

EVENT: State of the University

DATE: Tuesday, September 10, 2024

PRESIDENT'S ROLE: Remarks and presentation

Today, at The University of Texas at Arlington, a learning specialist led a study session that helped a Maverick student better understand a math concept, doing his part to help that student make academic progress.

A professor earned a grant that will fund years of potentially groundbreaking research, doing her part to elevate UTA as a recognized leader in research.

A counselor helped a new first-time-in-college student grapple with feelings of loneliness and learn strategies for gaining friends, giving this student the skills needed to flourish in their first few weeks on campus.

Off campus, an elementary school student, sparked by her experience at UTA's summer space camp, checked out a library book about women astronauts.

A high school senior applied to UTA, eager to join the class of 2029 and live in the brand-new Maverick Hall when it opens her first year.

And today, there are so many Maverick students who enjoyed better learning experiences in dozens of classrooms across our campus, because UTA information technology and facilities staffers upgraded classrooms.

What incredible impact we have together.

We're now into the start of my third academic year at UTA. I think back on my very first day as president, when I told y'all to "Dream Big."

Y'all ran with that. Our university is a place that's bringing so many of our shared dreams to life.

That's the magic of UTA. We dream big, but we also have the ingenuity and resources to develop plans that turn those dreams into reality.

I am so incredibly fortunate to lead an institution—and to work with talented, brilliant colleagues like all of you in this hall—who are dedicated to doing just that.

Here are the results of your efforts: We are consistently rated among the top 4 percent of all research universities nationwide with a growing national reputation for academic excellence, and dozens of academic programs ranked in the top 100 nationally. Both The Wall Street Journal and Washington Monthly in the last two weeks touted UTA as a top national university and the best in our region.

We are an institution recognized nationally for serving Hispanic students and accelerating their success in higher education. A public university that's considered the nation's absolute best for military veterans and their families.

We have an alumni network that extends to every Fortune 500 company headquartered in Dallas-Fort Worth.

I believe this will be another banner year for UT Arlington. We have in place a strategic plan, UTA 2030, that allows us to prioritize and execute. It provides a framework that is both realistic and ambitious, ensuring we're making steady progress toward our goals across our five strategic themes.

I'm sure you know them by now: People and Culture, Student Success, Research and Innovation, Alumni and Community Engagement, and Finance and Infrastructure.

Today, we celebrate and recognize the remarkable achievements and milestones that have defined our University over the past year and look forward to what is coming next.

First, that means recognizing you. Your passion and innovation have been instrumental in advancing our mission. We are here today because of you, and we are investing in your development.

Our partnership with Coursera Career Academy provides students, employees, and alumni with free access to nearly 50 micro-credential programs in high-demand areas. We have more than 3,300 Mavericks signed up to learn with Coursera, including nearly 550 employees. Our Department of Information Systems and Operations Management registered all of its faculty for a course on generative AI.

We are also growing our current and future leaders. Beginning next month, TCE is offering the revamped MavsManager Foundations Program, designed to help managers build teamwork skills. And our Art of Participatory Leadership program will welcome its third cohort this January, providing development for leaders on how to work across campus in solving complex challenges.

Our Employee Tuition Affordability Program, which covers tuition and fees for employees enrolled in classes, is taking off. We have doubled participation from year one to year two. And a dependent tuition program is in the works that will provide partial scholarship support—so stay tuned for more information later this fall.

This year, for the very first time, one of UTA's employee resource groups was selected

as one of the Top 25 in the nation by the Global ERG Network. Congratulations to our Native American-Serving Nontribal Institution Network, which is bringing together faculty and staff dedicated to advancing student success.

As part of our focus on People and Culture, we are integrating UTA's values at every level of our campus to create an environment and culture of support, belonging, and engagement. One of our core values is the idea of Community of Belonging. This is the notion that we create a thriving community that demonstrates appreciation, value, and respect for all individuals.

As we focus on our culture of belonging, we want each of you to appreciate each other and the breadth of what we have on campus. Staff and faculty can join campus tours leaving from our Dan Dipert University Welcome Center. TCE is planning our first Employees at the UTA Planetarium event. And thanks to Faculty Senate Chair Andy Milson and SAC Chair Christopher Templeton for your collaboration in hosting a reception after my remarks today. These are all ways we build fellowship and community.

Here's one way our staff in Student Affairs are supporting a Community of Belonging with our students...

- [PLAY PEOPLE AND CULTURE VIDEO]

The Maverick Pantry's impact on addressing food insecurity at UTA has been remarkable. During the spring semester, it served more than 4,000 students.

Thank you to Keyla and Armanya for the care and dedication you show our students. Let's please give them and the Student Affairs team a round of applause for their work to grow our pantry program.

At UTA we are sustaining our momentum with a strong incoming class. Y'all may have noticed how full our campus feels. What you are noticing is the increasing number of students enrolling in in-person programs on our campus. We welcomed more than 10,500 new students this fall, bringing our total enrollment to more than 41,000 students.

Students want to be here, both from here in Texas and from 98 countries around the world. We recognize our students holistically and are rising to meet their needs.

To meet the mental health needs of our students more effectively, Counseling and Psychological Services now has an embedded counselor in every residence hall. Our Foster Care Initiative is providing comprehensive resources to students who have aged out of state support. Our Learning Access Center facilitates 1,500 study sessions each year.

You can see our impact on students through the work of Patrick Johnson in admissions. He partnered with Transition Programs and Services, Student Success and others

across campus to support our first-generation students. Let's watch.

- [PLAY STUDENT SUCCESS VIDEO]

Patrick was our Outstanding Maverick Award winner last year for his work on this program. Thanks to him, Tasha Talton and so many others for your outstanding work. We know our students have big dreams.

And some of our students have REALLY big dreams of competing in the Olympics and Paralympics. Y'all, did you know that half of the Texans competing in the Paralympics this year are UTA students or alums?

Maverick Paralympian Brent Lakatos won gold and silver in the 400 and 800-meter races. Mavericks helped the U.S. women's wheelchair basketball team win the silver medal and the men take gold. A special congratulations to current Lady Movin' Mav and graduate student Elodie Tessier, who played for Team Canada.

Austen Smith brought home Olympic silver and bronze medals in skeet shooting. Now she's back home on our UTA campus, to fulfill her next dream of becoming an aerospace engineer.

Our students are the future of our society and culture, and we offer exciting courses to develop their potential. Courses that combine pop culture and classic literature, or actively engage in democracy by registering people to vote or serving as poll watchers. Our courses also provide credentials that boost the earning power of our students. This fall, we launched a new course where students can gain a license to operate commercial drones—adding another skill to enhance their resume as they enter the workforce.

We intentionally focus on students gaining career-relevant work experience and internships, which can help launch their careers and earn them higher first-year salaries.

We have modernized our student employment processes and titles and expanded job opportunities for students across campus. Y'all, we have about 5,000 students who qualify for work-study jobs, and we are doing all we can to help support them. We are intentionally working to grow the number of work-study partnerships with off-campus employers. This year, we have partnered with 39 employers for valuable career-building experiences for our students.

And our office of undergraduate research offers our Undergraduate Research Assistant Program, which allows our work-study students to work on a research project with a faculty member. These efforts are providing more of our students with income and providing valuable high-impact experiences.

Dr. Kay Johnson-Winters is the director of the Office of Undergraduate Research. Under her guidance, UTA has increased the number of faculty working with students on

original research. Let's watch.

- [PLAY RESEARCH AND INNOVATION VIDEO]

I have had the chance to meet Jeremiah, and he is a truly special student who wants to be a physician and a lawyer. I am so grateful we get to be part of helping his dreams come true. Let's have a round of applause for Dr. Kay Johnson-Winters for her leadership in advancing undergraduate research.

Y'all it is our faculty's mentorship that is having profound impact on our students engaging in research.

I have an example for you, but it involves me trying to explain particle physics.

We are one of 14 universities and national labs in the US and Europe working together to measure the mass of the neutrino, one of the building blocks of the universe. Kara Stogsdill is a UTA senior majoring in physics, and she is leading the development of a new method of cooling large fluxes of atoms. She is building what's called a Zeeman slower system, which slows and cools hot beams of atoms so scientists can study them more easily.

Kara just received the Outstanding Undergraduate Research Award from the American Institute of Physics. She's a shining example of the role of faculty mentorship in student success.

Part of our UTA story is about research impact. The impact of our research is significant—both in terms of discovery and dollars. Our total research expenditures in 2023 hit nearly \$150 million.

The Office of Research and Innovation is expanding our research infrastructure, growing the number of team members who support our faculty members in everything from preparing grant proposals, to supporting innovation to collaborating with new research partners.

It's been a long time dream of some of our faculty to have a netted drone facility to advance research. This dream will soon come true with construction on a netted drone facility at UTARI. The Maverick Autonomous Vehicle Research Center will enhance research opportunities for faculty and students, area companies, and local governments. It will allow us to deepen research on autonomous and intelligent urban mobility systems that will be used in everything from home package delivery to emergency response.

Another dream coming true for our faculty is the opening of our MRI facility this November. Years in the making, this facility will enable faculty to engage in impactful brain imaging research and attract new colleagues as part of our RISE 100 brain health cluster hire.

The scope of our research is as beneficial as it is broad. Our dazzling faculty are tackling climate change, teacher shortages, sustainability, homelessness, brain injuries, entrepreneurship, bridge safety, physician communication. You name it, we're on it.

Thanks to Professor David Wetz, UTA has been invited to join the Electric Ship Research and Development Consortium, which is leading efforts to help our naval fleet make the transition to electric power. Social Work Assistant Professor Saltanat Childress is bridging the gap between refugee communities and service providers through research that helps nonprofit agencies better understand the needs of the immigrants they serve.

Bone-Muscle Research Center scientist Kamal Awad, a Fulbright scholar and UTA alumnus, is working to revolutionize the recovery process for soldiers and others with traumatic muscle injuries by creating personalized muscle grafts that can be implanted into damaged tissue.

Our faculty are extraordinary – routinely garnering national recognitions. Associate Professor of Communication Chunke Su is collaborating with civil engineers, computer scientists, and behavioral scientists to address and mitigate inequities in neighborhood infrastructure.

Assistant Professor of Management Hanbo Shim's research into employee job performance received the Best Dissertation Award from the Academy of Management Human Resources Division.

The Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture inducted Diane Jones Allen to its Academy of Fellows and Sherry Wang was inducted as a fellow of the American Statistical Society – each for their long-standing impact in their fields. Likewise, Sandy Dasgupta received the American Chemical Society Award for his impact on analytical chemistry. These are a few of the many faculty who have received significant recognitions for their accomplishments.

And we are in the midst of hiring so many more faculty colleagues to join us as part of a transformative investment in expanding research impact through our RISE 100 program.

As a Maverick, watching our campus and community come together for the total solar eclipse in April made me so proud. Planetarium Director Levent Gurdemir describes the extraordinary experience as cosmic art.

What made it just as memorable for me was seeing our campus become a hub of community activity. Brazos Park, the Planetarium Mall, the Engineering Quad, the Architecture Courtyard, and so many other places on campus were full of life.

The event was so successful that I have asked Levent to arrange for another total solar eclipse as soon as possible—and maybe have this one last even longer.

He assures me he is doing everything in his power to make it happen. But... right now he is estimating it will happen on July 9, 2317. Yeah, almost 300 years from now. Sorry y'all, but I don't think I'm going to be able to make it to that one.

Okay so maybe we won't be able to replicate the total solar eclipse anytime soon. But what that event told me is that UTA is an anchor in Arlington—perhaps THE anchor. I mean that academically, economically, and civically.

We believe in the enduring power of education to transform both lives and communities. And we're seeing it—every day.

Here's an example of our role as an anchor institution. Chief Sustainability Officer Meghna Tare's leadership on our Community Garden partnership with the city of Arlington highlights how UTA can build bridges to the community in service of a larger cause.

- [PLAY ALUMNI AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT VIDEO]

Thank you to Meghna for keeping UTA at the forefront of community sustainability efforts.

That's not the only way we are seen as a leader in sustainability. RAPID, our autonomous rideshare partnership with the city of Arlington, is providing free rides for our students between downtown and our campus. And this week we are piloting drone delivery of groceries to families in need.

These innovations are why we are being considered for the Seoul Smart City Prize, an international competition recognizing inclusive innovations driven by information and communication technology. This is a credit to our Office of Sustainability, Office of Parking and Transportation Services, and our academic programs.

Thanks to Teresea Madden and her Extension and Extended Campus team, UTA served more than 32,000 learners this year through continuing education, professional micro-credentials, and certification and training courses. That's up 13% over last year.

UTA summer camps are also back in a big way. UTA Kids and Teens University hosted more than 700 campers this summer, engaging local children in space camp, spy camp, art camp, creative writing camp, and many more. Y'all, that sounds fun. I may need to be a camper next year.

New and expanded programming is in development for the 2025 summer season. And y'all as we strive to be a Hispanic Thriving Institution, we should take a moment to acknowledge that this is National Hispanic-Serving Institutions Week. UTA is committed to committed to leading, supporting, and creating a thriving environment by expanding educational access and success. Next year, we will be offering, for the first time, Spanish-language versions of a number of our camps. I am really excited.

We hosted Arlington ISD's Big Idea contest, a regional science fair, and the state's Destination Imagination contest. These events brought thousands of Texas kids to campus.

In the months to come, we are hosting district band competitions and basketball tournaments; regional track tournaments; and state baseball and softball games. These events attract more than 25,000 people to campus every year. All of these people coming to campus get a taste of UTA, and they contribute to our local economy.

It's important that the community knows what we're about. Our Maverick Factor advertising campaign is all about raising our profile, garnering nearly 91 million impressions so far. Next month, we are launching Phase 2 of the campaign, which includes more student stories. And there is more to come: Yolanda Bevill's team in MME is working on a new branding campaign to highlight UTA's people, programs, and progress. Keep an eye out for a launch as soon as fall 2025.

I'm always impressed at how our faculty find unique ways to engage the community. We have an Emmy nominee, y'all. Broadcast journalism specialist Julian Rodriguez worked on a transnational research project focusing on how access to public data can help people understand the effects of climate change. It is the first time The Weather Channel en Español has partnered with a university to produce an hour-long special, and it was nominated for one of TV's top awards!

Let's talk Maverick Athletics, where we are seeing success on and off the field. I love it, and our teams love it, when you come out and support our student athletes. You'll often find me courtside cheering on our Mavericks.

UTA student-athletes accomplish the extraordinary. Matro Jepkemboi was the Western Athletic Conference freshman of the year in women's cross country. Volleyball had its highest win total in nine years. Men's basketball reached the WAC finals, and coach KT Turner was a finalist for two national coach of the year awards. Men's tennis reached the NCAA tournament for the second year in a row.

It was our first year back in the Western Athletic Conference, and we made sure other schools felt our presence. As Jon Fagg would say, "Buck 'em."

This past year also was marked by significant philanthropic commitments. Y'all the community recognizes our growing success, and they are supporting us; we raised the most money in Athletics history this year.

And our partners are investing in creating impact. Tom Connelly and the Harold Simmons Foundation are choosing to honor the memory of the late Serena Simmons Connelly, a UTA alum, by establishing the Serena Simmons Connelly Memorial Endowed Graduate Fellowship in UTA's School of Social Work. The scholarship will provide support for at least eight full-time social work graduate students.

In addition, alumnus and UTA supporter Raj Nooyi and his wife, Indra Nooyi, have made a \$5 million commitment to the newly renamed Center for Innovation in Health Informatics. Their gift will support two new endowed professorships as well as competitive research awards for faculty studying health informatics. The research awards will serve as seed funding to help faculty garner additional research funding from external sources.

The Nooyis' generosity is a true testament to their support and dedication to our university. It also reaffirms their belief in UTA's efforts, led by Dr. Marion Ball, to develop and use cutting-edge computational tools that can analyze health data at scale in order to create better and more affordable health outcomes that improve both personalized and community health.

Please join me in thanking Raj Nooyi for his generosity and his belief in the promise of UTA. Raj, your support allows us to dream and achieve big things. Thank you.

Such support is key to our present and future. We're fortunate that the state of Texas continues to be a critical partner in our success. In the last biennium, we were able to gain state support that created impact across campus, enabling housing scholarships, supporting student success initiatives, addressing the statewide nursing shortage, growing research infrastructure, and supporting our academic programs.

We are heading into the next legislative session, and I know that Jeff Jeter and his Government Relations team will help us in making the case for why continued investment in UTA is so impactful. Here's to hoping the state will help us make a few more of our dreams come true.

Infrastructure is about the buildings we are in and about the technology that supports us. And our CIO Deepika Chalemela and our Office of Information Technology are here to help. For the weather nerds out there—and I'm one of them—they partnered with the UTA Planetarium to launch a website that displays campus weather conditions using real-time information from the UTA Observatory's weather station.

And OIT is continuing a partnership with the Division of Student Success to improve and enhance the student experience by aligning the MyMav web portal with UTA Mobile. We hosted a large-scale AI Day with Microsoft and its head of Academic Innovation. This event allowed UTA to create its own AI Tiger Team, endorsed by Microsoft, becoming the first higher education institution in Texas to do so. Our AI Tiger Team is working to advance AI's responsible use throughout our university.

You may have noticed our skyline looks a little different, with a giant crane towering over the Life Sciences Building. And tucked on Greek Row Drive, you'll notice considerable progress on our Greek Life Center, which is scheduled to open by the spring semester.

John Hall's group is leading some massive projects here in Arlington, with more than

\$300 million in new construction projects in the last year. They are also busy at work on major initiatives for 2025, including completion of the Campus Master Plan.

We will soon be installing a new track and scoreboard at Maverick Stadium. I know what some of y'all are thinking. Improvements at Maverick Stadium – does that mean football is coming soon?

No it doesn't. But these investments will mean we'll be able to host more track and field events.

You should see more hard hats and heavy construction equipment on two other major construction projects: Maverick Hall, which is underway, and the new UC, which is just getting started.

Let's take a look at how these critical projects are coming together, and the impact they will have on our students.

- [PLAY FINANCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE VIDEO]

These projects represent big dreams coming to fruition. Please join me in thanking John Hall and the many teams across campus who are working to transform our University.

Our biggest dream is starting to take shape 30 miles west of this building. Out at the western gateway to Fort Worth, are 51 acres of rolling hills and small lakes that will position our University as the key educational partner in the fastest-growing part of the Metroplex through the rest of the 21st Century.

It's UTA West, y'all, and it represents one of the boldest moves in our 130-year history. We plan to build out the campus in phases, with a goal of opening the first building in the fall of 2028. Eventually, UTA West will be able to support about 10,000 students and bring all the benefits of a top-tier research university and the nation's best public university system to the western part of our region.

Now think back to when UTA was getting started. Y'all, that's College Hall, Ransom Hall, and Preston Hall in the center of that photo. Arlington was an agricultural community, and we and the city grew up together.

We're betting that what makes UTA special is a unique blend of talent, innovation, and place that will take root in the rolling hills west of Fort Worth, just as it took root and blossomed here in Arlington.

There is no doubt that our location has been one of the drivers of our success over the last 100 years. And establishing the UTA West campus will help expand our impact for the next 100 years.

We've already made tremendous progress, getting Board of Regents financial support

for land acquisition and Fort Worth City Council approval for \$4 million toward infrastructure construction.

Like so many of our dreams, it takes us working together as a team to make it a reality. A research team's breakthrough is not just the result of an individual's insight but the culmination of shared efforts, open dialogue, and mutual support. An inspiring class is shaped by a professor's knowledge, a student's curiosity, and the constructive feedback from peers. Every initiative, from groundbreaking research to transformative community projects, thrives on the strength of our collaborative spirit.

The collective power of collaboration can transform our ambitions into reality. Alone, we each contribute our distinct talents and ideas. But together, we can create something extraordinary.

The University of Texas at Arlington IS extraordinary.

Together we get to help create opportunities that change the lives of our tens of thousands of students.

Thanks to all of you, I get to see that happening each and every day. Thank you for all you do for our University.