Dr. Mabry’s Remarks
Convocation 2015—August 21, 2015

Good morning! Welcome to Convocation 2015!

This morning, the inaugural class of pharmacists for the Ben and Maytee Fisch College of Pharmacy is already hard at work. The college, and Brookshire Hall, are excellent additions to our campus, and I know this college will have a significant positive impact well into the future.

Over a decade ago, I dreamed of a college of pharmacy. Of the substantial benefit it would have to our region by providing preferred pharmacists in an underserved population. Of the benefit to the several hospital systems in our medically oriented community. And of its benefits to departments in this university such as chemistry, biology and nursing by drawing increasing numbers of strong students to their programs. I am proud that it is here.

Dean Brunner and all of your faculty and staff, would you please stand and let us thank you for all of the hard work you have done the past two years to make our pharmacy college a reality?

The Next Era

Those of you who have been with us for awhile know the Fisch College of Pharmacy is only one way in which our university has grown recently. We’ve added new academic programs, new buildings, new residence
halls and apartment complexes, and now a Cowan Center music addition and alumni house. And new homes for Business and Arts & Sciences are soon to come.

Our progress has been robust, if not astonishing, and I hope that over the years I’ve told you often enough that you are the reason for our success. Thank you for all that you do.

Today, I have a question for you…

What’s next?

I know you’re all waiting for me to answer the question, but that’s not why I’m here today. I am asking you what’s next. What will you do in the next ten years to build on the foundation we have created? How will your department, your college, your office respond to the opportunities and challenges of the future?

Eight years ago, following our successful New Millennium plan, we created a strategic plan called Inspiring Excellence. That plan has taken us far, but with the expiration of that plan this year, this institution is faced with two very important questions…

Who are we? And;

Where are we going?

So, let me spend the rest of my time addressing these two important things:

1. Who we are, or what is UT Tyler’s identity; and,
2. Where do we want to go from here, which is to be mapped out in our new Strategic Plan

As many of you know, we spent quite a bit of time this past spring asking people, both inside the university and in the community, to help us find answers to our two questions.

Because of that process, we have a good picture of who we are today.

A Growing University

Over the past four years, we have been one of the top universities for growth in Texas. Over the past two years, in particular, our credit hour growth was 12.8%, making us the fifth fastest-growing public university in the state.

I’m pleased to say that our growth continues! Our first-day enrollment for fall is up again by more than 6%.

UT Tyler’s success is because of your influence on our students. We can build the best buildings in the world and have twice as many programs, but students will not be successful without the effort of dedicated faculty and staff. Thank you, again, for doing your job well.

Your efforts fuel improving metrics such as our 6-year graduation rate—up 7 percentage points since 2010—and our freshmen retention rate. Both are third highest in UT System, ranking behind only UT Austin and UT Dallas.
We are growing in most areas, and graduate enrollment is a particularly high growth market. Although 1 in 4 right now, we are rapidly approaching a day when 1 in 3 students will be enrolled at the graduate level.

Secondly, more and more of our students have some kind of online component to their learning.

Sixth-six percent of students at UT Tyler either learn completely online or mix both online and face-to-face classes. This number is up dramatically compared to just two or three years ago.

We have always had a strong impact on this region, and that impact is growing each year. Our influence on areas well beyond East Texas is also expanding. Because of programs such as the Houston Engineering Center and Project Lead the Way, our presence reaches throughout Texas and the Southwest.

Our growing impact means we are a significant driver for this region’s economy. UT Tyler adds $327 million in annual income to the East Texas Region, according to a study released last spring on our economic impact. Also, each dollar invested in a UT Tyler students results in $13 returned to taxpayers and society.

The study’s authors said we create the equivalent of 6,000 jobs in this region each year through what we do, which is no small influence. And that number will continue to grow as our university expands.
Our influence is not limited to East Texas – UT Tyler’s reach extends nationwide. UT Tyler students were enrolled in 2014 from 47 states and 52 countries.

Clearly, our impact is growing.

In addition to enrolling more international students, we are sending more domestic students overseas for international study experiences. Plus, many of you are presenting papers and participating in research in other countries.

We are still a university that is always building. We have worked to meet a large number of infrastructure needs over the past ten years and we’re not slowing down anytime soon.

We are currently in the planning stages for a project that will create new homes for both the College of Business and the College of Arts & Sciences, with architects talking to stakeholders around the University as they design this newest addition.

And we have more good news – I am glad to announce that UT System has earmarked $11 million in PUF funding to add to the $60 million from the Legislature for a total of $71 million. That increases the chances that we will work out some sort of solution to reduce our growing parking challenge as part of that project, too, something I’m sure our students, as well as you, will be happy to see happen. I am excited about this project, and I hope you are, too!
Protecting the UT Tyler Identity

As we grow, we must also work to preserve who we are – those unique aspects of our university that make UT Tyler special. These are the characteristics we want to maintain, no matter how much we grow:

- **Quality Learning:** We provide students with challenging academics where they gain exceptional career skills, learn positive values and become university men and women who understand good citizenship and can lead.

- **High Integrity:** UT Tyler faculty and staff are highly skilled, take their high calling of education seriously and exhibit unmatched character and integrity as role models for our students. You inspire our students to internalize these values and act with honor and integrity.

- **Excellent Value.** We offer great value to our students by providing a flagship level education and student experience at costs well below the costs incurred at flagship institutions—both in terms of lower tuition and lower living costs in Tyler.

- **Friendly Environment.** UT Tyler has always prided itself on providing a friendly, welcoming and helpful environment that encourages students to learn and grow in every way—and we pride ourselves on the friendly and efficient workplace we provide each other, too.

Where Are We Going?
**Strategic Planning 2015-2025**

Now for our second question: Where are we going? Last fall, we began working on finding answers to our questions about the University’s future. We named a new Strategic Planning Committee and charged them with building a plan to take us through the next 10 years.

The committee began constructing the framework for a new plan last fall. A rather large group of you agreed to serve on this committee and complete this important work, with University Counsel Mike Donley, AVP for Planning and Analysis Harold Doty, AVP for Strategic Affairs Laura Jackson and Associate Dean Ken Wink serving as the “chief conveners, information gatherers, and scribes” to make sure everyone’s input was recorded.

If you served on the Strategic Planning Committee, thank you! Would you please stand?

The committee started by hosting dozens of workshops and talking to hundreds of people, including faculty, staff, students and community leaders. Most of you in this room were involved in those sessions.

At each session we looked at our competitive environment, our core values, our general direction and what defines us.

After compiling all the data, the result of their efforts was the framework of our next Strategic Plan.

But, there are many pages still to be filled.
While five key areas, or themes, emerged to direct our growth, the details of how we will move forward and improve in those areas must be determined by all of you!

Instead of putting this rather beautiful document on a shelf, we will be working together to put flesh on the bones, so to speak, building our Strategic Plan framework into a plan truly relevant to every single person at this university.

Over the course of the next few weeks, I have asked our Provost, vice presidents, deans, and directors to take this document back to their Colleges and departments. I would like you to discuss it, analyze it, and decide how it applies to your department or area. How can you use this plan to build on the foundation of success in your areas? What goals and objectives will you set? What metrics do you want to measure?

So now you know why I didn’t answer the question of where are we going. Because it is up to us all to help decide.

Now I will quickly through the five key themes and some goals associated with each. I will also show you some recent examples of how we are already excelling in each theme. There is some amazing work done here each day, and most of it easily falls into our themes.

I hope that seeing just a few examples of what we are already doing in each area will aid you in deciding how the themes can fit into your role at the university.
Theme 1: Educate and Inspire University Men and Women

I’ve said for many years that one of our big goals should be to produce graduates who not only know their disciplines and academic content well, but who also can speak well, write well, work as part of a team and lead when asked.

Over and over, I hear how valued our graduates are because they exhibit those skills. Hospitals want our nurses; firms want our finance graduates; schools want our teachers; and businesses and non-profits alike want our historians and literature and languages graduates because those graduates have been trained to become excellent workers, team members, and leaders in the workforce, whether in a corporation, government agency or non-profit.

In the past year our students have gained considerable recognition in this region and beyond for their excellent academic and leadership skills. For example, Joan Edwards, a 2012 Ph.D. Nursing graduate, who is a 2015 American Academy of Nursing Fellow.

Or Dr. Paula Anthony, a recent HRD Ph.D. graduate, who received the Dissertation of the Year award from the Academy of Human Resource Development.

I never tire of talking about how much our students excel, and I hope you will continue to educate such excellent students who perform well both at university and after.
A key factor of this theme is to hold ourselves and our students to high moral standards. The following video reminds us all of how vital having honor is to our success.

Living by the university honor code ourselves can inspire our students to hold themselves to high standards, too.

**Theme 2: Focus on Quality**

Our second theme is to Focus on Quality.

To build a strong university, the one we want to be, quality has to be at the center of everything we do.

A vital element of this theme is a continued focus on retaining the quality faculty we have now and recruiting future faculty who are highly skilled and will help strengthen our academic units.

Over the past three years, we have invested several millions of ongoing dollars into bringing our faculty salaries up to within 10% of the market median for each discipline.

We’ve completed that three-year process with this year’s raises and adjustments, but we will not stop here. I will continue working with the Provost and other campus leaders to develop the next phase of a salary plan that will ensure UT Tyler recruits and retains high quality, productive faculty members.
And those higher salaries are helping. Our retention rate for tenured and tenure track faculty has risen five percentage points since 2010 and is at 94%, about the mark for other institutions in the system.

We are also recruiting and retaining more quality students than ever. Our honors program has grown by more than 50% in the past two years and now involves more than 100 students.

Many of you, both faculty and staff, serve on regional, state and national boards – another mark of the level of quality of UT Tyler professionals. Thank you for your willingness to lend your expertise.

Our students score well academically because of the strength of our programs. And, as we build metrics into the plan, we can identify those key centers and special research areas in which we need to invest in order to further build up our Colleges.

**Theme 3: Promote Innovation**

Theme three is one we’ve talked about for a long time, Promote Innovation.

We pride ourselves on our academic rigor, and we’ve come a long way in the realm of new technologies over the past few years.

Although our courses are rigorous, when combined with engaging practical applications, a supportive faculty, great academic success
support services, and a rich extracurricular life, that academic rigor can be managed…even enjoyed by our students.

Our innovation comes in many forms. From making certain that we have a rich student life to building strong STEM programs, I encourage you to strive every day to look for new ways to develop new teaching pedagogies and encourage stronger learning.

For the first time, there are more UT Tyler students participating in some form of online learning than there are in traditional face-to-face courses.

That presents us with the challenge of providing students with the technology they need while encouraging them not to lose the advantages provided through face-to-face courses. This theme can help us create an intentional plan to address that challenge.

Innovation is about doing things differently to improve results – and at UT Tyler that extends from the classroom to the playing field. We chose a Division III athletics program, and the result is that some of your best students are our athletes.

One of our athletes had a particular moment in the spotlight this past year, and I’m sharing it with you because it’s just fun. This is softball outfielder Christa Hartnett, who managed to make ESPN’s Play of the Day with this catch during the national tournament…

**Theme 4: Enhance Academic Pursuits**
Theme 4 is Enhance Academic Pursuits. That’s the short version. It has an even longer name because it encompasses so much of the soul of this institution.

It is actually titled Increase the Quality and Improve the Quantity of Research, Scholarship and Artistic Production.

Of course, one of the core functions of any university is quality teaching. We have had stunning success in this area, including several recipients of the UT System Board of Regents’ Outstanding Teaching Award. As we grow, we will continue to focus on high quality teaching and work to keep our student-to-faculty ratio as one of the lowest in the UT System.

Additionally, research and scholarship will continue to be highly valued at UT Tyler.

In fact, this theme calls on us to invest more in our research enterprise, in addition to investing in our quality teaching. That’s something last year’s Faculty Senate head, Dr. Williams, stressed many times to me.

If we need more faculty for research or teaching, let’s plan for that expansion. If we need to expand our research infrastructure or develop a multi-university or interdisciplinary partnership, this is our chance to plan ahead and get that done!

Like the other themes, we are already excelling in this area, as well. And we are beginning to grow in different directions as our university gets bigger and stronger.
Five of our faculty members secured research funding of more than $230,000 last year. Congratulations!

We are making headway in areas such as biology (Josh Banta and Blake Bextine have taken on several interesting studies), nursing (such as Benjamin Tseng’s funding by the American Heart Association to study stroke risks), and Mathematics (Professors David Milan and Christina Graves have received a grant to host summer research studies for undergraduate students).

Staying at the top of our fields through research, scholarship, and artistic expression is a key way we will be able to continue to teach at a high level in the future.

So while our goal to be great teachers hasn’t changed, this theme is designed to help support you in developing strategies for both better teaching and stronger research programs.

**Theme 5: Create an Impact**

I said earlier we have a great impact on this region. We also have an increasing influence beyond East Texas.

Let’s make that influence grow. This theme is where we plan the things we want to do to ensure the whole of Texas and the Southwest understands the value of UT Tyler. Let’s be leaders in our fields, develop relevant service learning and improve our relationships with those in and beyond this community.
Our students are eager to grab this theme and run with it. For example, our students created and led their own leadership development program this year, and their impact on this community was much-discussed. The program ended with the creation of a community mural.

Then there’s Benjamin Strube, a dual major in political science and economics, who spent his spring semester interning with the Committee for Health, Education, Labor and Pensions as an Archer Fellow.

Even the student worker in my office, Cayla Ward, is interning with the Disney Corporation this fall. Our students, faculty and staff truly have an impact on this community, this region, and beyond.

**Conclusion**

I know that was a lot of information. Now for the quiz…

Ok, no quiz, but I hope that I have helped get your wheels turning about how you and your department can help the university continue to grow into something very special within the framework of these themes.

I’m looking forward to seeing how you chart the future of UT Tyler.

Thank you.