Good afternoon and welcome to the 2014 State of the University Address. I am pleased to introduce a few special guests who have made many contributions to West Chester University. Please stand when I call your name and remain standing until we can acknowledge everyone at the same time.

Dr. Bernie Carrozza, Council of Trustees Emeritus and currently Chairperson of the Board of the Student Services, Incorporated

Carolyn Comitta, Mayor of the Borough of West Chester and WCU Alum

Mr. Mac Cotter, West Chester Borough Manager

Mr. Chris Lewis, Council of Trustees member and Co-Chairperson of the Budget and Finance Committee

Thanks to our special guests as well as everyone here for honoring us with your presence.
This past year has been a pivotal year for West Chester University. Despite many challenges, we have accomplished much that will secure a very bright future for our University and those we serve. We have collaborated with our colleagues across the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education to ensure that all of the state-owned universities have reasons to remain committed to the System rather than identifying reasons to leave the System. I will talk later about changes that are occurring in the relationship between the State System and its 14 universities.

Here at WCU, we have made considerable strides in implementing a strategic plan that is both responsive to our constituencies and holds us accountable. Most importantly, we have not only retained but strengthened our commitment to what we value most — the success of every WCU student. During the next few minutes, I will share some of the many accomplishments in which we can all take pride and discuss how we are taking control of our future – a future that can hold unlimited promise for WCU.

I take tremendous pride in West Chester University, and I know you do, as well. Thanks to your hard work and dedication, as well as the hard work and dedication of those who came before you, WCU has become the preeminent institution that it is today. According to Kiplinger magazine, West Chester University is the 14th best value in the entire country among universities with tuition less than $30,000. Best value is defined as a combination of affordability and excellence. And U.S. News & World Report rates WCU as one of the top regional universities in the north. U.S. News just released its latest rankings and WCU has climbed nine spots higher in one year, to 65th best in the north.
WCU is one of the most sought-after universities in the mid-Atlantic region. We had about 15,000 first-time applications for the fall 2014 first-year class of 2,350 and more than 20,000 applications overall, including transfer and graduate students. Currently, more than 16,000 students are enjoying the benefits of a West Chester education. We are the largest state-owned university in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by a considerable margin and the premier state institution in such key measures as retention and graduation rates.

Despite our popularity, we have intentionally limited enrollment growth to about 300 students this fall. Although we are turning away very fine students, limiting the growth on our West Chester campus serves to protect the quality of the higher education experience for our students and surrounding communities.

As one of the nation’s top regional comprehensive public universities, West Chester University is primed for even greater success. Over the last several years, more than 2,000 stakeholders participated in creating and now implementing a truly shared vision -- the Building on Excellence Strategic Plan.

Building on Excellence identifies opportunities and challenges, and presents clear goals and outcomes. The plan is not a document taking up space on our hard drives but a GPS directing us to where we need and want to go. It outlines concrete actions that will be taken and clearly identifies end results. I am very proud of our plan and believe it serves as a model for others to emulate.
We are currently in Phase 1 of the plan and we already have made considerable progress in a number of key areas, such as a major revision of our General Education program. All colleges and units of Academic Affairs have been engaged in the planning process for this major revision. Faculty are working to develop an outcomes-based curriculum that will provide students with a strong liberal arts foundation as well as prepare them for citizenship in a technologically advancing global society.

Strengthening and strategically growing graduate education is another goal of our Strategic Plan. Nationally, universities are seeing graduate enrollment numbers decline, but here at WCU, graduate enrollments exceeded targets last year, with an increase of almost 10 percent in new graduate students.

Our first doctorate, the Doctorate of Nursing Practice, already has seen tremendous success. Launched last fall, the program now has 32 students. Other doctoral programs under development include programs in applied statistics, clinical psychology and education. Congratulations to all who have worked so hard to get us to this important place in the history of West Chester University.

While many universities are experiencing significant financial challenges, WCU’s steady enrollment growth has allowed us to fill the gap between declining state support and increasing costs. We have hired 149 tenure-track faculty members and 139 staff over the last three years to keep up with enrollment growth. This is occurring at the same time that many of our colleague institutions are retrenching and eliminating programs. Any rumors that WCU will be joining them in retrenching faculty and staff are simply not true. We are not laying people off this year and will make every effort to avoid layoffs in the future.
Our campus facilities and infrastructure also are in growth mode. Our 10-year facilities plan calls for approximately $300 million in capital improvements. We have set aside funds to reduce the need to indebted the University. These reserves -- combined with an increased rate of giving to WCU -- will allow us to move forward with our capital improvement plans with very manageable increases in debt service to the institution.

On August 22, University Student Housing opened another state-of-the-art residence -- Commonwealth Hall. Much like Allegheny and Brandywine Halls, which opened in 2009, Commonwealth features amenities that promote learning and campus engagement. It also provides a new and improved home for the University Health Services Center and the Student Counseling Center. A number of studies confirm the relationship between the length of time students live on campus and their retention to graduation. We are working to make our on-campus housing as appealing as possible.

In the last academic year, we also completed work on the Pearson Testing Center, the Anthropology Lab Trailer and upgraded many other buildings. And, of course, we continue to add buildings to our geothermal energy network. One of the most exciting new projects is the Business and Public Affairs Center, which will be the largest academic building on campus. Classroom and office space will be freed up across campus when business and public affairs faculty and staff move into the new building in the summer of 2016. Vacated offices will be renovated to house faculty and staff who are now crowded into space that I -- and I know all of you -- consider unacceptable.

Mitchell Hall, slated for completion this January, will provide much needed classrooms and space for several departments. Thanks to the hard work of Facilities and Information Technology, Wayne Hall was transformed this summer from a student residence to an academic building, providing classrooms, the relocation of the history department and space for additional programs.

Other projects scheduled for the near future include a campus dining facility that will include a bona fide faculty/staff lounge and dining room, expansion of Sykes Student Union, and an addition to the People’s Building. Renovation of Sturzebecker -- as well as newly constructed space -- is under development for the College of Health Sciences, our fastest growing college.

I made a commitment to the campus community over five years ago that we would address overcrowding and space issue on our campus. We are achieving this goal, while at the same time transforming the campus into a more contemporary teaching-learning environment.
Another *Building on Excellence* objective is to “prepare students to be global citizens.” International programs are critically important: they add to the recognition of WCU as a top-tier university, expand the outlook of the campus community, foster diversity, and bring opportunities for collaboration with institutions around the world. Most importantly, the internationalization of West Chester University enables our students to learn about different cultures, religions, and ideologies as they learn to value their role as global citizens.

We have seen tremendous growth in international programs this last year. Study abroad participation increased by 43 percent in the last year. These programs are often life-changing experiences for our students.

Our strategic plan calls for adding five new agreements between WCU and international partners for cultural, educational, and scholarly exchanges by 2015-16. Thanks to the efforts of many, we have already achieved that goal. In the last two years we signed agreements with Hosei University, University of Cape Coast, Ulsan University and the University of Costa Rica. And in June, we entered into a fifth agreement, when we signed a memorandum of understanding with Mary Immaculate College in Ireland. When we were in Ireland, I met our first Irish student, Hollie McDonnell, who will study at WCU this spring.

We also have good news to report from Central America, where a partnership with Guatemala’s University Rafael Landivar is emerging. These efforts, along with our co-sponsorship of the Knowledge Crossing Borders Conference with the Universidad National in Costa Rica this October, will continue to strengthen our presence in Latin America. I want to thank everyone on the WCU KCB Planning Committee, and especially chairperson Mell Josephs, for their hard work in planning this major international congress.
For almost 12 months now, I have enjoyed seeing the new Frederick Douglass Statue in DeBaptiste Plaza. It is a visual reminder of the fact that we as a campus community are dedicated to Frederick Douglass’ message of justice and inclusiveness. WCU recognizes the importance of diversity to the climate of the University and the need to prepare our students for life in a richly diverse and global society.

Like Pennsylvania and the nation at large, WCU continues to grow more diverse. In the last five years, the student body reflects a 34 percent gain in the number of African-American students and an 84 percent gain in Latino students. While we are proud of these increases, we will continue to do more. We should not be satisfied until all of our students are unconditionally included in the campus community, enjoy their experiences at WCU, and are able to persist to graduation at a rate at least equal to the overall campus rate.

Last year, I established the African-American and Latino Male Student Retention Task Force to help more of these students overcome historically low graduation rates. One initiative related to the work of this committee is the Brother to Brother program, launched by graduate student Edward Franklin III. Brother to Brother has created a council of ambassadors from campus organizations; holds special events; and reaches out to teen minority males in Philadelphia and nearby towns. Edward, would you please stand and be congratulated for your initiatives.

There is more good news. The Office of Multicultural Affairs’ Mentoring Program set a new record last year with 188 multicultural participants and this fall, more than 200 students are in the program. Our Philadelphia campus is providing another important way to attract WCU students from a variety of educational, cultural, and economic backgrounds. About 85 percent of our students at the Center City campus are underrepresented minorities.
West Chester University has made significant progress in more effectively using all of our human talent. I have established committees -- or in the case of the President’s Commission on the Status of Women, re-established a committee -- to help address continuing points of inequity. I also am confident that our newly appointed social equity director, Lynn Klingensmith, will move forward the excellent work achieved by Barb Schneller.

Another type of diversity is represented by our military members, from those enrolled in our ROTC program to veterans, who often are a bit older and bring a good deal of worldly experiences. West Chester University has been designated a Military Friendly School by Victory Media because of the high standard we set in our services to our military members. The Veterans Center, which opened in 2011, works with other campus units to provide military and their families with a coordinated system of support. These services are in addition to our Troops to Teachers program, which has been recognized for its achievements in placing veterans into America’s schools, and has been named a regional center. WCU is book ending services to those who make great sacrifices on our behalf -- preparing excellent military leaders and serving them when they return to civilian life.

Dr. Gautam Pillay joined us last year as Associate Vice President for Research after serving at some outstanding research universities. His presence is beginning to be felt. During the last academic year, 28 research proposals were funded, representing all five colleges as well as Facilities and the Troops to Teachers program. Well over $2 million was awarded to these research projects, which represents a 35 percent increase from the year prior. Building toward a long-term annual goal of $10 million in annual sponsored program expenditures reflects the creativity and entrepreneurship of our faculty and staff as well as their command of their disciplines.

WCU research is now more accessible to more people, thanks to the efforts of Library Services. Last year, Digital Commons @West Chester University was launched to serve as an online repository of intellectual and creative work. As of August, Digital Commons @ WCU contained more than 930 works by our faculty and students and there had been more than 6,000 downloads of these works from the U.S., Europe, Africa and Asia.
Our excellence also is demonstrated through our many disciplinary accreditations. In March, the Professional Education Unit, made up of educator preparation programs from all five colleges, hosted a continuing accreditation visit from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). We met or exceeded all standards for our undergraduate programs and post-baccalaureate programs, as well as at the advanced preparation level, which includes our M.Ed. programs.

In July, WCU’s graduate program in public administration earned accreditation from the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration. Our program is only the fourth master’s in public administration in Pennsylvania to be awarded this accreditation. These are only a sample of the many successful accreditations or re-accreditations attained by WCU.

At WCU, learning isn’t confined to our classrooms and labs. Our students take full advantage of enrichment opportunities available through Student Affairs and Student Services. Our Student Government Association distributed more than $1 million from the SSI fee to 269 clubs and organizations for programs and activities. Participation in academic or professional clubs rose to almost 2,800, a 47 percent increase from the year prior. And close to 2,200 students enrolled in leadership training programs, a 56 percent increase in one year. The Twardowski Career Development Center and the Alumni Relations Office launched a job shadow program, pairing sophomores with WCU alumni.
When I think about what keeps our students busiest, in terms of their extracurricular and co-curricular activities, I am reminded of these words from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: ‘What are you doing for others?’”

At WCU, the answer is varied, but represents a great deal of giving – our students volunteer here in Chester County and as far away as South Africa. They work with local developmentally disabled individuals; they do alternative spring breaks to assist inner-city neighborhoods in Philadelphia; and help to write special education plans at an island school that has just one teacher. Student hours from service learning and other volunteerism totaled an incredible 605,532 in the 2013-14 academic year -- a new record. In addition, WCU students raised $106,527 for local charities.

WCU employees have the same opportunity to help others through the State Employees Combined Appeal campaign, which launched last week. The campaign theme is “not all heroes wear capes.” Each of us has the ability to be a hero and improve the lives of others. Large or small, your donation makes a difference. Please keep SECA in mind for your giving.

As part of our commitment to all aspects of the student experience, we are striving to enhance the safety of our campus. This past spring, I had a conversation with two courageous young women who had been sexually assaulted -- one, a few years ago, off campus, and in the case of the other young woman, more recently, on campus. That conversation, as well as input from the Women’s Center and Public Safety, has led to changes that will enhance safety for everyone. We have budgeted for a larger presence of uniformed officers on campus and have expanded education about sexual harassment and assaults. We also have added an expert in the Wellness
Center to compassionately support victims of such crimes. We are working equally as hard to prevent these crimes from occurring in the first place.

The Technology Division made great strides this past year. WCU was all over the news wires last month; publications like Campus Technology and Market Watch took note of the fact that the University has rolled out updated WiFi technology, creating an all-wireless environment for our WCU students.

Cutting the cord was the way to go, not only because our students have a need for fast, reliable Internet access but because we have been able to realize more than $1 million in savings by eliminating cabling costs.

Students bring to campus multiple technology devices; we are no longer a campus of 4,000-5,000 computers. As a result, our WiFi system is now handling more than 50,000 unique devices on average. Because of all the mobile technology in use, a new Software Application solution was implemented, providing faculty and students with web-enabled access to data and applications on any device, on or off campus.

Here’s a video that showcases some of our technological advancements.

Distance education -- both fully online and hybrid programs involving limited campus time -- is growing by leaps and bounds. The number of seats in distance education courses increased from 3,603 in 2012-13 to 4,964 in 2013-14, a 38 percent increase. Looking back five years, the growth has been even more dramatic -- in 2008-9, WCU had just 170 distance education seats. We have
caught up with and are now even surpassing the competition in the rapidly growing field of distance education. Congratulations to all who have created a culture that enables our faculty to feel confident in their abilities to teach with technology.

Each year we are turning away far too many students who fully meet our admission standards because we simply don’t have enough room here on our West Chester campus. Recognizing the dilemma that enrollment demand creates, our strategic plan calls for the establishment of off-campus sites and co-located programs, such as in Center City Philadelphia. Such initiatives also enable us to build new revenue streams that are critical to our future financial stability. Consider that our Philadelphia tuition revenue increased from just over $175,000 last fall to more than $550,000 this fall. Our enrollment outdistances any of the other State System institutions at the Philadelphia site.

Each of you has individually and collectively contributed to the tremendous growth in our University over the last few years -- in our widely recognized excellence, in our national leadership, and in the value that we provide to all of our constituencies. As one of the nation’s top regional comprehensive public universities, West Chester University is now ready for even greater success.

As a result of our strategic planning, we have collectively identified how we want to shape this University and what we want it to look like in 10 years. However, we also recognize that there are substantial barriers to achieving our dreams. This last year, as a result of candid discussions around Senate Bill 1275, the campus community learned more about how operating in a highly regulated setting limits our ability to respond to a rapidly changing environment. We also talked
candidly about our options should we be presented with the opportunity to make major decisions about our future. While this was a troubling discussion for many, it was a necessary exercise to better understand the environment in which we operate as well as the various pathways we might take to achieve our dreams for West Chester University.

Our discussions about our future permeated the entire State System and were advanced by ideas brought to the table by Chancellor Frank Brogan and the Board of Governors. Although in his job for just a short time, Chancellor Brogan has quickly come to understand the challenges facing public higher education in the Commonwealth. He and the Board of Governors are changing the culture of the System by refocusing energies on how the System can promote the success of the institutions rather than how the universities can promote the System. We are a collection of uniquely different institutions of higher education that are members of a system whose purpose it is to distinctively assist each in its endeavors to be successful.

I am optimistic that the Chancellor and his staff, and the Board of Governors, are promoting a new philosophy about the relationship between the state-owned universities and the State System, and are giving serious thought to changes in regulations and policies that reflect this philosophy. Here are just a few examples of what this means to WCU -- the Board of Governors recently approved tuition flexibility among the institutions to accommodate the unique situations each of us face, the Chancellor has established a policy that reduces the time to new degree approval by the System to 90 days, and there have been more open discussions about billable services provided by the System to the institutions. Additional legislation is pending that will address the negative aspects of adverse interests, the definition of public money, and the use of the Department of General Services for on-campus construction. These proposed changes are very encouraging.

However, we are clearly disappointed by the newly approved changes in the formula that allocates state dollars to each of the 14 state-owned institutions. Last year we lost $1.6 million in state funding and the new formula will result in an annual loss of about $3.5 million to WCU. This reduction in our allocation will be phased in over a three-year period, and has been mitigated by a one-time grant from the State System to offset the first-year impact of the redistribution of state dollars. Nevertheless, we will need to accommodate these reductions in state funding. The percentage of our all-funds budget that is provided by the Commonwealth is now just 17 percent.

We feel a sense of duty to assist our sister institutions while they develop and implement plans to create long-term financial sustainability on their campuses. These institutions face challenges that are often not of their own making. However, I am deeply concerned that planning for long-term financial sustainability at the state level and at the System office is evolving far too slowly. In the absence of quicker action, an escalation of reallocations away from the more financially stable institutions to those less stable is likely, which will eventually lead to all state-owned universities circling the financial drain. I hope that the new philosophy that is emerging at the System level will enable us to collectively address higher education funding, being fair to those who need short-term help without jeopardizing those who are currently financially sound.
In part, we can credit WCU’s growth and image to the excellent reputation of our neighboring communities. They contribute to our success. The symbiotic relationship we enjoy with these communities, especially the Borough of West Chester, serves us all. Over the last few years, Borough and WCU leadership have worked hard to establish a model town-gown relationship.

For example, the Community Campus Coalition is a collaboration between the Borough and the University to reduce alcohol-related incidents in our community. The WCU Foundation sponsors weekend security patrols in the southeast quadrant of the Borough and an Adopt-a-Block program is managed by our students to keep the Borough clean. We recently learned that the Borough of West Chester and WCU were awarded a grant from the State Liquor Control Board to develop a model program to promote responsible alcohol use.

The economic impact of WCU on Chester County annually exceeds $500 million. West Chester University is dedicated to the economic well-being of the region. We value our community so highly that we chose to make community engagement one of five major themes when we developed our strategic plan. WCU understands that focusing campus talent on the pursuit of the public good is a win-win -- it benefits external stakeholders while providing our students with experiences that enhance their learning and commitment to leadership.

Among our new partnerships is the Center for Community Solutions, which launches later this fall, and will link business and civic leaders who have research needs with University resources. Plus, in May we became part of the downtown business community, with the opening of the SSI Ram Shop, which sells WCU branded merchandise.
Another way that we are a good neighbor is by providing unrivaled cultural opportunities. There is no need to go to New York or Philadelphia to experience the best in music, theater, dance and art. You can find all that, and more, right here on our campus. Last year, 85,000 attended a variety of WCU cultural events, including the President’s Speaker Series, which this season will feature Jackie Joyner-Kersee and Jane Pauley.

While there’s usually no need to go New York, I will definitely be heading there in November 2015 -- to see the Incomparable Golden Rams Marching Band perform in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade. Our marching band overcame very stiff competition to win a spot in this holiday tradition.
The University has always enjoyed great success in intercollegiate athletics and last year was another banner year. The Golden Rams football team advanced to the semifinals of the NCAA Division II Tournament, women’s softball reached the national World Series in NCAA Division II, women’s rugby made it to the Final Four in the USA Rugby Championship, and women’s swimming came in 4th and men’s swimming in 6th at NCAA Division II Nationals. WCU athletics is not only the largest Division II program in the nation, but is consistently ranked among the top 20 best programs.

What is especially noteworthy about these accomplishments is that they have not come at the expense of academics. A record-breaking 66 percent of our student athletes joined the Athletic Director’s Honor Roll last year by earning a 3.0 GPA or better.
In October 2010, I signed the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment, which commits WCU to make a good faith effort to achieve a carbon neutral environment by 2025. In the short time since that signing, WCU has made significant gains in addressing our obligations to the environment. I commend the work of our Climate Action Planning Team, which is placing WCU at the forefront of environmental sustainability and helped ensure that sustainability was a component in the University’s strategic plan.

We have worked aggressively to transition to non-polluting energy sources. Today, we heat and cool 50 percent of our buildings with geothermal energy and 50 percent by high-efficiency natural gas boilers. By transitioning to these new energy sources, the University is reducing its annual carbon footprint by 7,500 tons of CO2.

Beyond geothermal, our building projects are designed with environmental sustainability in mind. Our new construction, including the Business and Public Affairs Center, will be LEED certified.
Given our successes as well as our solid planning, the level of confidence and pride in WCU has risen dramatically, including by those who we are asking to invest in our future. Over the past five years, giving to WCU has been growing at twice the rate as for all Pennsylvania State System institutions. During 2013-14, the West Chester University Foundation raised $7.6 million -- the largest amount in University history.

Led by the WCU Foundation, the Becoming More capital campaign was launched this past spring and already has reached more than half of its $50 million goal. Since the campaign’s quiet phase began three years ago, our endowment has nearly doubled from $16 million to $32 million. This is a permanent source of revenue that no one can take away from us. Later this fall, we will invite you to support the Becoming More campaign. Your contribution will send a clear message to our external constituencies about our commitment to the University.
Most of us have never before experienced the kind of economic turmoil seen in the last half-dozen years. While there is uncertainty for public higher education, we do know that there will be a future -- it can be a future by default or one that we design. Our challenge is not to sustain what we have done before but to protect the best of what has come before and to bring forward our collective best thinking to build a bright future.

It is a time for thoughtful decisions based on reliable and accurate information, not choices driven by speculation, emotion or fear. I am convinced that West Chester University has the capacity to not only survive this difficult period for public higher education but to continue its trajectory of success, positioning the institution as one of the strongest in the nation. It is a time for bold action and for exceptional leadership at all levels.

We must move ahead with the confidence that is born of the successes of the past and strengthened by the realization that we can control our own future. The University’s strategic plan reflects a commitment on the part of our faculty, staff, students and administration to build a nationally unparalleled institution of higher education -- an institution that is widely recognized for its exemplary programs and personnel and for the value of its services to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Whatever our future holds, we will face it together, steadfast in our resolve to overcome challenges and make the most of opportunities.

Thank you for your attention.
I want to take the opportunity now to introduce our newest colleagues. New faculty, would you please rise for us to welcome you? I also want to welcome the new staff who have joined us since last fall and are here this afternoon. Will you all please stand to be recognized?

Once again: welcome, everyone, to West Chester University! You are all proud members of the West Chester University family and part of one of the very best public comprehensive universities in the country.
For more than a dozen years, an annual fall tradition has been presenting the WCU Civility Award to honor an individual who has made an especially outstanding contribution to collegiality and community spirit. In that tradition, I am pleased now to be able to announce the 2014-2015 Civility Award winner.

This year’s recipient has consistently fostered civility and advanced West Chester University’s values during her 26 1/2 years of employment with the University. She is often the first person to address student complaints related to her office. I have been told she is respectful and patient regardless of the difficulty of the situation. She is compassionate and nurturing to our students while also holding true to policies and procedures.

As the author of one nomination letter writes, “My every interaction with her has been marked by her civility, patience, willingness to help, understanding, knowledge and commitment to our students.”

Another letter writer says, “She is always willing to assist, regardless of the request or the time of day. It is not unusual to receive an answer to a question between 4:30 p.m. and 7 p.m.”

A third letter writer notes: “When I think of the Civility Award, it should be directed to someone who is certainly civil in their approach to campus governance, but even more directly, it is someone by word, deed, and action dedicated to the proposition of making West Chester University a much better place. [This individual] has dedicated her life and career to the service of West Chester University -- and done so in a way that fulfills the characteristics of the Civility Award.”
It is with great pleasure that I present the 2014-2015 West Chester University Civility Award to Ms. Carole Deemer, who is an academic records specialist in the Registrar's Office. Carole, please come forward to be recognized and accept your award.

I would like to conclude with a short video by our Digital Media group. After the video, Sandra and I look forward to joining you for refreshments on the Quad. Thank you all for attending.