

EVENT: State of Higher Education 2024

DATE: Thursday, May 2

PRESIDENT'S ROLE: Keynote

It is so great to see so many new and returning faces for our second annual State of Higher Education address.

At UTA, we are excited because we have officially launched our new strategic plan.

UTA 2030, Shared Dreams, Bright Future.

Y'all we have made tremendous progress over recent decades – rising to become a national research university. This new plan lays out our path forward to accelerate our progress and to deepen our connections as an engaged anchor institution right here in Arlington.

Our campus community has come together to champion this effort, to build more bridges into the communities we serve, and to make a BIG impact. That bridge to community impact is what I will focus on today.

And it got me thinking. Y'all, as a city planner...I like bridges. And as UTA's president, I and my team at UTA get to build so many bridges. Real, literal bridges – like the revamped ones going up over Cooper Street - that tell everyone that they're in Maverick Country.

While building real bridges is pretty darn fun, we also get to build metaphorical bridges –

Bridges that connect us to our students, to our alumni, to our community. Bridges that connect UTA and our students to a better and brighter future.

Now I know everyone in this room wants to see our students succeed. “Student Success” is a goal we share with our entire community.

Local business leader Sam Marouq helped to create the Sam Mahrouq Financial Markets Lab and our Student Managed Investment Fund. This year our students managed this investment fund so well they placed second in the Global Portfolio Competition.

And tomorrow our men's tennis team is playing in the NCAA tournament for the SECOND year in a row. Y'all our mavericks make us proud.

It is the success of our students that is a reason that UTA has for the 7th year in a row had a record incoming first year class.

We know that for these students and all of our other students ...

their success starts well before our Mavericks arrive as first-year students. Arlington ISD, Tarrant County College, as well as many other community partners, we are all committed to making sure the children in our community are career- and college-ready by the time they graduate from high school.

We know that summer is an important time for children to learn while having fun. That's why we have expanded the number of UTA career exploration summer camps. Y'all, when I was a kid, I wanted to either be a fashion designer or a brain surgeon—or maybe both, like Vera Wang, with a scalpel.

And the kids in our community – they have so many different dreams for their future, too. We have created engaging opportunities for all ages. Campers can explore everything from structural engineering to film making to forensic science to even learning how to be a secret agent.

At your tables you have a handout about our summer camps – I'd ask that you share that with someone you know that has school-aged children.

We are already planning ahead for 2025, and finalizing an agreement with NASA to offer science and space camps.

Now a quick side story for y'all.

This is me back in the day, I was a motivated college student trying to figure out how to quickly graduate so I could start making some money. Y'all I figured out how to fit almost a year's worth of coursework into a single summer.

I took 5 classes at UTA, along with two more from Tarrant County College.

Plus, I was taking a correspondence course from Texas Tech; y'all this was before online courses, back when the professor and the student would mail notes and assignments back and forth.

I see y'all laughing, I know some of y'all are as old as I am and can remember a time before the internet.

So I'd get up go to classes all morning, then in the afternoon I'd go to my internship with the Texas Attorney General's Child Support Enforcement Office across town, then back to UTA for evening classes.

It was BRUTAL...

and let's just say I did not get the best grades that summer. But I'll tell you, UTA and TCC sure did help me – I was able to finish my bachelor's degree in just two and a half years.

Now that I'm president of UTA, I'm in a position to create more opportunities for our students to graduate sooner. We have 5% of our students that are like me that graduated in 3 years or less and we sure want to grow that number.

Today there are much better ways to help students to graduate early. We are expanding our offerings year-round and increasing course flexibility to ensure our students can learn how and when they want. And for students like me that want to take classes from another college or university while they are at home with their families for the summer – well we are transforming our transfer system making it easy for students to identify courses that will fulfill their UTA degree requirements.

Our early college partnerships across the region are another way students get a head start on completing their degree early. This past fall we had more than 80 students who graduated from TCC's early college high schools with their associates degree completed that chose to come to UTA.

Those students with the help of TCC they came in with TWO years of college credit.

We also have a number of students, like, Martin High school senior Faizah Khan– who was featured on our segment of Amazon Prime's The College Tour. Faizah, she's getting a head start on her college career by taking dual-credit classes at UTA.

All this adds up to our students entering UTA well-prepared and with a significant head start towards their bachelor's degree – saving time and money.

We also want to do more to support Arlington ISD and other schools in our community. Given the teacher shortage, we know that one big challenge for all of the school districts in Texas is providing alternative pathways to becoming a teacher. There are lots of people who started in one career field and want to give back to their community and become a teacher.

We have listened to the school districts in Tarrant County and what they need. And our College of Education has designed a new approach to alternative teacher certification.

Starting this summer, we are working to build partnerships that would prepare aspiring teachers in Arlington ISD and other districts on this alternative pathway, ensuring that our schools have the teachers they need.

While Arlington is our home, we want to make sure we support our neighboring communities too and preparing our Mavericks to be your future workforce.

We are partnering with Grand Prairie ISD and the City of Grand Prairie for comprehensive internship opportunities across fields like accounting, real estate, public administration, and criminal justice. The collaboration of our Career Development Center and our College of Architecture, Planning and Public Affairs is expanding our students' ability to gain public service experience, which allows them to be career-ready and contribute to the public good.

Y'all know that we have some really big events coming up in Arlington over the next several years, like Major League Baseball's All-Star Game this summer and the 2026 World Cup. When we go cheer for our favorite teams, you should know that OUR Mavericks are there behind the scenes. Our athletic training program is nationally recognized for its excellence, with Mavericks working for teams like the Cowboys, the Raiders, and the Seahawks.

We also have our Mavericks working in Arlington ISD supporting our homegrown athletes too.

Now, creating unforgettably memorable experiences isn't just about the excitement that happens on our fields, it's the experiences that happen in our restaurants and hotels.

UTA's planned hospitality program is scheduled to open in our College of Business in the fall of 2025. We are working closely with our World Champion Texas Rangers, Loews, and many others to design a curriculum that will position UTA to become a national leader in hospitality.

Now y'all it takes a lot of effort to develop world-class hospitality professionals. We have been getting pretty creative in how we build bridges in our community.

Y'all have probably seen the signs and heard about the Taste Project coming to Arlington this summer. This pay-what-you-can restaurant will be a real asset to our whole community.

We have all heard the adage of the broke college student, and while many of us can remember scrapping by in college, for some there is real food insecurity – with Taste we now have an affordable place to go when folks in our community want to celebrate a birthday or finishing final exams.

We are thrilled at the collaborative spirit that the Taste Project adds to our community. UTA needs an opportunity for our hospitality students to gain hands-on experience.

The Taste Project has been generous in forming a partnership that will allow UTA to share this community asset ensuring our students learn the skills they need to be successful. So stay tuned, we'll look forward to debuting a Maverick-made dining experience in the future.

Chancellor LeBlanc shared with you the work TCC is doing to create the talent the film industry needs. This need for talent, well we can thank our state legislature who wanted to make sure the Lone Star State is prominently featured in movies and TV shows. The legislature added funding to ensure that Texas is competitive for film projects. And y'all we are seeing a slew of projects filming in and around our region.

Both TCC and UTA we are collaborative and responsive partners. We partnered with the Fort Worth Film Commission to design the credentials needed for this growing industry.

At UTA, we created a commercial filmmaking minor, and this coming Fall, we are launching microcredentials that certify our students as 'on-set' ready for working on film sets.

So, all those shows we love to binge will have Maverick talent working on them VERY soon.

Y'all, it is our focus on building bridges with the industries in our region that has allowed UTA to become a top supplier of talent for so many companies in DFW.

I could go on and on about the talent we are preparing. And it is these bridges with companies that keep 70% of our graduates right here in DFW.

Now I know just about all of y'all have Mavericks on your teams. And if you don't - reach out to me, because we need to fix that.

Now, twenty years ago – the City of Arlington helped UTA with an important investment aimed at providing deep and meaningful impact: helping working adults achieve career-enhancing credentials. We invested in building our Workforce Education building creating the space and programming to support professional growth.

Our Extension and Extended Campus now educates 30,000 people a year. Let me say that again – 30,000 people a year.

That includes everything from preparing professionals in cyber risk management to health care to learning the latest computer technology.

Some of our events have become so successful that we literally couldn't offer them in Arlington because there wasn't an event facility large enough.

With the opening of the new Loew's and Arlington Convention Center, we are able to keep more professional development events here in Arlington.

We're moving our Transmission & Substation Design & Operation Symposium from Frisco back home to Arlington where it belongs, bringing over 1,600 participants from across the globe to learn from UTA and enjoy Arlington's hospitality.

Cute, right? Who doesn't love an adorable dog picture?

Man, I should have just shown puppies and babies for this whole presentation. These cuties are just a few of the therapy dogs that have been visiting campus during finals this week to help our students relieve stress.

I know we aren't the only ones that love dogs. I suspect y'all have heard there is a new doggie depot planned in downtown Arlington, that is breaking ground on May 15. Downtown Arlington Inc. reached out and asked UTA how we can help. Our art students are providing their artistic services and metal fabrication – creating signs, benches and other items – for the depot. We are proud our Maverick artists have this opportunity to use their talent to contribute to the community.

This past fall the Texas Manufacturing Assistance Center, TMAC for short, partnered with the Arlington Economic Development Corporation to create a Strategic Solutions Fund aimed at helping Arlington manufacturers accelerate their growth and profitability.

One of the companies we are helping is Indian Rubber, a customized rubber moldings manufacturer. They asked us to help in identifying gaps and opportunities in their Quality Management System to improve efficiency and reduce errors. TMAC designed an internal audit program that not only supports their existing customer base, but will allow them to pursue additional growth opportunities in new sales.

We're also enriching our communities by making sure that more of our purchases are coming from a diverse set of suppliers right here in our area.

Area companies are bringing our vision for a fresh new look at UTA to life. Arlington based DBA Metro Signs is providing banners and signage on campus. Grand Prairie based Zahner Manufacturing created the graphic panels on our Cooper Street bridges. And Grapevine based Digital Resources is upgrading the College Park Center's broadcast video system – which you are seeing right now.

All these projects and many more they add up to millions of dollars that are being invested in companies right here in Tarrant County.

A little over a decade ago our community came together to make the College Park Center a reality. We all wanted a place to bring our community together – this past year, we have laughed at the Impractical Jokers show, got our groove on at Stomp Wars, and, of course, cheered on our hometown Mavericks.

Y'all, tomorrow night, the CPC is going to be rockin'.

I hope many of you will be joining me as we pack the CPC to the rafters as we cheer on the Dallas Wings and watch basketball phenom Caitlin Clark in her debut WNBA game. Moments like this are possible because of our shared investment in building this bridge to connect our campus and community.

The University Center is another one of these important community engaged spaces. Many of you have been to community events in the University Center, and perhaps you are even joining us for our MAV100 celebration tomorrow where we will recognize the 100 fastest-growing Maverick-owned businesses.

Well, the University Center is our next construction project. It's time to modernize and expand. We'll be demolishing the original part of the building and replacing it with a larger addition creating new meeting spaces, adding a resource center for student organizations, and bringing new dining options.

This \$166 million dollar project will benefit not only our students but our whole community.

UTA is well known for our research capabilities. This year we will spend more than \$150 million on research and development as we strive to create real and meaningful impact around us. Our funders range from Intel to the Texas Department of Transportation to the National Institutes of Health and many more— all of whom believe in UTA's ability to create bridges to the future of discovery.

You may not even realize our UTA researchers are impacting your everyday life.

Have any of you ever gotten annoyed when you get stuck at a red light that feels like it is just never going to change? Well to time those better, the City of Arlington turned to UTA for help. We developed video analytics that use artificial intelligence to watch what is happening at six intersections in Arlington in real-time. Our analysis helped the city keep the lights timed just right.

It was so successful that we are in the process of expanding to create the first satellite traffic operation in DFW and just the second in the state. With more than 300 cameras across the city, we'll be able to make traffic across Arlington flow more smoothly, getting you to your destination quickly and safely.

I'm going to switch gears from talking about the cars we drive to CARS the acronym.

Did you know that - five Texans a day die from fentanyl poisoning. Fentanyl is incredibly addicting, and impacting families in Arlington and all over our state. I am so proud of the work our Center for Addiction and Recovery Studies, or CARS, is doing - turning research into practice. For the past 30 years, this center has been working with families

experiencing substance use or misuse. And every year our center has grown to reach deeper into our community.

Our MAVS 4 Youth prevention program for Arlington and Grand Prairie ISD's helps students learn about the dangers of drugs and alcohol and helps them set goals for their future.

We see over 1,400 students every year. As just one example, we were able to help a local 8th grader realize his drug use was a problem, leading him to share his secret addiction with his parents and get into treatment.

We are committed to making a real impact.

As a national research university we have a lot of inventors here at UTA. Faculty like Chemistry Professor Sherri McFarland. She created the biotech company PhotoDynamic, which combines a natural plant extract with light to create a powerful antimicrobial system used to prevent tartar from forming on teeth. Her invention is making its way into orthodontists' offices as a way to help keep teeth healthy while wearing braces.

Her latest invention is a chemical compound for treating bladder cancer that is in clinical trials and is so promising it has been fast-tracked by the FDA.

These innovations are why Dr. McFarland was inducted this year as a fellow of the National Academy of Inventors, and it's no surprise that we have had more National Academy senior members and fellows inducted than any UT System institution.

We're helping find solutions to many critical health issues. Representative Chris Turner and many others in our legislative delegation were advocates for UTA in the last legislative session and helped us to secure funding to create IMPRINT, UTA's Institute of Biomanufacturing and Precision Medicine in North Texas. This new institute is working to create solutions that improve health.

Did you know that pediatric inflammatory bowel disease can have devastating impacts on young children – slowing the development of the body and mind? IMPRINT is partnering with Cook Children's to develop a new diagnostic tool that will allow surgeons to know which treatment for Pediatric Inflammatory Bowel Disease works best, helping kids get healthier faster.

And we continue to push for ways to grow our R&D impact. Our RISE 100 initiative is one of those ways. We are actively recruiting more than 100 talented faculty to build off of our areas of existing strength. This initiative not only brings 100 high paying jobs to Arlington, it has the important impact of significantly boosting our R&D capabilities and solving real world problems.

I'll give you one of those real-world problems – y'all I'll admit it I'm not that great at parking – if you ask me to back into a parking space or parallel park – that's gonna test my limits.

Any of y'all out there ever tried to park a truck with trailer attached?

Y'all are braver than me.

Now Dr. Eric Tseng, he feels us, he understands the everyday challenges drivers face. Eric is exactly the kind of faculty member we were looking for as we expand our R&D capabilities.

He has dedicated his career to improving our driving experience. He has over 100 patents, many of which are in vehicles you may be driving. His innovation in machine vision resulted in the Ford F-150 backup assist, which allows parking novices like me to park the truck and trailer at the same time.

If you drive a Lincoln, Jaguar, Ford or Volvo – you can thank Eric for introducing Roll Stability Control that minimizes the risk of a rollover in an accident.

And lately, he's been working on hands-free driving, if you drive an Expedition or another vehicle that has BlueCruise – that's Eric's work in action.

Eric is coming here to join our team, who enjoys experimenting with sensors and controls as much as he does – we can't wait to see how Eric and the rest of our team collaborate with the automotive, aerospace, and other industries to bring even more exciting innovation.

Y'all this is the kind of talent that we attract to UTA.

And we have a lot more talent we are working to attract. At our Multi-Interprofessional Center for Health Informatics - we are all about turning sick care into health care. We are working to grow our team of scholars who use cutting-edge computational tools to analyze health data at scale in order to create better and affordable health outcomes.

I am delighted to share with you today, that an alum of ours understands the promise and impact of this work and has committed to help. Our Center Director Dr. Marion Ball and our VP of Research and Innovation Kate Miller are in the process of finalizing a seven-figure gift with this alum, to ensure that we can attract the very best faculty in the country engaged in Disease Modeling and Surveillance.

This level of support will also stimulate discovery by creating a competitive research awards program that will provide seed funds to our UTA faculty to build collaborative partnerships and garner additional funding from external sources.

This donor understands that UTA is at a critical point in its continued growth as a transformative top-tier research university and sees this gift as an important bridge to the future, by providing a pathway to secure external support and collaboration. We are excited and looking forward to formally announcing this gift in the coming weeks.

Y'all we have built so many bridges that have helped us get to where we are today. And did you know that next year, 2025, it marks our 130th-anniversary. We are planning a year-long celebration and we hope that you will celebrate alongside us.

We are planning an exhibition of our history in the library, partnerships with ROTC to celebrate our military academy origins. And we are planning to host a student competition to design an official UTA Tartan – it will be just one more way we can show our Maverick spirit – I know all of us in this room will look forward to adding a new tie or scarf to our wardrobe.

I want you to be the first to know about our 130th-anniversary celebrations and about other exciting updates about UTA.

I invite you all to join my MavsInsider group, where I'll text you special and exciting updates about UTA. For those of you who are not yet MavsInsiders, I invite you to scan the QR code or text the number on the screen. Those already on my text list can assure you that I won't spam you, but I will send you periodic updates about events and happenings around our campus so that you can stay involved.

I look forward to our continued partnerships and new connections as we create that shared bridge to the future as we work to achieve our aspirations for UTA 2030.

Thank you.