

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 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 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 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

And I believe there is something incredibly meaningful about want to be treated – with grace and kindness.

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

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

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 nation.

We have also been recognized as a Carnegie Foundation

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 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 goal of our institution. I encourage you to continue to assess the effectiveness of our practices and systems, and to determine how we can better support our students and faculty in their work.

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 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 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.

our capital projects.

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

the demographic makeup of the State of Maryland. Similarly, we will

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

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

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

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 opf studenpeTpandeot46.9i6t exd

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

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

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

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.