

Charting Our Path to Prominence

Patrick Harker, President
University of Delaware
May 10, 2008

Thank you, Howard. And thank you to Paul Head and the University of Delaware Chorale for that magnificent performance.

I am pleased to welcome Governor Minner, other distinguished guests, faculty, staff, students, and friends. And it is my particular pleasure to welcome our alumni back to campus. Thank you for joining us for this first-ever University of Delaware Forum. This has been an extraordinary day, with outstanding sessions, featuring more than 60 panelists, including leaders from government and industry, as well as our own faculty and students. As we clearly saw from the Forum today, this is a remarkable community.

I first walked onto the campus of the University of Delaware when I was a high school kid. Like most students, I was looking to select a school that could give me the best start in my career. Back then, I wanted to play football and study engineering. I had no idea where this remarkable journey would lead me, and that I would end up here, standing in front of you today. In the past 30 years, I have changed and the University of Delaware has changed.

For one thing, I'm not playing defensive tackle anymore.

The University has continued to grow in achievement and recognition as can be seen from the panels and speakers today.

At this point in my career – and I am sure many of our alumni and senior faculty can relate – your view of a university changes. You are no longer looking at what the university can do for you. You are thinking about what you can do for the university. You are no longer looking at the legacy you inherited. You are looking at the legacy you leave. This legacy is what I want to discuss today in laying out our new strategic plan, our Path to Prominence.

We stand at a critical point in the progress of the University of Delaware. Since the time that Rev. Dr. Francis Alison published an announcement of the opening of a free school in 1743, both the dream and the impact of the University have expanded and evolved. Even then, we were marked by greatness. Dr. Alison's first class of less than a dozen students included three who would become Signers of the Declaration of Independence, as well as future governors, doctors, merchants, and scholars. We have a proud tradition. We now are a community of 16,000 undergraduates, 3,500 graduate students, 1,200 faculty members and 135,000 alumni. We excel in diverse fields and hail from all corners of the world. We stand as one of the top universities in the country, and we have earned the designation of a "Public Ivy."

We start on our Path to Prominence from a position of strength. I am grateful for this rich and accomplished past. As Sir Isaac Newton said, “If I have seen further . . . it is by standing upon the shoulders of Giants.”

We are an institution of high achievement and even higher dreams. This achievement can be seen in every college, every school, every unit – our stellar faculty, our outstanding students, our distinguished alumni.

I was attracted to the University of Delaware because I saw that it is already a gem of an institution. Now, I am pleased to describe today our plan to make this gem shine even brighter.

When I returned to the university as president last year, I met with people across the campus. The question we considered was: How can we become the university of our aspirations?

Over the past ten months, I met personally with every college, school, department, and unit, as well as with many other constituents and stakeholders. Beginning in July 2007, the Strategic Planning Committee engaged a wide cross-section of the community to identify, shape, and refine our goals. We held hundreds of meetings with faculty, students, staff, alumni, community members, board members, and state leadership. We listened and we took notes. We engaged in a lively and often passionate discussion of the University’s future. Together we helped to identify the opportunities and develop the key initiatives of our plan, our Path to Prominence. My sincere thanks to everyone who participated in this process. It is your plan.

Today I want to outline the guiding principles, key themes and milestones on the Path to Prominence. At the May 19 meeting of the Board of Trustees I will provide additional details and specific action steps to achieve these milestones. A short time later, UD’s strategic plan, “Path to Prominence” will be shared with the entire UD community.

Before setting out on a journey, you first need to know where you stand, what you stand for. Before designing the specific initiatives of our plan, we identified a set of “guiding principles.” These “guiding principles” are core values. They define the essential commitments that make us who we are.

We have identified five guiding principles as part of this strategic plan:

Principle 1 is “Delaware First”: We are the flagship of higher education for Delaware. We will ensure that every Delawarean has access here and our prominence will bring opportunity and recognition to the state.

Principle 2 is Diversity: We will foster a robust educational environment in which all people are welcome and feel welcomed. Respect for diverse views and values is essential to the success of a university.

Principle 3 is Partnership: No university is an island. We will create and expand innovative partnerships for economic and community development to serve the critical needs of the state, the nation, and the world.

Principle 4 is Engagement: We will engage students, faculty, staff, and alumni in the most compelling social, cultural, artistic, and scientific challenges of our age. We will address such important matters as environmental sustainability, social justice, and alleviation of human suffering. We will contribute to the elevation of the human condition.

Principle 5 is Impact: Our job is not done until our ideas, our expertise, and our students are given the opportunity to make a significant difference. This will assure that the University's innovation, excitement, and accomplishments are known throughout the world. Ultimately, the success of our Path to Prominence must be measured by the positive impact we have on both the members of the University community and beyond.

These five guiding principles – Delaware First, Diversity, Partnership, Engagement, and Impact –are the beacons that guide our steps on the Path to Prominence.

After we established our “guiding principles” – where we stand – our next challenge was to define where we are headed. We created a specific set of initiatives that are the heart of our plan. These are the “*milestones*” that define our path and propel us forward on our journey.

A university of this size and diversity has many possible paths. We had to ask ourselves, which ones would take us to the next level in our development as an institution? Which ones are most important in meeting the urgent needs of our time? Which ones will take us farthest on our path to prominence? We selected six key initiatives, six critical milestones on our path.

Milestone 1 is to create a Diverse and Stimulating Undergraduate Academic Environment.

We will ensure that a University of Delaware education cultivates intellectual curiosity and a passion for learning. We saw the power of this passion in the panel today on “Engineers Without Borders” led by Michael Chajes and Stephen Dentel. For those of you who did not have a chance to attend, our engineering students are working to bring safe drinking water to a remote area of sub-Saharan Cameroon. This is a place with no electricity or running water, where many people speak only their tribal language. We are proud of the work of this project – and many others like it across our campus. Beyond engineering, it requires skills in foreign languages, first aid, economics, fund raising, and travel planning. It is a truly “integrative learning” experience. Our students need more experiences like this.

The challenges of the world often do not fit into neat compartments or disciplines. They are complex -- what my former colleague Russ Ackoff would describe with a very scientific term: “a mess.” If we want to address these real-world challenges – these messes – we need multidisciplinary solutions, and we need to offer access to the most outstanding and diverse students the world has to offer.

As part of this milestone, we will increase the quality, diversity, and engagement of our students. We already have made a strong commitment to ensure access to students from Delaware. We now extend that commitment to ensure that every qualified student from Delaware will have the resources to attend. Beginning in the fall 2009, the demonstrated financial need of every Delaware student admitted to the Newark campus will be met up to the full cost of tuition, fees, room and board, and books.

We will also increase our outreach to underrepresented groups, including building partnerships with historically black colleges and universities.

On campus, we will offer students more opportunities for interdisciplinary study. We will allow them to move more easily across majors and benefit from the diverse perspectives of a well-rounded liberal arts education. We also will concentrate attention on improving our first-year experience to help students quickly establish strong academic and social bonds.

Finally, we will strengthen our Honors Program, and recruit and mentor highly talented undergraduates. We need to increase scholarships, attract students, and cultivate strong candidates for Rhodes, Marshall, and other scholarships.

Milestone 2 is to become A Premier Research and Graduate University.

We live in a knowledge economy. We are advancing knowledge at an incredible rate but there is still much to be known. Physicist Paul Steinhardt estimates that “we understand the composition of less than five percent of the universe.” This means that 95 percent is unknown. He says “we do not understand how space, time, matter and energy were created; and we cannot predict where the universe is headed.” He did make one prediction. In 2007, he said that “in the next five years, we may witness the historic resolution of one or more of these issues.” And I am sure that our University will play an important role in these discoveries, exploring the great unknown parts of our universe.

We are becoming increasingly specialized. In the United States, Ph.D.s increased 120-fold during the twentieth century. And we have seen a similar rise in other parts of the world. As we become more specialized, a top university needs to lead the way in research and graduate education.

The University of Delaware already has sent researchers to the ends of the Earth – both the North Pole and the South Pole. Our research ranges from working with the smallest building blocks of life through the Delaware Biotechnology Institute to peering into the

farthest depths of the universe through the Whole Earth Telescope, which knits together observatories around the world.

The sky literally is the limit for what we can accomplish here when we work together.

Anywhere you look in this great university, you will see examples of excellence, creativity, and the highest standards of achievement. On our Path to Prominence, we need to encourage more of this work that will advance our knowledge and prepare the experts of the future.

As part of this milestone, we will lead high-profile research initiatives, develop new faculty leadership in key areas, and provide increased support to graduate students to attract the best young minds to campus. We will also build an excellent research infrastructure to support this work.

Milestone 3 is to achieve Excellence in Professional Education.

In our age of specialization, professional programs in areas such as health care, education, business and law are increasingly important. In many professions, an undergraduate degree is no longer enough. On our Path to Prominence, the University will expand existing professional programs and create new ones. One area of immediate priority is legal studies and we will build on our strengths in corporate law and related areas to create the University of Delaware Law Institute. With more than half of all U.S. publicly traded companies and 60 percent of Fortune 500 companies based in the state, Delaware is the center of corporate law. Delaware also holds unique environmental significance, with the entire state designated a vital coastal community. We have deep expertise in corporate, intellectual property, and environment law. In establishing this Institute, we will also continue to explore the broader step of creating a full law school at the University.

As part of this milestone, we will also expand partnerships in the life and health sciences drawing on collaborations with prime health and medical institutions: Thomas Jefferson University, Christiana Care and Nemours as well as with industrial partners in the life sciences. We will launch an Educational Leadership Initiative to prepare academic leaders for success. We will strengthen professional programs in business and corporate governance, building on the successes of Lerner College and the Weinberg Center for Corporate Governance. As our panels showed today, our university is at the center of study and debate on business and governance, and this new initiative will deepen our strengths in these areas.

Finally, as part of this milestone, we will strengthen our commitment to non-degree continuing education.

Milestone 4 is The Initiative for the Planet.

A century of unprecedented progress has led to deep environmental challenges for our planet. Issues from global warming to finite natural resources are demanding creative initiatives and new thinking. We face some serious challenges but we have the knowledge and resources to meet them. As Henry Ford II once said: “What's right about America is that although we have a mess of problems, we have great capacity -- intellect and resources -- to do something about them.”

We can be proud that the University has been doing something about these issues. We have been a true leader in environmental research and innovation. We have already made substantial contributions, from developing alternative technologies to leading environmental studies. To take just one example, UD's solar power program recently attracted national attention by achieving record-setting solar cell efficiency in a \$100 million project in cooperation with DuPont and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

We have, in Ford's words, “great capacity -- intellect and resources” right here on campus to address these challenges.

On our Path to Prominence, we will continue to strengthen our work in service of the planet. Next year, we will officially launch a university-wide institute for Alternative Energy that will build upon and further expand the world-class energy programs for which our University has gained recognition since the 1970s. We will also expand resources for path-breaking environmental research, building on the Center for Critical Zone Research to establish a new Institute for the Environment. We will practice what we preach, reducing our own impact on campus to become a “Green University.” We have already launched a sustainability initiative to drive our progress. We also will develop and demonstrate alternative energy technologies and more fully integrate environmental studies across the curriculum. This will help develop the multidisciplinary solutions that are needed for success.

Milestone 5 is The Global Initiative.

We live in an increasingly interdependent world. This diversity and connection can either be a source of great possibility or tremendous danger, the potential for what political scientist Samuel Huntington has called a “clash of civilizations.” The planet is getting smaller, linked by better information technology, communications, and logistics. We need to cultivate global citizens who can understand and participate in this shrinking world.

We have a long tradition of global engagement. The University of Delaware was the first university in the nation to develop a program for studying abroad. More than 40 percent of our undergraduate students have enrolled in at least one study abroad program. In January, during the five-week winter session, our students went to programs in more than 35 countries – on every continent. While many schools send their students to Europe or

Asia, not many make it to Antarctica. Ours do, studying wildlife conservation and nature photography.

We were pleased to have Ambassador Zhou Wenzhong of the People's Republic of China with us today. We are committed to bringing the world to our campus and placing our knowledge in the service of the world.

On the Path to Prominence, we will foster knowledge and awareness of the economic, environmental, political, cultural, and social issues that face the world, and nurture the skills to address them. To reach this milestone on the Path to Prominence, we will establish the University of Delaware Institute for Global Studies, expanding on the current work of our Center for International Studies. We will renew our commitment to educate active and engaged global citizens. We will expand our global reach and strengthen our global partnerships for study and research.

Milestone 6 is The Engaged University.

The final milestone on our Path to Prominence is to promote public service, valuing engagement with our local communities in Delaware and the world. We are a university with a long commitment to service and contributions to the arts, humanities, and social sciences. We will become a university that values engagement, reaching out to local and regional constituents, and far beyond, to address the challenges that face the world.

There are many initiatives that demonstrate this commitment. In fact, in a certain sense, almost everything we do is focused on engagement with the world. I mentioned the students working on bringing water to African villages and a few of our initiatives for the planet. Our Disaster Research Center is helping the world better understand and prepare to meet disasters such as hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and tornadoes. These are just a few of many examples.

As part of this milestone on the Path to Prominence, we will work to increase our engagement with the world and our impact. Initiatives in this area include creating centers to engage students, promoting lifelong interaction with alumni, leading innovation, and strengthening public education in Delaware and beyond. We will create a culturally and socially engaged university, building on our strengths in this area. Closer to home, we will strengthen our partnership with the City of Newark and extend our presence in Southern Delaware.

This is the view of the Path to Prominence from 30,000 feet. More details on each of these milestones are in the full plan.

These six bold, yet pragmatic initiatives demonstrate our responses to the major challenges we face as a university and in the world. They are:

1. Creating a diverse and stimulating undergraduate academic environment
2. Becoming a premier research and graduate university
3. Achieving excellence in professional education
4. Advancing our Initiative for the Planet
5. Extending our impact through our Global Initiative
6. Raising our commitment to be a more engaged university

We intend to reach these milestones, and in doing so, propel the University of Delaware forward on the Path to Prominence.

While these goals are clear and attainable, I want to stress that they represent the outcome of a strategic conversation. This dialogue does not stop now that we have committed these plans to paper. In a certain sense, it is just beginning, as we work across the university to flesh out the implications of this plan for every part of our enterprise. I encourage you to join us in the conversation that will shape the future of our great university. While we need to define specific tactics and milestones, we also need to remain nimble and to embrace change. But our overarching goal remains unshakeable – to fulfill the mission of the University and to be recognized around the world as one of the great public institutions of higher education in America.

But how do we achieve prominence? The key to all our successes, now and in the future, is the excellence of our faculty and staff. You have made the University of Delaware what it is today. Our reputation rests upon the passion and dedication of your own work in so many important areas. Without you, nothing we have achieved in the past or aspire to in the future would be possible. This is at the heart of all that we do. Please join me in thanking our outstanding faculty and staff. Thank you.

In addition to excellent faculty and staff, we will need the right facilities, IT infrastructure, management practices, and a commitment to excellence in all we do. Above all, we need a willingness to embrace change.

We do not kid ourselves. This path will not be easy. We will face obstacles. When I came to the University of Delaware, I was told not to try to create a strategic plan. Universities are resistant to change. In a talk at the Wharton School years ago, when we were in the middle of transforming our MBA curriculum, the late Peter Drucker, one of the leading thinkers on organizations, gave a speech. He said that he had worked with corporations, governments, churches, and universities. In his experience universities were far and away the hardest to change. Think about that. Universities are harder to change than the government. So we have our work cut out for us in achieving these ambitious goals. But our future depends on it.

President Theodore Roosevelt rode with the Rough Riders, and then moved to the White House where he was a champion of conservation. In his 50s, after leaving public office,

at a time when he might have been putting his presidential papers in order, he took off to explore the Amazon. He was a very accomplished man, in many areas, but he did not rest. In one of his most famous quotes, he said: “Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those timid spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat.”

We cannot forget that our tradition dates back to Revolutionary War times. Some may think that a chicken is an unusual choice for a school mascot. But we know our university nickname comes from the first Delaware regiment that reported for duty in 1776, known as the “Fighting Delawares” or the “Blue Hens Chickens.” We draw on this revolutionary heritage and courage in taking up this new task ahead of us. Like our mascot, we are sometimes underestimated by the world. But the Blue Hen tradition is one of courage and fierce tenacity. So, the world may be in for a surprise.

In pursuing this path, we carry the aspirations and dreams of generations of builders and graduates of the University of Delaware. Their successes are the foundation of our own. We owe a great debt to those who have gone before us. We hope that later generations will also feel this debt to us. We hope that they will look back and celebrate this time as another turning point in Delaware’s history, as a point when we started on the path to a new level of accomplishment.

What we do today will determine the University that we leave to our children and our children’s children. This is our legacy. In building this legacy, we fulfill the dreams of every member of the community who has participated in its progress over more than two and a half centuries.

These aspirations are embodied perhaps most directly in the words of the Blue Hen’s fight song, which was written in the 1930s by alumnus George Kelly of the Class of 1915. You all know it – and I think you will appreciate that I won’t try to sing it – but I will point out a few phrases that state in a very direct way our aspirations for our future. It goes:

Delaware will shine.
When the sun goes down and
the moon comes up,
Delaware will shine.

We invite you to join with us in pursuing this Path to Prominence, which will ensure that, now and in the future, Delaware will shine.