

State of the University 2015 Remarks by President James M. Danko

Good afternoon and thank you for joining us today. This is the first year we've scheduled the State of the University address in conjunction with Homecoming, which has provided an opportunity for both students and alumni to join this afternoon.

I'd also like to thank the Butler trustees who've joined us today, including our board chair, Keith Burks. On a personal note, I want to express my gratitude to the board and to the Butler community for the opportunity to lead this institution for 5 more years.

Together, we've achieved great progress and gained valuable insights over the last 4 years. I believe we can reach even higher levels of success as we work toward our shared vision for Butler University.

The state of our University is extremely strong. This is demonstrated by the well-being and positive outcomes of our students, our excellent faculty and academic quality, and Butler's impact throughout our community and the world.

But the complex challenges ahead—from shifting demographics to a nationwide focus on the cost of higher education—are greater than any we have faced before.

In spite of these challenges—and thanks to the thoughtful engagement and hard work of the entire Butler community—the trustees and I are *more confident than ever* in Butler's strategy and future.

I'd like to focus today's remarks on 3 topics: our past and present accomplishments; the challenges we face; and, our path toward sustained, mission-driven success.

In highlighting our accomplishments, I want to focus on the reason—the *why*—we're all here: our students.

We should take great pride in the fact that 95 percent of our students were either employed or pursuing graduate school within 6 months of graduation.

Let me highlight just a few of the many examples of the way students' lives are transformed and enriched by their Butler University education.

Kate Carroll graduated last May. Named one of our Top 10 Students, Kate excelled both in and out of the classroom throughout her Butler experience. She served as Vice President of the Student Government Association and a Student Ambassador for Butler's Office of Admission. She worked as a Student Analyst with the Butler Business Consulting Group. Kate even exceeded Butler's rigorous 2-internship business requirement by completing 3—including United Technologies, DEFENDER Direct, and Eli Lilly and Company.

After graduation, Kate started a full-time job at Lilly alongside nine other Butler graduates, five of whom received and accepted their offers following their internships.

Kate's success is not an anomaly at Butler. A record number of our students received major scholarship recognition in 2015, including four Fulbright recipients and Butler's first winner of the Goldwater Scholarship in 5 years, Luke Gallion.

Since coming to Butler, Luke has worked on a project to quickly and inexpensively detect dangerous metals in water. Now he's at the Indianapolis Museum of Art to discover why the colors have faded on a Fernando Brizio work. Luke originally intended to go elsewhere for his college studies, but after receiving a Lilly Endowment Community Scholarship, he toured the Butler campus and immediately decided to apply here. After graduation, Luke plans to pursue a doctorate in chemistry.

Our student-athletes also continued Butler's tradition of academic excellence, with two students garnering All-American honors, and three recognized as Academic All-Americans.

2015 graduate Mara Olson was among both these groups. Mara had a truly exceptional career at Butler—first and foremost in the classroom, where she earned a 4.0 GPA majoring in Biology with minors in Neuroscience, Biochemistry, and Spanish. She was also a star in Butler track and field. This three-sport and first-team All American led the Bulldog cross-country team to a third-place NCAA finish in 2013, and was a two-time winner of the NCAA Elite 89 award—which honors an individual who has reached the pinnacle of competition at the national-championship level while achieving the highest academic standard. Mara has recently moved to Colorado to work as a personal trainer and prepare for next year's Olympic Trials. She has also applied to medical school, which she intends to begin as early as next fall.

The academic and personal achievements of Kate, Luke, and Mara were supported by Butler's engaged educational approach. Experiential learning is evident across our University as students participate in service learning, study abroad, internships, student teaching, rotations, research, and performances.

One such opportunity for educational engagement is the annual Undergraduate Research Conference, or URC, which draws participants from all over the country. The conference simulates the experience of a professional conference, and even first-year students can present their work to peers from nearly 60 institutions. Last year, a record 900-plus individuals attended the URC and delivered more than 600 presentations. The Butler URC is the biggest conference of its kind in the nation and will celebrate its 28th anniversary next April.

Of course, the heart of Butler's mission is its faculty. I've often said that the success of Butler is rather simple: We put great students with great faculty and support them with a great staff.

Last year suffered no shortage of faculty accomplishments and curricular innovation. It would take me through Homecoming Weekend to cite all such examples, but let me highlight just a few.

Many of our faculty distinguished themselves in their teaching and research. One of those is Professor Andrew Levy, whose new book, *Huck Finn's America: Mark Twain and the Era That Shaped His Masterpiece*, received critical acclaim and wide-ranging media attention from the *Wall Street Journal*, NPR, and the *Boston Globe*, among others. Perhaps most rewarding of all, Professor Levy's book—now in its second printing—is already being taught in high schools.

In addition, Professor Donald Braid and Butler's Center for Citizenship and Community led a successful effort to earn the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement Classification; the Butler Innovation Fund supported the creation and launch of the *Butler Journal of Undergraduate Research* and the *BU Well* multimedia healthcare review journal; and the College of Education received the 2015 National Model of Excellence Award from the Association of Independent Liberal Arts Colleges for Teacher Education.

And last year, Butler continued to build upon the national prominence of our faculty. For example, the Jordan College of the Arts welcomed Colonel Michael Colburn—longtime director of the President's Own Marine Corps Band—as Director of Bands, and world-renowned opera star Angela Brown as a Visiting Artist.

Another faculty member who has actively engaged Butler students and community members is Biology department Chair Travis Ryan. Travis has recently led efforts related to a project called *StreamLines*—funded by Butler’s largest-ever federal grants, totaling more than \$3 million.

I would like to add that Cynthia Pratt choreographed a new dance work for 100 dancers for the *StreamLines* project, which debuted last night (September 24) in Butler's Holcomb Gardens.

In addition to our faculty’s many accomplishments, we collectively launched several new undergraduate programs last year, and approved additional programs that launched this fall or will launch in the near future. These include: Interactive Media; Sports Media; Music Performance and Education; Musical Arts Jazz Studies; Astronomy and Astrophysics; Environmental Studies; Recreation and Sports Studies; and Healthcare and Business.

We also launched new graduate programs. This is an area critical to the long-term growth of Butler University and the support of our core, undergraduate residential offerings. New programs include: the Butler-Schwab MBA partnership; the Physician-Assistant Program shift to a standalone master’s degree; and seven new non-degree certificate programs within the College of Education.

Finally, we continued to expand online and hybrid course offerings. Over the summer, we offered 62 courses. This is a tremendous accomplishment, considering that we only began to emphasize the development of these programs 4 years ago.

Co-curricular programming has also been strengthened over the last year—from NCAA athletics to club and intramural sports; and from hundreds of student, community, and professional arts and culture events to over 150 student clubs and organizations.

More than 90 percent of Butler students are involved in at least one co-curricular activity—and most students are involved in several.

This passion for involvement was never more evident than in Butler’s first community-wide Bulldogs Into the Streets event last month, where more than 1,200 Butler students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends tackled 25 different service projects across Indianapolis.

I’m very grateful to our Student Affairs team and to the students and community members who participated in this year’s event. We look forward to seeing it grow even more in the years to come.

If you’ve spent time on campus over the last year, you know we’ve been busy improving our campus environment.

The Sunset Avenue Streetscape and multi-use parking garage projects are nearly complete. More than half the parking spaces in the garage are being utilized, and our first retail tenant, Scotty’s Dawghouse, will open this winter.

Our collaboration with American Campus Communities to develop state-of-the-art student housing has gone extremely well, with our newest residential facility on track to open next summer.

And just last week—following extensive community engagement—the Board of Trustees approved our next steps in the planning and design of world-class facilities for the sciences and business.

On the community front, the Midtown Anchor Coalition initiative has Butler working alongside Christian Theological Seminary, the Indianapolis Museum of Art, the International School, Crown Hill, Citizens Energy, Midtown Indy, and the Butler-Tarkington Neighborhood Association to advance mutual priorities in our Midtown geography. Areas of focus include education, public safety, and housing.

Another key initiative underway is the deepening collaboration between Butler and Christian Theological Seminary. Over their long shared history, CTS and Butler have partnered academically, programmatically, and through shared services. Over the last year, our institutions have begun discussions about furthering this partnership, and we are now engaging the broader Butler and CTS communities in these discussions.

In addition to strengthening these academic programs and campus resources, we are focused on three critical efforts: investing in talent and development; advancing Butler's climate of diversity and inclusivity; and improving our support of safety, security, and wellness on campus.

Whenever I speak about Butler's future, I cite our people as the foundation of our success. Our faculty and staff are critical to the realization of our Butler 2020 Vision—and so it is important that they find inspiration, openness, and fulfillment in their workplace. To that end, we are pursuing several initiatives designed to elevate our approach to Human Resources and professional development.

Over the past year, we've added several proven leaders in critical positions to our already stellar executive team. These include: Steve Standifird, Dean of the College of Business; Jaci Thiede, Vice President for Advancement; Lori Greene, Vice President for Enrollment Management; Pete Williams, Chief Information Officer; and Tom Paradis, Associate Provost.

We are creating a new Office of Talent, Diversity, and Wellness. We have conducted a thorough search for a vice president of this new office, and we are now actively engaging with finalists for the position.

Building upon our vibrant faculty development programs, we have introduced new development opportunities for staff and administrators to improve leadership and skills and workplace culture.

Finally, last year saw an expansion of Butler's wellness benefits, including heavily subsidized access to our Health and Recreation facilities and new wellness incentives through Healthy Horizons for faculty and staff.

In keeping with Butler's founding values, we are committed to serving as thought leaders in our local and national community—and to taking decisive and courageous action against fundamental wrongs when we see them. This was underscored by our early opposition to the state's Religious Freedom Restoration Act and our related commitment of support to Indy's pursuit of the National Pride Conference in 2017. Our advocacy—and that of countless other companies, universities, and organizations who followed—led to real change and helped to ensure that Butler and Indy can continue to attract the diverse and talented students, faculty, and staff members that make Butler such an engaging and rewarding environment.

Like issues of freedom and equality, the safety and well-being of our community—especially the students for whom we are responsible—is always top of mind for me and for our campus leaders.

I am proud of our Student Government Association and the many Butler students who joined the national "It's On Us" campaign last February. Their aim was to create a cultural shift in the way students consider, discuss, and approach sexual assault on campus.

After launching Presidential Commissions on Diversity and Sexual Assault in 2014, we shared their final reports with our campus community earlier this month.

I want to thank the members of each Commission for their efforts, with special thanks to chairs Kate Morris and Levester Johnson. The groups have worked diligently over the last year to complete their assessments and craft recommendations for the Butler community. We have begun to implement these recommendations to make Butler a safer and more diverse place to learn, work, and live.

I'm also pleased with the continued growth and success of Founder's Day—now Founder's Week—which is entering its 4th year celebrating diversity, inclusivity, and equality at Butler University. Founder's Week is now under the leadership of Dr. Terri Jett, who was appointed as Special Assistant to the Provost for Diversity and Inclusivity.

Another area in which we have made great progress is effectively telling the Butler story.

After engaging external stakeholders and the campus community, our Marketing and Communications team developed and launched a reimagined Butler brand.

The new brand strategy—focused on Butler's promise to deliver *The Right Outcomes, The Right Way*—is turning heads among our prospective students and families, alumni and friends, internal community, and fellow institutions. Though still in its earliest stages, I am very encouraged by its results.

U.S. News & World Report—which has an annual readership of over 250 million people—published its yearly ranking of America's Best Colleges earlier this month. I am pleased to report that Butler tied for the No. 1 spot for the Most Innovative School among Midwest Regional Universities. Butler is also one of only seven universities recognized for Best Undergraduate Teaching, and one of 15 listed as a 2016 Best Value School. Overall, Butler ranks No. 2 among Midwest Regional Universities, marking its 26th year in the top 10. It is encouraging to see our peers recognize our efforts and to see these strengths publicized so widely to prospective students, families, and the general public.

Butler's first-year enrollment has grown over the last 10 years, from 865 to 926 in my first year on campus in 2011, and to 1,060 this fall—an increase of 5.5 percent this year over last year, although we did fall short of our aggressive goal of 1100 new students.

Our student body has steadily increased in talent and diversity as well during this time, with the average GPA increasing from 3.7 to 3.8; average ACT score improving from 25.6 to 27.1; our out-of-state student percentage increasing from 45 to 55 percent; and our multicultural enrollment increasing from 10 percent to nearly 15.7 percent.

This growth in reputation and enrollment—combined with the exceptional leadership and stewardship across the University's colleges and divisions—has led to sustained financial success for Butler, notwithstanding the very real financial constraints we face this year.

Since 2011, we have generated budget surpluses each year, including our largest-ever surplus in 2014, and a \$2.1 million surplus in 2015, despite beginning the year with a projected budget deficit.

While these surpluses are small relative to our overall operating budget of \$150 million, they allow us to make meaningful reinvestments in our students, faculty and staff, campus environment, and educational experience.

I appreciate all that our community has done to be fiscally responsible and to ensure that our resources are invested wisely in support of our academic mission.

From the accomplishments of our students and faculty to the significant progress being made on our campus environment; from the strength of the Butler brand and enrollments to our sound fiscal management, I hope you can see the clear evidence—as I do—that the state of Butler University is stronger than ever.

But it is important that we keep in mind why our collective efforts and progress matter—and that gets us back to our students.

While we should be proud of—and encouraged by—the extraordinary success Butler and our students are experiencing, this is certainly no time to relax our efforts. American higher education is changing faster than at any time in its nearly 400-year history.

Shifting demographics are among the most significant challenges facing higher education today. From 1997 to 2010, the number of US students graduating from high school in each year grew by 27 percent. This allowed colleges to grow enrollment consistently over this period.

From 2010 to 2022, however, the overall number of high school graduates is expected to *decline* by 2 percent. This decline is expected to be even more significant in the Midwest and Northeast.

While the population of high school graduates is declining, their expectations are rising.

During this time of year, when many high-school students visit and assess potential colleges, they find state-of-the-art facilities and amenities, including classrooms, technology, and housing. Students and their families expect high-touch student services, excellent food, and convenient parking. Most importantly, they expect a degree that will reliably lead to a great job or to continued study in their chosen field.

At the same time, the media, government, and public are intensely focused on the cost of higher education. While a college degree continues to be one of the best long-term investments you can make, the issues of prohibitive cost and student debt are very real.

In the face of these challenges, there are clear beliefs in the market place that the traditional model of education is quite susceptible to disruption if not obsolescence.

Some experts have concluded that many universities simply won't survive. Harvard's Clayton Christensen, for example, has predicted that half of US colleges and universities could be bankrupt by 2030. Despite our extraordinary accomplishments and growing national reputation, Butler is not immune to these challenges. Butler, like many private, mid-size, teaching-focused universities, is heavily tuition-dependent—in our case, enrollment-driven revenues account for approximately 86 percent of our annual budget. This means we are disproportionately impacted by the pressure on enrollment and tuition growth in today's market.

In addition, though we are encouraged by the growth in first-year enrollment this year, attracting this year's incoming class required an increase in financial aid. While this is consistent with what other universities are experiencing, it nonetheless has placed additional pressure on our budget.

Lastly, during the past two years we have seen our projected revenues from returning students fall short of budgeted goals. The good news is that decline appears to reflect a trend that an increasing number of Butler students are graduating on time, rather than returning for a fifth year. In the face of all the competitive pressures I've mentioned, it is imperative that we consider new ways to achieve our educational mission more effectively, efficiently, and sustainably.

Fortunately, Butler is well positioned not only to survive these challenging times, but to thrive in them.

In conjunction with a market that is focused on the cost of higher education is an equally intense focus on student outcomes—an area in which Butler excels today and in which we are making investments toward even greater success in the future. We are confident that the private, midsize, undergraduate residential university provides a differentiated environment that reliably leads to student success. And Butler is poised to do so as well as—if not better than—any university of our type in the nation.

With this in mind, our strategy is clear: to invest in existing strengths—our people and our academic and co-curricular programs—while capitalizing on key opportunities for improvement, such as our campus facilities and fundraising capabilities. Sustained, long-term success will require our collective commitment and discipline as we craft and implement key Butler 2020 initiatives and further distinguish Butler in the world of higher education.

Our Butler 2020 Vision and strategic platforms resulted from more than 2 years of engagement and input from Butler students, faculty, staff, alumni, and trustees.

The resulting vision statement is a succinct depiction of what is most important to our community and what we plan to accomplish over the next several years.

The six strategic platforms highlight the ways in which we plan to realize this vision. We are committed to distinguishing Butler among peer and aspirant universities by creating innovative academic programs while strengthening our commitment to community engagement, experiential learning, and international education.

In order to do this, we must attract, develop, and retain faculty who combine a high-quality, engaged teaching approach with scholarly inquiry and multi-disciplinary collaboration.

We must evolve by advancing our educational mission through superior campus amenities and dynamic co-curricular offerings.

We must enrich the Butler community by promoting diversity, creating a welcoming atmosphere, and preparing graduates to succeed in a multicultural workforce and global society.

Since early 2014, many of our colleges and divisions have initiated—and in some cases, completed—strategic planning efforts of their own, outlining objectives and key initiatives that will advance their individual unit *and* support Butler’s institutional strategy.

With these valuable planning efforts in mind, Butler’s academic and administrative leaders worked this summer alongside the Butler Business Consulting Group to evolve the six Butler 2020 platforms into *actionable objectives* that are *specific, measurable, and time-bound*.

I would like to call out two that are central to *all* of our efforts and sit at the intersection of our mission, vision, and opportunity to distinguish Butler among our peer and aspirant institutions:

The first is a continued expansion of our University-wide student engagement efforts. Today’s students—especially those considering an institution like Butler—expect and deserve to be immersed in an environment where they can learn, grow, and contribute each and every day. Through our focus on innovative teaching, close relationships with faculty and staff, diversity and inclusivity, experiential education, global education, and service learning, I believe we already provide our students with one of the most engaging and valuable educational experiences in the country.

The second objective I will highlight is, in many ways, a consequence of the first—continued improvement of student and graduate outcomes. More than ever before, today’s students and parents are focused as much or more on the expected outcomes of a college education as they are on the educational experience itself. And at Butler, we are well positioned to deliver on both. By continuing to strengthen the Butler experience and focusing intently on key learning and career outcomes, we can build upon Butler’s already-stellar record of preparing students for continued study, successful careers, and fulfilling lives.

Of course, achieving our enrollment and fundraising goals will be critical to the success of these mission-driven objectives. We continue to build toward an incoming first-year class of 1,100, and with our new collaborative strategy, leadership, and resources in place, I believe we will succeed—and continue to build beyond that point in the future. We are also entering the active planning stages for a comprehensive fundraising campaign that will be vital to our long-term success.

I am confident—as I hope you are—that a focus on these objectives, along with the others that support them, will ultimately lead to the realization of our Butler 2020 Vision and empower Butler’s continued success and ascension in today’s higher education landscape.

With today’s address, we will kick off a period of continued engagement with the Butler community to identify, prioritize, and implement key initiatives that will help us achieve these objectives. You will see some of the upcoming campus-wide engagement opportunities on the screen behind me, and you should also expect to hear from your college or divisional leadership about additional ways to get involved.

Importantly, these initiatives should reflect a balance between new, transformational initiatives and the strengthening or optimizing of ongoing efforts.

Everything I have talked about today—our successes, our challenges, and our future—revolves around the mission of Butler University—one that we have all proudly embraced. It binds us as a community.

We have considered the many challenges we face and committed ourselves to the hard work ahead. And we have envisioned a bold future in which Butler’s success and impact grows exponentially through future generations of students and graduates.

While a speech of this type naturally includes a lot of the what’s and how’s, it is truly the *Why* that is important. Why do we care about the work we do at Butler? Why is our mission so important? I’ve begun calling it the Butler “Why?”

We are not doing all of this for the sake of bottom line, financial success, or to be the most efficient/innovative university. Yes, balancing our budget, focusing our resources, and pursuing a smart strategy are important means to an end, but ours is not a profit/margin endeavor. Rather, we are pursuing a mission, and one in which we take great pride. As for my own “Why”—Why do I want to be part of this community and this mission? Why am I excited to be here for another 5 years, and hopefully, the remainder of my career?

Well, it’s because I believe strongly in this university, in our mission, and in our ability and potential to positively impact the world. It’s because I believe my background and experience can be a valuable part of our collective strengths in addressing the real issues that confront our industry and our university.

But I also recognize Butler is an organization focused first and foremost on its mission. And to successfully fulfill our mission, and our broader responsibility to our community and society, let me underscore my commitment to ensure that this university is a place open to a broad spectrum of ideas and opinions, even if sometimes controversial. We need to demonstrate our ability to engage in, and support, constructive and positive dialogue about issues affecting the future of our community, our country, and our world.

Are we perfect? No. Do we always agree with each other on the best way to achieve our mission? No. In fact, civility and respect for each other and our differences does not mean we need to agree or suppress certain opinions. But it does mean that we will stand out as a community uniquely capable of confronting complex issues in a constructive and thoughtful manner.

And in so doing, Butler will be a place that avoids quick-from-the hip, uninformed, 140 character attacks on others. Butler will be a place that stands opposed to an increasing anti-intellectualism, and unfounded attacks on the value of a liberal arts education that are affecting this country. And in its approach Butler will achieve its mission to prepare graduates to make a meaningful impact in the world.

I would like to thank all of you for being here today and for all the great work you do on behalf of Butler University. I'd like to close today with a video that I believe does an excellent job in highlighting many of the topics touched upon today, and most importantly, in emphasizing the importance of our heritage and our people.