

Tuesday, February 7, 2023 • 3:30 p.m.

Holloway Hall Auditorium

# STATE *of the* UNIVERSITY ADDRESS *with* President Carolyn R. Lepre



Good afternoon, and welcome to the State of the University address! Let me begin by saying the state of our university is strong, and as we move forward with excellence, it will be stronger than ever before.

I am deeply honored to have the opportunity to be with you today, to update you on our recent accomplishments, celebrate our collective identity, and present the vision for Salisbury University as we prepare to move into our second century as a world-class educational institution.

We provide transformational education at our main campus on the beautiful Eastern Shore and at several locations across the State of Maryland and in Germany. We are poised for agile and dynamic growth.

We live our mission and values of excellence, student centeredness, learning, community, civic engagement, and diversity and inclusion in all we do – something that will guide our future success.

Doing this is what keeps us busy. I hope this event allows us to take a moment and reflect on the fact that what we do here – what you do here – is transformative.

Our momentum is unmistakable.

Unmistakable because of each of you – the hardworking, committed, and passionate people who make up Salisbury University.

I want to begin by acknowledging a few individuals who are critical to our past and future success, and who exemplify this commitment to our community every day!

I want to acknowledge in particular the newly installed Mayor of Salisbury, Jack Heath, and other elected officials who are here with us today – and our community leaders, donors, and friends.

It is a pleasure to have you with us.

Please join me in acknowledging the Salisbury University Cabinet, our Shared Governance leadership team, and the President's Advisory Team. Will all please stand for a moment of applause.

Thank you.

I also want to take a moment to give special thanks to my predecessor, Dr. Chuck Wight, who navigated our university through many unprecedented challenges.

Thank you for your steady leadership and continued service to Salisbury University and thank you for your deep commitment to keeping our campus safe and healthy. It is an honor to follow in

your footsteps and to continue your legacy of excellence, equity, and inclusion.

I want to give special acknowledgment to my family – my husband Todd and my daughters, Sarah and Ainsley.

My daughters, who are both sophomores in college (and hopefully in class right now!), have given me a new appreciation for higher education and how critical it is to help students get connected and to feel like they belong. Being a mother has helped shape who I am as an academic and as a President. Seeing the college experience through their eyes enriches my understanding.

My family is my foundation.

I now think of the Salisbury Family as my extended family.

Often, families have shared core values and are held together with a common vision for the future. As a new part of the Salisbury Family, I would like to share some of my core values – which I hope we have in common:

I believe a college education has the capacity not just to change the life of the student, but can make a difference to their families, communities, and generations to come.

I believe if we are not inclusive, we cannot be excellent.

I believe there is little more powerful than saying thank you – and meaning it.

I believe we need courage to say that sometimes things need to be done differently in order to achieve continued success.

And I believe there is something incredibly meaningful about caring for people and putting them first. Treating people the way you want to be treated – with grace and kindness.

Our beautiful campus is made up of marvelous people who make Salisbury so special.

We are a campus of more than 1,600 staff and 600 full- and part-time faculty, who on average have been at SU for nine and a half years.

More than 350 employees have reached the milestone of between 10 and 20 years of service, and 244 employees have been with SU for more than 20 years – amazing!

I want to mention a special SU anniversary – Debra Bailey, Program Management Specialist in the Physical Plant, reached 50 years of service this August. Congratulations, Debbie!

We have our wonderful groundskeepers, housekeepers, and

building trades staff who oversee more than 200 acres, 101 buildings and 12 residence halls. We have our police officers and security personnel who continuously keep us safe. Our Dining Services employees managed over one million customer interactions in 2022.

Each person makes this home – our home.

Because of how hardworking these individuals are, they may not be here with us today, but would you all please help me in recognizing members of the Physical Plant, Dining Services, and University Police with our appreciation!

Our employees are committed and dedicated to our university. And this commitment does not go unrecognized. In 2022, the University System of Maryland (USM) Board of Regents recognized two staff members, Donna Carey and Haley Cristea, with one of its highest honors, the Board of Regents Staff Award. And just last month, Joe Benyish was awarded the National Association for Campus Activities Legacy Award.

Congratulations Donna, Haley, and Joe for your wonderful achievements!

On campus, we've recognized many more wonderful staff people through our Employee of the Month program. Our fiscal year 2022 winners all impacted our campus community in positive and meaningful ways. And the same can be said of this fiscal year's winners who have been recognized to date.

I am so appreciative of what our staff do each day. Would all the staff present please stand to be recognized?

Thank you.

Our faculty – made up of 425 full-time and 186 part-time members – have been educated at 187 different institutions – including 35 who received their terminal degrees from SU – and hail from 44 states and 7 countries. This diversity brings a robust set of perspectives and competencies that creates a learning environment where every student can thrive. Thank you for sharing your knowledge, skills, and expertise with our students.

This year, several faculty members received prestigious awards and fellowships from across the nation and globe. And, we were also once again recognized as a top producer of Faculty Fulbright Scholars.

Beyond this, I know our faculty spend countless hours advising, mentoring, teaching, and doing research with our students. And perhaps we can all agree that it's this work that should be most appreciated.

Can all the faculty in the audience please stand to be recognized?

Thank you.

We spend a lot of time talking about our students, and our common mission as a university to be student-centered – and rightly so.

In academic year 2021-22, we awarded more than 2,000 degrees and delivered nearly 195,000 credit hours to students across all disciplines. We have the second highest four-year graduation rate in the USM. Eighty-one percent of soon-to-be graduates accepted a job offer prior to graduation and 98% of graduates who are job seeking are employed within one year.

Our students are being hired by some of the best companies

and organizations in the world. Graduates go on to continue their education at prestigious institutions. And of course, I am most pleased about the students who chose to stay right here with us for their advanced education.

We also have students who bravely serve our country. In the fall, more than 50 SU students were either serving in the military or veterans of the armed services.

Students are doing incredible things both inside the classroom and out.

*The Saunterer*, our Clarke Honors College student-run newsletter, was awarded First Place in the National Collegiate Honors Council's Newsletter Contest for the third time. Our undergraduate research journal, *Laridae*, featured 12 research manuscripts and five pieces of art from students across campus, and remains one of the only peer-reviewed research journals for undergraduate students in the nation.

I want to thank our faculty reviewers, mentors, and students who made both publications a success.

Last year, for the fifth year in a row, we were named among the nation's top producers of Fulbright Students.

A record nine students and alumni earned prestigious Fulbright Student Awards, marking the best year in our history with a nearly 50% acceptance rate from original applicants.

These individuals helped to solve problems such as the impact of human activity on habitat of the capuchin monkey in Brazil, the role of methylation in the manifestation of breast cancer in Poland, and the use of language in Peru, Madagascar, and Slovakia.

Engaged learning at this scale is a strong tradition at SU and I've loved seeing how well we do this through student competitions. For example, the Mid-Atlantic Sales and Marketing Institute (MASMI) and the Perdue School's Entrepreneurship programs are nationally recognized.

## **Athletics**

Our student-athletes continue to impress, both on and off the field.

Our fall sports teams had another banner year – especially our Field Hockey, Football, and Volleyball teams, which all qualified for their respective NCAA Tournaments, and 24 students were named athletic All-Americans in 2022.

In the classroom, three of our student-athletes were selected as Academic All-Americans and 12 were named as Academic All-District. And for the fourth consecutive year, SU had more than 50% of its student-athletes on the conference Academic Honor Roll. Perhaps even more notably, 118 of our student-athletes earned a perfect 4.0 GPA in fall 2022.

Congratulations to all our student-athletes, and our talented coaches and personnel, for their success!

## **National Rankings and Acknowledgments**

This past year was another strong year for national acknowledgment and recognition. While national rankings are certainly not a full measure of who we are, they are one marker of

the value and excellence of an SU education.

*U.S. News & World Report* ranked us as a top institution for the 26th year in a row, and just a few weeks ago recognized us as having top online graduate programs in nursing and business. For the 24th year in a row, we were included among the 388 best colleges in the U.S. by The Princeton Review. We were also noted as having one of the Top 25 Best College Libraries in the nation.

*Forbes*, *Washington Monthly*, *Money* magazine, and *Kiplinger's Personal Finance* heralded us as a best value institution, a nod to the return on investment we provide to students and families.

Last year, we continued the tradition of holding the highest pass rate on the NCLEX Nurse licensure exam of all B.S.N. programs in the state, and we have a 10-year history of a 100% pass rate on the nurse practitioner certification exam.

We have also been recognized as a Carnegie Foundation Community Engaged Campus, reinforcing our strong relationship between the campus and our local and global communities. Truly impressive!

### **General Education Curriculum**

In April 2021, SU faculty voted to adopt new General Education requirements for all undergraduate students in an effort to strengthen the student experience, and we are eager to witness the results when implemented in fall 2024.

My thanks to Dr. Jennifer Nyland and other members of the General Education Oversight Committee, members of its eight subcommittees, and Drs. Melissa Boog and Kara Raab who supported Gen. Ed. review and revision work for the past eight years.

### **Middle States**

Our campus community has embarked on our 2025 reaccreditation review by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Further information will be shared with faculty, staff, students, and our Middle States liaison for feedback during the spring semester.

I want to thank Drs. Kara Raab and Jessica Clark for co-chairing our self-study, and to all who volunteered their time to support this process.

I am also excited to share that as Dr. Karen Olmstead transitions from her current role as Provost to retirement, she will continue her leadership over the Middle States process.

### **Sea Gull Pell Promise Program and Financial Aid**

One thing that makes us different is our dedication to ensure every student can afford a world-class education. This year, we made significant strides toward this goal.

We launched the Sea Gull Pell Promise Program, which makes it easier for freshmen who qualify for a federal Pell Grant to attend SU. Through this program, we cover any remaining tuition costs once eligible students' scholarships, grants, and benefits are applied.

We also announced this fall that we have pledged to give 20% more institutional aid to our incoming students. Data shows that

SU students who receive some kind of institutional aid have higher retention and graduation rates than their peers who do not receive aid.

And we launched the new Sea Gull Scholarship plan with five distinct merit scholarship levels based on academic performance. All newly admitted students will be automatically considered for these merit-based scholarships, ensuring every single student has the opportunity for an affordable and accessible education.

I want to thank Allen Koehler, Mason White and our entire enrollment management team for their hard work to make this possible.

### **Advancement**

We can achieve our goals because of our generous supporters. Let me share a few highlights.

In recognition of nearly two decades of support, the Peter and Judy Jackson Music Program is now named in their honor. This December, the Jacksons pledged an \$800,000 for music programs, bringing their total endowment to \$1.3 million. Thank you, Peter and Judy!

As a testament to the great work we do, long-standing supporters also continue to invest in our work.

Today, I am excited to announce the Philip E. and Carole R. Ratcliffe Foundation have pledged \$900,000 over the next three years in support of entrepreneurship programs through our Perdue School, so we can continue to build and grow.

Support doesn't just come from external sources, but from those in this room as well. In fact, in 2022, more than 400 faculty and staff gave back to SU.

One special gift came from Dean Maarten Pereboom and his family, who recently named the Fulton Film Center in memory of his uncle, Herman van Apeldoorn, a member of the Dutch resistance who was killed during World War II. A special thanks to Dr. Pereboom and his family.

And next week, the SU Foundation will celebrate its 50th anniversary of supporting and promoting activities, educational programs, athletics, and scholarships. A spectacular accomplishment!

As I said before, the momentum at Salisbury University is unmistakable.

As we look toward Salisbury's next century, together we will take our university to new levels of excellence.

### **Forward with Excellence**

Over the past six months, I've been intentional about wanting to listen and learn before presenting a vision for our university.

I met with hundreds of faculty, staff, students, and residents of the Shore to learn about their views of SU – its strengths, challenges, and opportunities. I asked people to tell me what needed to be changed and what is so ingrained in the culture of SU that it must be preserved at all costs. I am extremely thankful to all who gave me their valuable time and insight into our university.

So, what did I learn?

First, I learned our people are everything. Time and again, I heard what makes our university special is how deeply we care about one another and about our students.

Second, we have a desire to determine and own our distinctive identity and ambitions to differentiate ourselves from other institutions, both within the USM and nationally. Part of this identity is leveraging our location for deeper community engagement. You love our beautiful campus and the Eastern Shore, and you shared with me that you want to deepen this connection, capitalize on it, and assure that we are truly meeting the needs of our neighborhoods, towns, and cities.

You also shared some frustrations with me. Campus practices and systems should not interfere with your ability to do the great work that is the core of our mission. This means reassessing the processes and procedural complexities that we identify as barriers to our work and providing the resources and tools to navigate them.

You also shared with me a lot about focusing on student success. We have a collective pride in our philosophy of experiential learning and providing new opportunities to our students; we know the critical importance of assuring students come to SU prepared for college, stay with us through graduation, and go on to lead full and successful lives.

We discussed finding true, inclusive excellence, and cultivating a strong sense of belonging on our campus. It bears repeating: if we are not inclusive, we cannot be excellent.

And last, but certainly not least, you shared with me your desire to celebrate and support academic excellence.

We are a community of scholars who are experts in their fields, and some of the best and most dedicated teachers in higher education.

We are receiving grants to further knowledge generation and make our world a better place.

So, when I think about the future of Salisbury University, I think about our potential and what it takes to deliver our mission.

Dr. Leo Lambert, president emeritus of Elon University, once wrote something that has stuck with me for many years – he wrote: “We must keep in mind that we are not in the business of offering classes; we are in the business of human transformation.”

I would add, we must stand out from the many competitors offering their version of a high-quality educational experience – we must differentiate ourselves.

Therefore, in alignment with the current strategic plan – created with the participation of our whole campus community – our vision, as we enter our next century, is this:

Salisbury University aspires to be the pre-eminent inclusive, comprehensive university with a clear focus on delivering transformative learning experiences preparing students to be problem-solvers and leaders in an increasingly complex global society.

This vision is in alignment with our mission statement and core institutional values and will direct our strategic growth over the next five years.

As we move forward together, our focus is this – the ‘Salisbury Seven.’

1. We will: invest in the people who deliver on the promises we make to our students.
2. We will: consistently deliver a rigorous, student-focused academic program taught by world-class educators on a world-class campus.
3. We will: have a continual commitment to inclusion, diversity, opportunity, and equity, and the cultivation of a sense of belonging.
4. We will: strategically grow to serve the needs of the Eastern Shore, the State of Maryland, and the nation, while holding fast to our identity as a student-focused institution that doesn’t just say it cares about its people, it shows it with every decision.
5. We will: be known for our innovative high-impact practices and our belief that we are educating the whole person for a lifetime of civic leadership and community service.
6. We will: raise the resources needed to support SU programs, its students, and its culture.
7. We will: strengthen our institutional identity and reputation.

Let me dive a little deeper into some specifics.

## 1. Our People

Our first priority is and should always be our people. To my core, I believe we must be a people-first university. Every decision, every action must be viewed through that lens. We’ll constantly ask the question how this will impact our people and this will be our guiding principle when making decisions.

We achieve nothing without you. Our collective talents, ideas, hard-work, and yes, our mental and physical well-being are central to this university thriving.

One way we can prioritize our people is by creating a sense of belonging – to acknowledge and appreciate the value you bring to Salisbury University.

For example, you shared that you wished for leadership and professional development opportunities. We heard you and have already begun work on several programs, like SULead, to provide opportunities for growth. We don’t just want to attract the best talent to SU, we want to keep it here.

I recognize the nature of work is changing, and to attract and retain the highest-level of talent, we need to keep up with those changes in the work environment. Knowing this, we will continue to evaluate our remote work policy, while ensuring we remain responsive to the needs of our students.

Taking the time to pause is one way for our Salisbury family to “be well” so that we can “do well.”

To that end, I am pleased to announce that we will be giving everyone an additional day off this spring semester – to add to the Spring Break Friday given by the State, SU will also close Thursday, March 23, giving everyone a four-day weekend. I hope you all enjoy this extra day to rest and refresh!

## **2. Academic Excellence and World-Class Faculty and Facilities**

Academic excellence begins by investing in outstanding faculty and creating a place where students can learn and excel.

A new provost will join us next year, and I will ask them to focus on the recruitment and retention of faculty to assure our students continue to learn from top leaders in their fields and to examine the workload policy, especially as it relates to research with students and service.

Undergraduate research strengthens our pedagogy and learning outcomes. Service is a cornerstone of our mission, and we will work to recognize and celebrate service commitments that advance our university and community.

We will invest in disciplines to serve the workforce needs of the Eastern Shore, the State of Maryland, and the nation. We will seek growth in STEM and health science programs, and growth in teacher education programs – which is not only core to our identity, but our foundation as an institution.

We will work together to build a plan for facilities that will attract students and support the highest quality educational experiences.

This summer, we will begin the renovation of Blackwell Hall, which will serve as a hub for student services around campus. The extensive renovation is expected to be completed by the fall of 2026, when the renovation of the Guerrieri Student Union will begin.

We will begin construction this year on new event space in front of Holloway Hall, which will offer a new “front door” for our prospective students and a place for our community to gather for socialization and the exchange of ideas.

In addition, we will advocate for state support for a new College of Health and Human Services building, a renovated student recreational facility to replace Maggs, and other capital projects to transform our campus and improve the academic experience for our students.

I want to thank our elected officials for their continued support of our capital projects.

## **3. Creating a Culture of Equity and Inclusion**

Our University is strengthened by cultivating an inclusive environment and celebrating what each of us brings to our collective experience.

We will move toward diversifying our student body to better reflect the demographic makeup of the State of Maryland. Similarly, we will strive to reflect this new diverse student population in our faculty and staff, creating a culture of equity and inclusion across our campus.

I am excited that we have already made strides toward this goal.

To lead our efforts, we are seeking a Vice President for Belonging, Diversity, and Inclusion. This spring, we added a session of Powerful Connections, a program that provides students with diverse backgrounds resources for a successful transition to university life.

We know there is much more to do. We are creating a campus-wide diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) plan, attached to strong metrics

for accountability that will be shared widely and transparently. We will work on cluster hires to diversify faculty and advance research related to DEI and social justice. And Human Resources is working to train search committees on best practices, reinforcing our commitment to equitable and fair hiring.

## **4. Distinction and Growth**

The USM has set an ambitious goal to attract, retain, and graduate more students educated as part of our system of higher education.

Current trends challenge this goal – and higher education in general. Demographic shifts will make the competition for traditionally aged college students more complicated. Declines in the community college sector, traditionally a strong feeder for our institution, may mean fewer students.

Couple these shifts with lingering impacts from COVID-19 and the current public skepticism about the value of a college degree and we must think with innovation about ways to combat these disrupting forces.

Certainly, SU has seen the impacts of these factors. Costs continue to increase across the board, challenging our budget.

In order to economically sustain the quality of our educational experience, teach our students at the highest levels, and care for our people in the way we must, SU must grow enrollment.

That said, we must not grow without intention! We must consider what size is optimal – with the best balance of revenues versus expenditures – and allows us to hold fast to the qualities that make us distinctive in the USM and competitive against our aspirant institutions.

The discussion about our size has been asked of me since day one – and after much information gathering, listening, learning, and contemplation, our path forward is as an institution of 8,500 – and to attain that goal within five years.

I’ve heard from staff, faculty, and students alike that our deep sense of caring and community is what makes us special and noteworthy! Let’s lean into that!

No one is just a number. We know our students by name. We know their strengths. We know how to support them. This connection is the heart of SU.

It IS what makes us distinctive.

The “just right” size of 8,500 means we are large enough to have world-class facilities and learning opportunities, and small enough for the personal touch we are known for.

Currently, we enroll approximately 7,200 students, with about 9% at the graduate level. We will target growth in ways that are in line with our identity.

How will we do this? First, we will put additional focus on graduate studies, targeting 12% of our student body to be enrolled at the graduate level within five years.

I challenge us to expand our repertoire of five-year programs designed to create pathways for our undergraduate students to stay and complete their graduate work. We know this is a value-add to our

students by reducing time-to-degree and know our students would stay with us if they could.

In elevating the target for graduate student enrollment numbers, I believe it is time to revisit the proposal for a School of Graduate Studies and Research – the creation of which reinforces graduate study and research as an institutional priority.

We will explore and expand extracurricular programs to attract high-quality students who excel. Providing students with expanded opportunities in STEM-based extracurriculars like our robotics lab opens pathways for success.

We will also explore expanding athletic, music, and e-sport opportunities. In fact, I am thrilled to share plans are underway to introduce men's and women's golf as our newest varsity sports.

We will maintain our commitment to focus on bringing transfer students to SU.

The Maryland Transfer Advantage Program provides a pathway for students at participating community colleges to earn an undergraduate degree at Salisbury University within four years.

We will evaluate programs that provide attractive pathways for transfer students and remove obstacles that may currently exist.

Anticipating the increased demand for dual enrollment with Maryland high schools, a result of the new Blueprint legislation, we will explore ways to grow our offerings in ways that make sense with need and our expertise.

Further, we are seeking new strategic partnerships with local industries to develop avenues to meet their workforce needs. We know students leave our university with high-quality jobs – much of this to the credit of the strong partnerships forged with industry leaders.

We are setting a goal to increase the number of students we enroll from our pool of accepted students.

We will aim to increase from our current 19% yield rate to 25% over the next five years.

In this way, we will not need more applications or to lower our standards for admission. On the contrary, this will offer us the ability to continue to recruit and enroll students who flourish and thrive.

Consider this: if our current number of accepted students stays the same, increasing our yield would bring in nearly 450 additional students per year.

We will improve our first-to-second year retention rates to 85% over the next five years and eliminate the retention gap between our Pell and non-Pell eligible students, and our white and non-white students.

Raising our retention rate helps to fulfill our promise that at Salisbury we do everything possible to help students achieve their goal of graduating and future career success.

We are hiring a Diversity Recruitment and Retention Coordinator who will focus on the recruitment and retention of undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds.

We will simplify our processes and procedures to make them more straightforward for our students to navigate.

We will create ways to continuously foster belonging among our students, such as new special interest housing communities. Excitingly, three new additions are planned for fall: leadership, spirit, and transfer housing communities.

## **5. High-Impact Practices and Experiential Learning**

As a comprehensive university, we integrate liberal arts education, professional programs, experiential learning, and civic engagement. Excellence in and out of the classroom is the hallmark of our institution.

We are and should be known to all as a leader in high-impact practices.

Once such experiential learning experience where I believe we can – and should – excel in is study abroad/study away.

I am setting a goal for us to be known as the university in the State of Maryland with the highest percentage of students who have at least one global experience prior to graduation. Cultural competence will set our students apart and will advance our goals of inclusion and belonging.

To improve access to international experiences for all students, we will work to raise scholarship funds to support students who may lack the resources to support studying abroad.

At SU, we build problem solvers who will tackle the world's biggest issues – some of which are in our own backyard, and we will continue our dedication to service and civic engagement.

For nearly five years, we have aimed to decrease food insecurity among college students, especially among our own population through Food for the Flock, which this December received a \$13,000 grant from the Maryland Higher Education Commission to further their impactful work.

This year, our PACE Presidential Citizen Scholars are conducting capstone projects on topics such as bioremediation, homeless youth, and institutionalized un-inclusiveness in our community.

To continue to be recognized, like we were with our Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, we must not just continue our work, but grow – identifying areas that need development and further expansion – something I look forward to identifying with each of you.

## **6. Raising Resources**

To do all this work, we need resources!

Since the new year, I have been actively meeting with our leaders in Annapolis and across the state to speak to the SU mission and share our resource needs – and I will continue to do so.

To better support our students, we have set the goal of 100 new endowed scholarships as part of our Centennial fundraising strategy.

We will continue our efforts to increase alumni involvement.

This spring, we are launching Salisbury on the Road. I am joining our advancement team visiting alumni groups across the region as we continue to strengthen our alumni network, create a strong culture of philanthropy, and to encourage more alumni to meaningfully engage with their Alma Mater.

I cannot wait to meet these members of the SU Family.

Finally, I have tasked our Vice President for Administration and Finance and Budget Office with evaluating and restructuring how we build our annual budget to ensure we spend money in the most strategic ways possible.

I thank our advancement and finance teams for their work on helping us achieve these goals.

## 7. Strengthen Institutional Identity

The raising of resources, recruitment, and enrollment relies heavily on outcomes and institutional pride and identity.

We will strengthen our Sea Gull spirit. I want every member of the Salisbury community to feel the same pride and excitement that I do in being a Sea Gull.

We will work with students and departments around campus to build on our Sea Gull pride through increased engagement activities, like our Homecoming week events, Employee Appreciation Day, and Flock Parties.

The pride we share in being a Sea Gull should expand far and wide, and we should have the external recognition that validates our efforts.

Therefore, we are setting the goal to improve our national rankings and be recognized as a Top 25 university among all Regional Universities-North and among the Top 10 Regional North publics within five years.

And we must tell our story! We must celebrate our successes so there is no doubt in anyone's mind that an SU education is an exceptional education.

The launch of our Make Tomorrow Yours brand provides us with the opportunity to share how our students are changing the future. We look forward to expanding the brand to be representative of who we are both today and tomorrow, and invest in telling these stories in a dynamic and engaging way, being thoughtful about our many different audiences, so everyone can see themselves as a tomorrow-maker.

We will work together to ensure that we continue in the direction of distinctiveness that aligns with our mission and values.

And I want to be sure we have strong participation from every corner of campus as we put forward ideas and make decisions about how to achieve the bold vision I see for our university. And I am committed to investing in your ideas!

To that end, I am pledging to put forward a Strategic Innovation Fund of a half a million dollars a year over the next three years to fund your ideas, starting with our new 2024 budget.

These will be one-time funds, with the opportunity for additional funding in subsequent years based on metrics of success and impact.

Anyone on campus can put forward ideas to be funded. More specifics will be forthcoming this spring about the process for submitting proposals and how we will involve our shared governance groups in vetting and decision making. We will move our university forward together!

As we move ahead with excellence, our future is bright. Salisbury University is creating opportunities to contribute to the overall well-being of our students, employees, the State of Maryland, and the world.

As a family, we will acknowledge and celebrate our heritage.

Nearly a century ago, we were founded as a Normal School.

What you may not know is the use of the word normal did not mean "average" or "ordinary." On the contrary, normal meant excellence – that a Normal School would be the model – or the norm – for other schools.

This is my core vision: We will move forward with the purpose of transforming lives through academic excellence, life-changing high-impact practices, inclusion, and belonging. We will exemplify the norm.

As we gather here today, we may not know the exact steps we will take to achieve our goals. But, what I can say with absolute certainty is this.

The state of our university is strong!

And I hope you will work with me to disrupt the status quo, build pride in place, embody what it means to care for one another, and facilitate innovation so we can leave SU a better place – a stronger place – than ever before.

Thank you for all you have done, and all you will do. As we embark on our next chapter, I am proud and humbled to serve as your president. I am committed to working with you as we dream and build our future together.

I am nothing but optimistic that the best is yet to come. Thank you for being here this afternoon.

**Make Tomorrow Yours**

**Salisbury**  
UNIVERSITY

SU is an Equal Opportunity/AA/Title IX university and provides reasonable accommodation given sufficient notice to the University office or staff sponsoring the event or program. For more information regarding SU's policies and procedures, please visit [www.salisbury.edu/equity](http://www.salisbury.edu/equity).