

President Chuck Staben: “The University Represents That Which Shall Count”

Tree-Planting Ceremony – May 3, 2019

Thank you, Provost Wiencek. I appreciate the kind remarks. It has been my greatest professional honor to serve as president of the University of Idaho. I came here in 2014 with a belief in the unique power of land-grant universities like U of I to change lives and improve the world. That belief is only stronger as I stand here today.

Today I want to do three things: *thank you for your hard work; remind us what we’ve accomplished; and encourage us all to continue to strive for excellence* for this university and the people we serve.

The land-grant mission is to teach, to discover, and to serve. It remains a relevant force today and is an essential part of who are, who we will become and what we will achieve in the future.

More than 100 years ago, on April 10, 1911, and just up the hill in front of the Administration Building, President Theodore Roosevelt stood on a pile of wheat sacks and delivered an oration. He said, and I quote, “I know that the university represents that which shall count in the state tomorrow, and that it makes possible the growth in the years to come.”

Were he to look out over the lawn today, I think he would be proud of the growth since then, and the growth still to come.

The so-called “Bull Moose” used the shovel you see over there to plant the first tree, a Colorado Blue Spruce, in our presidential grove. That I have the privilege of using that same shovel, and planting a tree to grow and rise over the next 100 years in the same grove, is deeply meaningful. And it’s an opportunity that arises from the work of many of the people gathered around here today.

Over the past half decade, this university has built on its legacy with a forward-looking vision and practical steps to improve on our excellence.

We’ve enhanced access to a high-quality education and increased student success. Bringing more students to college remains an absolutely critical mission for the state of Idaho. It is a practical, economic and, I would say, *moral* imperative.

In 2013, when I was interviewing for this position, I met a young man working as a server at a diner in Grangeville. Asking him about his college plans, I learned that he didn’t have any. He’d not thought much about college. Neither had many of his friends. Had that young man pursued college, he’d be graduated by now, or maybe graduating next week at our Commencement. I might be shaking his hand while handing him a diploma as he crosses the stage into a new world of opportunity – a great career, a stable life, a chance to contribute that much more to his community.

We fought for that over these five years. We created initiatives like Direct Admissions to bring more students to college. We changed the way we recruit students. We eliminated fees that presented an unnecessary hurdle. We’ve tried to change processes on one hand, but also create a statewide culture of college-going for the state. I’m proud of the success we’ve had.

We fought to unleash our own expertise for the benefit of Idaho, with unique programs like Caminos al Futuro, an initiative helping young women and men, many Hispanic, many from rural and farmworker backgrounds, navigate secondary education on their way to college. Last fall I met two young students,

girls who might have never been too far from Idaho, who dreamed of coming to college to study astronomy. Our efforts – your hard work – makes that far-off dream possible.

We fought for an increase in Opportunity Scholarship funding and put together our own Vandal Promise campaign to help meet financial need. The number one issue facing our non-college-bound students is cost – they simply cannot afford to make the investment in a life-changing investment.

We've also worked hard to improve the student experience and deliver the outcomes our students deserve and our state demands. Last fall we raised our graduation rates by 5 percent over last year and maintain a retention rate over 80 percent. Both are high marks among Idaho public colleges and universities. Thank YOU for fighting the success of students – both the ones who cry out for the life-changing opportunity of a Vandal education, and those who are currently on their way to graduation, to good jobs, and to great lives.

Over the past five years we've reinvigorated and grown our research and scholarship enterprise as Idaho's premier research university.

Our annual research expenditures have climbed from \$95 million to nearly \$112 million. Those are impressive figures, but more important is what they represent. Every dollar is an investment in science, in scholarship, and in creativity. Every dollar represents a much-needed effort to solve a problem, to understand an issue, to explore a complexity in our lives and in our world.

When we opened the Integrated Research and Innovation Center in 2017, I recall that University Distinguished Professor Holly Wichman said, "Let's make things happen." That pithy phrase could well be a battle cry for Vandal research excellence.

Because of the talent and commitment of our faculty members and our research teams and our students, U of I research, scholarship and creative work is highly relevant in traditional and emerging fields.

In agriculture, we've broken new ground in exciting crop research and in industry partnerships. We've embarked on important new facilities such as Idaho Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment; the Sandpoint Organic Agriculture Center; and the potato germplasm facility that will help U of I continue to deliver 90 percent of "Famous Idaho" potatoes.

In natural resources, our accomplishments include the delivery of critical fire science research, contributions to species research like burbot restoration, the study of sage grouse and rainbow trout with a new \$20 million EPSCoR grant, and helping deliver innovative rangeland research at the new Rinker Rock Creek Ranch site in Sun Valley.

U of I research excellence includes exciting emerging areas like cybersecurity. It was a great thrill as president to see the success of University Distinguished Professor Jim Alves-Foss and Jia Song in the DARPA Grand Cyber Challenge. We're building a strong reputation. When people think of cybersecurity, I hope they think of vandals – but the good kind of "Vandals" with a capital "V."

In health and disease, the Vandal family is making its mark. In 2018 Eva Top, Craig Miller and Shirley Luckhart earned a \$5 million National Institutes of Health grant for work on antibiotics, vaccines and diseases like malaria. We can take pride in being at the forefront of these areas.

Scholarship and creative work remains invaluable. As a university committed to a comprehensive liberal arts identity, we continue to publish scholarship, literature, theater, musical works, and more.

Research does not occur in a silo at U of I. Over the past five years, we've enhanced research integration into the undergraduate life.

Two-thirds of U of I students participate in research, scholarship and creative activity – those high-impact experiences makes a profound difference for student success. In fall 2015 we created the Undergraduate Research Office to facilitate these opportunities – and it has taken off. I was at our Undergraduate Research Symposium this week – we had a record 183 posters. One of our students was chosen to present her poster on Capitol Hill; her opportunity and selection speaks to the high quality of opportunities Vandal students have here at U of I.

I appreciate how seriously our community of scholars takes the idea of mentorship and facilitating opportunities for students. Every day over five years I've seen our faculty, and our staff, live up to the adage that U of I is “big enough to matter, but small enough to care.” Those words are a promise. Over the past five years, as Vandals we've partnered with communities across our statewide footprint to promote education, health, leadership and economic prosperity.

Our Extension program continues to develop leadership through programs like 4-H and health and wellness initiatives. These programs spur college-going and are deeply meaningful to the development of young people and to the quality of life in our state.

Our Idaho WWAMI medical education has doubled in size, expanded its facilities, and revamped its curriculum so that more students learn right here in Idaho and have the opportunities to stay here in Idaho to practice medicine. Over the past several years, our Idaho WWAMI Medical Education program took on a challenge with Project ECHO Idaho, delivering expertise on addiction and behavioral health in communities across Idaho. The program is well-received and highly acclaimed, but more importantly, it's helping people recover from devastating addictions and get the support they need to live their best lives.

Our Law program has also expanded its reach to Boise. Thank you to the faculty members who have been instrumental in that accomplishment. Our computer science program has expanded its reach to Coeur d'Alene. Thank you to the faculty and leadership for helping U of I connect to demand for high-tech education.

If you look at a map of U of I locations across Idaho, you'll see some new dots on there, some of the programs I've mentioned, like in Sandpoint and Rock Creek. But I hope you'll know that each dot is a little bolder – maybe even a little braver – as a result of the investments we've made, the strategies we've pursued, and, most importantly, the work you've put in.

That's far from a comprehensive list, but thank you for your contributions to our success. Thank you for your belief in this institution and what it means for our students, our state, and our world. Thank you for your contribution to keeping America and our democracy strong – that is, after all, at the heart of our work here. We are not only producing future employees, we're producing well-rounded, dynamic people who can change our world. In the days, months, and years ahead, when you're walking through the Admin Building doors, I hope you'll note the inscription: *“Erected by the Commonwealth of Idaho for the training of her future citizens to their highest usefulness in private life and public service.”*

I've always felt that that inscription applies to much of our work here. And that work not the result of any one person, but of a strong team, a committed organization – a Vandal Family.

In another speech, Theodore Roosevelt offered what became a famous refrain: “It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have

done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena.” I have not been in the arena alone. Thank you for being there with me – you have done the work, and you deserve the credit.

The future of the University of Idaho is very bright. Where this institution has challenges, I encourage you to work together in a spirit of collaboration to meet those challenges. Get into the arena together. Build on the progress we’ve made at this institution.

On a more personal level, I hope each of you will think about the meaning and importance of your work at the university.

This university was founded in 1889. It has existed before each of us and will go on long after us. The Western Red Cedar we plant today will bear witness long after my time here, and your time here. The University of Idaho is bigger than any one of us.

We each have a window of time to contribute to what we see as important. Use your window wisely and intentionally. I hope you find some of the meaning, purpose and joy in your work that I have found over five years.

We have a special mission here at the University of Idaho. That mission has motivated me as president. I hope you will continue to be inspired and passionate about your contributions. Thank you again, and for what may be one of the last times before many of you, GO VANDALS.