Good morning! Welcome to Convocation 2014! For those of you who were here last year, thank you for finding us, since we’ve changed locations. We’re simply too large for the UC Theater this year.

Since Convocation last year, we’ve added more than 60 new faculty members! And we’ve added close to that many additional staff. We are growing at an astonishing rate—almost 10% last year. We’re expecting 7 or 8% this year on campus, not counting dual credit and online increases.

We’re nearing the 8,000 enrollment mark for this fall. What an accomplishment that is at a time when many other institutions are seeing flat or falling enrollment!

Earlier this week I briefly met some of our new faculty members. We welcome all of you to our fast-growing, innovative, effective and caring university. I want to note that you have joined a truly special group of people.

You will walk beside these dedicated people and learn from them. And they will, I’m sure, learn from you. Above all, I know that together you will help keep the torch of quality and innovation burning at this university.

Today, we are gathered to do three things:

1. Celebrate our growth,
2. Celebrate your many successes and those of our students, and
3. Look ahead for what is in store for us—this year and beyond.

Those of you who are new may be wondering who we are. We are a world-class institution that serves capable students and truly cares about their success. We treat UT Tyler students as if they were our own.

Our culture is that of a private university, where students matter. They are taught well, both inside and outside the classroom. We want them to excel in every way when they leave us with degrees.

As a member of this world-class teaching and research team, you are dedicated to teaching your students the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to be highly successful.

We want our graduates to be University men and women, who:

1. Have a sense of personal responsibility;
2. Produce at a high level for their own families and for their communities;
3. Are ethical and value honorable behavior;
4. Think well and make quality decisions (by gathering sufficient information and thinking analytically);
5. Are willing and effective leaders—and followers if needed. (If those who are university men and women do not lead, then who will?);
6. Are solid citizens who stay informed, care about others, understand interesting and appropriate differences in people, listen to other ideas, and see the glass half full.

UT Tyler occupies an important niche in The University of Texas System. We give students an alternative to Austin or Dallas in UT System’s portfolio of universities. Our academic programs have the same rigor and market value as the programs at the large, urban institutions that dominate our System.
However, students can choose UT Tyler’s non-urban learning environment; its resort-like campus with first-rate facilities; and its world-class, effective faculty and staff who truly care.

Other things that set us apart are our lower student-to-faculty ratio, smaller class sizes and extra student engagement.

Far from being another megalopolis-based, Tier 1 wannabe, we continue to maintain a 16:1 student-to-faculty ratio, the lowest in the UT System. That means faculty members at UT Tyler actually get to interact with students. We pride ourselves on that interaction.

In fact, our freshmen who completed the National Survey of Student Engagement (or NSSE) this year were more satisfied with Student-Faculty interaction than first year students attending any other UT System university. They were also more satisfied with their faculty interaction than students at our Carnegie peers and all first-year students who completed the NSSE nationally.

Those of you who were here last year will remember that we discussed the innovative spirit we have developed over the past 43 years. We are not afraid to think outside the box.

For example:

- We’re becoming national leaders in hybrid course delivery with our PATSS project.
- We added online-only graduate programs early in the game.
- We began working with a course marketing, design and support firm, Academic Partnerships, for graduate programs in engineering and business.
- We’re now establishing a self-sustaining college of pharmacy—that’s innovation for a public university.
- We’ve added a new satellite campus in Houston that will turn out engineering graduates in an innovative 2+2 program.
• Our “movie trailer” marketing campaign begun last fall is innovative;
• Maybe, making soccer our fall sport instead of football is an innovation.

Together we’ve accomplished much in the last ten years. We’ve been busy teaching students with the latest technology; adding new academic programs; adding new buildings, renovating others, and expanding still others. And, we continue to develop sports and other facilities, as well as new programs like Greek social societies to enhance student life opportunities.

In those same 10 years, we have nearly doubled enrollment. We’ve more than doubled our output of degrees awarded annually, thus increasing our efficiency and effectiveness.

Gift support is up considerably, too—more than $50 million over the past 10 years. Jerre Iversen and his team have been magnificent.

Those of you who’ve sought and received funding for your research and service, thank you. You have reached new records for external support. This past year, 2013-14, you met a year early our $9 million goal for 2015 a year early!

To summarize, you can see our growth and success everywhere. Our enrollment gains have been significant and steady, except for the three “great recession” years. And, you’ll learn in a moment, a large part of the reason for our growth this coming fall is the result of your direct efforts—our retention and graduation rates are climbing. Thank you. Again, our students are increasingly engaged in class and on campus and are more successful.
We innovate to stay ahead, to have the best academic programs and best delivery methods anywhere. Quality—measured in the form of better student outcomes—is noticed and it sells. A sense of overall success follows and growth is a natural outcome. That growth, given the funding model Texas uses, keeps us healthy financially.

We’ve grown not only here in Tyler, but also on our other campuses. We just celebrated the opening of a new nursing Sim Lab in Palestine. Our Longview University Center is launching a new Criminal Justice degree and is building a new Innovation Academy site on that campus.

Engineering Dean Jim Nelson has worked tirelessly on forming coalitions with community colleges, especially his work establishing the UT Tyler Houston Engineering Center. This effort is important on its own merits, but it also gives us a recruiting platform in the fourth largest city in the U.S.A.

While finishing our discussion of growth, we need to mention the great success of our Graduate School. Vice Provost and Graduate Dean, Dr. Bill Geiger, and Assistant Dean Alecia Wolf—in close cooperation with academic departments—have done a tremendous job increasing graduate enrollment with top quality students. Last year, total graduate enrollment increased 14%. We expect a 20% increase this fall. Just for comparison, the national average is 1.8%

Now, what’s happening and where do we go next? Let’s talk about construction first.

**Construction Update**

Construction of W.T. Brookshire Hall to house the Ben and Maytee Fisch College of Pharmacy has begun.
The groundbreaking occurred in June and the project is well underway.

By the way, if you’re looking for Dean Brunner and his faculty and staff, they’ve moved temporarily to Library 401. I know that space is often used by many of you each year and we beg your indulgence for this academic year only. Our pharmacy people needed a temporary home.

Our plan is to begin construction of the Music Education Addition to the Cowan Center in late fall. This addition of about 18,000 gsf will provide much needed space for music, and should enable that group to expand enrollment.

But it will also help everyone else. We’re currently losing to other universities recruiting prospects for top engineering, math and pre-professional programs like medicine and law because we don’t have a larger symphonic band or orchestra in which they can play their instruments.

We’ve requested $2.5 million in PUF dollars from System to help with this project, and we are waiting for their decision. Their answer will obviously affect the project, but either way we will break ground this fall.

We are working our way toward a groundbreaking for the Alumni House we showed you last fall. Here, just a year later, our development team has gifts and solid pledges for this project that total some $2.8 million towards the estimated $3 million cost. As a result, we’ve made the decision that this project is a “go!” and should start before the end of the year.

Our Business/Arts & Sciences project is in the near future. It is called our STEM project for certain reasons (for example, it emphasizes technology and computer science) and is comprised of two main parts—
completely rehabbing the current facility and constructing a very large addition. It is a project that rivals our two-building engineering complex in size. It will cost something like $76 million and consist of 120,000 gsf of new and fully renovated space. The Chancellor and Board of Regents have already approved that amount for us to request from the Legislature for this upcoming session. I will keep you updated as we move forward.

**Student Achievements**

I enjoy saying that we have quality students, and that they receive an even higher quality education here. Ultimately, all the building projects we have going are driven by students’ needs. We work to give them the facilities they need to accomplish great things.

It is because of your dedication to teaching at a high level and with a concern for student engagement and actual learning that our students accomplish so much and rival the graduates of the best universities anywhere. I can’t thank you enough for all that you do to help make our students successful.

We also had a great year last year on the athletics front. We chose DIII athletics for a reason, and many of those students who excel on the field are also top achievers in the classroom. Our athletes apply the same level of intensity to their academics as they do to their sports, and that dedication shows.

We won 9 of an available 17 ASC conference championships last year and we had 118 students awarded Academic All-Conference status last year alone—about one-third of all our athletes. We’ve also had several academic All-Americans in the past 10 years.

Our athletes contributed 2,805 hours of community service last year, and they maintained a higher overall GPA than the student body for the 12th consecutive year—always above 2.9 and sometimes above 3.0!!!

Our Patriots Athletics program—out of more than 400 NCAA D-III programs—was ranked 36th nationally last year, putting us in the top
Salary Update

Giving our improving financial picture, not only were we able to hire more faculty, but also we gave merit raises. Not everyone was eligible—for example some of you work under grants within which salaries are fixed. But, for those who were eligible, many of you got a nice letter this week.

In addition to those performance raises, we also were able to implement Phase II of our effort to make market adjustments for faculty who were performing well and who were more than 10% below the respective median salary for their discipline. Indeed, our provost tells me that it looks like we will have gotten almost everyone’s salary above this lower boundary this year.

We were also able to work a bit to get staff who had fallen behind—especially in high-demand fields—up to a salary that is competitive in the market. We made good progress this year and we promise to do more.

The Future

Let me close, by saying how excited I am to see what this year has in store for us. Vice President Acosta told me recently that he has 17 significant projects underway—on his construction spreadsheet—major changes and repairs, rehabs and additions, and getting three new buildings up. And the reason he mentioned these is because he wanted to tell me that every one of the current projects is on schedule.

Three other initiatives you’ll hear more about, and participate in this year, are renewing our strategic plan, creating a new campus master plan and rolling out a new marketing campaign. I should probably add a fourth—starting a national search for a new provost.

We had started the process of updating our strategic plan in preparation for our fifth-year SACS report coming up, but we will be
strengthening that process. That’s because UT System now wants that effort to be more robust—more than just an update.

With more students and new buildings coming very quickly—and because we’ve acquired new land, too—we need a full re-vamp of our campus master plan. I assure you that plan will keep a resort-like focus for our campus.

Finally, you’ll see a continuation of our highly successful “movie trailer” ad campaign that emphasizes informing people about our academic majors. But, in addition, you’ll see a larger rollout of a new, well-rounded marketing campaign this fall. A large and successful firm is guiding us: the Risdall Group out of Minnesota.

I’ll keep you updated on all three initiatives as we move ahead. These are exciting times!