



May 1, 2026

Thank you, Chair Munguia, Chancellor Williams, and Senator West for those generous remarks and for your support.

Members of the Board of Regents, Chancellor, our elected officials, fellow presidents and honored guests, faculty and staff, friends and family, my dear colleagues, and students: good morning! It is an honor to be installed as the fourth president of UNT Dallas and thank you all for being here to celebrate this occasion.

This academic year marks our 15th anniversary as a stand-alone institution of the UNT System, a significant milestone for a young university, made possible only by the hard work and dedication of so many here today.

To the Board of Regents, Chancellor Williams, colleagues, faculty, staff: Thank you for the faith and trust you have placed in me, for your support and counsel, and for your commitment to our university.

I especially want to thank members of the President's Cabinet for their support and for not only being willing to ask difficult questions, but more importantly, for seeking better answers. It is a privilege to serve with each and every one of you.

I also would like to acknowledge one person in particular – Angie Castillo. Angie, would you please stand to be recognized?

Not only is Angie a proud graduate of UNT Dallas, but she has also been a trusted advisor to every president since its founding, first as executive assistant, and now as chief of executive affairs. And today, this very day, May 1, marks her 20th year as one of the first employees of UNT Dallas.

On behalf of my predecessors, thank you for your dedication to our university and congratulations to you, too.

To our Community Partners, Benefactors, and Supporters: Your partnership has been vital in enabling us to provide students with meaningful opportunities and a promising future.

To our Legislative delegation and city officials: Without your support and collaboration, we would not be able to fulfill our mission as an anchor institution for Southern Dallas.

To Senator Royce West: Thank you for your vision, for your steadfast support and resolve that took UNT Dallas from a dream to a reality. Thank you also for your support and trust in me and especially for your partnership.

To my Family, especially my wife, Rachael, and to our children Chiara, Ilaria, and Townes. Thank you for your love and support these many years and for the endless joy you bring to me each and every day.

Finally, I especially would like to acknowledge the reason UNT Dallas exists – our students in attendance – would you please stand to be recognized?

Students, you have the most important role in building our young university. You create the traditions that will link future students to the past and present, and as alumni you will embody our institutional identity and carry forward our brand. You are UNT Dallas.

Whenever I am having a challenging day, I go find a student to talk to. Our students are amazing. They are resilient. They are curious. They are appreciative. They are optimistic. They understand the opportunity that they have been given; they recognize the transformative power of higher education and what it can mean for them and their families.

It also reminds me of my own journey and the transformative power that higher education has had on me and my family.

My undergraduate experience at Trinity University changed the course of my life and career by expanding my world and helping me understand interests and possibilities I never knew existed.

My first job in higher ed in the Office of Academic Affairs at The University of Texas System, while earning my PhD at UT Austin, opened my eyes to the important role that administrators have in shaping the direction of an institution to facilitate the work of others.

Serving as Director of the Texas Senate Higher Education Committee early in my career reinforced the economic and even political impact that universities have on regions and the state and the fierce loyalties they generate...especially when it comes to conference realignment.

Spending 14 years as a faculty member and administrator at the University of Notre Dame taught me how a university could harness the intense devotion of its alumni,

friends, and benefactors to be a global force for good in the world.

Now as an executive within the UNT System, I appreciate what it means to be a values driven public university system that seeks innovation and excellence to create opportunities within the Metroplex and throughout the State.

But the most profound examples I have about the transformative impact of higher education are my parents, both of whom are here today. My parents grew up together in working class neighborhoods of South Philadelphia and were first-generation college students who graduated from regional universities similar to UNT Dallas. Their education altered the course of their lives, the lives of my siblings, who also are here today, and the lives of our children and their children for generations to come. This is the transformative power of higher education.

This also is the animating vision behind the creation of UNT Dallas. To Empower Students. Transform Lives. Strengthen Communities.

Last night, we held a gala to celebrate our 15th anniversary, and I would like to thank again, the sponsors and all those who supported us last night in raising more than \$300,000 for student scholarships and programs.

But our history goes back much further – all the way to 1997. Recognizing that Dallas was the only major city in the US without a four-year public university, former Representative Helen Giddings, who is with us today, and Senator Royce West formed a task force of city and county leaders to study the need for a university in Southern Dallas. Four years later, the legislature passed SB 576, signed by then Governor George W. Bush, to create the University of North Texas at Dallas.

The University was envisioned not only as a means for economic development in Southern Dallas, but also as a visible symbol for the community that would inspire future students and residents alike.

You see, the founders of UNT Dallas understood that in addition to degree programs, curricula, and credentials, universities are about people and are about community. They knew that universities are instrumental in fostering regional pride, forging community identity, and increasing positive social, cultural, as well as economic, activity.

We are a beacon of hope and promise for so many, not just our students. This is the transformative power of higher education.

Because of our ability to reach beyond the confines of our campuses to impact the lives of so many, universities are one of the most important social institutions in this country. We help shape the economies of tomorrow, while creating important public goods such as new knowledge through discovery and research, as well as new forms of artistic and creative expression. We hold a privileged place through our ability to convene disparate

voices to address important issues and provide a forum where we can disagree with others respectfully and charitably.

That is not to say that we are not without challenges: increasing costs, erosion of public trust, demographic changes, to name a few. Though we are located in a high growth area, we are not immune to these headwinds. Each institution in our region will have to address the value proposition for higher education in its own way. Higher education, after all, is not a monolith.

The diversity of institutional types is a strength of our system. We all have a different role in ensuring that the workforce for tomorrow remains vital and graduates have the tools to participate effectively in civic life to address the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

We know that we are training students today for jobs that do not yet exist, and for jobs that probably will not exist ten years from now. The world is changing often faster than we can predict.

To address its value proposition, UNT Dallas seeks to be the leading public regional university in Southern Dallas, Ellis County, and beyond by delivering a holistic educational experience that integrates career-ready skills, leadership development, and experiential learning throughout the curriculum.

When they graduate, our students will be able to apply ethical reasoning to complex problems and act with integrity; advocate for themselves and others; engage with artificial intelligence and emerging technologies responsibly; persist in solving complex problems; be committed to life-long learning; and communicate effectively and navigate professional environments with confidence. These will be the hallmarks of a UNT Dallas Trailblazer.

To achieve this, we need to create an educational ecosystem that supports students in their personal, academic, social, and cultural growth. We need to future-proof our students, by instilling in them those enduring and authentically human skills that employers seek, such as resilience, empathy, self-awareness, and character, and that are constitutive of a fulfilling and successful life.

And we need to change how we organize ourselves as an institution to ensure we are providing degree pathways that are responsive to a fast-changing and complex world. Thankfully, we are not starting from scratch. This has been the animating vision for this university from its inception, and no better example exists than our College of Law. The College of Law set out to train a different kind of lawyer and provide an educational experience that was distinctive from more established law schools. Not better or worse, just a different mission for a different purpose.

We train students to be effective practitioners of law by providing an education grounded in applied learning and professional preparation focused on serving the public good.

Just a little more than a decade old, the College of Law is demonstrating the success of our distinctive approach. This year, our Advocacy Team beat NYU, Harvard, and Yale to become the 23rd ranked moot court program in the nation!

Higher education is not just about obtaining a credential to help one find a better paying job, though that is an important outcome of any degree program. It also is a time for students to come to understand their personal passions, strengths, and vision for their lives. It is an opportunity for them to find their purpose and develop career-ready skills.

Students at UNT Dallas, approximately 70 percent of whom are first-generation college students, pursue an education not only for their benefit, but to benefit their siblings, families, neighbors, and communities. I know this...because they tell me so. They know that being a trailblazer means not only being the first for yourself, but more importantly, creating a path for others to follow.

This is the transformative power of higher education – to transform students by empowering them through education to strengthen their communities.

For this reason, UNT Dallas remains committed to providing access to those for whom higher education historically has been out of reach. We are proud to offer the lowest cost of attendance of any four-year institution in North Texas and are among the lowest in the state.

To ensure that we continue to provide an affordable education and that our students graduate with little debt, I am proud to announce today that thanks to the generosity of many of you last night, we are launching the Trailblazer Tuition Trust program, which guarantees that the university will cover tuition and mandatory fees for any qualified undergraduate student coming from families earning less than \$100,000 annually. But socioeconomic mobility isn't our core mission; it is an important and necessary outcome of what we do. Our core mission is to educate students and ensure they have knowledge, skills, and dispositions to succeed in life.

Yes, we develop human capital, but we also help students build their social capital and assist them in transitioning into a professional environment. It is especially important that we help first-generation students understand and master professional norms and expectations, so they enter the workplace with confidence and conviction.

At UNT Dallas, we want to provide students with more than just the opportunity to earn a degree; we want to help them launch a purpose-driven, career-ready future.

And that...begins with our faculty.

For us to achieve this goal, it is essential that we continue to invest in faculty and academic programs. As a mentor of mine, the former provost of Notre Dame, who is here today, would always say, “a university can only be as good as its faculty.” Recruiting, retaining, and developing teacher-scholars who teach, mentor, and inspire students are critical to our success.

That’s why we have invested more than \$2M in recurring funding for new faculty lines, to increase faculty salaries, provide development leave, and created UNT Dallas’s first-ever Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning to assist faculty members in incorporating effective pedagogy, including how to use artificial intelligence appropriately, into their classrooms.

We also are in the final stages of revising the Tenure and Promotion Guidelines to align faculty incentives with the mission of a regional teaching university devoted to mentoring students and community impact.

These investments are essential because student success, after all, begins in the classroom.

Regardless of their degree or major, we also must prepare students with the requisite skills and experiences to thrive in an unpredictable and changing labor market. That means revising our curricular and co-curricular offerings to foster those enduring human skills employers seek, along with advancing literacy in artificial intelligence and emerging technologies.

Recent surveys show that fewer than half of recruiters now use GPA in applicant screening, almost 70 percent use some form of skills-based hiring practice, and nearly all indicated that an internship or co-op is a deciding factor in hiring college graduates.

Thanks to the \$7M increase in appropriation for the biennium we received from the legislature, we launched UNT Dallas’s new Center for Experiential Learning & Career Success to ensure our students are career-ready when they graduate.

This Center seeks a career development paradigm shift by creating a career service ecosystem that embeds experiential learning, high-impact practices, and employer engaged experiences throughout the curriculum and student journey.

Our deans and faculty have been mapping curricula and reviewing courses with the goal of having every UNT Dallas student experience a minimum of five high-impact practices, three employer engagement opportunities, with at least one being an internship or employer-based group project.

The work of the Center is essential to our students’ lifelong success by helping them identify career goals, connecting them with industry partners, and supporting their

exploration and planning of a meaningful and lucrative profession. Because of their life circumstances, however, many of our students already possess several of the skills employers are seeking, especially resiliency. The problem is that many of them don't know it! Our job is to give them the tools and resources for them to discover their talents and abilities and teach them how to put them in service of their life goals and in service to others.

This is the transformative power of higher education.

To that end, thanks to the \$17 million gift we received in September from the O'Donnell Foundation – the largest in University history—we are redesigning the first-year experience so that students can identify and acquire those enduring human skills employers seek and have formed a team of success coaches across campus to mentor students throughout this process.

Finally, we must reimagine and re-engineer our academic structures and degree programs to ensure that not only are students adaptable and resilient in the face of a changing world, but that our university is too.

According to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, computer science and engineering majors are among the highest unemployed of any recent college graduates. Before the release of generative AI, universities were making smart, strategic investments in these fields because the demand was so high. Where we are just a few years later is a sobering example for university leadership about how and where to invest resources.

Today's significant challenges also are large scale and complex. They require multiple disciplines and perspectives to solve. Because majors and disciplines aren't just specialized knowledge content; they also are disciplined ways of thinking, seeing, and analyzing the world and its complexities. We should, therefore, train our students how to integrate multiple perspectives, multiple disciplines in understanding the world and its challenges.

This can be accomplished by redesigning specific majors, like we have done with our new cybersecurity bachelor's degree. Instead of creating a traditional Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity, in response to industry feedback we are launching a Bachelor of Arts in Cybersecurity that combines technical IT courses with courses in communication and applied English so that our graduates can communicate the technical aspects of cybersecurity effectively with stakeholders.

To facilitate multidisciplinary education across the university, however, we also are reorganizing our academic structure. As we transition from Schools to Colleges the university is creating academic departments for the first time in our history. But instead of traditional disciplines, our departments will be clustered by fields of study, interdisciplinary programs, and meta-majors.

Grouping faculty members and programs in this manner allows the flexibility to design degree programs that are responsive to the interests of students as well as the needs of industry partners and the community.

Take pharmacy as an example. And let me be very clear, especially to some important members of the audience, thanks to our partners at UNT Health, we are bringing pharmacy to UNT Dallas. In fact, we are finalizing a plan to add a pharmacy lab to the fourth floor of our STEM Building that we will present to our Board later this month.

Yet, with the advance of artificial intelligence and personalized medicine and changes to the manufacturing and distribution of pharmaceuticals, retail pharmacies are under tremendous pressure. The University also is part of a community where residents have very little access to high-quality, nutritious food, which contributes to significant and debilitating health issues for our residents. Add to that fact that there are several food manufacturers operating in the DFW region that offer good paying jobs.

So, instead of creating a traditional department focused on just pharmacy, we are looking to design a department at the intersection of pharmacology, food science, nutrition, and public health. This will allow us to create multiple interdisciplinary pathways for students through majors, minors, and certificates to address the various needs of our community while preparing students for rapidly changing industries.

Students could pursue traditional degrees, such as pharmacy, but they now would have the option for careers such as nutritional pharmacology, or food as medicine, or as food scientists who develop nutrient-rich, functional foods to reduce chronic disease in our communities.

These are the approaches we need to take to “future-proof” our students and our university against a fast-changing and increasingly complex world; to re-examine what we do and who we are to ensure we harness our transformative power to empower students, transform lives, and strengthen communities.

Let me end with a personal story that illustrates why I am so passionate about the mission of UNT Dallas and the opportunities we have ahead.

My 84-year-old mother, again, who is here today, was the first woman admitted to the College of Engineering at Villanova University. Unfortunately, she dropped out after only two semesters. We know the challenges women face in STEM fields today, so you can only imagine what it must have been like in 1959. To her credit and to no surprise to anyone who knows her, she went back to college later in life and completed her degree in 1984. But I imagine at the time, she must have felt that she wasn't ready, it was too much, and that she failed.

No student should ever feel that way. And what I know now about higher education and student success, she didn't fail, her institution did. For their moment came, to be a Trailblazer for women in STEM, and they weren't ready.

Our moment has arrived. We have to opportunity to write the next chapter of UNT Dallas and its transformative impact on the region. To be a Beacon of Hope and Promise for the next generation.

And if anyone feels that we aren't ready or that it is too much, look around the room. Look at the support that we have. Because of our state, city, and community leaders; our benefactors; our regents and chancellor; our faculty and staff; and a dedicated and determined President's Cabinet and deans, we will be ready. We are ready. Together, we will Blaze new Trails.

Thank you for the faith and confidence you have placed in me, thank you for your support for UNT Dallas and thank you for being here to celebrate with us today. I am honored to accept the privilege of serving as the fourth president of this great university.

Blaze Trails!

Warren J. von Eschenbach, PhD