I welcome all of you who have joined me today here in Mary Gates Hall and those who may be watching online from near and afar, from Bothell to Tacoma or even across the walkway at Suzzallo Library. Thank you all for your time, talent and the energy that you bring to the University of Washington year after year.

This isn’t the only time I hope we are all together this year. In fact, I invite you all to mark your calendars for the upcoming Town Hall meetings I’m hosting with students, faculty and staff in the coming months. These Town Hall-style events provide an opportunity for both talking and listening — a conversation. There are some signs with the details by the doors, and I hope you’ll join me.

Now, I decided that we hold this address here in Mary Gates Hall. Well into my fourth year as president, I think it important to continually remind myself and all of us of the centrality of the students in all that we do. And this space is such a reminder. It is the heart of the University for our undergraduates.

It’s the place where students can find the support they need to launch their lives and careers. One of the most visible manifestations of that are the Undergraduate Research Symposiums. Over 8,000 of our undergraduates did a significant amount of research last year, and more than 1,000 filled this hall with their posters and presentations about what they learned. I walked around and talked to the students. I asked them to read their poster titles to me (about two-thirds of which I didn’t understand!) and tell me about their research. And I learned a lot — about new discoveries and about these students. It was extraordinary!

They come to Mary Gates to explore degree options (of which there are over 440), learn what it takes to study abroad (which 2,139 Huskies did last year) and in essence, become the leaders, thinkers and doers they are destined to be.

Mary Gates Hall is a symbol of our promise, our passion and our commitment to do everything we possibly can to create the opportunities our students need and deserve to become the great community and world leaders we know they will become. So here we are. And I believe it is important we are here.

OUR REMARKABLE YEAR

As I always do at this time of year, I’d like to take a moment to reflect on what a remarkable year it’s been and thank this entire community for all their extraordinary work. Year by year, this community sets the bar higher and every year we pass it. This year is no exception. We reported a number of milestones over the course of the summer, but I want to highlight just a few more today.
We recently rose to No. 15 and then upgraded again to No. 10 as the “Best University in the World” by Shanghai Jiao Tong University’s academic rankings. Equally impressively, National Taiwan University conducts an annual survey, ranking universities by their research productivity, impact and significance. Just last week, they named us the 5th best university in the world — No. 1 for U.S. public universities and among the top handful in clinical medicine, life sciences, and geosciences and social sciences.

We continue to rank No. 1 among public universities and No. 2 overall in competitive federal research funding — another measure of the success of our world-class faculty.

But our extraordinary work isn’t limited to our research, of course. We have worked hard to ensure that the UW is a welcoming place for all our students, where they can reach their full potential, including our men and women who are or have been in uniform serving our country. And we were just ranked No. 2 in the nation for supporting veterans in higher education.

Moreover, as I’m sure many of you remember, two years ago, as a community, we recognized the need to help so many people in our state — as well as other states — who had started but for any number of reasons been unable to complete their college education. And so we launched our degree completion initiative. Hundreds of people have — and are — taking advantage of the program, changing lives and our world for the better.

Last year we started with a degree in Early Childhood Learning and Family Studies, which was just ranked No. 2 in the nation for — and I really like this — putting “Students Before Profits.” We have reached hundreds of people through these programs, and they in turn, will improve education for thousands children. The early national recognition of this program is extremely gratifying and a harbinger of success to come. Our second degree completion program in Integrated Social Sciences just launched. Congratulations to everyone who has made these great programs both possible, and excellent.

I could go on. I could mention the record number of companies started from University ideas and technology last year — 18 companies. I could mention the record-breaking year in alumni and supporters’ contributions to the University — 40 percent higher than the previous year for almost half a billion dollars. I could talk about the extraordinarily accomplished class of freshmen that just started on all three of our campuses.

But I want to stop here and make a critical point: I actually ignore most rankings. But these rankings I’ve cited today are useful — I do pay attention to them — because they measure what is at the very center of this University. They measure our core aspirations and ambitions, and accomplishments against those very ambitions. And this is the important point and this is what these rankings really show us: When we set our minds to do something, when we focus on our core values and our critical mission, we do it well. In fact, we do it the very best in the world. The very best.

WHO WE ARE

Now, let’s turn our minds to the future. How do we build on our remarkable accomplishments and do even more? But to talk of the future, it is always imperative that we take a step back and reflect on our core mission for a moment.

1. Our identity: who we are.
2. Our purpose: why we do what we do and why it matters.
3. Then our vision: what we are going to do going forward, but building on our extraordinary past, to continue to make the world a better place.

First, who we are. I’ve been with you for three and a half years, and during that time met with countless people, visited numerous labs and classes, listened to professors, students, staff and alumni.

I want to tell you that it’s crystal clear that we are a community of change makers, idealists, intellectuals and achievers. We’re passionate about the pursuit of discovery but also pragmatic and tenacious. And those aren’t just words. We delve into the deepest mysteries of the universe, of the human body, of the human heart. But we take learning and insight and we do something meaningful and important with it.
Chris Murray and his colleagues at the IHME produce the most sophisticated data on health outcomes throughout the entire world. But they don’t stop there. They work with governments as close as King County and as far away as Africa and Europe and help develop policies that improve health outcomes for everyone.

Our colleagues in the Colleges of the Environment and Arts & Sciences, including Professor Jody Demming and her team, study ice — arctic ice and its much-too rapid disappearance. But they don’t stop there, either. They work tirelessly to unravel the causes and to advise on ways to slow its decline and ameliorate its impact.

Our colleagues in Tacoma, led by Professors Joel Baker and Ed Kolodziej, work together with the port and the city to analyze the impact of source point pollution and its degradation of the coastal waters. But they don’t stop there, either. They work to unravel the causes and to find ways to curtail it.

Patricia Kuhl and Andy Meltzoff of iLABS, the Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences, have illuminated the benefits — and the need — for intellectual and social stimulation even in newborn babies. But they don’t stop there, either. They help educate the world on the critical importance of early childhood learning. And, in fact, this November there are ballot initiatives supporting early childhood learning in both the City of Seattle and King County.

And tonight I’m attending an event called LiveWire, a partnership with the Seattle Times, Microsoft and the University, where Patricia and Andy will be talking to the entire community about early learning, all based on the great work of our researchers. These are a few examples of who we are and why we do what we do and why it matters.

Now to the future. Last year, I talked of what we do through what I called the “four columns.” Let me carry forward that structure as it still shapes our agenda for the University.

The four columns are:

1. A Husky student experience that builds global, enterprising students;
2. Research that has local and global impact;
3. Our commitment to experimentation and innovation;
4. And our deep commitment to access and the public good.

THE HUSKY EXPERIENCE

Let’s start with The Husky Experience.

The University of Washington is well known for our graduate offerings, but less well-known are our superb undergraduate programs. Our undergraduates have the opportunity of a lifetime: to study, work and live on campuses where the greatest experts in the world — greatest teachers, researchers, scholars, mentors and advisers — all are committed to expanding their vista and opening opportunities for their future through education.

We’ve done this well for many years — our dedicated alumni and their achievements are the bounty of this work. But now, we are working to ensure that the pieces we put in place make the Husky Experience hit the mark for ALL students. We want to ensure that we are preparing all of our students to go out and change the world.

A large swath of our community has spent the past two years asking the traditional questions and questioning the answers. And the result is a variety of commitments: first, to make the extracurricular and the curricular synergistic, and as lively, engaging and challenging as possible to push students to unleash their full potential.
We have identified a set of outcomes we expect from all students. Senior Vice Provost Jerry Baldasty and his colleagues put together a top 10 list centered around the student experience. These are the 10 things we want to focus on:

1. A major and more — essential learning and high-impact experiences
2. Collaborative projects
3. Undergraduate research
4. Service learning
5. Intercultural exploration and understanding
6. Internships
7. Civic engagement
8. Critical thinking
9. Communication
10. Ethical reasoning

An entire set of activities, programs and initiatives are in the works to advance these goals and ensure they are robustly woven into everything we do with our undergraduates.

As you've seen, we have also invested in our students’ experiences through new residence halls, new student programs and a more engaged campus community — and much more in the works. We are also working to ensure that the classroom experience is optimal. To that end, we are well into a four-year plan to renovate the vast majority of our medium-sized and large classrooms with the technology our professors need.

We have also invested significantly in ensuring that the transition to the University of Washington is well supported through a variety of programs, including expanded first-year student orientation and mentoring programs like Making Connections, through the Women's Center; the Ambassador Program, through the Office of Minority Affairs & Diversity; and the Academic Transition Program at UW Bothell for disadvantaged students.

This year, Early Fall Start included a remarkable start for 60 freshmen who spent three weeks in Leon, Spain, as part of their entry experience into the UW.

Our colleagues across the University are doing an incredible job with all of these programs, and, in the process, reinventing the definition of a core education. That’s what we do here at the UW — we lead the way. These programs shrink the space between the 54,000 students at the University and our faculty and staff, creating an opportunity to build lifelong connections. They create the opportunity for the one-on-one mentorships that are the essence of what we do year after year to change the world one student at a time. And I not only see that every day here at the UW but I know the power of it on a very personal level.

When I was in my sophomore year of college, a professor set the fate of my own student experience, and subsequently my life. Early in the semester he called me out in an upper-division political science class and ordered me to come see him immediately after class. I didn’t know before then that I could sweat through every layer of clothing or how 45 short minutes can feel like an eternity.

To my utter amazement, and that of many of my friends, after class the professor told me that he had seen promise in some of the papers I had submitted and wondered whether I would like to be a research assistant on a large-scale project he was about to begin. I accepted with alacrity and it changed my life.

That generous professor played a major role in the formation of my career — he opened up the whole world. And I’ve tried in my own way to carry forward his legacy. And I know you do exactly the same thing every day on this campus and to the same effect.
Take alumna Tami Bond, for example. I am certain there were professors here who mentored her during her undergraduate days at the College of Engineering. I am certain there were staff members who supported her. I am certain there were peers, collaborators and educators who helped transform her into the world-class researcher on climate change that she is today.

And, just two weeks ago, Dr. Bond was named a MacArthur Fellow and received a Genius Grant. What a contribution you made to the world through what you did for this student! What a great legacy!

Dr. Bond represents just one of thousands of success stories that the UW can tell this year and every year. All of these stories have a common, purple thread. That thread is our collective commitment to a Husky experience that builds global, enterprising students, one student at a time.

I hope within the next few years when I say Husky Experience, you’ll know it’s shorthand for how UW students transform their lives and what we are doing to make that possible, enabling our students to themselves transform our planet in turn.

GLOBAL RESEARCH IMPACT

The next column is about the global impact of our research.

The New York Times calls us a “research colossus.” And the shoe fits. Our impact on the world through discovery, the advancement of knowledge, through moving ideas into outcomes that change the world is a headline every day, somewhere in the world.

The “just the facts” version is that the UW received an astonishing $1.4 billion in research funds in fiscal year 2014, which speaks volumes about our faculty’s unparalleled track record for impact and excellence.

We are a community of giants: six Nobel Prize winners, 15 MacArthurs, 30 in the National Academy of Engineering, including newly inducted Professor James Ryan of mechanical engineering; 78 faculty members in the National Academy of Sciences, including new 2014 members, Benjamin Hall, professor emeritus of genome sciences and biology, and Eric D’Asaro, professor of oceanography; 60 in the Institute of Medicine — including three who were inducted last year: Dr. Janis Abkowitz, Dr. Frederick Applebaum and Dr. Bruce Psaty — and six Lasker Award winners, including Mary-Claire King, professor of genome sciences and of medicine, who was recognized just last month with the 2014 Lasker Award in Medical Science.

Her groundbreaking discoveries identified the BRCA gene mutation that indicates a higher risk of breast and ovarian cancer. She also used her DNA research to reunite families in war-torn Argentina.

The world needs us. Whether it’s combating heart disease, reforming education, studying our oceans, addressing climate change, pushing our understanding of human behavior and performance, or engineering new ways to treat autism, we are addressing the grand challenges of our time and making the world a better and more livable place — from the laboratory to the concert hall.

As I see it, here’s the reality. We can name any major issue, yesterday or today, and somewhere, in some way, the UW was involved.

For example, Professor Ben Hall, whom I mentioned earlier as a new member of the American Academy of Sciences, in 1963 took on Hepatitis B, one of the world’s most common blood-borne viruses. The virus is 100 times more contagious than HIV, and 50 years ago, it was affecting hundreds of thousands of people in the United States alone. Dr. Hall’s discoveries led to the world’s first genetically engineered vaccine against Hepatitis B, saving lives here and around the planet.

Half a decade later, our researchers are still at that important work. Professor David Baker and his colleagues with the Institute for Protein Design are working to find a cure for the deadly Ebola virus, enlisting gamers playing FoldIt to help solve the scientific puzzle. Professors Michael Katze and Michael Gale, as you have probably read recently, are coming at the virus from a different angle, also with promising results. Yesterday and today, we challenge the major issues and solve them.

But there is an additional, critical reason research is central to our enterprise. Through our research, we are training the next generation of people who will, in their turn, make the world a better place. They will learn from us, build on our success and
themselves do extraordinary, world-changing things. We teach through research. Indeed, I’ve yet to visit a lab or talk to a professor who didn’t have students, often undergraduate students, who they were training through their research activities.

For example, if you’ve ever been in Dr. Mary-Claire King’s lab, you know she’s not only brilliant, she is passionate about mentoring young scientists. Indeed, when we recruited Dr. King, she asked that we recruit her students as well. She told us she wasn’t going anywhere without them; we happily complied. And, I’m sure as time goes on, even more Lasker Award winners are bound to come out of Dr. King’s lab.

To close this second column, let me say that we don’t take our research success for granted. We understand that to have the impact we seek, we need to attract the top faculty, staff and student talent in the world. And we must have the resources to ensure we can execute on the challenges we seek to address.

And that is my primary task and my commitment to you: to work relentlessly to secure resources to allow you to do the exceptional work that changes the world for the better, one research project at a time, one student at a time.

**INNOVATION AGENDA**

The third column is our long-standing focus on experimentation and innovation — yet another hallmark of the UW.

It’s no surprise. In fact there is a direct cause and effect between the Puget Sound’s rise as one of America’s fastest-growing and most technologically savvy regions and the UW’s success in this arena.

But we foster innovation on our campuses not just because of its deep economic impact, but because, more importantly, we know it can create a world of good. Equally important is the extraordinary advantage that teaching innovation and creativity gives our students, whatever path they ultimately choose to pursue.

These things together get me up in the morning. We do good, and we train the next generation of people who will do good.

The UW is more fully integrating innovation into its educational mission through what we are calling the Innovation Agenda. Here’s what we’re doing:

We have appointed Professor Vikram Jandhyala to a newly created position, vice provost for innovation. Dr. Jandhyala is already working to create platforms to integrate innovation through cross-disciplinary teams, best practices, and access and collaboration with community innovators to make learning and experiences in the area of innovation available across the entire University and beyond.

Two programs already initiated in just a matter of months focus on helping ideas and research get to a minimal viable product prototype for impact, and in getting entrepreneurs engaged with students and faculty early in the process. We are even shifting the entire commercialization process to have a more student-oriented and student participation focus.

We are also addressing the STEM shortage, ensuring graduates are receiving the training necessary for existing and future jobs. UW Bothell opened its School of STEM one year ago and, in the same time period, we increased STEM degree production by almost 9 percent across the entire university.

To expand on that success, we are seeking funding for a new computer science facility that will help expand this even further, and will ensure more students in non-computer science disciplines can take classes in this field. There are virtually no fields of study at this University that don’t require some basic knowledge of computer systems and programming. Last year, I told all of our students they were iStudents, international students. But they are also iStudents, like the Internet. It is vital to how we teach and do our scholarship in nearly all fields — including everything from physics and chemistry to anthropology and history, to English and art.

We are also in the design phase of a new life sciences building to create modern teaching and laboratory space for the life sciences, including biology, one of the fastest-growing majors in the University.
Part of that Innovation Agenda also includes Startup Hall, our exciting partnership between the UW and three local startup leaders where local entrepreneurs will dare to discover, igniting and testing new ideas. It's a way to bring the best solutions spinning out of the UW to the entire Puget Sound region, and include and train the next generation of entrepreneurs.

Another great example of innovation on campus this year is The Whole U. This holistic program is designed to support all our extraordinary staff in creating a better work-life balance and ensuring that all the resources of the University are available to our wonderful staff, not only to do their jobs as well as they possibly can, but also so they can get as much out of life as they possibly can. It is designed to give opportunity for everything from better health to more engagement with the arts and to community building and to leadership.

Last month, Marti and I hosted 30 teams of UW employees who completed all the requirements for the Whole U’s Summer Fitness Challenge to recognize their accomplishments. Participants told us that it inspired them to prioritize fitness and nurture relationships with their colleagues, resulting in better health and less stress, as well as more friendships and more fun.

The Whole U — combined with the work of the Faculty Senate on our tenure and promotion process — earned the UW a place among the Chronicle of Higher Education’s “Best Colleges to Work For.” The Whole U has set its sights on doubling its reach in the next year, from 10,000 faculty and staff in its first nine months to 20,000 by the time I stand up here next year.

PUBLIC TO THE CORE

The last column I want to talk about today is about being a public university — public to the core.

We are all passionate about the UW’s leadership as one of the great public universities in the world. Our mission is to unleash human potential, to ensure every student who has the talent to attend the UW has an opportunity to study here no matter his/her economic standing, and that we take knowledge and discovery and share it — to address real world problems locally, regionally, nationally and globally and bring joy and reflection through art, culture and the humanities.

Now, everyone working in higher education has to be aware that the business model for public universities has changed, almost certainly forever.

Where just 20 years ago our state paid the lion’s share of the cost of a student’s education in the interest of the public good; students and their parents now pay the majority of that cost. Despite the shift in who pays, the cost of educating students has remained the same. For now, their investment still pays enormous economic dividends over their lifetime. In fact, studies have shown for UW students in particular the return is remarkable. But for some students, it means they might never get started. The decanting of state funding is an immediate and long-term threat to the access and availability of education for all.

We need to be imaginative as we work with our state leaders, donors, alumni and students to make sure there is continued investment in higher education, as well as an increase in availability of scholarship funding and the optimal distribution of financial aid for all our students.

Last year, I established an Enrollment Management Council to be part of the solution, to examine and plan for enrollment trends and opportunities to ensure the University can fulfill its public mission, keep the Husky Promise, and continue to attract and retain the most promising students from throughout Washington and the world.

Access and affordability go hand-in-hand and we remain proud and committed to our track record of educating more first-generation and Pell-eligible students than all the Ivy League schools combined. We also do it in the most effective, cost-efficient manner of any major research university. These are the realities in which I’m enormously proud and 100 percent committed to carrying forward.

Before I leave our public mission, I want to go back and mention again that stunning figure of $482 million in private contributions. While that is from private sources, it reflects an investment from our vast and generous community of supporters who are driven by a passionate belief in our public mission and our commitment to fulfilling that mission. Our public mission matters, and this past year, it mattered in a way that generated financial support from over 100,000 individuals. We are in the nucleus phase of our next fundraising campaign, and we know and our donors know that our public roots are powerful, deep and critically important.
SO THESE ARE OUR FOUR COLUMNS:

1. A Husky student experience that builds global, enterprising students;
2. Research that has local and global impact;
3. Our commitment to experimentation and innovation;
4. And our deep commitment to access and the public good.

They are vitally important, and we are working together to build, advance and deepen those columns.

Now, I want to close with a final, important thought: Our vision is as simple, yet profound, as this: We aspire to be the greatest public university in the world, as defined by our impact on our students and on the world.

Put even more succinctly: We aspire to be boundless.

And we are going to tell the world. This is new ground for us, because here in the Northwest, there is an ethos that we should keep our heads down, do superb work and disregard others who shout from the rooftops about their excellence.

But, after hearing countless times that the UW is a best-kept secret, and, frankly, seeing our peers across the world get recognized for activities with respect to which our work is actually having an even greater and more profound impact, we have decided to change that and to do what’s necessary to better tell our story.

We are building a world-class communications structure that tells our stories, declares our values and highlights the incredible work being done here.

The reason for this investment is simple: Because you — our faculty and staff — need the most promising students, the greatest collaborators and partners, adequate resources, the best facilities, to keep doing the incredible things you are doing.

Your work is not easy. You built the University of Washington and our reputation. Our work is who we are and reflects our values.

If we work together to share with our students, our colleagues, our public, our supporters, everyone, what we stand for and what we value, we can positively influence the caliber of what we do, how people think and feel about the UW, and how they support us in this critical work.

That means we can amplify our potential impact, whether by recruiting and supporting more high-achieving students and top faculty, performing at even higher levels in our research, or raising even more resources to support all of our work.

And it means we can push ourselves to do our very best — if we talk about accomplishments and, equally importantly, our aspirations, we will inspire each other to do even more and inspire our supporters to help us to an even greater degree than they already have.

We do it by transforming one student at a time, one scholar at a time, one spark at time. What we do matters. It is important.

Together, boundless and undaunted, we go forward for a world of good.

THANK YOU.

Michael K. Young
President, University of Washington