



**President Cheryl B. Schrader**  
**State of the University Address**  
**Wednesday, September 13, 2017**  
**3:00 p.m., Apollo Room**

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- Good afternoon, everyone! I'm pleased to have this opportunity to participate in my first Wright State University Convocation and Awards Ceremony and to present to you the State of the University.
  - I'd like to acknowledge that this is the first time we are showcasing together both faculty and staff excellence award winners, and in doing so, sharing the extraordinary talent evident throughout this university.
  - Before I begin, I'd like to thank all of you for the warm welcome you have given me and my family over the past few months. We definitely feel a part of the Wright State University family!
  - There is no doubt that I came to Wright State during a time of incredible challenge and of immense opportunity. When I accepted the honor to serve as your president, I knew there would be difficult times ahead: but, I am convinced that by working together we can overcome every obstacle.
  - This will not be easy, however. And it is not an exaggeration to say that what happens over the next two years will determine the course of this university for decades. A daunting challenge to be sure: but, also a once in a lifetime opportunity to shape this institution, Ohio, and beyond!

- To be clear to all, the vast potential of this university far outweighs the temporary setbacks we are experiencing.
- I have been asked numerous times how Wright State got to where it is today, to the position we find ourselves; even though my views might be considered as coming from an armchair quarterback.
- In turn, I have asked many people with diverse perspectives who experienced this situation firsthand for their insight. Common words and phrases emerged: complacency, hubris, lack of discipline, lack of accountability, decline in learning orientation, or a confusion of 'great' with 'big.'
- In discussions with one of our astute faculty members, I was directed to a book by Jim Collins, How the Mighty Fall and Why Some Companies Never Give In. Being a Jim Collins fan and a life-long learner, I picked up the book and began to read.
- The five stages of decline listed in this text are eerily reminiscent of what appears to have occurred at Wright State in the recent past.
- First let me say that there is no need to be uncomfortable speaking about what occurred. Recognizing, understanding and discussing it will only help us as we set a bold course for the next 50 years.
- There is also no need to be embarrassed as Collins' research emphasizes that great institutions can stumble, and stumble badly, yet recover and come back even stronger.
- Collins writes, "The signature of the truly great versus the merely successful is not the absence of difficulty, but the ability

to come back from setbacks, even cataclysmic catastrophes, stronger than before.”

- This is the ability to bounce forward from adversity, crisis and challenge. And it is this resilience that is increasingly called for from organizations and their leaders due to the complexity and rapid pace of change around us.
- The upshot of this book is in what we should do as we find ourselves falling, as we find ourselves failing. It may not be surprising to many but could be comforting to all that much of the answer lies within our control in “adhering to highly disciplined management practices.”
- In similar vein an expert in resilience, Diane Coutu, highlights three essential characteristics:
  - A staunch acceptance of reality.
  - A clear sense of purpose and meaning.
  - An uncanny ability to improvise.
- Such is the State of the University. Wright State finds itself on a precipice, ready to soar. And we can envision several scenarios for the future that are well within our grasp.
- We can be Icarus. Many of you recall from Greek mythology that Icarus and his father attempted to escape Crete using wings of wax and feathers.
- For those who are not experts in mythology, a quick look at Wikipedia reveals that Icarus’ father first warns him of complacency (flying too low so the dampness clogs his wings) and then of hubris (flying too high so the sun's heat would melt them). You may all recall what happened when Icarus ignored his master craftsman father's warnings. And you may also recall

the words 'complacency' and 'hubris' that some applied to Wright State.

- Or we can be the Wright Brothers. The Wright Brothers were not the first to build and fly experimental aircraft, and their first US patent was not for an aircraft per se; rather, their significant contribution was the invention of three-axis aircraft controls that remains standard for fixed-wing aircraft today.
- Forgive this systems and control engineer for focusing on the fact that the Wright Brothers determined how to take an inherently unstable vehicle like a flying machine and control it.
- Their approach was unique and did not follow the 'great' means 'big' strategy that other experimenters of the time pursued by developing more powerful engines.
- With no formal college education, the brothers worked with the Smithsonian Institution and other experimenters to tap into a wealth of information and to learn all they could about design and flight. They were most certainly learner oriented.
- Their extensive testing challenged the accepted data of that time period and found it to be false. They built their own wind tunnel to test wing and propeller design to create data that could be relied upon.
- And, they innovated by studying birds in flight, by moving outside their 'industry' as some would say.
- No one can question the discipline and accountability of the Wright Brothers.

- So I ask you, shall we continue as we have and possibly be Icarus? Or shall we follow the example that our namesakes, the Wright Brothers, have set?
- I expect the answer to that rhetorical question is to follow the example of the Wright Brothers and to employ Jim Collins' intervention of adhering to highly disciplined management practices.
- As you know, the focus in my first year is three-fold: financial sustainability, administrative transparency, and campus conversation.
- I have begun assembling a strong leadership team and making necessary changes in structure to ensure efficiency and effectiveness. You may recognize this as a highly disciplined and broadly accountable approach.
- I am invested in learning about this institution, and to understanding the people and culture of this region. Much of my time is spent meeting and visiting face-to-face with groups and individuals both internal and external to the university.
- Every day I learn more about how integral Wright State is to Raider Country, to the state of Ohio, and beyond. Every day I learn more about you—the extraordinary people of Wright State. And every day convinces me of the grand potential this university has to be the institution Ohio needs it to be.
- This week we welcome Walt Branson as the new Chief Business Officer, who will help bring a customer focus and improved services shared across campus. His unquestioned acumen and integrity are a great addition to Wright State.

- Walt and I will work together with the campus community to place this institution in as strong a financial position possible by the end of this fiscal year.
- Great progress can already be seen, due in large part to difficult decisions made and implemented over the past six months across the university. Thank you to all of you who so generously serve and continue to invest for the greater good.
- As you know, we ended FY17 with \$10 million more added to our reserves than initially expected. And we have an FY18 budget that we must strictly adhere to in order to return at least another \$6 million to reserves. This will require continued fortitude without overspending; that is, discipline and accountability.
- I continue to work with communications professionals to deploy a communication strategy that helps inform and engage stakeholders and increases meaningful dialog as we enter this period of necessary change. Different communication modes create myriad ways to keep up to date on happenings and to encourage input and counsel.
- For example, soon you will be invited to our first “Let’s Talk” forum on October 3<sup>rd</sup> at 11:30am in the Apollo Room. This initial offering will explore the Wright State Research Institute and the Wright State Applied Research Corporation through a panel of experts who will engage in dialog with interested attendees.
- The “Let’s Talk” series is a presidential initiative for all members of the Wright State community aimed at discussing a singular issue or theme in an open forum format. The goal of the series is to create a safe space for open, informed discussion around a campus issue while providing Wright State's campus

community with accurate information and perspective. More detailed information is available on the president's office website, where you can also suggest topics for future discussion.

- I am committed to developing strong relationships with our employees who form the very heart of this institution. Many of you know that I have invested a great deal of time in campus conversation, beginning during the search process and continuing today.
- In my first week here, I met with faculty senate, staff council, alumni, retiree and student leaders to discuss how faculty, staff, students and administrators might work more closely together in the coming months and years. We have continued conversations on specific as well as general issues, and I purposely delayed some decisions until the academic year began so as to consult more broadly with faculty, staff, students and partners.
- Just last week, for example, I tapped into faculty and staff expertise in shaping and leading a comprehensive strategic planning process which will begin this semester and continue well into next year. Planning is underway to develop a diverse steering committee that will guide us through this process for a sustained period of time, and give voice to what resonates deep within.
- The creation and implementation of a shared strategic plan involving thousands of stakeholders will provide a vision and focus moving forward that directly links resources to our values and strategic priorities. It will help determine a clear sense of purpose and meaning that is a critical foundation for resilience.

- And many of you may know that I spent a good deal of time in July and August meeting with each of the 33 academic department chairs and many faculty and academic staff as well, learning about opportunities and strengths and seeing firsthand some of the amazing contributions in teaching, research and scholarly activity, economic development and community engagement.
- I continue to meet with colleges, divisions, and units across campus to understand more fully the true influence and commitment you have on student success.
- I also spent a day at the Lake Campus in August, and had opportunity to meet with faculty and staff in groups and individually there.
- I have been asked what has been most surprising to me here at Wright State. My answer is the intensity with which I have been welcomed. “We are so happy you are finally here...” “We have been waiting for you..” followed up very quickly with “...and we are eager to help.”
- From the moment I first set foot on this campus, you have been open and honest with me. I appreciate your candor, ideas, eagerness and willingness to create a new path forward. You can expect the same from me.
- You have demonstrated to me that you want what is best for the future of Wright State University and for our students.
- And so now, we will forge a new path together as we begin creating a bold, comprehensive strategic plan that will guide Wright State into its next 50 years.

- Beginning with the search process and in many venues since, I asked you to share with me your vision for Wright State.
- You might remember me asking you to consider this question:

*Imagine that it is 10 years from now and Wright State University has met its most important goals. What does the university look like and how is it different from today?*

- When you answered me, several themes quickly emerged around the university's financial health, academic programs, campus life, and morale.
- Ten years from now, you hope Wright State will be financially healthy. You envision a university with sound business practices, accountability measures, and a transparent budgeting process.
- In a decade, you hope our academic programs are even more robust. You see our colleges, departments, and programs collaborating across campus, disciplines, organizations, and traditional boundaries. You envision that in 10 years our Lake Campus has grown into an even larger powerhouse.
- Your vision for Wright State includes enhancing and expanding campus life, making Wright State the university of choice for students. You want to enrich residential experiences for students, provide better recreational and dining facilities, and create more opportunities for fun on campus.
- Over the next 10 years, you also hope our students, faculty, staff, and alumni feel a reinvigorated sense of pride in our university. You recognize that our people are our biggest asset

and you want to make Wright State a happier place to live, learn, and work.

- I share your vision for Wright State. Together, we will make this vision a reality.
- The challenges of the last few years have been a stark wake-up call that business as usual is not an option. We can't go back to the way we have always done things. We can't be Icarus. There needs to be a change that enables the best characteristics of this institution to flourish.
- I know that change can bring anxiety, and that change is not always welcomed with open arms. But I encourage you to think of this requisite change as an investment—an investment in our future that will make us leaner and stronger. I encourage you to take on an 'opportunity mindset.'
- That will bring us to a place where we can invest in our priorities to achieve the vision we set together. That will propel us to bounce forward to an even greater future.
- Many challenges face higher education today. Among them are:
  - Keeping tuition affordable while maintaining and improving quality
  - Ensuring we meet the needs of a changing student body
  - Finding resources to grow while determining what we will no longer do
  - And increasing public trust and support for our institution
- If Wright State is to succeed and thrive in the 21st century, we must be able to rise above those challenges.

- I have no doubt that—if we all work together—we can overcome any challenges that come our way.
- Wright State forms the very fabric of our region. As goes Wright State, so goes the region.
- We need to be strong—for our students, for our region, and for each other.
- I look forward to collaborating with all of you on a strategic plan that will utilize your talents and extraordinary capabilities to make the dreams of our Wright State family come true.
- And, as we begin our strategic planning process this fall, I hope you will never lose sight of one thing: excellence abounds at Wright State and you are all part of that excellence.
- We see that here today clearly with our awards ceremony, where we celebrate the excellence that permeates within this institution.
- Please keep sharing your hopes and dreams for our university. Your interest, input and engagement are vital to our success.
- I look forward to working with you as Wright State University soars into its next 50 years! And I thank you for your many contributions.