

EVENT: Presidential Investiture Ceremony

DATE: Sept. 30, 2022

PRESIDENT'S ROLE: Keynote address

When the Wright brothers were on the beaches of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, they would stand for hours flapping their wrists and elbows as they watched giant seabirds soar overhead.

They were trying to learn the motions of the birds' wings. But to outsiders, unfamiliar with their work or what they were trying to accomplish, they looked, well, a little weird.

One Kitty Hawk resident, as recounted in David McCullough's biography of the brothers, memorably said "We couldn't help thinking they were just a pair of poor nuts."

The Wright brothers were brilliant and courageous. Not just because they were the first to successfully take to the skies, but also because they were so mission-focused that they could see beyond the doubts of others.

The Wright brothers were innovative because they were collaborative. Their collaboration went well beyond the brotherhood we have all learned about. They read voraciously and wrote endless letters to scientists, engineers, aeronautic specialists and meteorologists seeking advice and assistance. They sought wise counsel as they contemplated how to design the proper shape of airplane wings, to create wind tunnels to test their ideas, to develop propellers and to build motors for their plane. It took collaboration to get to the beaches of Kitty Hawk.

Above all, these bicycle salesmen from Ohio knew how to dream big. They focused on an idea that seemed beyond the grasp of humanity. Then through careful study, planning and teamwork, they made the impossible possible.

As I begin my tenure as the 10th president of The University of Texas at Arlington, I think about the significance of creating a clear vision and a larger purpose for this incredible institution. I ask myself, what possibilities will we dream of? What would UTA become if we turn those dreams into reality? What conversations, if begun today, could ripple out in a way that allows everyone in our Maverick community to work towards shared goals?

I am honored to be charged with leading our thousands of employees, our tens of thousands of students and hundreds of thousands of alumni who are the Maverick family. It is an awesome responsibility and the privilege of a lifetime. In accepting this role, it is my great fortune to be in a position of harnessing the expertise and intellectual capital of our brilliant faculty, our dedicated staff, talented students, and strong community supporters and directing it toward fulfilling our greatest dreams and aspirations for UTA.

I am humbled to stand before you—our community leaders, legislators, alumni and members of our UTA family. Thank you to Provost Brown and Promise Robinson, for your generous remarks. And Mayor Ross, thank you for the key to the city – I promise I will use it to unlock our shared bright future. I have deep appreciation for Chancellor Milliken and The University of Texas System Board of Regents, including Regent Crain, for providing me with this exceptional opportunity. Thank you.

Eighteen years ago, the UT Arlington president who had the foresight to build this arena, Jim Spaniolo, spoke at his own investiture ceremony. He said that in the course of a lifetime, we experience certain moments that will be etched in our memories forever. This is just such a moment for me.

It is especially meaningful to me—and to my family—because I am a proud daughter of Arlington. I grew up just five miles from this campus and attended high school just seven miles from this very building. I walked this campus as a kid, attended orchestra camp, ate in the University Center and watched Fourth of July parades. UTA’s official Homecoming may not be until November, but this already feels so very much like one for me.

I am filled with gratitude that I get to share today with some incredibly important people in my life.

My Martin high school orchestra teacher Bill Huff is with us today. I want to thank you for demonstrating with your everyday actions what it means to be a devoted educator. It is your constant care for each of your students that inspired me to go into education myself.

My parents, Paul and Jan Evans, are in the audience. I am here because of the help and guidance they offered me through every stage of my life. They worked hard to make sure I had the opportunity to go to college, and they instilled in me enduring values.

And I am beyond grateful that I get to experience this amazing opportunity and the journey ahead with my husband, Jon, and our son, Nathan. Jon is the smartest, funniest person in my life—and that is saying a lot considering all the brilliant people I get to work with at UTA. He has been an amazing partner, supporting me at every step in this journey. And our son Nathan has grown into one of the kindest and most caring people we know. Thank you both for being here and for your support and love.

I offer a special thanks to all who made today possible. That includes our staff in College Park Center, facilities, development, police and the countless others who have played a role in today’s events. I also am thankful to everyone in the UT Arlington community who has welcomed me with open arms and enthusiasm.

I commit to each of you that I am devoted to working with you and all our partners to advance our mission. I am invested in the success of UTA.

Today, of course, is about so much more than me.

It's an important moment for this University, a time to celebrate all that The University of Texas at Arlington is and all it can become. We are gathered to celebrate our past and present, but also to imagine our future. This is about our dreams, our plans and how we can meet the expectations of our current and future students, our communities and our state.

As you saw in the introductory video, UTA has risen to become one of the nation's largest public research universities. We have graduated hundreds of thousands of students, made countless discoveries, and we have increased our impact on our state and country. Along with this proud history comes a great sense of responsibility, one that was shared by the nine presidents who came before me.

Throughout our history we have flourished because we were positioned for success by the right people at the right time. Jack Woolf pledged in his investiture that "this college shall always be operated for the benefit of the people of the state of Texas, and that it shall grow in stature so that you may always be proud of it." That rings true to me even today. At UTA, access remains central to our mission.

Wendell Nedderman led as a tireless advocate for the University and its students. He frequently spoke of UTA as a "positive-slope institution." It reflected his belief that everything about UTA—including its graduation rates, degree programs and overall growth and stature—was on a permanent upward trajectory. He used to say, "There is no substitute for taking pride in your university and exhibiting great enthusiasm." He was a leader full of optimism and a president who produced results. I share his optimism and hope to carry on his positive legacy.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my immediate predecessors. Teik Lim guided this institution faithfully through the challenging waters of the pandemic. And Vistasp Karbhari oversaw critical expansions of the University's research and residential capacities. He used to say that "our mission is to be an internationally recognized research university distinguished by excellence in every regard and by the access we provide to students of all backgrounds." Those ideals remain our north star today.

Then there is Jim Spaniolo. He nurtured UTA's heart through our traditions, such as the Maverick Speakers Series, MavsMeet Convocation, and Parent and Family Weekend. And right after my remarks today, we will all proceed outside to a festival and afterparty on the street that's named in honor of him.

Jim Spaniolo, Vistasp Karbhari and Teik Lim have all provided needed counsel and welcomed me into a role each knows so well. Jim Spaniolo is here today, and I want to personally thank you for all you have done for this great University.

In part because of past leadership, this University is positively brimming with talent, innovation and possibilities. I tell people that UTA is a national treasure, and I mean it.

Our most important assets are our people, our scale and our location. Our staff and faculty, of course, are UTA's greatest strength. They have a long and distinguished history of providing an impactful education to a diverse population of students and providing access to that education throughout a student's lifetime.

Our scale is a major advantage. We have grown to become one of the 30 largest public universities in the United States. The combined annual economic impact of UTA and our Maverick alumni on the state of Texas is 22 billion dollars, representing more than 215,000 jobs. With our contributions to our region and our state, we are DFW's university.

Mavericks blaze their own trail here. We have the academic infrastructure that, for example, allows a working professional to pursue an executive MBA or academically talented undergraduates in any major to distinguish themselves through an enhanced degree from our Honors College.

And our location is hard to beat. UTA is in the middle of everywhere, whether it is on our main campus right here in Arlington or through our programs offered in Dallas, Fort Worth or online. Our location presents us with countless opportunities to partner with businesses, non-profits, and government agencies to serve the communities of our region.

Our Mavericks are everywhere. As a top supplier of talent, our graduates can be found in the 23 Fortune 500 companies headquartered in North Texas, as well as the small businesses and nonprofits that are all key to our region and state's success.

Our engineering graduates are making key contributions to Texas infrastructure. Our nursing graduates make up the backbone of Texas health care. Walk into the classroom of any grade school in the region, and you're likely to find UTA pennants pinned to the walls by Maverick teachers. You'll find UTA graduates in nearly every police department, newsroom, architecture firm, social service agency, orchestra and theater company in North Texas.

Our graduates are thriving—with the highest first-year starting salaries of graduates in any UT system university. We know the value of a UTA education.

UTA occupies a unique space in higher education. We have the research and academic credentials of a R-1 institution that place us among a highly select group of less than 150 of the nation's top research universities. And we are one of only four universities in Texas designated as a Texas Tier One university. Both R-1 and Texas Tier One are signifiers of academic and research excellence.

And yet, we are unique among these national research powerhouses because we are not here to be highly selective but to be highly inclusive. We are one of just 21 universities nationwide to be both categorized as a Carnegie R-1 university and designated as a Hispanic-Serving Institution. In addition to our Hispanic-Serving designation, we are also an Asian American, Native American, and Pacific Islander-Serving Institution, making us one of just eight research universities nationally that share this commitment to being a fully multicultural campus.

So, you know, we're a kinda a big deal.

In every corner of our campus, you will find the ambition, ingenuity and promise that made those achievements possible. On the third floor of the Science & Engineering Innovation & Research building, faculty and student biologists search for the cure to antibiotic resistance. In the School of Social Work, researchers collaborate with community members to discover the therapeutic benefits of motorcycle riding for veterans and first responders. Across campus, an interdisciplinary team of

architects and engineers has partnered with a Texas coastal community to monitor the effects of climate change on its landscape.

We have true and distinguished faculty excellence at UTA. Sedrick Huckaby is a Fulbright Scholar, creating portraits of the Mascogos community in Mexico as part of a history of Juneteenth. Yue Deng is one of three scientists leading a NASA mission that will use satellites to study and explore the dynamic boundary between the Earth's upper atmosphere and space. Erin Carlson has initiated a public health program that teaches paramedics how to better identify and treat patients who could be suffering from dementia.

Our faculty's dedication to academic excellence, creativity and innovation enables the success of our students, leads to research advancements and makes a positive impact in Texas and beyond. Their research creativity and productivity are dazzling and ever-increasing. Our research investors see the value we bring. That's why the Department of Defense, the National Science Foundation, companies and foundations are all investing in the research we are doing here at UTA. We expect our federal research expenditures to rise by 20% over last year. Amanda Olsen and Candace Joswick just received a 7.9 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Education in partnership with Texas Instruments and the Dallas and Mansfield Independent School Districts to increase teachers' capacity for integrating math, social-emotional learning and equity into middle school mathematics classes.

Our distinctly Maverick approach is what truly makes us a national treasure. Hand in hand with our academic rigor is our unwavering commitment to inclusion of students from all backgrounds. We can boast of being one of the nation's most diverse undergraduate student populations, in one of the most diverse cities in Texas. UTA looks like Texas, and we are proud to be a leader.

Earlier this month, we were ranked by U.S. News and World Report for being among the top universities nationwide for social mobility, for campus ethnic diversity, and for graduating our students with the least amount of debt. These are important measures showing how our values of access and affordability make us a national leader as we transform the lives of our students.

We are committed to ensuring that students whose families are economically challenged have access to our outstanding education. Edmund Miguel Mattler graduated from Southlake Carroll High School with no expectations of family financial support, no savings and no means of transportation. He wasn't sure how he could pay for college or even get to his classes. Thanks to financial support, he is a senior accounting major, working as a tax accounting intern with a private equity firm, and he is set to graduate this December.

Now we are able to help even more students like Edmund through our new signature program called Blaze Forward, which is designed to assist financially challenged undergraduates coming from families who make less than \$85,000 per year by covering 100% of their tuition and mandatory fees.

We know our students' lives are transformed when we bring focus to student success. This is yet another area in which we are a national leader, and I am privileged to share with you breaking news

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I'm announcing from this stage, that UT Arlington has been certified with the Seal of Excelencia for 2022. We have representatives from UTA in Washington DC as we speak accepting this national recognition as a university that has been able to demonstrate the measurable impact we are having in changing the face of higher education and creating an environment where Latino and Latina students thrive. We are joining just 29 other colleges and universities from across the country that are ensuring America's future through our steadfast commitment to develop and advance the talents of our students. This is a huge honor for the university, and I congratulate everyone who made this possible. I especially want to thank Jennifer Sutton and Carla Amaro-Jimenez for their leadership in this effort...

Our students and their families see the value we bring. We've set enrollment records for the number of first-time college students consecutively for the last six years. At my first Mav Move-In Day in August, I met our future landscape architects, nurses, civil engineers, and business leaders. I met entire families who drove from all corners of Texas and beyond to safely deliver and entrust their children to us.

At the same time, we continue to attract and serve working professionals who are resolute in improving their knowledge base and career prospects. I think of Thelma Alanis, who earned her degree in August and was able to balance her academic studies, while working full-time at American Airlines and caring for her 7-year old daughter. What an inspiration.

We're not some ivory tower, disconnected from the world around us. We are, in fact, what UTA President Woolf promised we would be: a university that operates for the benefit of the people of Texas.

UTA always has an eye on the needs of our state. In recent years, we've launched new degree programs, from construction management to economic data analytics to substance use treatment to sustainable building technology—making ourselves key knowledge partners in critical areas.

Our Division for Enterprise Development is a key pillar of our talent development efforts, whether it's providing leadership training, sharing insight for navigating government regulations and processes, or creating guidance plans for nonprofit organizations. Just last year, we provided training to more than 24,000 people, provided more than 2,000 courses, and granted more than 1,500 credentials.

It's no surprise that when our students graduate that their impact also is felt in critical areas of public service. We are annually among the top universities in the country for veterans and military-connected students. Just last month, alumnus Michael E. Langley became the first Black four-star general in the history of the Marine Corps. Fellow four-star UTA alums include Richard Cavazos, who was the U.S. Army's first Hispanic four-star general, and Tommy Franks, who led the U.S. military response in Afghanistan after the September 11th attacks.

Our impact is far-reaching—and I do mean far. The Wright brothers may have initiated human flight, but UTA is pushing its boundaries. Alumnus Daniel Delago is a flight engineer on every launch of SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket, the first reusable rocket that can land back on Earth. Alumnus Ian Lim is a NASA computer scientist who studies data on the agency's space communications. Alumna Wendy Okolo is a NASA aerospace engineering researcher. And alumnus Steve Hunker helped build a

robotic arm that's part of NASA's Perseverance Mars Rover. Our impact is felt literally on Mars and right here on earth too, with our alums having impact in the arts, social services, health care and beyond.

One example is Nanoscope Technologies in Bedford, which has been working with the Texas Manufacturing Assistance Center housed at the UTA Research Institute in Fort Worth. We were able to mentor and coach the inventor of this early-stage company to develop a long-term strategy of building their company, navigating the regulatory process and establishing a manufacturing site.

And that innovation? It's life-changing—a gene-therapy drug that helps damaged retina cells regain sight. They're helping people who are blind to see again.

This is an incredible university. When Wendell Nedderman retired in 1992, the piece of advice he gave to the next president was "Be sure to listen. It is very important to make a conscious effort to listen to what faculty are saying, what staff are saying, what students are saying." And boy have I been doing a lot of listening - since officially taking office five months ago, I've had the opportunity to meet thousands of members of the Maverick family, including students, alumni, staff, faculty, community leaders and elected officials. At each encounter, I've gained a greater appreciation for the passion of our students, the leadership and expertise of our staff and faculty, and the global power, influence, and impact of our alumni. I hear you, I hear your optimism for our future, and I hear your dreams for the future of The University of Texas at Arlington.

Y'all our state needs us to dream big. We are all here because we each harbor big dreams for this university. Through your dreams—and my own for UTA—I sense the enormous potential that our University has. I can see it, and I can feel it. I want to share with you just a few of these dreams so that you can be as inspired as I am.

Our students have big dreams for their futures, and they are looking to our Maverick community to help realize these dreams. Juan Martinez dreams of becoming an architect and showing his three little brothers that it is possible to pursue your dreams if you work hard. Stephen Silva Brave dreams of pursuing research that will improve the lives of women in Native American communities. Melissa de la Cruz' aspires to be an anchor for a Spanish-language news outlet, a dream she's nurtured since she edited her middle school newspaper. Construction management student Hussein Matar dreams of returning to his native Lebanon to build infrastructure that will improve the lives of its citizens.

To ensure that we are making these and the dreams of our tens of thousands of students come true ... well, we have a lot of work to do. Fortunately, our faculty and staff are dreaming of ways we can make that possible.

Ram Venkataraman dreams that we will be able to transform the lives of our students by tailoring our teaching to better meet them where they are in their educational journeys.

Jeff Davis and Martha Walvoord share a dream of having a new fine and performing arts center that meets the needs of our students and brings our community to campus to experience the wealth of talent we have here at UTA.

Allison Tomlinson dreams that by working across the campus we can effectively coordinate our efforts to advance diversity beyond our classrooms. And Ben Jones dreams of reaching beyond our classrooms to create a workforce that reflects the diversity of our state through expanded internship opportunities for our students.

Jay Horn dreams that UTA will become a national role model in international education, with our faculty using creative approaches to foster international perspectives and allowing our students to become globally engaged citizens ready to collaborate across cultures.

And our dreams don't stop at the edges of our campus. Many of our faculty and staff dream of UTA's immense potential for transformational change at the state and national levels.

David Nygren dreams that UTA will create an institute that studies the earth and humans as complex systems—making us a leader in addressing how our planet will adapt to changing conditions.

Jacqueline Fay dreams of a campus culture that expands the definition of research, allowing humanists, artists and STEM scholars to organically collaborate and create significant societal impact.

Gabriela Wilson and Jon Weidanz dream that we will play an important role in building a biotechnology and bioinformatics industry in North Texas.

Luca Maddalena shares Wilbur and Orville Wright's dreams of flight. But in Luca's dreams, UTA will be a leader in creating aircraft that travel at hypersonic speed.

Our alumni, our community supporters and our Maverick friends have also shared with me their dreams for UTA. I have heard from many who dream of a powerhouse athletics program, of Western Athletic Conference championships, NCAA tournament competition, and a growing number of banners hanging from the rafters above us.

Marcelo Cavazos dreams of creating an early college high school in collaboration with UTA, Tarrant County College and Arlington Independent School District that would allow us to grow our own future teachers.

Varun Mallipaddi dreams that UTA will be held in the esteem of Texans in the same way that it is esteemed in the eyes of prospective students from India—as a place of excellence and boundless opportunities.

Michael Jacobson dreams that UTA will be at the center of an economic ecosystem that will drive the economic future of Arlington.

Chris Turner dreams that UTA will be one of the most diverse R-1 research universities in the country and that it will deliver the workforce-ready graduates that our global industries need.

Trey Yelverton dreams of iconic campus architecture, vibrant campus life, engaged student government and palpable alumni pride. Oh yeah, and that UTA will be among the strongest research universities in the country, becoming a member of the American Association of Universities.

I'll share with you one last dream, one of my own. I dream that UTA will grow and change right alongside our region—in partnership. I dream that others see us—and that we see ourselves—as true partners in supporting our region's economy, culture, and society. And that by doing so, we will come to be seen as one of most inclusive and impactful research universities in this country. Working together, we will be a force for positive impact across Texas.

While I have shared just a handful of the many dreams I have heard – we must remember this: “A dream without a plan is just a wish.”

I'll say it again: “A dream without a plan ... is just a wish.”

Now is the time to work to weave these dreams together, to turn them into a plan for action. We can will our dreams into reality. And if that means we have to build the plane as we fly it, well, we can do that, too. I've got to say, it helps that we have one of the nation's top aerospace engineering programs – I'm sure they can lend a hand.

We already are beginning to take the actions needed to enable a brighter future. To make this possible, we are building a plan that focuses on five key strategic themes. People and Culture; Student Success, Research and Innovation, Finance and Infrastructure, and Alumni and Community Engagement. Next week, I will share a campus communication updating our community on the progress we are making.

I can feel our momentum, so let me state it plainly: I want to tap the talents and expertise of everyone in our community to make this University the very best version of itself. And I mean everyone: our alumni and our lawmakers, our custodians and our administrators, our police officers and our community members, our faculty senate, student government and our staff council—all working in concert to ensure that UTA serves the people of Texas. That UTA improves the lives of our students and their families. That UTA fosters and develops groundbreaking research across all disciplines. That UTA's impact is felt through the service we provide to our communities.

I can feel our momentum. These dreams bind us together, united in the belief that UTA can be both a top research university and an institution that's inclusive to all. We are perfectly positioned to provide access to a world-class college education for ordinary Texans and help them lead extraordinary lives.

Texas has built some of our nation's greatest universities with an expectation that they open their doors to serve the people who live here. Our university has the power to transform individual lives. UT Arlington, with our size, scale and scope, can transform not just the lives of Texans, but Texas itself.

Based on the talent and commitment I see all around us, I am confident that we can reach new heights—together.

I can feel our momentum, and I think you can, too. Thank you for listening. Thank you for being here. Thank you for all you do and will do on behalf of our great University. And GO MAVS!