

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

Tuesday, September 17, 2024 • 3 p.m.
Holloway Hall, Jackson Family Auditorium



Our SU Stories

Good afternoon!

Just like each member of our SU family, I too have my own SU story. Our collective stories are tales of dreams pursued, challenges overcome and milestones achieved – each contributing to the broader story of our campus.

These stories are the very heartbeats of our university and help us find common ground.

Today, our State of the University presentation will share some of these amazing stories with you, to illustrate how incredible our university is and inspire you to think about how you are creating your own SU story.

While each of us has our own story, we may not always recognize the influential role we play in helping to write the stories of the thousands of others every day – through our actions, our words and our work.

To begin, there are a few people I want to acknowledge who make such a difference in the life of our institution.

I'd like to thank all the elected officials, community leaders, alumni, donors and friends with us.

I'd also like to recognize Salisbury University's Cabinet, our shared governance leadership teams and the President's Advisory Team. Thank you for your support.

For the past two years, the Salisbury Seven has guided our work. And this past year, we've accomplished a lot.

A Look Back – Our People

Just a few weeks ago, we proudly welcomed more than 1,400 new students, bringing with them a wealth of perspectives and experiences that enrich our community. The Class of 2028 hails from 21 states and represents 14 countries – nearly a third come from underrepresented backgrounds and more than a third are first-generation college students.

To complete our new class, we also welcomed nearly 500 transfer students and 200 new graduate students.

Our incoming students aren't just numbers though. They come to us after summers spent interning with local businesses, serving their communities and searching for, and finding, a campus where they can begin a new chapter of their very own story. They are musicians,

advocates, team captains, SCUBA divers, budding entrepreneurs and volunteers. And one is a balloon artist who owns their own small business!

The numbers I share about our new class reflect not just their size and diversity, but also our ability to navigate the evolving landscape of higher education, especially in light of the challenges posed by the FAFSA rollout.

For perspective, last year, 92% of our incoming students received financial aid, with SU awarding nearly \$17 million in scholarship gift aid. This year, we anticipate awarding more than \$19 million in aid. I extend my deepest gratitude to our Enrollment Management teams, especially Beth Skoglund and the Admissions team for bringing in another strong class, and Mason White and the entire Financial Aid and Scholarships Office, whose tireless efforts meant we were the first in the USM [University System of Maryland] – and likely among the first nationwide – to release financial aid offers. This remarkable achievement undoubtedly played a crucial role in attracting this year's outstanding class, so thank you.

As we celebrate the newest additions to our flock, let us also acknowledge the pivotal role each of you – our dedicated faculty and staff – play in shaping their journey and their success.

This year, the Board of Regents once again recognized our employees as some of the best within the University System of Maryland with their Staff and Faculty Awards for Excellence – the highest honor given to employees by the USM Board of Regents.

A record-breaking three staff members – the most in SU history for awardees in one year and the most of any USM institution – Jennifer Ellis, Michelle Pryor and former staff member Stephanie Davis – were recognized for their contributions to our campus and service to the community.

Drs. Timothy Stock, Hong Yao and Sandy Pope were recognized by the Board for their innovation, leadership and mentorship both in and out of the classroom through the Board of Regents Faculty Awards.

Stephora Cesar Alberi and Bradley Powers received the Board of Regents Student Excellence Scholarship in recognition of their academic excellence, creativity and ability to make a real and important difference in our world.

Here at SU, we also celebrate our own.

Dr. Deneen Long-White was recently awarded this year's Distinguished Faculty Award, a peer-nominated accolade recognizing her exceptional advocacy for both students and the broader community.

Additionally, we recognized the dedicated individuals who are standout contributors to our campus community through our Employee of the Month program.

Thomas Perry, our Employee of the Month for April 2024, has been honored as Employee of the Year. Tom's journey at SU demonstrates the profound impact each of us can have on this institution, regardless of our role. Tom's story is one of exceptional innovation and efficiency.

Tom, the manager of the campus Chick-fil-A, successfully streamlined his operations, resulting in more than \$50,000 in savings and a revenue increase of more than \$120,000 – funds that directly support our institution and our students. Additionally, Tom has been recognized in the top 5% of the more than 400 licensed Chick-fil-A restaurant leaders across the country – a story worth telling! Congratulations, Tom!

When I first joined SU, I frequently heard calls for simplified processes and greater opportunities for advancement and growth.

While Workday is complicating our processes currently, significant efforts have been made to improve our Human Resources operations.

Earlier this year, HR introduced a new single-form position request process, replacing the previous system of multiple, cumbersome forms. These changes provided us insight into how departments were managing position requests and supported the transition to our new budget model.

To further enhance communication, the HR website was redesigned with a simplified layout and more intuitive navigation, making it easier to access the important information you need.

While the redesigned HR website and changes to our position request process are great steps in making it easier to do our jobs, I know the transition to Workday has brought significant challenges.

You may or may not know that we are part of the Maryland Connect project with four other USM institutions, and for the past four years, we have worked as a team to try to create a Workday platform that works for all the institutions as one central solution.

The shift has introduced complexities and limitations we need to address and adapt to, not the least of which is that we cannot always solve the problems ourselves with our in-house staff. As mentioned in my message last week, many times, we find problems but are reliant on an administrator in Baltimore fielding requests from institutions in the Maryland Connect consortium to resolve these problems.

Despite these hurdles, I am confident that with continued community effort and dedication, we will overcome these obstacles and eventually experience the full benefits of the Workday system.

I am sincerely grateful to our colleagues who have invested years of hard work into this project and are continuing to support us over the finish line. I think it's important to note that the transition to Workday is something most agencies are grappling with state-wide – including

the Central Payroll Bureau and USM institutions inside and outside of Maryland Connect – and it's these individuals here on our campus who have been able to help us be among the first to champion these changes. So, thank you to everyone – whether you've been working in the Workday system for two months or two years – you are helping us to lead the way.

And once again, thank you for your continued patience and for your understanding and kindness in dealing with those who are trying their best to do this work as fast as possible.

As we move forward, it's essential we continue to invest in our most valuable asset: our people. An important part of caring for our employees is giving room for training, professional development and advancement. Later this fall, you will see new on-boarding and manager trainings designed to enhance skills, foster growth and support career progression. These initiatives will help our team members excel in their current roles and prepare them for future opportunities.

Additionally, we continue to offer SULEad, a professional development initiative that provides staff the opportunity to learn about various aspects of University operations and create a pipeline of diverse leaders within the institution.

In just two years, the program has already achieved remarkable success. Take Michelle Hirsch, for example. She entered the program just a short while after transitioning into a new role as the executive assistant to the vice president of advancement and alumni relations. Michelle leveraged SULEad to build the skills and forge the connections necessary to excel. SULEad provided her with opportunities to engage with peers in her cohort and build relationships across campus – all interactions that she credits for helping to shape her into a more empathetic and effective leader.

Of course, each of you deserves recognition for the incredible work you are doing, though to do that, I would likely be here until our next State of the University address. Knowing that thanks is never enough, I am thrilled that we were able to reward everyone for their great work with COLA and merit salary increases in July, despite the challenging budgetary landscape of the State.

A Look Back – Academic Excellence & World-Class Facilities

We recognize that for any of our students to reach their highest levels of success, academic excellence must surround us, and, most especially, it must live within the classroom.

To ensure this, we made a sustained investment in our faculty, year-over-year. Just this year, we welcomed 20 new faculty to our campus. Twenty-nine faculty were granted sabbaticals to focus on research and study, becoming even more accomplished and effective teachers and scholars. Twelve faculty members received tenure and 25 were promoted for the incredible work and dedication that they have shown to our students and SU.

Advancing academic excellence also means we must share – widely – the excellent things happening here. I am happy to note that last year, faculty traveled to more than 400 conferences, presenting their work or advancing their skills, across the globe.

This summer, a group of faculty and doctoral students from the Seidel School journeyed to Crete, Greece, to present at the Federation of European Literacy Associations conference, sharing their insights on literacy instruction and artificial intelligence. The trip facilitated valuable networking and showcased the groundbreaking research from SU, and it is a vivid example of the high-quality faculty-student research that takes place on our campus.

The talents of our faculty, staff, and students deserve to be housed and showcased in world-class facilities.

In June, we broke ground on the Blackwell Hall renovation. Understanding the importance of this project, the State provided an additional \$19.2 million in support over the next three years. Faced with the prospect of cutting key elements of the project and pulling from SU's own reserve funds to complete it, these additional monies keep us on track to becoming one of the first net-zero buildings in the University System of Maryland.

Part of the Blackwell renovation is the installation of geothermal fields beneath the Holloway Hall lawn, representing a significant step forward in our commitment to sustainability. Geothermal fields are a clean, reliable and efficient source of energy, enabling us to operate with a zero net carbon footprint while upholding SU's enduring commitment to environmental responsibility.

Upon completing the installation this spring, we will restore the lawn and begin the development of a new Centennial Plaza next summer. This new plaza will enhance our campus' front door and help to celebrate Holloway Hall and our century of history.

Campus improvements can sometimes be disruptive. Right now, we know the loss of the Blackwell parking lot is creating complications and inconveniences. We are currently working to remedy this.

Some of these steps include:

- moving fleet vehicles and equipment from auxiliary lots to increase student parking spaces;
- converting service vehicle spots to increase available parking spaces; and
- reviewing the shuttle system to alleviate pressure from main campus parking.

I know it creates a headache when a spot is not easily located, and please know we are working to remedy the issue. More information will be forthcoming via email, so please look for it soon.

The ongoing construction keeps us on track for the anticipated renovation of the Guerrieri Student Union upon Blackwell's completion. Funds for the project are already set aside, and we look forward to exploring how we can use this space strategically and efficiently to meet evolving student needs.

Another project benefiting our entire community is the newly completed planetarium. Made possible by a gift from the Henson Foundation, the planetarium will be primarily used for astronomy classes, while the projection dome can also be used for special events such as virtual reality experiences and movies.

These projects and achievements – along with many others

completed this year – are some of the driving forces to enhance the academic excellence of our students, faculty and staff. Each initiative contributes to this overarching goal – reflecting our commitment to academic achievement – and I thank everyone for their work in making these achievements possible.

A Look Back - Creating a Culture of Equity & Inclusion

When celebrating these accomplishments and their role in advancing academic excellence, it is equally important to recognize how our commitment to a culture of equity and inclusion underpins and strengthens these efforts.

Earlier this year, Zebadiah Hall joined SU as our inaugural vice president of inclusion, access and belonging. Zebadiah joined SU from the University of Wyoming, where he served as vice president of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Zebadiah oversees the newly formed Division of Inclusion, Access and Belonging, which enhances collaboration across campus by uniting these key offices into a cohesive team, offering a more comprehensive approach to addressing the diverse needs of our community and ensuring resources and support are more readily accessible and effectively coordinated.

Two standout programs that exemplify this comprehensive approach are the DRC STARS and Powerful Connections programs. These initiatives are significantly impacting students, fostering a strong sense of belonging, and paving the way for retention and success in and out of the classroom.

Jahnaiya Sutherland is one of the students who has seen just how powerful these programs can be. From Prince George's County, Jahnaiya knew that coming to Salisbury was going to be different. Looking for a safe space to land, she joined Powerful Connections as a mentee her freshman year. Aside from the connection to everything from clubs to study groups, today, Jahnaiya says that she wouldn't still be at SU if not for Powerful Connections and the people she's met. Growing from a mentee, to mentor, to mentor coordinator, Jahnaiya knows that she's a small, but mighty part of someone else's journey here at SU.

Jahnaiya's journey with Powerful Connections illustrates how crucial support systems are in fostering personal growth and community.

SU's commitment to environmental sustainability reflects its dedication to creating a more equitable future, recognizing that the effects of climate change often disproportionately impact vulnerable communities.

Earlier this year, many saw office trash cans replaced with new recycling bins with attached mini-cans. Through this initiative, we increased our recycling rate by 25% in these locations, and it is estimated SU will send 75,000 fewer plastic bin liners to the landfill annually, reducing our use of single-use plastics on campus.

Our sustainability teams are also working to keep what isn't trash out of landfills. During December and May's move-out weeks, Give-and-Go Donation Stations were positioned at each residence

hall to encourage students to donate unwanted items. Over these two periods, we collected nearly six and a half tons of donations, most of which went to local thrift stores!

All this work resulted in SU being named a Top Performer in the Energy Impact Area by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education.

From sustainability to access, SU is dedicated to advancing a culture of equity and inclusion. Our commitment extends across all aspects of University life, ensuring that these values are woven into everything we do.

A Look Back – Distinction & Growth

SU continues to be lauded for all these efforts and well beyond.

Once again, we were recognized as a top University by countless outlets for our excellent academics, student success, affordability and career readiness.

We also were recognized as a leader through numerous grants, including:

- a \$35,000 grant from the Maryland Heritage Area Authority for interpretation and accessibility features at the Museum of Eastern Shore Culture – set to open on November 1;
- a \$380,000 grant from the National Science Foundation granted to Dr. Clifton Griffin, Dr. Sophie Wang and Michael Jensen that will help SU use AI solutions to solve problems for local agency, business and non-profit partners;
- a \$750,000 grant from the Maryland Higher Education Commission will facilitate on-campus public safety infrastructure improvements;
- a \$216,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education aims to increase student retention and success;
- and so many more.

Speaking of student success, I want to highlight our Back to Flying Scholarship, which offers financial support to students who move from academic probation to Dean's List status in one semester. To date, 30 students have received this \$1,000 award. This program not only provides financial relief, but it also celebrates academic improvement and perseverance, evident in the remarkable turnaround of those who received the scholarship, seeing their average GPAs go from a 1.29 to an astonishing 3.8.

Kellie Waye is one of these phenomenal students. Last fall, Kellie transferred to SU from Prince George's Community College. Away from home for the first time and trying to find her way, Kellie found herself with a 1.0 GPA after her first semester. She knew she had a choice: keep down the path she was on or find a way to succeed. Returning for the spring semester with a renewed focus and a promise to herself to ask for the help she needed, Kellie finished the semester with a 3.57 and her name on Dean's List.

Kellie's story is about more than just a scholarship – though she notes it's been an important part of her success – it's the lessons she learned along the way – lessons she will take into her own classroom one day. As an elementary education major, Kellie knows that her experience as both a struggling and successful student will make her a better and more empathic teacher to her future second graders.

Last year, Faculty Senate approved the proposal to formalize the Graduate School, furthering our shared goal to boost enrollment, enhance graduate education and strengthen the University's reputation.

We've already seen how this increased synergy and support has helped students transition from undergraduate to graduate studies.

Take Nick Ransom, a 2024 graduate of the Perdue School of Business with a finance degree and a dedicated men's lacrosse student-athlete. Although many of his peers were moving on after graduation, Nick chose to extend his time at SU by pursuing an M.B.A. The decision wasn't easy, but having the chance to further his education, remain part of a championship culture and continue being immersed in the vibrant student life alongside supportive faculty and staff ultimately made his decision clear. He knew there was no better place for him to be.

Nick's choice to stay reflects the broader enhancements we are making to our academic offerings, demonstrating our commitment to providing exceptional opportunities for our students.

At my last State of the University address, I announced several newly developed programs in engineering physics, music therapy and public communication. Since then, we have made significant progress on the launch of these programs. This fall, we are officially offering engineering physics within the Henson School and Master of Arts in public communication through the Fulton and Graduate schools. The music therapy program, also through the Fulton School, will be the first of its kind at a public school in Maryland and the Delmarva region and plans to take its first cohort of student's next fall.

Growing and strengthening our institution requires investment. In 2023, we launched the Strategic Innovation Fund, which provided funding for six projects that support initiatives across our campus. On your way out, I encourage you to take a postcard that includes an update on the funded projects and the impact they have already had on our campus. I also encourage you to look at our newly released annual report and submit your SU story through the links included on that same postcard.

Commitment to excellence at our University is undeniable. From new programs to improving student outcomes through strategic enhancements, these achievements are a testament to the collective effort of our faculty, staff and students, all of whom contribute to the ongoing success and evolution of Salisbury University.

A Look Back – High-Impact Practices & Experiential Learning

High-impact practices and experiential learning are central to how SU provides transformative education, offering hands-on experiences that bridge theory with real-world application.

We see evidence of this through our Fulbright awards. Last year, three Salisbury University students were selected for the prestigious Fulbright Student Award.

Ashlynn Burrows, a communication and conflict analysis and dispute resolution major, was selected for an English teaching assistantship in the Czech Republic where she hopes to volunteer with the Czech Women's Lobby to advocate for the rights of women and disadvantaged groups.

Madison Cuthbert, an environmental and international studies major, will conduct research in Greece on the interconnectedness of science and policy in the role of minimizing microplastics in Greek surface waters at the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research and the University of the Aegean.

And Naomi Perry, a biology and French major is the first SU student to receive a Fulbright to study in France, one of the most competitive Fulbright locations across the globe. Naomi, who hopes to someday be a spaceflight surgeon, will complete astrobiological research at the Université Paris-Saclay, which includes working to determine analogs for life on Mars. After completing her Fulbright, Naomi plans to begin medical school and apply to be a physician through the U.S. Air Force Health Professions Scholarship Program.

Students are not the only ones who continue to be recognized through the Fulbright program. This year, two faculty members, Drs. Viktoria Basham and Ryan Habermeyer, are teaching and furthering their research in Europe.

Dr. Basham, a lecturer in the Clarke Honors College and assistant director of the University's Nationally Competitive Fellowships Office, will spend the spring semester and part of next summer conducting research and teaching in her native home of Bulgaria with a focus on folklore, specifically, the field of vampire studies.

Dr. Habermeyer, associate professor of English, will serve as a visiting scholar at the University of Gdansk, Poland. During his fellowship, Dr. Habermeyer will teach a course examining the intersection of post-truth and folklore, and author a semi-biographical novel about his great-grandfather's World War I experiences as a U.S. soldier in Europe.

Similarly, Jason Curtin, vice president of advancement and alumni relations, aims to achieve a parallel objective through his participation in the Fulbright International Education Administrator Program. In Berlin, Germany, Jason will join 16 other representatives from U.S. higher education institutions to build valuable connections with German educational leaders and gain insights into their educational system.

These efforts collectively contribute to expanding opportunities for international collaboration and enriching study abroad experiences. Currently, we have 12 international memorandums of understanding spanning the globe, from France to Ghana, including two I recently signed in South Korea.

These partnerships have facilitated more than 1,000 student exchanges, either sending students abroad or welcoming them to SU. Remarkably, these exchanges have even led to at least six marriages – *that we know of* – demonstrating the profound and personal influence these programs have on our students' lives.

Last year, more than 200 SU students studied abroad or away for academic credit. Notably, more than 50% of students in the Clarke Honors College engaged in an international experience, reflecting their strong commitment to global education and preparing students for an interconnected world.

A world that Windy Spellman witnessed firsthand when this summer she became the 100th SU student to earn academic credit through a global internship with our study abroad partner the American Institute for Foreign Studies. As a psychology major with a minor in law, justice and advocacy, Windy worked at Ozanam House Resource Center in Dublin, Ireland, on a project for children in need of support, many of whom come from families affected by incarceration, addiction or other serious conditions. And while Windy will always look fondly on her summer learning about Irish history and culture, she is most proud that her time there moved her toward her goal of enrolling in the University of Maryland master's degree program in terrorism analysis and one day working for a federal law enforcement agency.

The partnerships we're forging domestically are equally as crucial as those we're establishing internationally. A prime example of this commitment is our recent Space Act Agreement with NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, signed this past March. This partnership aims to create many educational and career opportunities for our students, giving them the chance to participate in internships and collaborative projects, work alongside leading scientists and engineers, and contribute to groundbreaking research.

One person who will take advantage of this new partnership is first-year student Sophie Stillwell. Sophie chose to come to SU largely because of our collaboration with NASA. Last spring, as Sophie weighed her college options, she was drawn to our strong ties with the space agency, knowing her passion for astronomy was leading her to a future among the stars. What makes Sophie's story even more remarkable is that it's difficult for her to actually see the stars because she is legally blind, with clear vision limited to just a few inches from her eyes, making the distant stars largely out of sight.

Yet, as a physics major with a concentration in astronomy and astrophysics, Sophie is determined to see the stars through her studies. Hoping to one day do research at NASA and attend graduate school, she knows that SU's connections and research opportunities are exactly what she needs to turn her dream into reality.

SU signed another impactful Educational Partnership Agreement with the Maryland Army National Guard in May 2024. This agreement focuses on creating pathways for students to engage with the National Guard through internships, leadership training and educational programs. The partnership will develop the leadership skills and provide practical experiences that align with the Guard's mission and SU's academic goals.

In a similar vein, we are thrilled to announce that we have marched forward, making significant progress in bringing back the marching band next fall. With great anticipation, we welcomed Dennis Senkbeil this fall as the director of bands. This appointment heralds a new chapter for all our bands, the Peter and Judy Jackson Music Program, and our Athletics Program. Promising to inspire and elevate school spirit, I hope you will come see our newly formed academic Pep Band in action as they perform at our Homecoming football game on October 26.

Our commitment to providing experiential learning goes beyond the classroom and extending on to the fields and courts.

Last year, volleyball and men's and women's lacrosse won conference championships; 10 teams participated in NCAA post-season play; baseball and softball won NCAA regional championships; and our women's lacrosse team was the national championship runner-up.

We had 21 All-Americans, 147 All-Conference athletes, nine Players of the Year and five Coaches of the Year.

These successes on the field are great, but the success of our students in the classroom is even more impressive.

Once again, student-athletes have higher GPAs versus non-student-athletes and are more likely to remain and graduate on time. In addition, during the 2023-2024 academic year, we had six Academic All-Americans and one conference Scholar-Athlete of the Year.

This year's incoming class includes the largest student-athlete cohort ever – 256 freshmen and 30 transfers. Our total number of student-athletes stands at 690, which is the largest group of student-athletes in SU history. These numbers excitingly include the 14 members of the brand-new women's and men's golf teams.

A huge part of these students' college experiences will be their participation on these teams, and I am thrilled to welcome them to the Flock and that we can provide them with the opportunity to play the sport they love at the collegiate level.

This group will also quickly learn our students are known for their dedication to this community beyond our campus. Earlier this year, Salisbury Athletics won the Division III NCAA Community Service Award for more than 7,000 volunteer hours logged and a 74% athlete participation rate. This is particularly impressive when you consider that Division III is the largest NCAA conference, comprised of 423 colleges and universities.

High-impact practices and experiential learning will always be central to our purpose as a university, and each is unique to every member of our community. Even the smallest touch point can often be incredibly significant for others.

A Look Back – Raising Resources

As we continue to prioritize and enhance these vital elements, we recognize that achieving our goals requires more than just commitment and creativity – it also necessitates robust support and resources.

In an incredible display of community support and generosity, this spring's Giving Day was a resounding success. Within just 24 hours, we raised a combined total of more than \$504,000 thanks to the efforts of 3,061 dedicated supporters. This impressive achievement reflects the deep commitment of our alumni, friends and partners to our University's mission and vision. I offer a big thank you to our generous matching gift donors Wayne and Melissa Judkins, who for the third year in a row helped to make this day a success.

Another significant contributor to this success is Michelle Pryor, who oversees Giving Day and our flash fundraisers and has been recognized as one of the Community Foundation's Top 40 Under 40. Her leadership and innovative approach have been instrumental in driving

our fundraising initiatives forward. Congratulations Michelle on this well-deserved honor!

A year and a half ago, we set the goal of reaching 100 endowed scholarships for the Centennial Scholarships Program. As of today, we have passed the halfway mark, with 67 scholarships to date.

I thank the SU Foundation whose Endowment Incentive Program helped get us this far so quickly. Through the Endowment Incentive, the Foundation pledged \$100,000 of Sea Gull Century proceeds toward 20 newly established endowments. This significant contribution makes it easier for donors to contribute the initial investment needed to create lasting support for SU students.

These scholarships make a profound difference in the lives of many. For instance, the Anne and John Gilheany Scholarship is sponsored by SU faculty members Eileen Gilheany and Jim Forte in memory of Eileen's parents.

Each year, the scholarship is offered to a first-generation, senior, social work major who demonstrates a commitment to caring for others. This spring, Emily Haun accepted the scholarship, but she wasn't able to attend the thank you celebration since she had just given birth to a beautiful baby girl.

In her note of thanks to Eileen and John, she wrote the following: "Please know that your scholarship is appreciated and has helped me afford my tuition during school year. I have overcome many challenges during this time – being employed part-time and completing an internship while juggling pregnancy was demanding ... I have now enrolled in graduate school, and I plan to become a licensed clinical social worker so I can provide therapy services to people with mental health disparities."

Raising resources goes beyond scholarships and campus initiatives; our collective action as a community makes a substantial difference across the Eastern Shore. Our students especially play a pivotal role in this endeavor. Initiatives like Relay For Life and Take Back the Night, led by our students, not only raise essential funds but also foster awareness and engagement on important issues. And this spring, just these two events together raised more than \$60,000 for their respective causes. Additionally, our Fraternity and Sorority Life community has demonstrated remarkable philanthropic spirit, raising nearly \$103,000 for their national and local causes last year.

The dedication of all these students reflects the character of giving and service that permeates our campus. Each effort, whether through large-scale events or smaller, targeted initiatives, highlights our commitment to raising resources that enrich our community and support our shared goals.

A Look Back – Institutional Identity & Reputation

As we build on this momentum, it's essential to channel our success into strengthening our institutional identity and reputation.

A key part of this effort involves embracing and celebrating our rich traditions and values. This year, we introduced new regalia, legacy seating and a first-generation honor at Commencement. These

initiatives honor the unique journey of our students and reinforce the pride and heritage associated with our institution.

As we look forward to celebrating this heritage with our fast-approaching centennial, earlier this year we announced the Centennial Steering Committee, comprised of more than 30 SU students, faculty, staff, administrators and alumni, as well as members of the greater community.

The committee has been pivotal in guiding our strategic direction for the centennial, ensuring that we both honor our past and shape our future through these centennial milestones.

In June, we had the privilege of hosting the University System of Maryland Board of Regents, USM staff and System presidents on our campus for their board meeting. Their visit allowed us to showcase our campus to those who make crucial decisions for our System and University. Over the course of their two days at SU, I repeatedly heard their heartfelt reflections on the sense of home and comfort they experienced here. This feedback reaffirms the warm and supportive environment we aim to create. It is deeply meaningful to know that the Regents and the System view SU with the same appreciation and understanding that we do.

Building on these successes and celebrating our unique strengths, we are enhancing our institutional identity and reinforcing our reputation as a nurturing and dynamic place of learning and growth.

Why We Do This

And it is a place where all these things – and more – are happening. A place where you make that happen.

We face any challenges and persevere because our work is profound, it is significant and it is life changing.

But don't just take my word for it. Take a look.

These students, and thousands more just like them, are why we do what we do each day. Not every day is easy. Sometimes many days aren't easy, but the reward is beyond anything we could hope for. And that's why we always look forward, always look to improve and better ourselves and our institution.

Looking Forward – Capital Projects

Nearly 100 years ago, our campus and much of the Eastern Shore looked very different than it does today. Moving into this next century, I am excited to announce the launch of our next Facilities Master Plan, which will shape the future of our campus infrastructure over the next 10 years. This comprehensive roadmap will engage the entire campus community and will offer detailed insights into the optimal use of every space at SU, from main campus to east campus to downtown.

One space that has remained seemingly untouched for 100 years is the Social Room. Just down the hall from where we gather today, this space was originally for “courting” in the 1920s and 1930s, and it has evolved into a versatile venue hosting more than 75 events annually, welcoming more than 4,000 guests each year.

With our upcoming centennial, there is no better time than now to give this space the fresh face it deserves. This summer, we raised more than \$140,000 toward the renovation, putting us on track for the entire renovation to be fully paid for by private philanthropy.

Renderings for the space include an ADA-compliant lift at the entrance, enhanced stairs, a fireplace insert, bookshelves for our new faculty library, expanded storage areas, new furniture and updated lighting. These enhancements will ensure the Social Room continues to be a welcoming space for all who gather there and befitting to the history and success of SU and all who have been a part of its journey.

Just as the Social Room has been a place for gathering throughout our institution's history, so has the Square.

As a part of the Blackwell project, the Square will also receive a complete makeover. It will include outdoor seating, an amphitheater area and gathering spaces, and it will provide a beautiful and welcoming space between two of our most student-success-focused buildings – Blackwell Hall and the Guerrieri Academic Commons.

Taking care of the needs of our community has always been central to our mission, and today, much of that care comes from making sure our community is healthy and has access to top-tier medical care.

To that end, a new space to house our College of Health and Human Services and the renovation of the Maggs Physical Activities Center remain our top capital priority. After careful planning and work, what was a two-building capital improvement project is now a single, multi-phase interdisciplinary project. Not only will this provide world-class teaching and learning spaces for our CHHS programs, it also will allow us to address the Maggs Center deficiencies years before we would have otherwise.

This year, we successfully advocated for the CHHS/Maggs project to be put forward by the University System as a request to the Governor's Office. If funding is approved at the State level according to the proposed timeline, we could begin the planning process and receive the first funding allocation as early as fiscal year 2027. It will not be an easy road, given the challenges we see at the State level, but we believe that by combining these critical projects, we can most effectively advocate for the State support needed to make it a reality.

Another long sought-after project is the much-anticipated Performing Arts Center. Announced earlier this year, plans for this \$100 million downtown space will include everything from large auditorium seating, theatre and music spaces, scene design facilities, and classrooms. The Center will not just be a place to showcase our students' talents, but it will provide a venue for performances for the entire Eastern Shore community. This project is the result of efforts from many – too many to say aloud – so please allow me to thank everyone for their excellent work in helping to move this exciting project forward.

While the Center is eligible for State support because of its special focus on academics, the project also will be substantively funded through grants and private philanthropy. In fact, after a tremendous summer of work, we have received commitments for more than \$11 million, with more support expected this year! This is the highest amount of private philanthropy ever raised for one capital project in SU history. Thank you to Jason Curtin and his team for their tremendous work.

Looking Forward – Strategic Partnerships

To build on this momentum and further enhance our community and campus, we are also focusing on developing strategic partnerships.

One such partnership is with the Wicomico County Public Library, which has been instrumental in making the Performing Arts Center a reality. This collaboration involves a unique approach, a building swap that will move the library’s main downtown branch to the Schumaker Pond building, allowing us to repurpose the current library space for the Performing Arts Center.

The library’s relocation to the Schumaker Pond building ensures it continues to serve the public with enhanced resources and services, while the former library space will be built upon to support our cultural and academic programs.

By working together in this way, we are maximizing the use of existing resources and creating a win-win situation for both institutions and the community at large.

As we expand our presence in our local community, we are also expanding our presence across the bridge.

This fall, we’re thrilled to open a new SU branch office in Annapolis, a strategic move that positions us to more effectively advocate for partnerships, State support, and reach new students and donors. The office will be shared with TidalHealth and will establish SU’s presence in the State capital.

Only a six-minute walk from the State House, through active participation in legislative sessions, state forums and policy discussions, we will advocate for collaborative opportunities. We will be able to engage more effectively with potential partners and supporters, expanding our network and securing crucial support.

For years, our teams have proudly proclaimed “Champions Wear Gold,” and now, they’ll wear the best gear with our new partnership with Under Armour. As the official outfitter for all 23 varsity sports, Under Armour will enhance our University’s visibility and reputation with high-performance, cutting-edge uniforms – and our athletes will finally all be wearing the exact same shade of maroon and gold! This collaboration will also provide our athletes with exclusive access to events, including product testing and special competitions at Under Armour Stadium in Baltimore, promising to elevate both our sports program and our champions.

These are just a few examples of the strategic partnerships we are pursuing. As we look at the higher education landscape, it is clear that as an institution we need to be considering alternate pathways to recruit students and new sources of external funding to continue to provide the educational experience that Salisbury is known for. I look forward to sharing more with you throughout the year about new opportunities for growth.

Looking Forward – Centennial

As we eagerly anticipate the exciting possibilities that our partnerships will bring, it’s also a perfect time to reflect on and celebrate our rich history. Our centennial anniversary not only honors our past achievements but also paves the way for a future of continued growth and influence.

The Centennial Steering Committee and its subgroups have been diligently preparing for this landmark occasion. Our official celebrations will commence on our birthday, September 7, 2025, with Fun Fest in the Nest, a day dedicated to honoring the incredible community that has supported us for a century and showcasing all our campus has to offer. Festivities will continue throughout the year, woven into every aspect of our activities, events and academic programming.

Our centennial celebrations will come to an official end at the May 2026 graduation.

Although celebrations will officially start next fall, we don’t want to miss another major milestone. This May – May 2025 – will mark our 100th graduating class, a significant moment in our institution’s history.

To mark the occasion, I am thrilled to share that this year’s May Commencement Ceremony will take place right here on our campus at Sea Gull Stadium. This exciting update, shaped by feedback from students, faculty and staff, will give our graduates the opportunity to celebrate their first moments as an SU alumni in the very place where their journey as a Sea Gull began.

Looking Forward – Strategic Planning

As we celebrate our centennial and reflect on our remarkable history, we also look ahead with great anticipation. This year will complete a key initiative integral to the health and strength of our University: the Middle States Self-Study, which will result in our University’s re-accreditation.

In early October, we will share a draft of the Self-Study Report with campus for review and feedback. On November 6, we will welcome Dr. Marilyn Wells, the chair of our Visiting Team and chancellor at Pennsylvania State University-Brandywine, for her preliminary visit. During this visit, Dr. Wells will review our draft report, engage with our campus constituents and offer valuable feedback.

I encourage all students, faculty and staff to engage in the various meetings with Dr. Wells to contribute to this critical dialogue. Please also mark your calendars for the Full Team Visit scheduled for March 2-5, 2025.

I extend my gratitude to Dr. Jessica Clark, Dr. Kara Raab and Eric Stewart as well as to the entire Steering Committee and the more than 70 working group members whose collective hard work is driving this process forward – thank you!

As we advance through the Middle States Self-Study process and approach the end of our current Strategic Plan, set to expire in 2025, we are turning our focus to developing a new Strategic Plan. This upcoming plan will build upon the previous plan, serving as a roadmap to guide us as we conclude our first century of achievement and chart a course for continued success into the next century.

Like Middle States, the strategic planning process involves students, faculty, staff, alumni and community partners to craft a vision reflecting our shared aspirations and strategic priorities. This will involve a series of workshops, forums and discussions designed to gather input, align our goals, and set actionable and measurable objectives for the years ahead.

Our aim is to develop a Strategic Plan that not only addresses immediate needs but also anticipates future trends and positions us for long-term success. I am excited about the potential this process holds for us to redefine our goals, innovate our practices and further our mission of excellence.

Today, I am thrilled to announce that Zebadiah Hall, vice president of inclusion, access and belonging, and Dr. Christy Weer, dean of the Perdue School of Business, have agreed to serve as the Strategic Plan co-chairs. Be on the lookout for an email from our co-chairs announcing the steering committee and with more information about how you can participate in the next few weeks.

Everyone's involvement in this process is invaluable, and I thank you all for your upcoming work.

Driven by Mission, Fueled by Rest

Now, all this work means we also need some time for rest and relaxation. To that end – and I know that some of you have been sitting here this whole time for this very moment, this winter, we will close campus January 2-3 to add to the winter break holiday, giving each of us a full two weeks off. Thank you again for all that you do.

Our SU Stories

Every single day, within these walls, we have the profound privilege of helping to write someone's story – a story filled with potential, hope and meaning.

When I began today, I shared that I, too, have my own SU story. Many of you know my love of reading – so forgive me these analogies. Some days my SU story is a love story. Some days a tearjerker. Still

others are mysteries and historical dramas and adventures. But, every day adds a new chapter into this magnum opus that we are all working on together.

I will share this: My story is made up primarily of what might seem like small, fleeting moments – but in combination, they are what makes this life so incredible. It's welcoming a student back to campus after she overcame a life-changing attack. It's spending the afternoon with some amazing staff members making a community quilt. It's my morning conversation with Officer Green about his puppy Scooter. It's the high-five from a student as I walk across campus. It's the hug from a parent on move-in day as they leave their daughter in a new place for the first time.

It's every lacrosse goal, every handshake at commencement, every email sent, every meeting attended, every presentation given, and every night I get to go to bed thankful to be part of this flock and to be able to do this work.

I hope that each of you sees the beauty in your small moments, because your story might not be a whole epic all at once – because the epic-ness might just be the day-to-day, one hour after another moments that we are lucky enough to experience. How we choose to experience these moments will define our story – and our impact on the whole. Because we are not merely participants in a process; we are the architects of dreams, the cultivators of futures. Our work is about igniting passion, fostering resilience, and making a tangible difference in the lives of our students, our community and beyond.

As we move forward, let us remain steadfast in our commitment. Let's remember why we embarked on this journey in the first place: for every student who walks through our doors, for every family we support and for the brighter future we're shaping together.

So, I challenge you: Think how you will contribute to this unfolding narrative. Your actions, your passion, your dedication – these are the pages of our SU story.

So, we challenge you: What's your SU story?

Thank you.



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