

The Kentucky Promise
President Eli Capilouto
University Investiture Ceremony
October 18, 2011

I accept this honor with deep gratitude to a Search Committee, Board of Trustees, and University community who have bestowed upon Mary Lynne and me the privilege of a lifetime ... to serve Kentucky alongside you as we prepare its sons and daughters for lives of meaning and purpose.

There are many among us who made this day possible. It is their commitment to the University that is the foundation of what we do here, and in whose honor I accept this privilege ...

They are the faculty, staff, deans, and chairs who dazzle me each day with their brilliance, and their devotion to teaching our students and expanding the boundaries of discovery. With commitment to our students and an unyielding resolve, you attack the problems that confront our world ...

They are the students whose futures at this defining time in our nation have never been more promising or more uncertain ... Your intellect, talent and optimism inspire me each and every day.

They are the generations of graduates, some 200,000 strong, who return to their communities as leaders -- as doctors, lawyers, poets, pharmacists, educators and entrepreneurs. You are beacons of hope for our Commonwealth and our world ...

They are my fellow presidents of Kentucky's colleges and universities along with members of the Council on Postsecondary Education. Each day, you lead with clarity and courage, understanding the critical role our respective colleges and universities play in creating a path of opportunity and promise ...

They are my fellow UK Presidents, on whose shoulders I now feel so privileged to stand. With us here today are Presidents Wethington and Todd, whose examples of leadership and whose advice to me has been meaningful and invaluable.

And they are the people of Kentucky, who hold in their hearts a special place for this University -- *their* University.

And they are my family ... my grandparents who came to this country so that we might live the uniquely American dream. And Mary Lynne and Emily -- who sustain me with their love and support ...

It is with much gratitude that I accept this honor, recognizing that I share it with all who make this university THE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY.

I stand here today, both humbled and emboldened by a rich legacy - the generations of students, faculty, presidents and leaders whose work and voices speak to me.

And say one thing:

This place is truly remarkable.

When Mary Lynne and I were first approached with this opportunity, we were struck by what we read about the ambitions of the university's community and about the progress being made. Our ascent as a university has been impressive and our work and efforts are recognized around the country and world.

But it was not until we actually visited this place that we felt in a meaningful and lasting manner its defining character –it is what I call the soul of the University of Kentucky.

And it is everywhere ... in the energetic eyes of our students ... in the dedicated tone of the voices of faculty ... and in the welcoming handshake and committed demeanor of our staff.

Whether it's manifest in faculty from our College of Design and Center for Applied Energy Research who are building energy efficient, low-cost housing to reposition Kentucky's houseboat industry ...

Or from the extension centers where county agents sustain communities through the performing arts and home gardens that provide families with affordable food.

Whether it's from caregivers in our healthcare facilities, who ensure that Kentuckians can wake up and know that no matter where they are in the state or how serious their illness or condition, they can receive the nation's best care at UK.

Or from faculty and staff representing virtually every college on this campus who worked tirelessly to receive one of only 60 translational science awards in the nation so that discoveries in the lab are quickly transformed into community solutions ...

Whether it's our students, who dedicate their time and talent to be ambassadors of our university be it through visual and performing arts, student government, athletics, Greek life, and faith communities -- or through more than 450 student organizations, all while they put academics first.

You cannot help but be moved by this University's unquenchable thirst for knowledge and steadfast devotion to service.

And it is just not on this campus. I have seen it in every corner of our Commonwealth ... from Pikeville to Paducah. I have heard it through stories shared with me in diners and town halls, in homes and offices and in high school classrooms ...

It is an idea not captured in statistics or in an abstract narrative.

The University of Kentucky is a promise -- one that is manifest in each of us.

It is a promise we have all made to each other ... forged almost 150 years ago in the darkest hour of our nation's history ... reverberating in the echoes and voices of those who came before us and those who will dream long after we have faded...

UK is a promise ... understood by President Patterson who made personal loans to help a fledging university survive ... a promise that was carried forward by President McVey whose planning and vision during the throes of a Depression have guided our efforts and facilities for decades ... and a promise brought to life by President Dickey, who in the face of opposition and doubt, birthed a medical center that provides community and specialty care to millions.

UK is a promise -- a covenant that Kentuckians have made with each other to build a shining beacon of excellence that will light our path forward and illuminate our efforts and progress.

UK is a promise we have made to each other that says that young Kentuckians from all walks of life, backgrounds and experiences are welcome here ... and that they leave as our best and brightest because we foster their potential and brilliance.

But what does this promise mean today? And -- looking to the future -- how do we honor that promise in these times?

With a fierce sense of urgency we begin to think anew and rebuild this campus so we can overcome that which confronts us.

Why?

Because an independent study of the academic core of our campus recommended that we tear down 12 buildings and undertake major renovations of 29 more.

Because the vast majority of our space is not accessible to people with disabilities - more so than any campus in Kentucky.

Because in the core of our campus the average age of buildings is nearly 50 years and they are deteriorating at rates that require daily patching when the long-term cost of rebuilding is wiser.

And because only 10 percent of students who live in our residence halls live in modern housing.

We have more than \$1 billion in construction needs ... but in the midst of great economic challenge, there are opportunities. Construction costs have never been more affordable and interest rates never lower or more competitive.

We will ask the state for support, support they have long sought to give as partners in the promise of UK. But we must also find new approaches to earn our way ... through greater and more intentional philanthropy ... through innovative partnerships that leverage our resources ... through smart growth of our student body ... and through globalization of our campus and internationalization of our programs and different modes of learning.

There is no easy time. There is only our time. And this is the University of Kentucky's time -- because we must honor our promise.

This means we will construct residence halls that provide high-tech living and learning opportunities for our students, where they can learn as part of a community, and be prepared for a more diverse world.

We will build new classroom space in the core of our campus ... equipped with technology that opens up nearly unlimited potential for students and faculty to teach and learn as partners. Space that allows us to expand our innovative educational and honors programs, including clinical and research space so our students can know the most modern of discoveries and heal and touch lives.

We will grow the funds so that we can stop saying no to hundreds of talented freshman who qualify for our highest scholastic award – the Singletary Scholarship. And we will work to structure opportunities to ensure that our best and brightest students do not leave the Commonwealth ... And for more students who show promise and who want to realize their dreams through education.

We will become more diverse and inclusive -- with more students of different races and ethnicities, with different backgrounds, experiences, and origins. As a university, we must -- and we will -- reflect the interconnected world in which our students are expected to compete and succeed.

21st century facilities are essential to our students' success. But bricks and mortar only matter when the right people are there to light the fire of our students' imaginations.

We must have as a goal to appropriately and comprehensively support our faculty and staff who make this promise real.

And we will continue to seek ways to finance revitalized facilities for the arts and self-financed athletic facilities, which together both draw in new students and cement ties to our alumni and supporters throughout the Commonwealth and the nation.

It is time to build with our eyes fixed firmly on honoring the promise, to which we -- and those whose efforts laid the foundation of this institution -- are all committed.

We cannot wait, or be held back because we were afraid to take these first steps.

We must – and we will – act.

We will honor Kentucky's promise -- to each other -- to our students and to our children.

And I, as this university's president, promise to accept the challenge.

UK is, indeed, a remarkable place.

It is remarkable for the excellence of its legacy, in the clarity of its values, and the sustenance we find in its potential.

Let us together proclaim, in the cadence of a common voice, that we are resolute in seeing that the University of Kentucky's promise will endure.

Thank you.