

President's Report (PR 1) for April 2025 Board of Trustees Meeting:

“Good afternoon. We are meeting, as you know so well, in a time of significant challenge for higher education and for our university.

As I mentioned to you yesterday, every part of our mission is facing stress and scrutiny. And every part of our mission will need to respond in ways tailored to their specific policy concerns, but in alignment with our north star: how — in everything that we do — we work to advance Kentucky.

We will talk often in the next several months, seeking your guidance on how we can best navigate this time.

But we must never lose sight of the idea and promise we represent — the belief that we can be part of ensuring a Kentucky that is healthier, wealthier and wiser tomorrow than it is today.

Those are not mere words that we recite around here.

It is a mission. It is a calling. And it is more important today than at any time in our history — when Kentucky has an incredible mix of both opportunities for growth and challenges threatening that possibility.

Nothing I say here today should be interpreted as diminishing or seeking to minimize those headwinds and the turbulence we face.

Already, even as we seek to stay focused on our purpose and our promise in the face of these headwinds, we have had to make tough decisions — decisions that in and of themselves concern and, in some cases, I know, hurt.

Canceling celebrations for people on our campus who haven't always seen themselves reflected in our broader community is one example.

We've taken that action because we believe that's what is required.

And we believe complying with the law is the best way to protect our people and our continued capacity to support them.

But I am convinced as much as ever that if we remain focused on that north star, how we work with partners to make progress for Kentucky possible, we will, again, not simply survive.

We will thrive.

And that really is the question of the day — of this time, and in this place:

How do we comply with the law — and the directives we receive — from policymakers at both the federal state and levels ... while, at the same time, working every day to support the people ... our students ... our staff ... our faculty ... who make our mission possible?

We are investing in the idea that we can ... that we will ... and that we *must* do both. Recently, I was reminded of these questions — and our approach — when a team of university officials visited with executives from Apple.

Apple is now a long-time partner of the University of Kentucky. Through this partnership, we provide iPads to each new group of first-year students as part of an effort to connect them, regardless of who they are or the circumstances they come to us from, with technology that makes learning more accessible.

It has been a powerful partnership. And it is clear to me that as much as we have learned and grown from our partnership with Apple, they have learned and grown from us, as well.

They have given us a window to what is possible. We have shown them what can be done.

With Apple, we are now exploring — and asking intriguing questions — about how we can further leverage technology to expand access to, and understanding of, patient care ... or how we might think about wellness and belonging efforts, in ways that deepen connection and community.

During one session, three graduates of the University of Kentucky, who now work for Apple, joined us. Their ages ranged across several decades. A couple were at the starting points of their careers. One was further along.

All of them discussed how their educational careers at UK prepared them for these opportunities with one of the world's most important companies.

At one point, a graduate who had been deeply involved with theatre at UK and in the Lexington community while as a student, said that the dramatic arts and creativity were foundational for him.

Specifically, theatre provided him with a framework for understanding issues and responding to them.

Theatre, he said, is the process of “creating structure out of chaos.”

Creating structure out of chaos.

That is what universities — across disciplines, different modes of thoughts, competing ideas and perspectives — do best.

We seek to make the complex understandable, to find resolution in the midst of tension in ideas and perspectives and extend discovery and healing to the most intractable of dilemmas and diseases.

And at our best, we do it in partnership with and for those we aim to serve. In our case, that always — ***always*** — starts and ends with what is best for Kentucky. That is what we were created to do.

It is what all those who came before us endeavored to make happen, over the course of recessions and depressions, pandemics and wars, questions and doubts.

In the last several years alone, our community has been challenged with a global recession and a pandemic.

Each time, in our way, within the context of our particular culture and community, and in partnership with others, we emerged — better, stronger and more focused on what we are here to do ... to advance this state.

In recent months, you have lauded our progress, but said we have no room to be satisfied or complacent.

Last fall, you heard from our elected officials and community leaders about the challenges facing our state.

As a result, you charged us to work with partners to do more than any institution in the country to advance the health of the state we serve.

We can't be satisfied with only treating disease. We must prevent it.

We can't stop at simply enrolling and graduating more students. We must be sure they are ready for the careers that this state needs the most... to make progress.

We will continue asking questions that lead to discovery and answers. But we must intensify our efforts, and our focus, on confronting those challenges facing our communities across the Commonwealth.

That means creating and sustaining a network of partners across Kentucky that work together to further open access to health — in ways that both treat and prevent disease. It means partnering with other educational institutions, and communities, to ensure more students graduate, and are prepared, for the careers and opportunities Kentucky needs most — primary care physicians, nurses, teachers, social workers and software and AI engineers.

It may mean addressing food needs in areas of the state where our people are more likely to suffer from diseases like diabetes, directly related to diet.

Or placing social workers in libraries, where people gather, to better connect them to essential services.

And it may compel us in what is only a stone's throw from this room — a zip code where the life expectancy is a full decade shorter than in the neighborhood of affluence right next to it — to conceptualize and build a primary care clinic that is more than a place to address acute needs.

We envision it as a connector for a community to get answers to problems — issues of food, transportation, hours of access and oral health, among others.

We will work with public and private partners to eliminate barriers to holistic health and wellness.

That is what it means — in this time and for this place — to create structure out of chaos — to find unity amid disunity ... to seek connection where the tendency is to isolate ... to

create a trendline of hope and progress when so much else seems to dwell on discord and despair.

We must insist on remaining a community focused on each other and our state, even when there are those who question what we do and how we do it.

Creating structure out of chaos ...

Put another way, it is what a community like ours — a place of ideas and service, of perspectives and promise — was created to do. And what makes us special is that all of that creative and intellectual talent, energy and sense of purpose is focused one thing:

How we advance this state.

That is what we have always done. It has been our north star, and our calling, for more than 160 years.

I am more convinced now if we continue to listen and respond to that call, it will lead us for the next 160 years as well.

Mr. Chairman, that is my report.”