



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

FALL ASSEMBLY 2023 | PRESIDENT'S REMARKS

Good morning!

It was so nice to see many of you at the Fun Run and Walk this morning on our beautiful Biddeford campus. This event, along with our "First Night" ceremony for new undergraduates, our white coat ceremonies, homecoming, our holiday lunches, and of course commencement, are among my favorite UNE traditions. Such traditions are important in connecting us to our students, with one another, and to our past as we look toward the future.

Before I begin my remarks in earnest, let's dispense with one piece of business. I'm pleased to announce that UNE will offer two gifted holidays over the winter break this year. We will be closed the full week of December 25, reopening on Tuesday, January 2, 2024. This will provide us with a continuous holiday celebration in which to enjoy some much-deserved time off.

Now, back to the importance of connecting our past to our future — this is the theme of my remarks this morning. We find ourselves at an inflection point, navigating the way from our humble past to our ambitious future. As you may have noted during the six years since I joined UNE, I normally have my sites set squarely on the future. I don't spend a lot of time looking backwards; however, sometimes it's important to pause briefly to reflect on where we've been as we chart our course forward.

When I arrived at UNE in the summer of 2017, one of my first tasks was to initiate a comprehensive strategic planning process. We spent the 2017-2018 academic year working together on developing our plan, with countless meetings and brainstorming sessions, and feedback on many drafts. I was pleased to have had such widespread participation by our faculty, professional staff, students, and trustees. The resulting five-year plan, *Our World, Our Future*, was approved by our Board of Trustees in November of 2018. We all agreed

that the plan should not collect dust on a shelf like so many such efforts do but rather should be a living roadmap, regularly updated as we made progress on specific initiatives and as new ones emerged.

And what a roadmap it's been! Our plan has served us well to guide our strategic work over the past five years. I'm so proud of what we've accomplished together, and I'm very grateful to each of you for the role you've played in our success.

Before I highlight a few of our achievements, it's important to ground the conversation in our history, and to appreciate just how young we really are as an institution. As you know, our University is the product of the merger of three precursor institutions – St. Francis College, the New England College of Osteopathic Medicine, and Westbrook College – each of which faced its own unique challenges. The UNE we know today only emerged on July 31, 1996, with the integration of Westbrook College. Although our roots go way back, all the way back to 1831 in fact, the modern UNE we know today is really only 27 years old. In human terms, it's like we're developmentally somewhere between an adolescent and young adult – officially of legal age, but with much more growth yet to come. We've emerged from our humble beginnings. We've grown rapidly to become Maine's largest private university. We've developed an identity and we've staked out ambitious plans, but we're still finding our way into full-fledged adulthood.

The past five years has been a remarkable period in our development. We've accomplished far too much for me to describe in detail here. Nevertheless, I'd like to share just a few highlights that demonstrate our innovative spirit and hard work.

As you know, our strategic plan consists of an articulation of our mission, vision, and values, along with six high-level priorities, with various initiatives following from each.

The first priority focuses on fostering **Exceptional Teaching and Learning**. We set ourselves the goal of reconsidering all aspects of our core mission of educating students. With the support of a grant from the Davis Education Foundation, we embarked on the difficult work of revising our undergraduate curriculum. This was a multi-year, faculty-led effort that drew on the talents and wisdom of the faculty from both undergraduate colleges. Our resulting new curriculum provides greater flexibility for each student to craft a unique, tailored path through the curriculum while also ensuring that they acquire the deep disciplinary knowledge and skills in their chosen area of study as well as the professional competencies and habits of mind to become lifelong learners to meet the challenges of our rapidly changing world.

The Davis Grant also supported our Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) in creating two new initiatives for the faculty: a Teacher Scholars Program and Faculty Learning Communities. Both of these programs are now mainstays of CETL's array of offerings to support adoption of new and innovative pedagogical approaches grounded in the evolving science of teaching and learning. Our adoption of new technologies and pedagogical innovations in the classroom was accelerated by the exigencies created by the pandemic.

Responding to complaints from both students and faculty about our Learning Management System, or LMS, our faculty partnered with the Provost's Office and the Office of Information Technology Services to stand up a new LMS, which has proven to be much better suited to serving our students.

We have also expanded our experiential learning opportunities outside the classroom. For example, we significantly upgraded and expanded our interprofessional simulation facilities and programming. We added more opportunities for students to participate in faculty-led research. We expanded our internship offerings. We formed new relationships, and deepened existing ones, with clinical partners for our health profession programs. And we have increased opportunities for students in our Office of Innovation and P.D. Merrill Makerspace to develop their creative ideas as far as they want to take them. In the four years we have participated in the Greenlight Maine College Edition business pitch competition, UNE student innovators have already had two first place finishes!

The plan's second priority focuses on Increased **Enrollment, Progress to Graduation, and Lifelong Learning**. Here, too, we've made great progress. As we've discussed many times, we live in a challenging time for higher education. Demographic changes, especially the steady decline in the number of college-bound high school graduates in the Northeast, make it difficult for all but the most selective of institutions just to maintain current levels of enrollment, much less to grow. Many of our peers have seen dramatic declines in their enrollments. Many have closed, and more will follow. Public and governmental skepticism about the value proposition of higher education has reached an historic high.

Against this backdrop, we've managed to hold our own and even to grow in some areas. Sure, we've seen enrollment declines in some programs, but we have been able to pivot to grow in other areas. Central to these efforts has been the development of new, market-aligned academic offerings, along with revisions to existing programs, that prepare students for strong career prospects. We've developed new undergraduate programs in criminology, aquaculture, special education, data science, accelerated nursing, among other areas. We've developed new graduate programs in areas such as aquaculture, nurse anesthesia, emergency management, and clinical anatomy. We've expanded our online offerings, including by adding stackable certificate programs and non-credit bearing credentials in areas like emergency management, health informatics, and online teaching – the kinds of offerings demanded by today's adult learners. We've embraced our undergraduate students who've not yet decided on an academic major by developing the "GUST," or Guided Undergraduate Studies, program.

While we have had a bustling Portland campus in the summer months due to our year-round graduate programs, the Biddeford campus has historically been quieter. Recognizing the great potential to grow our academic program footprint on the beautiful Biddeford campus throughout the summer, we launched a partnership between UNE Online and CAS to expand our summer course offerings, and the response has been remarkable. I'll elaborate on this effort in a few minutes.

Many of our graduate programs have also experienced unprecedented competition for students in recent years due to a proliferation of new programs across the country, and in many cases a declining national pool of applicants. While historically we did not need to invest in marketing our flagship programs in the health professions, that is no longer the case. We have therefore made significant investments in our graduate admissions office, and in collaboration with our Communications team, we have implemented a comprehensive array of new marketing, recruitment, and prospective student engagement strategies. We have also created attractive curriculum pathways that allow our undergraduate students to earn graduate degrees in an accelerated timeline.

We've also developed many programs to support our students once they arrive on campus. For example, we've completely reimaged and made significant investments in our various student success initiatives, from professional advising to tutoring to mental health counseling. We launched an innovative program in 2022 to support our first-generation students. We created a bridge orientation program to better support transfer students in our dental hygiene program. We have continued to refine our early alert system to identify at risk students. We made ongoing refinements to our first-year experience programs. We joined the Open Education Network, an alliance of colleges, universities, and other organizations working together to promote the use of open resources, thereby reducing textbook expenses for students.

Recognizing the importance of athletics to attracting and retaining students, we've launched several new athletic programs and constructed new facilities, including Blue Storm Stadium and Blue Bolt Field. Our student athletes routinely outperform our general student body academically and they tend to persist at a higher rate.

The third priority of our plan is **Focused Research and Scholarship**. From humble beginnings, UNE is now becoming a research powerhouse. Indeed, we are now ranked as the number one college or university in Maine with respect to NIH funding of biomedical research. We were awarded the second and third phases of UNE's first ever COBRE grant, meaning our COBRE program has now brought almost \$26 million in research funding to UNE and has resulted in over \$32 million in additional new research awards by UNE investigators. Our total research expenditures over the five years of the Strategic Plan have exceeded \$74 million. And we recently submitted a new COBRE proposal that has received a very promising initial review from the NIH.

Through the work of Professor Sri Mohan in pharmacy, UNE was awarded our first two patents, which focus on biomarker development.

And our scholarly accomplishments extend beyond biomedical research. Our social scientists and clinicians have also made significant scientific discoveries and professional innovations. And our humanities faculty have published numerous books and papers that have made national, and in some case international, headlines as they enlighten us about the human experience.

Our research growth led to a reclassification of UNE in 2018 by the Carnegie Foundation from a master's institution to a doctoral high research activity university (also known as "R2"). UNE was one of only ten institutions nationwide, and the only one in New England, to rise from the former category to the latter.

One thing that really stands out at UNE is the extent to which our research agenda includes students. Our most recent estimates are that a whopping 41% of UNE undergraduates participate in faculty-directed research, compared with an average of 23% at colleges nationwide. Unlike most research universities, in which undergraduate students rarely work closely with faculty investigators, our students work side-by-side with their faculty mentors in the lab, the field, and the clinic. Indeed, every active researcher at UNE has students working closely with them, something that can't be said by many of our peers. As just one example, our Center for Excellence in Public Health has not only brought in \$41.5 million dollars in extramural funding over the past five years, resulting in 51 peer-reviewed publications, but has involved 319 students over that period.

Our students are doing important and innovative work, ranging from optimizing the production and harvesting of kelp on our experimental aquaculture farm in Saco Bay, to designing biosensor applications for biomanufacturing, to understanding how children learn to read.

Working with our Business program, we've stood up the P.D. Merrill Makerspace and the associated Office of Innovation to support our students' entrepreneurial efforts. Based on the resounding success of these business-focused initiatives and our strong position in the market, the board just approved the creation of a Business College. At a time when other institutions of higher education are hunkering down, UNE continues to grow and invest in areas of opportunity.

Fostering **A Welcoming, Inclusive, and Vibrant Community** represents the fourth priority of our plan. One of the first things that struck me when I arrived at UNE was how warm and welcoming the community was to Lynn and me. I was likewise impressed by how supportive our students are of one another. While this aspect of our culture was already strong, we need to ensure that every member of our community, regardless of their identity or background, feels like they belong. This imperative is especially critical given the divisive times in which we live.

We've made much progress to foster and celebrate the diversity of our community. We've formed grass-roots Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) committees in each of our colleges and in many business units. We created the role of assistant provost for DEI to coordinate these various efforts and Shannon Zlotkowsky is doing amazing work in this role in collaboration with many DEI committees and other groups within the UNE community. This past winter, I became the first college or university president in Maine to sign on to the national CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion Coalition. Our Human Resources department recently partnered with the University Faculty Assembly's DEI committee to incorporate guidelines for recruiting diverse faculty and professional staff into our hiring policies and procedures. We've established new

affinity groups for students, including the Brothers of Color, a Muslim Student Association, and a Hillel Chapter, just to name a few. We've increased celebrations of international cultures through events like the new annual Culturefest. We've invested in a new space for the Cultural Exchange Lounge. Lynn and I have been honored to participate in student-led marches for Black Lives and for women's rights, and we have been proud to carry the UNE banner at Portland's Pride parades.

We've seen remarkable growth in the number of students from diverse backgrounds who have chosen to study at UNE. For on campus students, the percentage of students who identify as persons of color in relationship to total enrollment increased between 2018 and 2022, including for both undergraduate and graduate students. In 2018, 7% of our undergraduates self-identified as students of color, growing to 11% last fall.

While we focus on traditional aspects of diversity such as race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender orientation, and neurodiversity, our DEI efforts cast a broader net than most of our peers to include things like geographic, first-generation, and socioeconomic status. For example, over 30% of UNE undergraduate students are, like me, the first in their families to attend college. These students face many unique challenges. We've established programs, including things like a special, targeted orientation program for new first-generation students and their families, to support their success.

And importantly, we have committed ourselves to fostering one of the most important, and often neglected, forms of diversity on college campuses today: viewpoint diversity. As I've discussed in previous addresses to our community, the very essence of the academy requires that multiple perspectives to pressing questions and issues be on offer, and that these be discussed and debated through robust and civil discourse. Yet most colleges and universities are failing to uphold this most sacred of values, increasingly becoming monocultures of a kind of ideological orthodoxy. We've planted a flag as an institution that won't shy away from addressing the hard questions, doing so thoughtfully and constructively.

We established a series of webpages called the "Marketplace of Ideas" to advance this initiative. If you haven't visited these pages recently, I encourage you to do so. Meanwhile, Assistant Provost Shannon Zlotkowski and Director of Intercultural Engagement Andrea Paredes are facilitating listening circles with incoming students to introduce them to the practice of constructive discourse.

And we began the President's Forum program to bring speakers representing opposing sides of a timely issue together to have a moderated conversation with one another, and with members of our own community and the public. We've held events on topics such as gun control, the ethics of profiting from climate change, and policing in America. Our most recent event, held last spring, brought together two well respected scholars to discuss issues around transgender women competing on women's sports teams. I've been consistently so impressed by the engagement and participation of our students in these events.

You may remember that last year at this time I announced a new recognition to support these efforts: The President's Award for Constructive Discourse. Recall that one award will be given each year to a faculty member, and another to a member of the professional staff, who go out of their way to support constructive, thoughtful discourse on difficult or controversial topics. Each award comes with a \$1000 cash payment. I appreciate all those who responded to Provost Mahon's call for nominations in April. We received many worthy and impressive nominations. This morning, I'm happy to announce the inaugural recipients of these awards.

The faculty award goes to **Professor Andrew Rotondo**.

Andrew is an associate teaching professor of Philosophy in the College of Arts and Sciences. He is intentional and planful in encouraging thoughtful discourse in his classes. To quote a student who nominated him for this award, "in his Debating Ethics course, students are encouraged to challenge or defend ideas that they themselves do not hold. The class teaches students how to have intellectual conversations about current topics and most importantly, how to disagree with one another in a healthy way." Andrew also serves as the academic advisor to UNE's Philosophy Club, which he helped resuscitate in 2020 following a period of dormancy. Andrew and his fellow philosophy colleague Professor John Waterman model a lively debate for the club each semester on topics such as the ethics around voting, and the future of transhumanism. Andrew regularly attends the Center for Global Humanities lectures and encourages his students to join him there.

Please join me in congratulating Professor Rotondo for this honor.

The professional staff award is given to **Marc Ebenfield**.

In his role as director of our Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Marc has worked hard to provide faculty and professional staff with the tools needed to promote difficult topics both inside and outside the classroom. He has held multiple training sessions through the Center related to this theme. The announcement of one of these sessions nicely captured the spirit of the gatherings; I quote, "We aren't promising one-size-fits-all, quick fixes or perfect recipes, but we will create a respectful, collaborative, and critical learning space in which to develop more comfort with these topics." He also organized a document containing useful resources on how to promote constructive conversations on difficult topics. He is working on a foundation grant proposal to support additional efforts.

Please join me in congratulating Marc for his outstanding efforts to help both faculty and professional staff foster difficult conversations.

I'm grateful not just to Andrew and Marc, but to everyone else who is intentional about promoting viewpoint diversity and civil discourse at UNE. I already look forward to receiving nominations for next year's awardees.

Now, the fifth priority of our strategic plan is enhancing **Engagement with Local, Regional, and Global Partners**. Once again, we've made significant progress here. We've enhanced our study abroad experience in Tangier through better internship experiences in the local community. We've established a new partnership in France to offer a better experience for our students. We've established new student exchange partnerships with two universities in Iceland. In developing a focus on the "Blue Economy" and the global North more broadly, we were accepted into the University of the Arctic consortium, and we established UNE North – the Center for North Atlantic Studies – to support these efforts. It's no wonder that UNE students now study abroad at over four times the national average.

Closer to home, we've significantly increased research partnerships with regional entities, including the MaineHealth Institute for Research, the Jackson Laboratory, the Mount Desert Island Biological Laboratory, and the Roux Institute, just to name a few. And speaking of the Roux Institute, we've developed accelerated joint academic programs with them. We've also developed enhanced articulation agreements with local community colleges, with the University of Maine School of Law, and with Cheyney University of Pennsylvania, the nation's first historically black university, just to name a few.

Our students engage in ever more meaningful internship experiences. Indeed, the vast majority of UNE undergraduates engage in credit bearing internships, and all our graduate health profession students engage in a range of clinical training activities in hospitals and clinics throughout the state and region. UNE students teach in our local schools, offer healthcare services in our communities, and support businesses throughout the state.

The final priority of our plan is to continue to build a **Strong and Sustainable Resource Base**. In essence, this is what empowers our work on each of the other priorities. You may be familiar with the adage, "no margin no mission" (attributed to Sister Irene Kraus). It's a simple fact that our work requires resources. Through careful financial stewardship, we have significantly increased UNE's net assets during a time when many colleges are running budget deficits. We've refinanced our debt under very favorable terms. We've significantly increased our fundraising, bringing in the largest single gift in UNE's history while doubling our rate of annual giving. These efforts have been recognized externally by the major credit rating agencies. For example, Moody's Investors Service has twice upgraded our credit rating, which is highly unusual at this time of fiscal stress within the higher education sector.

Our efforts with respect to this priority extend beyond mere fiscal management. They also include optimizing all aspects of our operations. As I mentioned earlier, we've stood up a new learning management system as well as other software upgrades and are now poised to begin a major upgrade to Enterprise Resource Planning system, Banner.

We've worked hard to make UNE an even better place to work. We've engaged in a benchmarking process of employee salaries and over the past two years, we have invested over \$2.5 million in additional wages

for 315 faculty and professional staff, beyond the standard cost of living increase, to bring them to a competitive wage. We've instituted a flexible work policy. We've enhanced our employee benefits package. Our Human Resources colleagues organized a management training program known as "Lead with Impact," in which 80 of our colleagues have already participated. These are just a few ways that our leadership team and the HR department have enhanced the professionalism of their work to support all of us.

We have also begun the process of improving our annual employee goal setting and evaluation procedures, beginning with automating the process. This will set the stage to allow recognition of truly exceptional performance with additional compensation. While we were initially poised to roll out this system in the coming academic year, we received feedback from many of you that we weren't yet ready, that we need to first develop more robust training and tools for goal setting and performance evaluation. We heard you, and so the coming year will serve as a "test run" of our new processes. We will delay full implementation of this new practice for a year, until the 2024-25 academic year.

And as we grow our resource base and support our employees, we are mindful of our responsibility to be good stewards of our shared environment. We have made good progress on reducing our carbon footprint, for example through a new electrical contract that halves our emissions, the addition of solar panels on our campuses, and adding electric vehicle charging stations. In 2021 our Board of Trustees voted to reallocate the University's endowment into a portfolio that minimized carbon-related investments.

As I said earlier, this snapshot doesn't begin to do justice to the full scale of our work over the past five years, but hopefully it gives a sense of how much we've accomplished together. And there's one more piece of context that I would be remiss not to mention: The COVID-19 pandemic. Whereas most of our peers merely went into survival mode during the pandemic, we continued to move our strategic work forward. Unlike the vast majority of our peers, we kept our faculty and professional staff whole throughout the pandemic, avoiding layoffs and not cutting anyone's salary or benefits. In turn, our community worked hard, not only serving our students during that very difficult time, but also moving our strategic work forward.

As we reflect on our progress to date, there's a key thread that runs throughout each of the six priorities of our plan: providing transformational learning experiences to our students. In one way or another, directly or indirectly, everything we do touches on this overarching theme. It will be imperative that we keep our eye on this North Star as we turn our attention to the next steps in our strategic work.

Over a year ago we began contemplating next steps following the plan's expiration this November. The consensus of the faculty, professional staff, leadership team, Board of Trustees, and myself was that the six high-level priorities of our plan remain just as relevant as the day we adopted them. These priorities are broad enough to encompass many new initiatives — some of which we couldn't have even foreseen five years ago — yet focused enough to channel our collective energies. We agreed that it would be pointless to scrap the plan and start anew when there was so much work remaining in these areas. Instead, what

was called for was a “refresh” of the plan, that is, an updating of the specific initiatives and action steps within each of the six high-level priorities.

So, last fall we initiated this renewal process. This has been a highly iterative undertaking, with evolving drafts that have incorporated comments from trustees, faculty, and professional staff. In the coming weeks we will also seek input from our students, while providing ongoing opportunities for you all to continue offering further feedback.

I won't attempt to describe the many initiatives we already have on deck but allow me to highlight just a few.

We will develop new academic programs and will make any needed adjustments to our organizational structure to ensure their success. As I mentioned earlier, we recently announced the formation of the College of Business to support growth of our business programs. We conceptualize business as a sort of “bridge discipline” that leverages strengths in other program areas, thereby synergistically advancing both. At the same time, we elevated our education program into school status, building on the recent growth and the possibilities for further growth in that area. Our Arts and Sciences faculty have been hard at work this summer developing plans for exciting new majors in Computer Science and in Statistics.

Our marine programs are developing ambitious plans to build on their recent success. And we are planning to create an Honors College to attract and engage the most academically ambitious undergraduate students.

In addition to new majors, we will update the curriculum, pedagogy, or both in existing academic programs to ensure that they become even more competitive. For example, it's becoming clear that adult learners in graduate health profession programs are increasingly demanding hybrid formats in which didactic coursework is completed online, complemented by face-to-face clinical instruction. Some of our competitors are rapidly moving in this direction, which has already contributed to a decrease in applications for some of our programs. To remain viable, we must pivot our model to meet this new reality. Our Master of Social Work program has seen recent growth after taking just this approach.

We will closely monitor the regional marketplace for opportunities to grow. Over the past couple of years, we've grown increasingly aware of lost opportunities to educate our students over the summer. Many students have been taking courses elsewhere then transferring credits back to UNE. This summer, through the leadership of the Provost's Office, including both Provost Mahon and Associate Provost Karen Pardue, and in partnership with the College of Arts and Sciences, the College of Professional Studies, and the Registrar's Office, we embarked on a project to significantly increase our summer undergraduate offerings, both online and on our Biddeford campus. The results have been very encouraging. The number of courses offered in the summer grew from 49 last year to 120 this summer – nearly a 150% increase, and the number of students taking summer classes grew from 738 last year to 1,127 this summer, which exceeds a 50% increase. Conversely, the number of our students transferring credits from elsewhere to UNE decreased

from 427 last year to 270 this year, representing a reduction of 36%. We will build on this success by offering even more courses next summer and beyond and by marketing our summer sessions more aggressively.

As we prepare to move the College of Osteopathic Medicine into its new home within the spectacular Harold and Bibby Alford Center for Health Sciences, I'm excited to announce that we will take this opportunity to rename the Portland Campus the "UNE Portland Campus for Health Sciences." We will also rename the remarkably productive Center of Excellence in Collaborative Education to the Center to Advance Interprofessional Education and Practice in order to redouble our emphasis on interprofessional education across our diverse health profession programs. These adjustments will allow us to properly celebrate the Portland campus as a hub of interprofessional healthcare education and research that is quite literally unique in all of New England.

At the same time, we will strategically leverage the space vacated by COM on the Biddeford campus to enhance our academic programming, to elevate our student experience, to grow our research agenda, and to optimize our business operations there.

We will transform all business operations to make them more user friendly and efficient for students and others. We will move our core services to the cloud to optimize operations and enhance cybersecurity.

We will continue our efforts to make UNE an even more welcoming place for the diverse tapestry of people that comprise our community. We will continue to find new ways to foster a robust marketplace of ideas, setting the standard for higher education for how to tackle the hard problems facing our society through robust, thoughtful, constructive discourse.

As you may have heard, we have been in the quiet phase of a comprehensive fundraising campaign that began when we received the record \$30 million gift from the Harold Alford Foundation. I want to take the opportunity today to launch that campaign internally, so that all of you can know about the incredible fundraising work that has been going on in Institutional Advancement, and so you can understand our vision for UNE's future. Lynn and I have already made a pledge to the campaign, as have our deans, trustees, and many others in our community. At this time, I'd like to invite Alicia Fereday, our Vice President for Institutional Advancement to tell you more about the campaign.

[Alicia takes the podium]

Thank you, James. It's an honor to stand here today among my UNE colleagues, to announce "Doing Our Part: The Campaign for UNE"

As you can see, the campaign takes a page from our marketing campaign, and turns the phrase back on UNE's supporters, asking them to *Do Their Part* to support this incredible University.

The campaign is in part about building the new health sciences facility in Portland, but it's about much more than that. While we raise funds from outside foundations, from alumni, and from donors who are intrigued by our mission and vision, we will also begin focusing on how those of us within the University can do our part to support our University. And that's not necessarily about making a gift, though we of course would love for faculty and professional staff to do so.

It's also about just being a cheerleader for UNE in your daily lives and talking to those within your circles about the inspiring work that goes on here, and the impact UNE has on its students.

We also want you to join us in celebrating the campaign's most important milestones, and an important one is coming up. I invite all of you to join us at Homecoming, September 23rd, for the official public launch of the campaign at halftime at the football game. We would love to have you all there as we share this exciting new initiative with the world.

Thank you! [James retakes the podium]

Thanks, Alicia, for your terrific leadership of our fundraising efforts. I began my remarks by referring to important traditions that bring us together, and Homecoming is definitely one of those events. I hope to see many of you at the game for this historical announcement.

As I said before, the projects I've outlined here are just a few — a small taste if you will — of our plans for the next five years. And as we set strategic goals and work diligently to realize them, we will be ever vigilant for new opportunities that will arise that we've yet to contemplate.

One thing that is clear: We cannot cease our forward momentum. We must be thoughtful and deliberate, AND we *must* act with a sense of urgency. We must innovate at every level. We must develop new academic programs and rethink existing ones. We must forge ahead with groundbreaking research and scholarship. We must look for better ways to meet our students where they are and to foster their growth into productive citizens and fulfilled adults. We must better tell our remarkable story to those unfamiliar with our community.

The headwinds facing higher education are already stiff and will only grow, and we become complacent at our peril. I cannot stress enough how much our ability to thrive requires all of us — everyone here today — to embrace our shared mission and to do our part to advance our work. We must all step outside the status quo to self-reflect and to embrace change.

I am grateful to each of you for the part you have played in our success, and I look forward to working with you as we reach for even greater heights going forward. For UNE to be able to reach our aspirations of enriching the lives of our students while promoting the health of individuals, communities, and our planet, we must all do our part to innovate — boldly, creatively, and urgently.