zones foretold potential devastation that would unfortunately come true with Hurricane Harvey. Sam is now leading a group of professors and other specialists who are helping to develop strategies and policies that will “future-proof” Texas to reduce the damage from future storms.

The initiative we announced last year to better support our faculty in using technology to enhance the effectiveness and positive outcomes of our teaching and research has already borne fruit as well. The Teaching with Technology Conference took place in early March, the theme of which, “Activating Student Learning,” emphasized multi-disciplinary learning and inclusive teaching approaches that encourage student motivation. Next year this conference broadens to one of Transformational Teaching and Learning, led by Dr. Heather Wilkinson and Dr. John August. Nationally-known educators will join our very own outstanding scholars for this important event.

The Innovative Pedagogy Grant Program, also launched in 2017, provides grants to instructors and staff to learn how to skillfully intertwine technology into face-to-face, online or hybrid courses.

Thirty-four Principal Investigator awardees received grants in the spring and fall of this year with the goal of increasing student motivation, reducing attrition and incorporating modern pedagogy.

In McAllen, our programs in public health and nursing are well underway. Our first new degree – interdisciplinary engineering – is underway with 38 students. We have partnered with Chancellor Sharp, the city of McAllen and Hidalgo County to establish a new facility that will house the expansion of our degree programs and bring a little Aggie spirit to the Lower Rio Grande Valley, a growing area.

Our Qatar campus is growing as well. We are proud of the compelling research underway through grants awarded by the Qatar National Research Fund to include a solar-powered desalination process, a polymer-enhanced foam to improve oil recovery in Qatari reservoirs and a wearable device to detect low blood sugar.

In summary, we have:

- Enhanced hiring;
- Enhanced support of our professors;
- Enhanced support for our teaching mission;
- Enhanced quality and availability of high-impact learning experiences; and
- Significant restructuring of research support services.

All of these are opportunities we've identified over the past few years as those we must address and build on to enhance the foundations of excellence.

Overcoming Challenges

As we discuss achievements, it is vital to analyze the challenges we also have faced in the last year, lessons learned and how we fared.

An ongoing challenge is controversial speakers. Last year I released a white paper on freedom of expression. A month later, we had our first challenge, when a non-Aggie rented a room on campus for a controversial speaker whose views were antithetical to our core values. We allowed the speech to take place on December 6th. I am very grateful to our outstanding University Police Department and security for their thorough planning; to our faculty, staff and students for peaceful protests; and to the students who stepped forward to have a positive counter event on the same night at the same time called "Aggies United." That event included thousands of participants and earned the Anti-Defamation League's No. 1 "Most Inspirational Moment of 2016" designation.

Of course, we know that our work in diversity and inclusion must transcend these crisis moments and be present in our university day-to-day. There are pockets of best practice in this regard around the university. We need to consistently demonstrate these practices. The ACE awards celebration – for Accountability, Climate and Equity – is another wonderful recognition of the areas where we get it right.

We should be on the lookout for great work to nominate for this recognition. I hope you will consider attending this special event in the spring. While we look forward to announcing the new Vice President for Diversity for the university in the near future, it is and will still be the responsibility of every single one of us to demonstrate excellence in how we treat, welcome and engage others.

In August, as we know, a group announced that they would take their arguments to public space, by Rudder fountain, announcing in a news release on the same day as the Charlottesville violence, "Charlottesville Today. Texas A&M Tomorrow." After deep and thorough analysis, and based on demonstrable and actionable threats of violence, we cancelled the event. We will continue to be diligent in

guaranteeing the critical right to freedom of speech, as well as the safety of students, faculty, staff and the public.

Natural disasters were another challenge, as we all know. More than 45 percent – or 31,000 of our students – are from one of the 38 counties in Texas affected by Hurricane Harvey. We have 124 students from Puerto Rico as well. Hurricane Harvey delayed the start of the school year for the first time in our history. But what was extraordinary – truly unique to Texas A&M – was the amazing way in which students, faculty, staff and former students rallied to rescue, feed, comfort and love even strangers.

- We evacuated students from our Texas A&M University at Galveston campus to here. Students were housed at nearby apartments. Even Reveille made a visit to cheer their spirits.
- We took care of Houston Police Department horses and our entire university and Texas A&M System deployed to help.
- Our College of Medicine students staffed rescue centers to assist hundreds of evacuees around the clock.
- And Najah Khan – a third-year medical student – even delivered a baby during the storm in someone's home.
- Professors and students from our College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences worked tirelessly to receive and treat animals.
- Texas A&M-Galveston student Austin Seth jumped into his small boat and rescued dozens of people, one elderly couple and their dog live on national television.
- Professors offered their unique expertise to assist emergency responders and explain to the world what was happening and why. Looking at the analytics, amazingly the top eight professors quoted reached more than 125 million unique visitors across news outlets in the first 30 days following Hurricane Harvey.
- The Institute for Sustainable Communities and faculty associated with the Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center, The Texas Target Communities Program, and the Center for Texas Beaches and Shores proved extraordinarily helpful and will continue to play a central role not only in this recovery but globally.
- Students made us proud with their BTHO-Harvey campaign which raised thousands of dollars and collected truckloads of supplies.
- The Qatari Student Association (QSA) and Al-Sanna student organizations at our Texas A&M at Qatar campus organized a fundraiser to raise money for fellow Aggies in Texas.
- Student athletes wore a Hurricane logo to remind TV viewers to donate to the Red Cross in support of victims.
- The SEC donated \$100,000 and Aggies from all over the world donated funds to the University Disaster Relief Fund, disbursed via prepaid Visa cards to more than 300 individuals, some faculty and staff and mostly students so that they could buy food, cleaning supplies and books.
- Our financial aid office counseled students to help keep them in school despite their families losing their homes.

- And our own Chancellor Sharp agreed to take on a second massive job in leading the Governor's Commission to Rebuild Texas.

We faced this unexpected challenge with selfless service and resilience that impacted not only Aggies but also so many others in affected areas.

What affects Texas affects Aggies.

There will be many years of selfless service yet ahead to help recover from this terrible storm and we will face those challenges with the excellence in scholarship, service and heart that Aggies demonstrate day in and day out.

To our students, faculty, staff and families affected by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, we love you and will continue to support you in any way that we can.

We have faced challenges with respect to international students and the changing policies affecting them. Our international support office has helped guide students through these changes and I am proud that we continue to be a welcoming environment to our students from across the globe. I stress again that every student who is here is legitimately and appropriately here, and we will continue to do everything we possibly can to ensure that everyone receives the very best education and educational experience we can possibly give. Simply put, we are the Aggies, the Aggies are we!

Another challenge that we have faced is that our work has sometimes been mischaracterized and misunderstood. Make no mistake, we stand and will always stand for free inquiry and will support that as the very essence of this great university.

Another challenge is the value proposition for universities. We are showing daily how we create leaders for tomorrow through high-impact experiences for students, which will help them to serve and lead in life. We do so in highly efficient and effective ways, ensuring among the very highest return on investment in the nation for our students. We are beginning to tell that story more broadly, but we know we must do even better in the coming years, and we will.

The legislative session represented another challenge – a threat of massive cuts to our university. Of course, we understand the fiscal pressure under which our great legislature and Governor work. The demands on the public fiscal budget are enormous. But we are an investment line, not a budget item for the state. Support for higher education is vital to the future of this state, to our children, to our grandchildren. Support for higher education produces by far the best return on taxpayer dollars of any expenditure the state can possibly make. I reiterate, we are an investment, not a budget line. Happily, through the great work of our Chancellor, our government relations office, and most importantly, support from thousands of members of the incomparable Aggie Network, who called and wrote legislators about preserving funding for our university, we were able to educate and preserve most of our state funding. That does not mean we are flush with cash, however. The state still has not been able to get back to the funding levels

per FTE of 2008. But we are deeply grateful for what the state was able to do and for all our supporters who helped ensure that level of state support. We will continue to expand our efforts to demonstrate to our legislators and all our supporters that such support is vital to the state's future.

To recognize these challenges aloud as I am doing today is to celebrate our successes while recognizing gaps we still need to close.

Moving Forward

We have talked today about our three strategic pillars and our commitment to excellence. We touched upon but a few of the many accomplishments witnessed throughout the last year – accomplishments that include specific, exciting examples of discovery and innovation, and that all have meaningful impact upon the state, the nation and the world.

And now I would like to say a few words of gratitude:

Thank you to faculty who – as we have discussed – are leading scholars, researchers, effective teachers and caring mentors;

Thank you to our staff members who support this great university and all that it stands for in student services, human resources, financial stewardship, facilities management and reputational enhancement;

Thank you Chancellor John Sharp whose robust leadership for the System and Agencies and whose support for this university is unwavering;

I would like to thank members of the Board of Regents who help us set vision, measure delivery and demonstrate accountability;

I thank Governor Abbott for his leadership and support of our institution, including the Governor's University Research Initiative that helped fund faculty;

And I also want to thank our congressional delegation who help us own our seat at the table nationally.

Lead by Example

The affiliate organizations – The Association of Former Students, the Texas A&M Foundation, The 12th Man Foundation, and The Bush Presidential Library Foundation are incredible. Over the last year The Texas A&M Foundation had a record return on investment in managing a \$1.5 billion endowment. And we are well on our way at \$2.73 billion to meeting our goal of \$4 billion raised by 2020 in our "Lead by Example" campaign.

In two days, I will speak to a group of more than 500 advisory board members who serve across our great university to update them as well on the state of the university and to thank them for their invaluable counsel. These are people who dedicate their time and their hearts to helping this university continue to raise the bar on excellence and we appreciate their commitment.

We are grateful to people like Lowry Mays, Jon Hagler and the late Artie McFerrin and their families who made significant investments again this year in this great university – in

buildings and in programs, faculty chairs, and student scholarships. Without their support and that of so many others, it would not be possible to be where we are today.

While I am in a spirit of gratitude, I think it fitting to also thank the Corps of Cadets – the Keepers of the Spirit – for the tradition and advancement in leadership training, improvement in grades and service that they contribute now and always.

2018 Initiatives

The future at Texas A&M is bright!

The physical space in which we conduct our critical work is expanding in new buildings underway such as the Zachry building which is state-of-the-art for furthering excellence in learning and discovery.

Thanks to support from the Texas A&M University System and the Permanent University Fund and our extraordinary former students and friends, we are growing our academic excellence in both scholarship and physical space. This includes another 5.5 acres to build out our capabilities with EnMed and EnHealth. We have already broken ground for the Music Activities Center, as well as completed a total renovation of the corps dorms, six years ahead of schedule.

The Student Services Building is underway in a great central location for students on campus. The new Vet Med building has been completed, allowing us to expand the size of our veterinarian class for the first time in years in order to meet the growing demand around the state and nation. New research buildings have been brought to completion at AgriLife, as well work begun on The Gardens Project, a beautiful outdoor teaching and research space. We have also broken ground on a new classroom facility, the first in many years devoted solely to expanding our classroom inventory. Our national champion men's track team will soon have a new state-of-the-art facility, as well as our softball team.

We just finished the campus master plan, working with TTI to find ways to reduce vehicular traffic to make our campus more walkable and with more green space. Campus architect Lilia Gonzales has injected new ideas that blend beauty with functionality, honoring our past while bringing us into the future. I truly view the campus layout itself as a laboratory – academic movement and physical movement – as we move into the future.

Growth is a topic of conversation and one which I want to meet head on. Growth has been dramatic and, even as we work to pause our growth, we have been defeated by a startling, indeed unprecedented and unpredicted, increase in our yield rate for admissions offers.

We must grapple much more intentionally with that growth to ensure our resources match our growth, so we can continue to provide the quality of education our students so richly deserve. We will soon launch a task force made up of faculty, staff and students to study growth on this campus. Undoubtedly, we will need to add more faculty and more student support services, as well as more classrooms and laboratories, to accommodate growth and ensure that class

loads and sizes remain on par with the academic goals and engagement we want to continue at A&M.

In 2020, we will again measure ourselves against the bold ideas that visionary thinkers laid out in 1998. We have also embarked upon a Vision 2030 endeavor that is both aspirational and achievable and that involves faculty, staff and students in the process.

But today, as another concrete step to build on our foundation of excellence and continue to propel our university to the very highest ranks, we want to announce an initiative designed to ensure that our focus on excellence remains the centerpiece of all we do and that we explore opportunities for excellence across the broad range of all our activities.

School of Innovation

To further enhance our focus on innovation, creativity and excellence, we are delighted to formally announce the creation of the School of Innovation, or I-School.

We have some of the most innovative, creative, and intelligent students in the world here at Texas A&M. Through various programs in every college across our campuses, we see how their talents are put to use on important problems. They are so good, that we want to unleash that creativity and energy on even more problems, and so we've created our School of Innovation in part to do just that. We've asked the I-School to look at how we can make it possible for people everywhere to bring problems that need solutions to Texas A&M, and have our students and faculty take the lead in finding those solutions. We want Texas A&M to be the place where the world comes for help to solve its problems.

To do that, we've asked the I-School to focus on creating opportunities for student-led problem solving. Aggies are leaders and Aggies are innovators – it's in our DNA. We want to tap into our students' and faculty's capacity to lead by example, to tackle real problems and provide real solutions to the community, our state and the world.

Why create a new school to do this? Because we need to make it somebody's job to work across disciplinary boundaries to multiply the impact of the amazing things students, faculty and staff already do around our campuses in every college, school and department. The I-School's charge is to find ways to help students connect their own passions with others', outside of their majors. In this way, the I-School becomes a force multiplier for the amazing things already happening at Texas A&M.

Much more to come as this school develops, but we are very excited about the work Dean Morriss has done even in the very short time he has been at the helm as he leads this exciting initiative.

We also want to ensure that our faculty remain at the absolute epicenter of helping this university define and achieve excellence in all our research and learning activities.

President's Excellence Fund

To that end, we are very excited to announce a 10-year, **\$100 million dollar President's Excellence Fund**. These will be cash award grants offered to faculty projects and will commence this December.

You will be happy to hear that we plan to break through the months-long "White Paper" bureaucracy and other hurdles in order to rapidly distribute these funds. We want faculty to get together from across disciplines throughout the university to unlock great ideas. The fund will be broken out into large grants of half a million to a million dollars or more and small grants, such as \$30,000 "T3 grants" which involve three professors from two or more colleges who have a great idea. Preference for T3 grants will be given to triads that include one junior faculty member.

Recipients of the grants will agree to participate in a President's Excellence Fund Seminar each September at which they will present on projects and progress.

Next steps include notification of online portals to make it easier for you to apply, as well as selection criteria. Should we get a large response, qualified applicants may be entered into a lottery for these rapid grants.

A letter from Provost Fierke will be distributed next week that details the application process. The process will be simple and we have every confidence the outcomes will be extraordinary.

We know that excellence does not come cheap, but we have every confidence that further turning loose the imagination, creativity and energy of this great faculty will take us places we can hardly imagine today. Frankly, I can't wait! And our \$100 million fund is only the down payment on this effort. As projects come to fruition, we look forward to working with you to build on this base, this commitment to excellence, to do even more.

Aspirations

In his book on Texas A&M 1876-1976, Henry Dethloff wrote about a 24-person "Committee on Aspirations" which was formed at the direction of then-President Rudder to explore four areas:

- 1) *What kind of graduate and citizen should Texas A&M seek to produce?*
- 2) *What is the mission of A&M College?*
- 3) *To what degree of academic excellence in research, instruction, and other services should faculty and staff aspire? and*
- 4) *What should be the scope and size of A&M by 1976?*

Each of these questions is relevant today. To what degree of academic excellence should we aspire is perhaps the most important question they asked. Keep in mind at the time – April 1961 – they asked this question two years before women or African-Americans were admitted to the university. There was no tenure policy for faculty in line with national guidelines. To be sure, we have come a long way. But I loved the title of their group "The Committee on Aspirations." Hope,

positivity, bold goals and aspirations have always been and remain today who we are. And I love the tradition – and a tradition it is – of always asking that question: to what degree of excellence do we aspire?

This has been a year of achievement – of great strides as a tier-one research university; of growth in reputation and rankings; in faculty and staff who mentor each other and students; and students who serve selflessly, as evidenced during Hurricane Harvey. But I know the best is yet to come.

Our Core Values

In conclusion, I want to highlight the single most important foundation of excellence: our core values. Our core values are timeless. They guide us in all we do. They are who we are.

I hope that the 50th and 150th president of this great university will be as passionate about these core values and their importance as I am, and may even conclude their State of the University address the same way I will.

Our core values unify us and truly set us apart from other institutions:

Respect. Excellence. Leadership. Loyalty. Integrity. Selfless Service.

Whenever in doubt, return to those values. Write them down and post them in your office or work space. Always keep them close to your heart and on your mind when making decisions small and large, and I know we will continue on this extraordinary journey of learning, discovery and excellence.

Thank you for all that you do for this great university.