

STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY ADDRESS

Innovate for the Public Good

Friday, October 6, 2023

1:00 P.M. – 2:00 P.M.

Strauss Performing Arts Center

Good afternoon, and welcome. I am so thankful that you have taken the time to join me for my first State of the University address today. What I have to share with you comes at a pivotal time for higher education, and specifically, for the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The year ahead has many challenges, but also many opportunities. I can't wait until we're back here in this room one year from now, looking back at how our university has risen to the moment while also looking ahead to see how we can keep the momentum going.

But before we look too far forward, it's important that we look back. Standing here on the campus of a leading urban-metropolitan university serving over 15,000 learners, it's hard to believe how UNO got its start. It was 115 years ago this week in 1908 that the University of Omaha was founded with less than 30 students. But it wasn't long before the university's founders stated a desire to transform UNO into an institution that provided a quality, practical education that was in reach for anyone who sought it.

Around this same time, the city of Omaha had just begun its path of growth that would be largely uninterrupted to this day. Over the next 115 years, the city of Omaha would grow from around 100,000 residents to a projected 1 million in the greater Omaha area by next year, evolving along the way with the rise of new industries and technologies. With each evolution, our institution acted with a sense of service and urgency to support our community. Because Omaha is our home.

By 1930 we had become our city's first and only public university and moved to our current home on the Dodge Campus in 1938. Our university's leaders at the time had the foresight to choose this location back when this was considered WEST Omaha to align with Omaha's east-to-west development. During this decade the university adopted Adult Education and Continuing Studies programs that focused on access, lifelong learning, and educating students for employment in a rapidly growing labor market in need of skilled workers.

The university and our community experienced challenges and opportunities together, hand-in-hand, in the decades following our founding. Our city and this young institution experienced the 1918 pandemic, the Great Depression, the civil rights movement, and rapid innovations in technology, like television and the internet. These turning points in our history forever changed the way we would live, learn, teach, and work.

Fast forward to today and we have navigated another global pandemic, stepped up to serve our country in times of conflict, held strong through economic recessions, grown closer together through social movements, and are now wrestling with the promises and consequences of technologies, like artificial intelligence, machine learning, and quantum computing.

I wanted to remind you of our university's history because of its striking similarities to our current moment, and how it cuts directly to the core of who we are as a university and a community today. Resilience, innovation, and courage are as central to our university today as they have remained over the past 115 years. Yet today, we face different challenges. Since my joining of UNO, we have done several things that are mission critical:

1. We reorganized and restructured functional units and made ourselves "data-intelligent" so UNO can be more responsive to changes in higher education.
2. We built the Division of Innovative and Learning Centric Initiatives to foster rapid prototyping of new ideas and projects for online learning and student support.
3. We have consistently promoted connectivity across units, from academic to athletics, while honoring shared governance with our faculty senate, staff advisory council, and our student government.
4. We commit to enterprise solutions so we can scale our operations and stretch our resources.
5. We are relentless in making compliance as a culture and not just checking the box.
6. We exerted strong financial policies to ensure that we do not subsidize growth with money that we do not have – because that is not sustainable.

As a system, the University of Nebraska is facing a 58M dollar deficit over the next two years. The crisis is real and we must tackle it now.

While increasing our student enrollment can help in addressing budgetary challenges, financial management is equally, if not MORE important, for sustaining our mission. Just this year alone, we were disciplined to reduce our tuition discounts by \$3.6M, coming at the expense of a .3 percent decline in headcount for this year. UNO must remain vigilant in managing its finances so we can honor our mission and vision.

Every day, UNO opens new doors to higher education for all walks of life. Financial health of our institution will continue to dictate whether we can honor what we set out to do for our community. University of Nebraska System President Ted Carter outlined his five-point plan to reimagine the university system and position it for a sustainable future. Since outlining his vision in June of this year, I have worked closely with my leadership team as well as our deans to build a framework to help UNO be proactive and strategic in our portion of this systemwide plan. Know that we are on top of this, and that we will go into much more depth on this in town hall meetings that will begin later this month. Look for information in the Maverick Daily and Bullseye on the first town hall which will take place on October 20th.

As part of this effort, I charge the Senior Vice Chancellor, Dr. Phil He to work closely with our deans, by engaging with academic leadership, faculty, and staff to review every single academic program. This academic vitality initiative is to allow ourselves to be honest of who we are and who we want to be in the future. We will be direct to ask what UNO is good at or not, where we have competitive advantages or not. We must have direct and sincere conversations so we can determine the best route forward.

Ultimately, we're one university to support our students and our community. At the same time, supporting our state includes opportunities for UNO to diplomatically work hand-in-hand with other institutions. We must embrace cross-campus collaboration, pushing forward in those areas where UNO is strongly positioned to lead.

Headcount and net revenue are equally important to provide a viable future. As I shared during our last strategic planning forum, UNO learners account for 30 percent of the overall University of Nebraska System population and receive about 11 percent of state dollars. This means our

bottom line is heavily dependent on how well we recruit AND retain students.

Recruitment of students is particularly challenging when there are fewer prospective students. A major reason for this is being called “the enrollment cliff,” which is a reference to the steep decline in the college-age population expected to begin in 2025. The birthrate in America has fallen steadily since the Great Recession in 2008, and if you are doing the math, universities nationwide will experience the effects of this in the next few years. By 2029, projections show that the number of 18-year-olds ready to enter college will drop by about 15 percent.

This issue is compounded by a workforce that is increasingly reliant on higher education to educate their employees. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that 65 percent of all jobs will require a bachelor’s degree or more by 2030. That means twice as many jobs require a bachelor’s degree today than they did just three years ago – and four times as many jobs require a bachelor’s degree than they did 60 years ago. The workforce challenge is intensified by the exodus of baby boomers from the workforce. By 2030 all baby boomers will be eligible for retirement. While the community is looking for higher education to solve this challenge, we are falling short.

Parallel to this, most states are spending less on public colleges and universities than they did in 2008 when we first started on the path toward the enrollment cliff. This is a far cry from where we were as a nation 50 years ago, when public investment in higher education produced a level of educational attainment that was unmatched anywhere in the world.

Accessibility to our nation’s colleges and universities served as a springboard to intergenerational economic mobility and a catalyst to innovation, which in turn brought prosperity to a broader middle class. Facing a reduced investment, we also see an erosion of public trust in higher education. A recent Gallup poll found that only 36 percent of respondents expressed confidence in public colleges and universities – a figure down 21 percent since 2015. Politicians everywhere question the value proposition of higher education. As a parent of a college student, I don’t think we can quickly dismiss these sentiments. Putting our heads in the sand will not earn us back the trust.

When we combine the substantial budget deficit, the enrollment cliff, and workforce challenges with the lagging investments in higher education and the erosion of trust, you can see the urgency in the bigger picture. But we have the opportunity to control our own destiny.

In many ways these challenges facing higher education are a perfect storm of its own design that has been building for hundreds of years.

Higher education began in the American colonies in 1636 when Harvard University first opened its doors to only the elite members of society. A fun fact: The US population was about 4,600 back in 1630—by comparison, less than one-third of our current study body—and now we have roughly 334M people. There is so much to admire about our elite universities. But truth be told, elite colleges and universities alone aren't enough to educate the tremendous growth of population in the U.S. if we want more people to be educated.

Deeply engrained in the psyches of top-tier higher education institutions is the idea that the quality of an education is measured by its exclusion, or the number of prospective learners that are turned away during the admissions process. An analysis of enrollment data from 18 top public universities found an admission rate of 31 percent in 2022 compared to 52 percent just twenty years ago. By comparison, UNO admits 86 percent of applicants who want to be Mavericks.

While I fully respect the Ivys of the world, elitism, selective admissions, and restrictions on access to higher education are not going to address the workforce needs we face in our communities. Nebraska in particular has been experiencing record low unemployment. This means we simply need more people to enter a workforce. The future of Nebraska needs educated employees in a growing and increasingly diverse society. Elite institutions are not the answer to the larger challenges in our community.

One of the reasons I joined UNO is that UNO is the university for the people. This institution is leading the way in developing a diverse workforce comprised of learners from all backgrounds and walks of life.

As top universities have become more exclusive, so has the cost of a degree. In the past 20 years, tuition and fees have increased by an average of 134 percent across higher education institutions. This has led to an erosion of public trust and confidence in the value of higher education.

This impacts every university, including ours. However, a UNO education is still a remarkable value. It remains one of the lowest costs of attendance in the nation at \$8,300 per year for in-state students – a price tag lower than the average cost of tuition and fees for the entire state of Nebraska. At UNO, we pride our accessible and affordable quality education above all things.

At this juncture of history, I predict that universities will sort themselves into two groups in the next five years.

The first group will buckle under the weight of change and their communities will pay the consequences. There will be fewer educated people to take on jobs in not just existing career fields, but ones that could emerge with advancements in technology. Young people in those communities will leave to find opportunities elsewhere, widening the talent gap. If those universities fail to change their exclusive ways, individuals will not have the inspiration they need to pursue an education.

Failing to rise to the challenge creates a snowball effect resulting in a rapid decline in social mobility. This leads to a lower standard of living in that community along with rising crime rates. This group will not advance the American dream of enabling people to create a stronger future for themselves and their communities.

Then, there is the second group of universities. This group will re-imagine how they learn, teach, and work to ensure their community thrives. They will reduce or remove barriers to access by being flexible to meet them where they are in their personal journey. They will explore every avenue to reduce educational costs, so that the weight of debt doesn't burden a student's entrepreneurial spirit. They will partner with local businesses, government agencies, and nonprofits to ensure their graduates are connected with a career they are passionate about in their community. They will inspire people of all ages to be lifelong learners, so they are able to adapt to changes in technology and be resilient in economically challenging times.

The result is a university and community that thrives in a mutually beneficial relationship primed for continuous, upward social mobility, sustainable growth, and intergenerational wealth. THAT is how you serve your

community, regain public trust, and have a foundation to build on for the future.

In case this is sounding familiar, let me be very clear: This is what UNO is all about.

This is what a new American university looks like as described by Arizona State University President Michael M. Crow in a book he co-authored entitled, "Designing a New American University." They advocate for universities to be more inclusive and community-focused while maintaining high academic standards. They emphasize the importance of fostering innovation and entrepreneurship while engaging with their local communities and industries to drive economic growth and solve real-world problems. Crow later wrote that there is an opportunity for a new wave of universities to lead a transformation in higher education that joins academic excellence with broad accessibility. Through partnership with industry leaders, government agencies, nonprofits, and even other college campuses, this new wave of universities could lead higher education away from prestige and toward positive changes in social and economic mobility. This is UNO and this is why I am so proud to serve this great university.

The first group of universities clings to outdated structures that hinder innovation and access, while the second group seeks to reinvent themselves to rise to the challenges of the 21st century.

Today we have a choice. We decide which route we must take as a university. The lessons we learned from the past and the challenges we face today will propel us into the future. We must choose to be the university that is dedicated to inclusion rather than exclusion. We must dedicate ourselves to serving the community. We must be the university that is dedicated to innovating for the public good.

Now, do not get me wrong. I am an academic and I love intellectual debates. Indeed, in academia, there will always be room for purely intellectual learning. But today, I submit to you, that the direction of this university is one of pragmatic and impactful research and learning, *with* the community and *for* the betterment of our community. Because UNO is Omaha and we are one with this community. I see this when I look at the audience in the room today.

In working alongside you for the last two years, three months and six days, I have seen your commitment, your hard work, and your loyalty to our

community. I believe with deep conviction that UNO continues to have its hands on the pulse of the community and is uniquely positioned to transform and respond to the issues facing our society. We must understand the challenges of the moment as well as the stakes of inaction. We must identify and pursue solutions – and together, UNO can and will create a legacy of innovation for the public good.

Think of knowledge gained from our teaching, research, and community engagement as our community's most powerful renewable resource. When people use it, it becomes more valuable and helpful. It gets better as we use it in different ways and share it. It also improves as we question it, test it, and discuss it with others. We must make innovation for the public good the fabric of who we are.

Today we have barely scratched the surface of the innovation for public good taking place RIGHT NOW on our campus, but what does it look like in the years to come?

In the future, innovation for the public good leverages creative thinking, artistic expression, technology, and novel approaches to address societal challenges. It embodies a commitment to improving the well-being of a community, nation, or even the entire world using innovation as a force for positive change. It puts a laser focus on benefiting the public, rather than serving narrow self-interests or private motives. It defies the concept of zero-sum game.

To innovate for the public good means developing solutions that tackle pressing issues such as poverty, healthcare access, environmental sustainability, education, human condition, and more. It often involves collaboration between diverse stakeholders, including governments, nonprofits, businesses, campuses, and individuals, to pool resources and expertise. Innovation for the public good values inclusivity, equity, and sustainability, aiming to create lasting and widespread improvements in the quality of life.

When you hear the word innovation, people often think about disruptive innovations, the invention of the automobile, the internet, the smartphone. But did you know that 95% of innovations are actually non-disruptive innovations? 95% of innovations are what we call 'sustainable innovations'

and they occur, for example, when we bring together ideas from different sectors and disciplines, or just simply modifying processes.

When people from different sectors and fields come together to solve complex, real-life challenges – that co-created knowledge transcends disciplines. It leads to intellectual multilingualism – in other words, helping people in one discipline understand and speak the same language as those in another field. Ultimately, innovation for the public good is a call to action for all sectors of society to work together, creatively and responsibly, to address the complex challenges facing our world. Collaboration and training across fields and disciplines is key in doing this and ensuring a brighter future for everyone.

An IT professional can greatly benefit from a background in the humanities. Intellectually multilingual training can open doors for creativity and expression at the intersection of the arts and social issues. A background in business could open new entrepreneurial avenues for an individual working in engineering or natural sciences. As the world faces new complex problems that require innovative solutions, it is those who have the ability to be multilingual in terms of their disciplines and training that will be best positioned to develop solutions. The more that we can foster this type of collaboration across fields, across colleges, across campuses, and across industry sectors, the more that we can say we did our job and prepared our candidates for future challenges.

When the focus of knowledge and learning is centered around solving real-life challenges instead of “what-ifs” and hypotheticals, it brings the urgency to act. Because inaction really doesn’t solve anything. Inaction does nothing to advance our society.

It is our responsibility as Omaha’s only public research university to be part of the solution. Inaction is simply not an option. Is there anything more draining than discussing the same issues over and over again? Let’s find answers instead of simply recycling problems.

And inaction comes in many forms. It is often the fear to act in pursuit of a perfect solution. I have news for you: perfection cannot be the enemy of good. While we can always strive to improve, we must be okay with imperfection. We must pilot ideas, evaluate, and improve – including by taking manageable risks. We are allowed, if not encouraged, to make

manageable mistakes so long as we learn and innovate from our failure. Without stepping outside of our comfort zone, and without moving quickly to adapt to the evolving issues of our changing world, we'll be stuck – locked into the status quo with the same old issues.

At UNO, we must pick up the speed of doing business. Timely execution might very well be one of the most prized commodities in higher education's toolbox.

Our faculty and staff wake up every day searching for more ways to expand access to a quality education for our Omaha community and beyond. UNO is home to more than 5,000 first-generation learners, and more than 4,700 learners are ethnically diverse. To take it a step further, 87 percent of our learners receive some form of financial aid, 33 percent of UNO's learners are Pell Grant eligible and 25 percent are Nebraska Promise. Finally, of all the learners from Nebraska who attend our university, 85 percent of them are from right here in the Omaha Metro Area. You can't begin to understand how much pride I have just by sharing these statistics with you.

You can tell a lot about a university by its student body. The story that ours tells is that UNO exists FOR and BY the people of this great community. We must approach every day with a purpose. Our purpose is to increase access for our students and their families. Every student. Every family. We are an institution that does not mistake someone's socio-economic background for their intellect. We remember that talents are equally distributed, but opportunities are not – and we are here to level the playing field. The academic quality of UNO must not solely be measured by the credentials of our incoming learners, but by the student success because of our educational programs and research. When students come to UNO, we welcome them as who they are and celebrate them as who they want to be upon their graduation.

This is what we have come to define as social and economic mobility. This is the value of higher education. This is UNO's promise.

Today I **PROPOSE** the UNO Core:

UNO is an urban public research university educating people of the world. We innovate for the public good through pragmatic and impactful research and discovery. We advance the social and economic mobility of our

learners and serve our communities through inclusion rather than exclusion. We assume responsibility for workforce and economic development within our state and beyond. We devote each day to transforming lives.

Allow me to break down the **PROPOSED** UNO Core statement: First, UNO educates people of the world. Let me provide you with a few examples:

At UNO ALL are welcome and student performance is one of our strategic goals. Over the past two years, our Vice Chancellors and Deans — in close partnership with department heads, faculty, and staff— have developed and begun the execution of innovative enrollment strategies. Each strategy across first-time/full-time, graduate, transfer, out-of-state, international, online, and microcredentials seeks to answer one question: who are we missing?

Is there a working parent who wants to expand their skill set, but can't because of their busy schedule? Is there a student in Omaha who thinks higher education is out of reach because they don't have a family member or close friend who holds a degree? Is there a student in a surrounding state who has dreams of pursuing a career, but there isn't a degree program for it in their state? Is there a community college student in Nebraska who needs a four-year university to take the next big step in their academic journey?

We have created and strengthened our partnerships with K-12 schools, community colleges, and the community. We have developed an aggressive recruitment strategy for out-of-state students through the Omaha Urban Rate "OUR Tuition". And we plan on advancing the international profile of UNO by increasing international students' presence.

As an international student myself, I can personally attest to how transformational an American education can be. My life was changed forever by my experience, and it inspired me to give back to the country that had given me so much. Our international recruitment strategy is driven by the belief that we can add richness and depth to the university experience through the international exchange of culture and ideas. We set an ambitious goal: that we would bring more international students to UNO so that they comprise 10 percent of our overall student body by the academic year 2026-27.

Through establishing and developing relationships with other institutions and recruiting partners worldwide, we can enhance UNO's global footprint and impact. In the same way that many economists and political scientists agree that international commerce is a powerful tool for world peace, I believe the same is true for public higher education.

We understand that some students can only pursue their educational dreams if we provide flexibility. UNO has emerged as a national leader since entering the online learning space more than 25 years ago when the internet itself was still an emerging technology.

We recognize that the path to higher education is no longer one-directional, and we are going beyond recruitment strategies to further our mission of higher education.

And because we are data driven, we know that there is a strong demand for reskilling and upskilling. 64% of professionals are looking for reskill and upskill credentials, which is why we are entering the new market of microcredentials. Through short-term programs like data literacy, business intelligence, grant development, and juvenile justice, to name a few, UNO is helping learners of all ages and industries develop in-demand skills and fill critical workforce gaps. These flexible, affordable, and accessible new course offerings will be a driver in our workforce development efforts as a complement to our full degree programs.

Not all students **ARE** the same. Not all students **LEARN** the same.

We do not shy away from looking at innovative methods of teaching and learning to ensure people from all walks of life feel welcome. This summer, UNO piloted competency-based education. This approach allows students to advance by mastering a skill or competency rather than doing a traditional test – it is focused on outcomes and real-world performance.

Our efforts to solve real problems for the community and the catalyst for Nebraska's workforce are evident in the number of Mavericks who call Nebraska home after they become alumni. Nearly 64 percent of Mavericks who have earned their undergraduate degree from UNO in the past decade have remained here in Nebraska – either to join the workforce or attend graduate school.

Our colleges do amazing work to build pipelines. Let me share a few examples:

I told you earlier that the main questions we ask as a university is “who are we missing?” One program that has done exceptional work in answering that question is the Prep Academy housed in the **College of Business Administration**. The CBA Prep Academy opens doors for underrepresented groups to enter the business field. Each summer, high school students come to our campus to connect, network, and interact with Omaha-area industry leaders. When learners from underserved groups enter business careers in our community, it creates a ripple effect that inspires them to begin their own academic journeys.

As another example, the **College of Communication, Fine Arts, and Media** brings UNO to our community through UNO Theatre’s Summer Musical Theatre Academy. Through this tuition-free program, students from high schools across the metro gain invaluable experience as the cast and crew of a full theatre production, with the final performances taking place out in the community at the newly renovated Gene Leahy Mall Pavilion downtown.

In addition to building pipelines from aspirations to college to career, UNO also produces pragmatic and impactful research. I know I can’t cover all the great things but please allow me to give some examples: UNO is home to the Department of Homeland Security’s **National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center**, otherwise known as NCITE. NCITE serves as a transdisciplinary consortium of 50+ experts from 26 university and industry partners around the country and in Europe that provide actionable counterterrorism research, technology, and workforce development support in the field of security research. In fact, NCITE faculty were recently invited to brief the National Security Council and the CIA in the White House on matters of national security. Now how cool is that?!

The **College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences** continues to pave the way in solving the teacher shortage and innovating in the fields of biomechanics and kinesiology. Through partnerships like the Teacher Scholars Academy with Omaha Public Schools, our education programs are bringing more educators into classrooms across the metro and the state.

Now celebrating its 10th anniversary, the **Department of Biomechanics** has contributed over 27M dollars to the Omaha metropolitan economy. It’s

home to impactful research such as low-cost 3D printed prosthetic limbs and advancing careers of athletes through the UNO Pitching Lab.

In the **College of Arts and Sciences**, Dr. Paul Denton in the Department of Biology is part of an international group of researchers that just published an article in the journal Nature Medicine. Through continuing research into antibodies and immune system response, they may have moved another step closer to a medication-free existence for millions living with HIV today.

And we are great at doing research. UNO's **sponsored research and creative activity** has grown from 25M in 2021 to 37M in 2022 and now, 42M in 2023. Let's continue this trend!

Finally, at UNO we solve the real problems for the community. Workforce development is a significant challenge facing our community and it is also one of our strategic goals. This is why we created **Career Connect** with the focus on paid internships. Businesses need interns and our students benefit from hands-on internship experience with companies. But our student body faces real financial challenges, and we cannot allow our students to go unpaid. It simply will not cut it. I am proud to announce that since the launch of Career Connect last year, we created 135 new partnerships with Omaha-area organizations which have posted over 8,000 paid internships on Handshake.

Career Connect complements college-level internship programs, such as the **College of Information Science & Technology's** Learn and Earn initiative. Learn and Earn is a comprehensive initiative that pairs students with industry through job shadowing and internship opportunities – increasing the likelihood that these students are retained in the Nebraska workforce. This is critical in meeting the needs for high wage, high skill, and high demand jobs in the state that rely on workers with backgrounds in technology. UNO's College of IS&T is helping to solve the tech worker shortage, especially in fields such as cybersecurity and computer science.

Another important program in our brain gain effort is the Aviation Institute within the **College of Public Affairs and Community Service**. The aviation program is a key force in fighting workforce shortages in aviation through its academic programs, flight simulation and training, and industry partnerships. Four years ago, the institute partnered with Southwest Airlines for their career pathway program called Destination 2-2-5. Just last

year, the Aviation Institute announced a new partnership with United Airlines to become the newest member of its United Aviate program. Partnering with Southwest and United sets our learners on a career path with either airline. When you add in partnerships with regional airlines that operate under Delta and American Airlines, it's incredible to see that UNO has connections to almost all major airlines in the United States.

When we talk about **athletics** at UNO, our Mavericks truly put the "student" in "student athlete." Across all sports, our Mavericks are earning an average GPA of 3.52 and, critically, 94% of our Maverick student athletes go on to complete their degree at UNO! Our athletes are also successful in competition. Our softball and women's soccer teams captured Summit League titles in the past year. Many of our athletes are also active in the community, joining in community celebrations, parades, and other services. I'm so proud of our Maverick athletes and all they do in the classroom, in competition, and in the community. Don't forget we will kick off our hockey season on October 13th!

This year, we celebrate 25 years of **service learning**. A revolutionary idea of bringing together the university classroom, K-12, and community in the co-creation of knowledge and learning. This came about because people allowed themselves to dream, responded to skepticism with 'why not', and formed a coalition of the willing with a bias for action, UNO's service learning and community engagement are nationally celebrated for their innovative approach to learning. Now, UNO students serve around 300,000 hours in their communities every year. Our learning and teaching happens in this amazing community, that I'm so proud to be a part of. UNO has over 800 community partners in Nebraska that are our co-creators of knowledge and our co-teachers.

The **College of Arts and Sciences**, experiential learning and community engagement are mainstays of programs across disciplines. The college is home to the most service-learning classes at UNO and a number of innovative study away programs. The College introduced programs such as a winter ecology course taught at Yellowstone National Park and the first ever archaeological dig at Moses Merrill Mission Site. The College of Arts and Sciences also takes pride in its mentorship of award-winning undergraduate student researchers including Goldwater Scholarship recipients. Our learning and teaching happens every day in this amazing community.

UNO's trajectory is one that champions the New American University model. Our core is:

UNO is an urban public research university educating people of the world. We innovate for the public good through pragmatic and impactful research and discovery. We advance the social and economic mobility of our learners and serve our communities through inclusion rather than exclusion. We assume responsibility for workforce and economic development within our state and beyond. We devote each day to transforming lives.

I hope you agree with me that the UNO Core reflects our successes and our aspirations. Today I challenge you to commit to this core.

At UNO, we embrace a unique attitude—an attitude that says, "come as you are." We believe in meeting you where you are, recognizing that a college degree is not the end of your education journey, but the beginning of a new life filled with endless possibilities.

UNO is committed to providing educational opportunities that empower lifelong learners to upgrade and expand their skill sets. We understand that the workforce is constantly evolving, and we are here to help you stay ahead of the curve.

Our university offers multiple value propositions, rooted in knowledge creation through research, knowledge proliferation through teaching, and the preparation of individuals for life and careers.

In the pursuit of knowledge, our faculty and researchers have a unique opportunity to reaffirm their commitment to serving society. They are the driving force behind our efforts to advance innovation on a scale that matches the complexity of the local, national, and global challenges we face.

UNO is a knowledge enterprise that combines accessibility, inclusiveness, and societal impact. We are committed to providing a comprehensive knowledge enterprise accessible to a diverse demographic, both socioeconomically and intellectually.

At UNO, we understand the pivotal role we play in driving innovation, spurring economic growth, and making the connection between groundbreaking research and how it can be utilized out in the world. We aim to attract talent for our city and our state, address workforce shortages and contribute to the growth of our region.

We are the university that exists to serve all people and transform all learners of the world. And we do it with intention and speed. We know the time is here. We understand the urgency. We will adapt and we will advance.

But we don't stop there. We aspire to be the friendliest campus on Earth, where everyone is welcome, and hospitality is our hallmark. How do we make it happen? Everyone who works at UNO is expected to welcome our community as our family. We receive each individual with a smile and treat them with utmost respect. When you walk onto our campus, You. Are. Welcome. Here.

Today I will leave you with a call to action for the year ahead. Be part of our community. Shape the future of education. Because the time is NOW. Make UNO the most welcoming, accessible, and impactful university in the nation. We act rather than wait. We do it with speed and adaptability. Together, we become THE university for our community.

Thank you.