

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

Monday, November 13, 2023 • 3 p.m.  
Holloway Hall, Jackson Family Auditorium



## *Building a Bright Future Together*

Good afternoon! I am excited to welcome all of you to this year's State of the University address.

Nine months ago, I stood right here and shared our collective vision to be a university known for its purpose of transforming lives through academic excellence and its commitment to suffusing life-changing high-impact practices, inclusion, and belonging throughout the educational experience. Since then, I have been blown away by your excitement for our path forward.

So many of you have taken this vision, along with the Salisbury Seven, back into your own areas and conceived strategic advancements that help support our mission of success.

All of this work has put a spotlight on what we, as an institution, do best: care for one another in our pursuit of impactful, continuous excellence. Today, I am excited to share some of our institution's remarkable achievements from the past year and how, together, we are using this momentum to propel us forward and write the next chapter of our story.

I am glad we can take a moment to celebrate our collective efforts and reassert our commitment to education, innovation, and each other.

### **A Look Back – Our People**

We are all architects of our University's success, and I am deeply appreciative of all who contribute to our vibrant community.

I want to acknowledge in particular the elected officials, community leaders, donors, alumni, and friends who are with us today. Thank you for all of your support.

We have many incredibly hardworking individuals who keep our university moving forward here with us today. To recognize just a few, please join me in acknowledging Salisbury University's Cabinet, our shared governance leadership teams, and the President's Advisory Team. Will all please stand for a moment of applause.

We've welcomed new faces to our campus over the last several months. Notably, Dr. Laurie Couch, provost and senior vice president for academic affairs; Aurora Edenhart-Pepe, vice president for administration and finance; Monica Polizzi, director of athletics and campus recreation; and Dr. Deirdra Johnson, associate vice president of student affairs. We are glad you are here!

We also welcomed one of our largest first-year classes in SU's storied history, with nearly 1,400 students embarking on their journey to a

college degree. And what truly excites me is not only the impressive size, but who this class is.

Hailing from 27 states and 18 countries, almost a third of these students come from underrepresented backgrounds, and 41% identified as first-generation students. We also welcomed more than 530 transfer students, and more than 320 new graduate students to our campus for the first time.

As we greeted so many exceptional new faculty, staff, and students to our flock, I was reminded we are not just a University – we are a family. A family that cares about one another and works toward a common goal – creating an environment in which every student has what they need to achieve success in a place where our people love to work.

This spirit is embodied by our 2023 Board of Regents' Faculty and Staff Award winners. This year, two staff members, Phillip Brunecz Jr. and Brooke Church, were recognized for their unwavering dedication to ensuring operations always run smoothly and for improving the services provided by their respective areas.

In addition, three faculty members were honored by the Board of Regents for their excellence, inside and out of the classroom. Dr. Jeni Davis, Dr. Corinne Pubill, and Dr. John Wesley Wright were celebrated for their outstanding contributions to teaching, public service, and creative activities.

Noteworthy accolades also came from within our own ranks. Drs. Sandy Pope and Tim Stock were the recipients of this year's Distinguished Faculty Award – an honor bestowed by faculty upon faculty – for their exceptional advocacy for students and our community.

Internally, we recognized Richard Shaw, Amanda Liang, Seth Endicott, Diana Cropper, Cassandra Lewis, Jenna Payne, Kara Staley, Jalesa Hull and Tammy Voigt as members of our campus who have gone above and beyond through our Employee of the Month program. We also celebrated Donna Knopf as our 2023 Employee of the Year. Congratulations to all!

There are countless more examples of the daily efforts put forth by our community, all driven by the shared goal of creating meaningful differences in the lives of those around us.

These transformational differences lie in the opportunities and support each student has here. A compelling example of this commitment is Josiah Parker, an SU junior who was named as one of

two student members to the [University System of Maryland] USM Board of Regents this spring. Josiah's role as Student Regent places him at the forefront of university operations, where he tirelessly advocates for the more than 170,000 students who attend USM institutions. Thank you, Josiah, for representing your peers and Salisbury with such passion and purpose.

Passion and purpose are exactly what the new presidential Volare Award celebrates. Meaning "to fly" in Latin, the inaugural Volare Award was presented to Dr. Lili Leonard, a two-time SU alum and the former president of the Alumni Association. I can think of no one more deserving than Lili to accept the very first Volare Award for her dedication, enthusiasm, and commitment to Salisbury University.

At my last address, I made a commitment to each of you that we would continue to invest in our employees who work tirelessly to advance and better themselves in order to better serve our institution.

In June, we graduated our first cohort of 10 SULEad staff who participated in professional development initiatives designed to support learning about various aspects of University operations and network with others from across our campus. The second cohort of SULEad launched this fall with 12 employees taking part in the program.

Earlier this year, we also renewed our partnership with the Greater Salisbury Committee in participation with their Transformational Community Leadership professional development program and enrolled six of our employees into the county-wide initiative.

I look forward to continuing to find ways to invest in the professional development of our employees of all levels.

Earlier this year, when funds for cost-of-living adjustments and merit increases were provided by the State for only some employee classifications, we as an institution repurposed internal budget dollars to provide these adjustments for many of those who were not included.

I have said it before, and I want to reemphasize it here today, we will always do our best as an institution by investing in our people in every way we can.

### **A Look Back – Academic Excellence**

What impresses me the most about all these individuals, and our entire community, is that we never lose sight of who all this work is for – our students.

We extended our longstanding tradition of academic excellence with another year of remarkable rankings and recognitions.

*U.S. News & World Report* ranked us as a top institution for the 27th year in a row, where we improved our overall ranking in the region and our ranking for best value schools.

For the 25th year in a row, we were included among the best colleges in the U.S. by the Princeton Review and are among the nation's top 15% of four-year colleges.

For the third time, the publication also ranked SU's Guerrieri Academic Commons as a "Best College Library" – and placed the facility among the top 10 in the nation – amazing!

This was also a record-breaking year for SU's Office of Sponsored Programs. They administered our highest ever amount of external grant and contract awards in 2022-23 with \$11 million earned by our exceptional faculty through their research and initiatives. This includes a \$2.6 million federal grant from the U.S. Department of Health

and Human Services to support and expand our Fraud and Forensic Accounting Certificate Program.

### **A Look Back - Creating a Culture of Equity and Inclusion**

The experience we all have on our campus extends beyond the walls of the classroom. We will continue to strive to ensure every person feels a sense of belonging.

The Office of Diversity and Inclusion was moved from Blackwell Hall to a prominent first-floor space of the Guerrieri Student Union, ensuring that diversity, inclusion, and belonging are not just something thought about in our minds, but are visibly recognizable.

We've also substantially grown our Powerful Connections program this fall – welcoming more than 100 mentees and 50 mentors, the largest cohort in program history.

In the spring, we celebrated our campus advocates of diversity and inclusion with the President's Diversity and Inclusion Champion Awards.

Recognizing 10 faculty, staff, and student winners, these champions are individuals who made extraordinary contributions to promote the appreciation and understanding of cultural diversity, and advance institutional diversity and inclusion goals.

I am also excited that this semester, we continue to celebrate the rich diversity of our community through our cultural programming, embracing the theme *Asia – A Continent of Inspiration*, where we recognize and celebrate wider influences of Asian origin in many of our regular offerings in the visual and performing arts, humanities lectures, and social science events.

We also know that all too often, students are faced with the invisible burden of struggling with mental health and equitable accessibility to resources that support their needs and we as an institution must make every effort to meet students where they are.

To that end, the Division of Student Affairs has made a significant investment in TimelyCare, a 24-7, external tele-mental health service provider that is free for all SU students to make much needed resources as accessible as possible. This service is a beautiful partner to the traditional, in-person services that we continue to offer.

TimelyCare offers resources including on-demand and scheduled counseling, assistance with basic needs such as housing and insurance, and self-care with yoga, meditation, and educational offerings.

I know that these resources are needed now more than ever and thank our Counseling Center and Office of Student Affairs for their work on implementing this important platform.

### **A Look Back – Growth and Workforce Development**

We made a commitment to strategic growth that keeps our students at the core of our mission. In our pursuit of excellence, we committed to the goal of increasing our enrollment within the next five years. This strategic objective positions us as an institution capable of creating world-class opportunities while upholding our reputation for a personal touch. This "just right" size to allow for all students to participate in the highest quality academic experiences and impactful out-of-class experiential learning opportunities.

Supporting our growing student population and meeting workforce needs is, and always will be, at the heart of our institution's own

growth. We have received incredible donations and grants toward the continuation of both long-standing and new programs.

A \$900,000 pledge from the Philip E. and Carole R. Ratcliffe Foundation will support our Shore Hatchery entrepreneurship competition for years to come; a \$2.44 million grant from the Office of Statewide Broadband will ensure our Eastern Shore Regional GIS Cooperative successfully visualizes broadband internet capacity across Maryland; and a \$2.5 million Maryland Rebuilds Grant is helping to advance the education of instructional assistants and teaching aids across the area.

Bolstering these academic programs ensures we are taking innovative steps toward enhancing the student experience.

Something else to celebrate! Of the 46 Maryland Teacher of the Year semifinalist across Wicomico, Worcester, and Somerset counties, 35 were former SU students, and numerous other Sea Gulls earned semifinalist honors across the state.

Not only are these alumni setting a remarkable example to follow, but they also are working with us to create pathways and opportunities for mentoring the next generation of educators being trained on our campus.

Recognizing the need for health care professionals across the nation, we also strive to be a leader in the changing industry landscape. This summer, we graduated our first students in the Fast Track Second Degree Nursing Program, an accelerated, one-year program. Our first seven graduates, aptly dubbed the Magnificent Seven, are sure to be the first of many more whose needs we look to serve.

### **A Look Back – High-Impact Practices**

One of our greatest strengths is the lasting influence we create for our students and community through high-impact practices.

Our record-breaking Fulbright Scholar program is a testament to both this and our commitment to diversity and inclusivity. This year, we had 12 SU Fulbright Student semifinalists who exemplify the diverse community that is SU – including Pell Grant recipients, first-generation students, individuals from various ethnic backgrounds, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

This fall, seven young SU alumni are teaching English or engaging in research with funding from their Fulbright Fellowships. These students will complete prestigious and groundbreaking research across the world, proving that it's our students who will truly shape tomorrow.

Perhaps even more noteworthy is that earlier this year SU was named the nation's number one Master's-Level Producer of Fulbright Students – an incredible accomplishment! I thank Dr. Kristen Walton and all those in the Nationally Competitive Fellowships Office for this wonderful work.

These students are not the only ones to take their academic experience to new places. Last year, 206 SU undergraduates studied abroad in 15 different countries on five continents. Additionally, the first four SU students studied away on full-semester academic exchanges in Alaska, Louisiana, Florida, and the U.S. Virgin Islands through SU's new membership in the National Student Exchange.

Reinforcing our relationships for study abroad opportunities has been a priority over the last several months, as providing cultural competence and finding ways to give our students global awareness has perhaps

never been more important than it is now.

This is part of a multifaceted strategy to ensure inclusive access to this incredible high-impact practice. The faculty and staff in the Janet Dudley-Eshbach Center for International Education, in partnership with the provost and other faculty partners, are building pathways; pathways that included growing the number of need-based scholarships and funds we offer to support high-impact practices, work-study-internship opportunities; collaboration and partnerships with foreign institutions to reduce costs; and working with external agencies, like AIFS, to remove barriers. Our commitment extends to providing comprehensive support services, including mentorship and academic advising. This work will be ongoing, and we aim to create an inclusive and accessible study abroad program for all students who desire such an experience.

In April, Dr. Brian Stieigler and I traveled to Salzburg, Austria, to strengthen SU student enrollment around the world in the American Institute of Foreign Study's numerous study abroad programs.

I also visited Chonnam National University in South Korea to celebrate the 10th anniversary of our partnership agreement with university President Jung Sung Tech.

During the first decade of our partnership, more than 100 Chonnam students have studied at SU – either furthering their education as a traditional undergraduate exchange student, improving their English skills in SU's English Language Institute, or teaching Korean language on our campus.

And we continue to be a destination for students to experience their own study abroad experience. This summer, 60 visiting students from our partner universities in Japan, South Korea, and Spain spent three weeks studying English at the Summer English Language Institute.

Our faculty are also taking their research across the globe. This year, two more SU faculty received Fulbright Scholar awards.

Dr. Art Lembo, professor of geography and geosciences, is teaching and conducting research in GIS in South Korea, and Dr. Jill Caviglia-Harris, professor of economics and finance and environmental studies, is conducting research in the Amazon rainforest in Brazil.

Closer to home, our Office of Undergraduate Research and Creative Activity once again hosted Posters on the Bay in Annapolis. With topics ranging from aiding the youth homelessness crisis to addressing LGBTQ+ discrimination, SU students had a chance to speak with state representatives, including Governor Moore, about issues that matter most to them.

Working to connect students beyond academics, this fall our Housing and Residence Life Office launched their new Special Interest Housing pilot program, where students with shared mindsets or experiences will have a chance to be part of their own peer groups. This year, 48 students took part in the inaugural SIH communities, which include University Spirit; Transfer; and Student Advocacy, Inclusion, and Leadership.

Our high-impact practices are also felt directly in our communities. Recently, current and former students of the PACE Presidential Citizen Scholars program and the Clarke Honors College saw their vision become a reality.

Through their capstone project, recent graduate Charles Laird and

seniors Bryce Machalek and Emma Tarquinio partnered with the non-profit Blind Industries and Services of Maryland for a bioremediation project – removing asphalt and beautifying the property – which will help local residents, surrounding businesses, and the environment.

High-impact cognitive and social activities designed to prepare students for life after college take on many forms, including on the fields and courts where we are committed to ensuring the highest quality student athlete experience.

This spring, our men’s lacrosse team secured their 13th national championship, matching the Division III record for the most national titles.

Coach Jim Berkman also achieved significant milestones and was recognized as one of the *Maryland Daily Record’s* 2023 Influential Marylanders and the Intercollegiate Men’s Lacrosse Coaches Association Hall of Fame.

Earlier in the year, Coach Berkman broke the record as the NCAA’s all-time winningest men’s lacrosse coach, with 620 wins. He is the only coach in NCAA men’s lacrosse history to reach the 500- and 600-win marks in a career. Congratulations to our lacrosse team and Coach Berkman on these incredible achievements!

Our other athletic teams have also made names for themselves, including the softball team who finished the 2023 season as national runners-up and the cheerleading team making SU history as Intermediate All Girl Division III Champions.

Our student-athletes succeed both on and off the field. This year, we had an outstanding 238 Academic All-Conference honorees, and our student-athletes had a cumulative GPA of 3.122!

Our coaches were also recognized for their contributions to the athletic community, with five Conference Coach of the Year awards and 18 Coach All-American awards.

Congratulations to all!

### **A Look Back – Raising Resources**

Of course, none of this work is possible without the resources needed to support each of these initiatives.

Last fiscal year, we raised more than \$6.6 million, nearly \$400,000 of which was raised on our annual Giving Day – truly remarkable! Thank you to our Advancement and Foundation teams for their tireless work in achieving this goal.

I want to mention specifically a few recent events that are truly cause for celebrating.

Two of our athletic complexes have been given new names in honor of SU greats. The soccer complex was named in honor of former athletic director Dr. Gerry DiBartolo, celebrating his long and accomplished career at SU, and the softball stadium was named in memory of Margie Knight – a longtime SU softball and volleyball coach who was affectionately known as “the Greatest Gull.”

We also honored long-time SU supporters Dr. Peter and Judy Jackson with the naming of the Jackson Family Auditorium, where we are today. For decades, the Jacksons have been ardent supporters of SU’s music and art programs, and it is a privilege to honor them in this way.

### **A Look Back – Institutional Identity**

Connecting with not just our local region, but with those across the nation is essential to building relationships and advancing our institutional identity.

Salisbury University continues to receive recognition for being a leader in higher education. For example, the *Maryland Daily Record* recently named Salisbury University among its honorees for the inaugural Empowering Women Award. This state-wide recognition highlights companies and organizations that have demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting and elevating women in Maryland.

And, at this year’s annual conference for the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, Salisbury was recognized with the We the People Award for Excellence in Civic Learning and Community Engagement for the tremendous work our PACE program is doing. Congratulations to Dr. Sandy Pope and all those involved with this exceptional program for this honor!

Throughout the year, members of the alumni relations team and I traveled all over the country with SU on the Road to meet with alumni, donors, and members of our flock to talk about the wonderful work that is being done here. We’ve met with teachers in Dallas, cheered for hometown teams in Philadelphia and Baltimore, and gathered for food and conversation with alumni in Annapolis and Leonardtown, to name a few. The energy and devotion we saw to our SU was inspiring.

The Inauguration brought a week of celebration to our University and provided us with an extended opportunity to highlight the many remarkable things we do here to an audience of influential leaders – both near and far. In doing so, we were thrilled to welcome many legislators and officials to our beautiful campus – some for the very first time.

It is critically important to spotlight our many accomplishments and foster support for the needs of our students and campus. We must celebrate SU, as our reputation is critically important in this age of competition: competition for resources and competition for enrollment. We must put time and attention to building our identity and brand – which is built on faculty, staff, and student achievements – so that none of us ever have to hear again that we are a “hidden gem.” We will continue to tell our story, internally and externally, to cement our place in the minds of all as a university that is known for impact and excellence.

Which is why I am so pleased that we continue to maintain and develop strong relationships. For example, we have hosted Governor Moore – multiple times – and other state and federal officials – including Maryland Comptroller Brooke Lierman and the Federal Communications Commission Chair Jessica Rosenworcel – on our campus. Whether they come to our campus to make major announcements or join us in celebrating the accomplishments of our University, we will always make every opportunity to connect our leaders with our passionate and impressive students.

We are invested in building these relationships, ensuring we are strategically positioned as a leader within higher education, the State of Maryland, and the nation.

The fact that these individuals choose to come back to SU time and time again tells us something. It tells us that others also see how special this University is.

This infectious energy is becoming more obvious with every passing day. At this year's Homecoming game, we hosted our second largest crowd in attendance – more than 4,000 people – since the stadium's opening in 2016. We had nearly 900 students attend the SGA-sponsored pep rally. And we hosted an incredible group of alumni celebrating their 50th reunion, the Class of 1973. How I love the stories they shared!

This enthusiasm is more than we've seen in many years, and it's a great honor to celebrate our Sea Gull spirit together!

The past several months have been filled with remarkable achievements and impactful stories of dedication. Let's take a quick look back at a few more examples that exemplify what makes Salisbury University such an exceptional place to be.

Seeing the energy of our campus and our people fills me with optimism as we envision our future. As we look ahead toward a new strategic plan and a new century, we will continue to use the Salisbury Seven to strategically grow and drive our University forward with excellence.

So let me share a little bit about some exciting new initiatives that are going to help grow our institution, solidify our identity, and raise our reputation. We can only scratch the surface today, but I hope you get a small taste of the excitement that is to come.

### **Looking Forward – Our People**

One overarching goal for the entire institution is to make SU a great place for our people to be. We know the characteristics that help create a wonderful place to work are things like open communication, growth opportunities, work-life balance, recognition and rewards, diversity and inclusion, and employee wellness.

We want to create a workplace that's more than just a job. It's a place where employees feel fulfilled, motivated, and proud.

One step that we're taking in this direction is thinking differently about how we run our Human Resources department. We heard you when you shared with us that there were things keeping you from being able to do your jobs to the best of your ability, and some of that had to do with our processes and procedures.

I am thrilled that our new vice president for administration and finance has made this one of her first priorities and will continue to strengthen our human resources department so they feel empowered to help our community and to streamline some of the processes and procedures that hold us back. We look forward to being able to share much more with you in the future and for you to see a real change that will make a significant difference in your work.

I'm also excited to share with you a new project with a focus on improving the health and wellness of our employees.

Within the next few months, the University will build its first pickleball courts! Faculty, staff, and students alike have shared with us a desire for more recreation areas, to interact with one another, and to get out there and get moving. The first of these courts will be located by Sea Gull Square, and we are exploring locations for future courts.

We hope to work on additional employee wellness programming, including employee leagues and tournaments. We are excited to see our entire community take advantage of these popular opportunities – I

look forward to seeing some of you out on the courts!

I know that I've said this before, but it bears repeating – the University cares about work-life balance.

We know our employees need the time and the opportunity to bring this balance into their lives. We will continue to seek ways to do this, and I look forward to hearing from you about the kinds of things that will help you find your own balance in your own lives.

In the meantime, I am proud to announce that we will once again be offering the gift of time and closing the University on January 2 so that everyone can have one additional day during the holiday season to recharge and relax.

### **Looking Forward – Academic Excellence**

We must never lose sight of the reason we are all here – to prepare our students and provide them with opportunities for excellence in and out of the classroom.

Our students deserve the best, and that's why we are investing in our facilities to ensure we are forward-thinking and that our campus will support our students now and in the future.

The Blackwell Hall renovation is the perfect example of this. Not only are we investing in our future by creating a one-stop-shop for all student needs, but this will also be the first net-zero building on our campus, and one of the very first within the University System of Maryland.

We are a national leader in campus sustainability, and in furtherance of these initiatives, we've made sure the Blackwell renovation project leads the system, and the State, as an example of sustainable architecture.

We will continue to be thoughtful with all our capital projects because we know students do their best when they are living, working, and learning in places where they feel comfortable and safe.

Our next generation of students will learn in the best facilities and learn from a curriculum that prepares them to be civically engaged, critical thinkers of tomorrow. Next fall, we will roll out our new General Education curriculum that does just this.

While continuing to meet the Code of Maryland Regulations, the new Gen Ed's focus is now on student learning outcomes that mirror SU's mission and vision. Starting with an academically centered first year seminar and ending with an experiential learning opportunity, our unique approach and our faculty's innovative courses will engage students and prepare students to think critically and civic mindedly in a diverse world – regardless of their major or chosen profession.

Additionally, we will continue to build programs that reinforce our reputation as an institution that educates students in high-demand fields to meet critical workforce needs.

Increasing graduate enrollment remains a top priority as we look to grow. I am happy to share that the Faculty Senate has approved and advanced the process of formalizing a Graduate School and a separate Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. The creation of a Graduate School will not only help us bolster our efforts to grow graduate enrollment, but also help improve our ranking, strengthen our institutional identity, bolster our efforts to create a great sense of belonging for our graduate students, and present new opportunities for advancement. And we will continue to support and spotlight

the tremendous research being done by our faculty and both our undergraduate and graduate students.

We also know that we must continue to offer new programs that promote growth and meet workforce needs. Therefore, we are setting a goal to launch one new program in a high-impact area each year.

To this end, I am thrilled to announce we have just submitted letters of intent to the University System of Maryland to launch two new innovative programs: one in engineering and one in music therapy! In addition, we have one proposal for a master's in public communication also working its way through internal and external processes. Our goal is to have these programs ready for enrollment by next academic year.

Today, the State of Maryland has more demand for engineers than the capacity to educate them. The proposed new bachelor's degree programs in coastal engineering and geotechnical engineering are positioned to address the growing needs for the workforce of the Eastern Shore and state.

I give a special thanks to [Henson School of Science and Technology] Dean Mike Scott and Dr. Matt Bailey, chair of the Department of Physics, who have spearheaded long-standing partnerships across the Eastern Shore and worked diligently to create these new opportunities for the future generation of environmental problem solvers.

As the first public institution in the State of Maryland to offer a Bachelor of Arts program in music therapy, graduates of this interdisciplinary program can be board certified to use their training in music, psychology, and biology to promote well-being among those receiving treatment for medical or mental health issues.

Thank you, to Dean Maarten Pereboom and Colleen Clark, co-chair of the Jackson Music Program, for championing the development of this important program.

Our Master of Arts in Public Communication Program will focus on advanced education for public relations practitioners and analysts in the athletic, health care, commercial, and public affairs and political arenas.

Thank you to Dean Maarten Pereboom, Dean Clifton Griffin, and Dr. David Burns, professor of communication, for your work on advancing this proposal!

### **Looking Forward - Creating a Culture of Equity and Inclusion**

Our strength is derived from the people who make up our community. Our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging remains at the forefront of our priorities.

I want to reiterate unequivocally that Salisbury University is a place where everyone – regardless of ethnicity, race, age, religion, gender, ability, or identity – is welcome.

As an institution, we are committed to upholding and respecting the diverse range of values and perspectives expressed by our community, and we are steadfast in our commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of every individual.

To foster a culture of equity, inclusion, and belonging, we will consistently integrate these values into our institution's core ethos and operational strategies. This will involve developing ongoing training programs, implementing diverse recruitment practices, and promoting open dialogues.

Through a concerted effort to infuse these principles into our everyday activities, we will create an environment where everyone feels valued and empowered.

To this end, I am excited that our new coordinator of recruitment and retention in the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Sheree Satchell, started in September. Sheree will focus on developing and implementing strategies and programming, with a cultural lens, to support the recruitment and retention of students from diverse backgrounds.

In addition, we are moving forward with the search process for our new campus leader for inclusion, access, and belonging. Thank you to all who have been participating in our listening sessions and letting us know what characteristics you are looking for in this new leader, and I look forward to sharing more in the near future about the exact process, including the development of a search committee with campus-wide membership.

### **Looking Forward – Growth and Workforce Development**

At my last State of the University address, I spoke about the Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF), which awards one-time money to projects that specifically address our Salisbury Seven and strategic goals of enrollment growth, student success, increased retention, inclusion, and institutional identity as a place for impactful learning. This fund, created by savings from our institutional debt service, was envisioned to be a place for members of the campus community, regardless of position or title, to present their innovative ideas and receive seed funding.

I am thrilled that we received more than 40 proposals, which have been evaluated by our Strategic Innovation Fund Council, spearheaded by Dr. Kara Raab, and made up of faculty and staff from across the University with broad expertise, and the Shared Governance Consortium. I thank these groups for shepherding these proposals through the review process.

So many of these proposals showed great potential in their impact on students, enrollment, growth, or retention. When evaluating which proposals to fund, we had the difficult task of prioritizing initiatives and determining which proposals had the greatest potential to make a significant impact and ensuring our resources are strategically invested.

Enrollment drives our University finances. Therefore, we need to invest in new initiatives that will attract, recruit, and retain students of today and tomorrow to ensure our economic viability now and in the future. I understand that these are challenging budget times. And, we need to be investing in new projects and proposals that will have a significant impact on enrollment and retention. We believe that the proposals that were funded have the strongest immediate potential to impact enrollment numbers.

Every proposal was discussed in depth by the committee. A set of funding and prioritization recommendations were then presented to the Cabinet for their review and final decision-making.

Today, I am excited to share with you the five proposals that you will see being developed with support from the Strategic Innovation Fund in the coming months. Those who submitted proposals and did not receive funding through this first cycle will receive communication from Dr. Raab about opportunities for feedback.

To support academic excellence and inclusive practices, we will invest in a partnership with the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE), a recognized organization dedicated to improving student success through the implementation of evidence-based, inclusive teaching practices. The project's significance and its impact on SU and the broader community are noteworthy, including an estimated return-on-investment of more than \$1.1 million at the end of three years from student retention. Congratulations, Dr. [Jessica] Clark!

To support academic excellence and high-impact practices, we will invest in the recruitment, retention, graduation, and social mobility of first-generation students. As I noted earlier, 41% of this year's incoming class self-identified as a first-generation student, signaling the importance of supporting this community. These initiatives will build resources and support programs for first-gen students to ensure that they not only succeed at SU but thrive. Congratulations, Vanice [Antrum] and Dr. [Margaret] Sebastian!

To support environmental sustainability and student access and resources, we will invest in a secondhand shop for SU community members. The shop aims to reduce the waste generated both on and off campus and help our campus community get the resources they need to be successful during their time at SU. Congratulations, Rachael [Faust]!

To support academic excellence and student success, we will invest in enhancing our understanding and implementation of effective strategies to assist students in their successful transition off academic probation. We recognize that one key to student retention lies in promoting and sustaining academic achievement. By continually refining our approach and nurturing a culture of scholastic achievement, we aim to empower our students to thrive academically, thereby bolstering overall educational experience, long-term success, and retention. Congratulations, Wendy [Jin]!

Lastly, to support raising resources and our economic stability, we will invest in expanding Flash Fundraisers for initiatives across campus. These fundraisers help establish an invested base of donors, creating sustainable and more successful giving programs, often doubling the money for each cause. Congratulations, Michelle [Pryor]!

These projects have the opportunity to change our campus for the better – and there is still money left to be invested! We look forward to receiving resubmissions and new proposals in the spring semester to ensure we fully invest the \$500,000 committed to ideas that make a difference across our campus.

As we were working through the SIF process, we were also evaluating requests for supplemental funding.

While SIF funds are designed to be start-up, one-time funding, one proposal was identified as a critical on-going need though it was outside the scope of the criteria used to provide funding through the SIF.

This important proposal, brought to us by Dr. Ellen Schaefer-Salins, advocated for the establishment of a fund to ensure that all University events and meetings have the resources to hire sign languages interpreters. This is something so deeply connected to our promise of building a campus community where everyone feels a strong sense of belonging, and the Cabinet approved funding through supplemental resources.

We look forward to releasing more information about this important

program soon! The divisional vice presidents will begin to communicate about all supplemental requests this week.

### **Looking Forward – High-Impact Practices**

The energy our campus has is just one thing that differentiates us. We will continue to be a leader in offering high-impact practices that give students the opportunities they need to thrive.

Our school spirit is one way we showcase this energy.

Seeing firsthand the enthusiasm a marching band brings to campus, especially our athletic events, I am excited to share that there is a feasibility study underway to consider bringing back SU's marching band! I am deeply appreciative of the work that our music faculty and other campus partners are putting to this project.

As we strive to be known as the public university in the State of Maryland with the highest percentage of students who have at least one global experience prior to graduation, we will continue to expand study abroad and study away opportunities and seek ways to provide access for all students to participate.

For the first time during winter 2024 term, we will lease an entire building for student residences in Stirling, Scotland, as we grow the SU In Scotland Global Campus at the University of Stirling, where students will learn both in the classroom and in places like Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Our faculty will bring their lessons to life around the globe. For the upcoming winter term, three SU faculty will teach SU courses in the University of Stirling's world-class facilities. Additionally, in June, seven SU faculty members from four different schools will offer courses taught in English and Spanish during the summer session in beautiful Málaga, Spain.

I'm delighted to share today that Ashlynn Burrows, a double major in communication and CADR [conflict analysis and dispute resolution], was named a finalist for the Rhodes Scholarship, one of the most prestigious national and international awards. This remarkable achievement, which makes Ashlynn only the second Rhodes finalist in SU's history, underscores SU's unwavering commitment to excellence and high-impact educational practices. Congratulations, Ashlynn, on this outstanding accomplishment – we are incredibly proud of you!

We also continue to offer new athletic opportunities for our students. As we tee up to offer men's and women's golf, I am excited to welcome Dalton Deardorff to campus as our inaugural golf coach. Coach Deardorff brings many years of experience to the Sea Gull golf program, including as a collegiate golf athlete.

I know these initiatives will help to open doors for both prospective and current students, and I am excited to see all we can continue to offer.

### **Looking Forward – Raising Resources**

Everything we aim to do is only achievable because of the resources available to us.

We should celebrate the success already achieved by our Flash Fundraisers. This fall, the four flash fundraisers for Food for the Flock; cross country track and field; men's lacrosse; and music, theatre, and dance have collectively raised more than \$102,000!

Eight more flash fundraisers are planned for this year, where we'll

raise funds for everything from athletics to the Henson Simulation Center and the Financial Management Association.

At my last address, I set the goal of 100 new scholarships as part of our Centennial fundraising strategy. I am proud to report we have already secured 30 of these scholarships – including the Thomas H. Draper Scholarship for students from right here on the Delmarva Peninsula to the Smith-Webb Scholarship for students enrolled in the Master of Social Work Program and plan to pursue a career in behavioral health and addictions – showing the breadth and strength of the community who supports us.

### **Looking Forward – Institutional Identity**

Our institutional identity is intricately linked to our commitment to excellence in higher education in every way. We are dedicated to proactively shaping how we are perceived and bolstering our reputation as a higher learning powerhouse who can scale high-impact practices for all our students.

This entails achieving accomplishments from each of Salisbury Seven initiatives – developing innovative programs, securing resources, promoting experiential learning, achieving athletic success, ensuring our campus is a place for everyone, and more.

This also includes celebrating our rich history. In a few days, I look forward to unveiling the portrait of Dr. Chuck Wight, SU's ninth president, and hanging it in the newly installed presidential portrait wall outside of the President's Office, moved from the Great Hall.

The change in the hallway outside the President's Office is part of a goal to explore new possibilities for centennial-related decorations, installations, and furnishings in the Great Hall and Social Room, as they are among the few spaces on our campus that are relatively unchanged from the SU of a century ago. Look for an announcement about these projects soon!

Our journey toward the next century, especially as we approach our Centennial celebration, is an exciting opportunity to reflect on our 100 years of educational excellence.

As we look ahead, we will capitalize on our Centennial celebration to share our story in engaging and powerful ways. Our Centennial teams are starting to meet and think about the different ways we can share where we have been and where we are going.

Shortly, we will be embarking on the process of developing our next strategic plan. This new plan will be a collective effort involving our entire community, ensuring that it is a shared vision for us all.

I look forward to sharing more in the very near future about what this process will look like, but today, let me assure you that the plan I envision is one that will be built by all of us working together as we set forth the goals that we wish to achieve.

Together, we will build on what makes Salisbury University so special, and we will continue to serve the Eastern Shore for 100 years more.

### **Building a Bright Future Together**

As I close today, I want to share what I am certain of.

I am certain that we will find ways to put our people – our community – first.

I am certain that we will provide impactful academic programs that serve the needs of our students and the world.

I am certain that we will create a place where everyone feels valued and empowered.

I am certain that we will create opportunities for students to be the critical and ethically minded leaders of tomorrow.

I am certain that our institution will be a premier example of excellence.

And I am certain that, together, we are building a brighter future.

Thank you.

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