

EVENT: State of Higher Education

Date: May 10, 2023

PRESIDENT'S ROLE: Remarks

Since coming to Arlington what's really stood out to me is just how much the people here, and this community value education and how much this community values UTA.

And what have I learned is that everyone knows at least something about UTA, which is fantastic.

BUT what I have also realized is that there is the UTA you know and then the UTA - you need to know.

And what everyone in this room probably knows are some really great things about UTA.

You're familiar with the visible aspects of UTA. Like our main campus in Arlington. That our mascot is the Maverick. And that our school colors are blue and orange.

You may even know our colors are worn by the Movin' Mavs – and that our men's wheelchair basketball team won 10 national titles, including back-to-back championships in 2021 and 2022.

But whatever you know about UTA, I guarantee there's an even bigger UTA you need to know. And that's the UTA I want to introduce to you today.

Perhaps you own a piece of blown glass from our world-renowned glass art program. But you need to know that UTA is reintroducing neon into our glass program, allowing our students to sculpt with light and making us one of only a handful of programs nationally teaching this art form. So next time you see a neon sign – know it may just be Maverick made.

Now, y'all have probably heard about our fabulous new building for social work and nursing, but here's something you need to know: UTA is the largest public nursing school in the country. And more nurses in Texas graduate from UTA than any other university in the state. If you are in a hospital anywhere in Texas – and I sure hope you don't have to be, but the odds are you are being cared for by a UTA nurse.

I want to share with you the UTA I get to experience every single day ... as I see what our faculty, staff, and students are doing on campus and in the community ... as I see the impact our

Maverick alums are having. I see it over and over again, it's: The Maverick Factor. It's what I consider to be the unique something within our Mavericks that sets us apart.

It's being unafraid. It's rewriting the status quo. It's creating impact in our community.

Let me start by giving you some examples of our research impact, because after all we ARE a national research university.

Now you might know that the nation's most prominent media outlets regularly call on us to provide our insights and to share our stories of research impact. So what is it that our national media know that you might not?

For starters, over in the McDowell Center for Global Studies, Brian Whitmore has an internationally recognized podcast called The Power Vertical, which covers Russian and post-Soviet affairs, including the war in Ukraine. The podcast's regular listeners include officials in the CIA, the State Department, the Department of Defense, NATO and any number of European governments. Brian has become an important expert voice regularly explaining what is happening in the war to us locally on NBC 5 and to our nation in media outlets like the Washington Post.

And over at CBS well they know we love trash – yep you heard me right, here at UTA we – love - trash. Over in our Solid Waste Institute for Sustainability we work on what to do with all our trash.

The Maverick Factor means being a game changer.

Those water bottles you discard well we are turning them into roads. We are working with the Texas Department of Transportation to build the first plastic highway in Texas, construction starts this month on our plastic road project in Bangladesh and this summer we'll be paving our first plastic parking lots right here at UTA.

Putting recycled plastics in our roads increases the durability and reduces the need for maintenance – saving us all taxpayer dollars. So the next time you recycle a water bottle – think about how that could one day make it into a street near you. PAUSE

Now, we're certainly working to make infrastructure better. And it's not just plastic roads.

We just received a \$10 million grant from the US Department of Transportation to develop concrete for roadways that costs less, last longer and is better for the environment. The most amazing part? Our researchers are aiming to have this new concrete absorb up to 80% of the greenhouse gases emitted from our vehicles as we drive on our roads.

Now I suspect y'all are like me and when you hear a TV commercial for a medication and you hear that scary long list of side effects – you think should I really be taking that?

Well at UTA we are busy making the drugs we rely on safer. Think about the last time you took an oral medication – maybe it was a pain reliever for a headache or an antibiotic. About 60% of the drugs taken orally are safer because of the chemistry research happening right here at UTA. We have invented ways to reduce those dangerous side effects. And It's this unrelenting focus on innovation that has our graduates recruited into all of the major pharmaceutical companies in our region, nation and across the globe.

Now, this cute little guy is smaller than a coin. He's a member of *Craugastor mexicanus*. It's one of six species of miniature frogs that were unknown to science until our Mavericks discovered them.

Now, for biologists, discovering six new species is amazing. But did you know that UTA's researchers have discovered at least 237 amphibian and reptile species and counting?

Yea, discovering new species is one of the things we are really great at.

UTA's Amphibian and Reptile Diversity Research Center – well it's the largest research collection in Texas and one of the largest in the world. We have more than 200,000 specimens from all over the world.

Think of it like a lizard lending library - we literally ship these specimens all over the world to researchers who want to study what we have in our collections.

NASA has us working on solving one of their most pressing problems. You know how we can open our phones and get a weather forecast? Well, wouldn't it be really nice to have a weather forecast for the boundary of where Earth's atmosphere meets space? Big space storms can disrupt communications from our satellites. NASA asked Yue Deng to lead a team to help solve this problem. Just a few months ago she hosted a kickoff meeting for a seven-year NASA satellite mission that will allow for future space weather forecasting.

It's our reputation for impact that has led to so many companies looking to UTA for our help with their most pressing challenges. We work with companies all over the nation and right here in our backyard. Companies like Arlington-based Galaxy Unmanned Systems who partnered with us to help create the autonomous guidance controls for their autonomous blimps. These airships are in development for a range of applications, from shipping cargo to assisting the U.S. Coast Guard and Border Patrol.

I'll share a few more quick examples. This past year we created the world's largest CT scanner to help Bell and Lockheed scan helicopter blades and airplane wings to look for structural defects.

And we're working with Ford on the automatic decisions systems for the next generation of autonomous vehicles.

Working on autonomous vehicles is great and all, but I keep wondering when our researchers are going to get to the personal space vehicles that I grew up watching on the Jetsons – I am sure our researchers will get to that soon.

Let's just say I get to work with some really, really, REALLY smart people here at UTA who get to think about important stuff so the rest of us don't have to. This is the Maverick Factor, it's being unafraid to undertake visionary research.

At UTA we also understand the power of entrepreneurship. And that starts with supporting Arlington ISD and the Greater Arlington Chamber with the What's Your Big Idea Competition? Encouraging entrepreneurship in 3rd through 6th graders right here in Arlington.

We support our very own UTA students starting their own businesses. We are in the midst of this year's MavPitch, our Shark Tank-style business competition in which we award funds to help these student businesses get off the ground.

So many of our Mavericks graduates go on to build successful businesses. UTA graduates Adeel Hozri) and Niddal Abedrabbo were honored as the Mavs100 winners for having this year's fastest-growing alumni-owned business. I recommend you cool down this summer by stopping by Bahama Bucks Shaved Iced right here in Arlington. That's the Maverick Factor, this unstoppable force to forge your own path.

Now did y'all know our Maverick alums are making their mark on BBQ in Texas? Alums like Brandon Hurtado who has turned Hurtado's BBQ into one of the fastest-growing independently owned barbecue brands in the entire state. Hurtado's is on the Texas Monthly Top 50 BBQ Joint list, alongside fellow UTA alum Ashley Weaver who runs Dayne's Craft BBQ in Fort Worth.

And for those of you who prefer to grill at home. Matt Pittman is another Maverick pitmaster. Matt's signature spices and rubs are available online or at his Meat Church store in Waxahachie.

You might have even seen Matt on the Food Network's BBQ Pitmasters. It's got me thinking maybe we should think about starting a College of Barbecue?

In all seriousness though our Maverick entrepreneurs are building successful businesses, hiring within our communities, continuing to give back and of course spreading that Maverick spirit.

Y'all, doing what it takes to make a positive impact on our community, on the state, nation, and globally? That's the Maverick Factor. And none of that happens without long-term partnerships. We believe it's our partnerships that help our communities thrive.

James Sandy and his students partnered with the city to research and identify every military service member from Arlington who lost their lives in service to our country. Their work has led

to a memorial currently under construction in Arlington's Veterans Park. And our history and archeology students are planning to work with Arlington Baptist College to capture and preserve the history of the Top o' the Hill Terrace – Arlington's own Vegas before Vegas. We are honored to be a resource that can help tell our shared story.

Have you ever heard of wind therapy? Our team in the School of Social Work partnered with the One Tribe Foundation to study the therapeutic benefits of motorcycle riding in veterans and first responders. These veterans speak about the increased mental clarity, relaxation, and sense of purpose they're experiencing by getting out on the open road and experiencing wind therapy.

These are just a few examples of how we focus on veterans. Of all the universities in the country, UTA ranks as the 4th best college for student veterans. And we offer a military social work certificate to prepare professionals to support veterans across our state.

Amanda Olsen and Candace Joswick are making our regions' schools better by supporting nearly 300 middle school teachers integrating Texas Instruments technology into math classrooms, thanks to the support of a \$5.6 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

Over in Architecture, Brad McCorkle and his students are partnering with Tarrant County's Housing Channel to build tiny houses at Wynn Terrace right here in Arlington. This project is scheduled to break ground in late August and will create energy-efficient housing for seniors in need.

Now y'all may have heard that there is a Meow Wolf opening soon. After sold-out immersive and interactive shows in Las Vegas, Denver and Santa Fe – we are getting a location right here in Dallas-Fort Worth. And who did Meow Wolf turn to in order to create this large-scale interactive art? Well UTA art faculty of course. I'm sure many of you will join me in taking Meow Wolf in this summer.

We partner to fill hotel rooms, restaurants and generate economic impact for the businesses in our community. Destination Imagination is just one of the many events we host on our campus. This year's state finals brought 7,000 attendees to UTA. And the organizers have found the experience so wonderful they are bringing the event back to UTA in 2024 giving kids from across our state the chance to experience all that Arlington has to offer.

Y'all the work we do at UTA - it creates extraordinary impact on our community. Our latest economic impact report shows that the University of Texas Arlington has an annual impact of 22 billion dollars. Let me say that again \$22 billion dollars. That's an astronomical impact.

Y'all I could just go on all day telling you about all the amazing stories of impact we have here at UTA. But let me turn to the future. I have listened to all that you hope to see for the future of UTA and we are following through on the commitment I made to ensuring that UTA becomes

one of the nation's most inclusive and impactful universities. I want to share with you some of what we are cooking up.

We are continuously working on academic innovation. All that talk about BBQ earlier – well what sounds good with some great barbecue?

A cold beer.

Now y'all there's a science to crafting a great beer. Soon we'll be launching a new certificate in fermentation science to help aspiring brewmasters create that perfectly paired beer to go alongside your plate of bbq and who knows maybe we'll even have a UTA IPA one day. PAUSE

Now we have heard the call to generate more of the talent we need to help our restaurants, hotels and entertainment venues grow and it's why we are planning for a new hospitality program.

We heard your desire to see UTA engage in more research that will improve our lives. We are working to prevent and find treatments for things like dementia and concussions by recruiting a "cluster" of brain experts, who will build off our current expertise and bring further leadership to advancing UTA's contributions to our nation's long-term health and wellness.

And none of the research at UTA happens without physical space. That's why we are investing 149 million dollars to renovate and expand our life sciences complex.

I heard from our alums who wanted to see us grow our Greek Life on campus. And here we go – construction is starting soon on our new Greek Life Center that will provide space for our students to meet, socialize and host activities.

We are listening to our students who want to live on campus. So we are planning to open the new Maverick Hall in fall 2025, which will allow 500 more students to live on campus.

You shared a strong interest in the success of our athletes. Well, this year, our student-athletes kicked off their first year in the Western Athletic Conference with a bang, as our men's tennis team just won the WAC championship and competed in the NCAA tournament last week. And our new men's Basketball Coach KT Turner is working hard to recruit a stellar team of student-athletes. We are just getting started, so let me encourage y'all to come out to watch all of our student-athletes next season.

And we've listened as affordability for college is something top of mind for families – that's why our new Blaze Forward program helped cover tuition and fees for over 3,400 students since last fall. We also awarded a record-breaking 81 million dollars in scholarship support to students this past year. Helping to ensure those who want to achieve their degree, have that opportunity right here at UTA. And this fall, we are launching a pilot to provide housing scholarships to incoming students who are most in need.

We are doing all this and so much more to ensure we are continuing to grow our impact.

So remember the UTA you thought you knew? I hope today you've learned a lot more. Our community is stronger because of UTA, and UTA is stronger because of you.

There is an undeniably unrelenting spirit in our community. It's the Maverick Factor at work.

And y'all we need you. We need you to help spread the good word about UTA, to partner with us, and to stay in touch. That's why I am launching the MavsInsider group, and you are officially invited to be the first to join. To be a MavsInsider, text UTA to the number on the screen or scan the QR code at your table.

I am going to personally text you updates about events and happenings around our campus so that you can stay involved.

And I promise not to spam you. I have great text etiquette. But I do want to keep in touch.

As we prepare to close for today, I have one last story I want to share with you. That's the story of an alum who embodies the Maverick Factor. He was born and raised in east Texas, and he came to UTA where he ran track, was a member of a fraternity and earned his degree in civil engineering. Kelcy Warren took what he learned at UTA and has gone on to be a leader in the energy industry for more than 40 years. He co-founded a small business in 1996 that has gone on to become the Fortune 100 company Energy Transfer Partners. Truly, I could go on and on about the accomplishments that Kelcy has achieved over his career, but I want to focus on his impact, which defines the Maverick Factor. He knows the importance of the energy industry to our state and has spent his career making an impact there. But Kelcy has also long understood and supported education. He's a dedicated philanthropist and is a member of the UT System Board of Regents, the first-ever UTA alum appointed to the board.

Kelcy is a proud alum who has supported UTA throughout his career and helped lead its rise in national prominence. This year UTA's College of Engineering jumped 10 spots to become ranked by US News and World Report as the #69 best engineering school in this country.

Mr. Warren has been a constant supporter of UTA along the way. He has made an impact here through the years by providing scholarship support to students, a faculty endowment and research support.

Kelcy Warren has been a champion for our new Resource and Energy Engineering degree program that will see its first incoming class of students this coming fall. He saw that UTA could become a national leader in the energy industry. With his support, we're launching a program that will set UTA apart from all other universities in this field. This new program will fuel faculty

and research excellence and provide our engineering students with life-changing opportunities for educational and career success.

It is his generous support that will ensure that UTA becomes a national leader in energy education and research through his gift of 12 million dollars.

I am deeply grateful for Regent Kelcey Warren's philanthropic commitment to making UTA a national leader. While he could not be with us today, please join me in thanking him for this extraordinary investment in UTA.

Y'all, the Maverick Factor is real. I see it every day as I walk around our campus. It's all these wonderful, amazing, brilliant ideas and individuals that make us all better. For me, the Maverick Factor at its simplest is an unwavering commitment to impact and being the best partner this city, county and region could have.

I hope you leave having a glimpse into the UTA I get to know and support every day. All I ask of you is that you tell others about the UTA you now know. I am honored to get to lead this amazing national university and to share our story with you. Thank you and enjoy your afternoon.