

STATE OF THE UNIVERSITY ADDRESS

PRESIDENT MARVIN KRISLOV

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

Colleagues, students, friends—hello from the Kessel Student Center on our Pleasantville Campus. Thank you for being with us today, whether you’re here in person or joining remotely. And thank you, Nick, for that very kind introduction.

This afternoon I am going to talk about where we stand at Pace University today, and where we are going as we move the University forward. After my remarks, we’ll take questions from those in the room and also those watching on Zoom.

I want to start today by saying how happy I am to see so many of you here and joining us remotely. I am happy about the resurgent spirit on our campuses, I am proud of all we have accomplished together, and I am excited for where we are going.

The last several years have been tough. We managed through the pandemic. We managed the return to campus. We were resilient, we adapted, and we did what Pace people always do: We were creative and resourceful, and we succeeded.

Last year in this speech, I introduced our New Normal. It was the time when we got back to something resembling a normal life, if a differently normal one.

But this year, I think, is the time when we are finally getting our optimism and our energy back, what our former board chair, Mark Besca, used to call “our Pace swagger.”

When I walk around our campuses, I’m seeing that swagger again. I see bustling offices. I see in-person teaching and learning. I see packed libraries, hard-working study groups, and students laughing in busy dining halls. When I talk to students, I feel energy, excitement, and a sense of possibility. Our students have turned the corner.

We’re seeing this new outlook in all the amazing things happening across Pace University. Since last year’s State of the University address, the women’s lacrosse team here in Pleasantville became not only Pace’s first national championship team—but the first-ever national champions in Westchester County.

In New York City, we opened our new campus center at 15 Beekman. It offers brand-new classrooms and common areas, a modern residence hall, a great library, and a state-of-the-art new home for the Seidenberg School of Computer Science and Information Systems.

And at Haub Law, our environmental law program was ranked No. 1 in the country for the third consecutive year. Our trial advocacy team last month took home a national championship. And we are deepening our commitment to serving our community through our clinics and our Access to Justice initiatives.

We launched the new Sands College of Performing Arts, recognizing a transformative gift from our Board chair, Rob Sands, and his wife, Pamela.

Faculty in Dyson College won major new grants to support experiential education in the humanities.

Our recently developed online degree programs in the Lubin School were ranked among the best in the country, both undergrad and MBA. The School of Education is developing an online doctorate in education, that school's first doctoral degree.

At the College of Health Professions, we're continuing to see impressive pass rates on licensure exams, we're posting record enrollment in some programs, and we're at work on a new doctoral degree in the Lienhard School of Nursing.

And the Seidenberg School is preparing a new artificial intelligence lab, which will serve as the AI hub for our entire University, providing opportunities for learning, training, interdisciplinary collaboration, and grant-funded research.

At Pace today, we are firing on all cylinders.

But as well as things are going at Pace, we must also recognize that today we are, as a nation, in a challenging moment for higher education.

Students and parents are questioning the value of college. Global pressures are creating new tensions on campuses. The pandemic led to learning loss and mental distress among students. We are still managing the implications of that.

But an extraordinary thing is that here at Pace we are demonstrating that a diverse community can work together productively in an environment of mutual respect. And that when done right, higher education can be the engine of success and mobility it has always been in this country.

We are proving these things by doing exactly what we've always done for nearly 120 years. We seek out motivated, hard-working students. We recruit faculty and staff who are committed to teaching and learning, and to helping our students succeed. We offer a powerful hands-on education that's grounded in the liberal arts. And we deliver for our students.

Pace University has always believed in experiential education, in learning by doing. Our students have always been a part of the world, not isolated in some ivory tower. Today we call that model the Pace Path. And what we're seeing in this challenging moment is that the Pace Path works.

People want to know that college is worth the investment. They want to know that students will graduate with useful, practical skills. They want to know that college grads will know how to work together, how to innovate, how to get ahead.

This is exactly what we do at Pace. And that's exactly why the Pace Path works. Across higher ed, we know that a college degree can transform a life—delivering higher earnings, upward mobility, even better health outcomes. But what we do at Pace exceeds what other colleges accomplish.

Just look at our placement numbers. Data for the Class of 2023 aren't final, but we know that results for the Class of 2022 were stellar. 94 percent of our bachelor's graduates are employed or continuing their education at six months after graduation. A whopping 97 percent of master's graduates are. Our employment rates are at least 10 points above national averages. As they have been year after year.

These outcomes prove that we deliver value. And they're thanks to the hard work of so many—the students who have such drive, the faculty who impart their knowledge and expertise, the staff who ensure our students have the resources they need to thrive. These outcomes are thanks to your dedication and commitment.

In this speech over the last few years, I've focused on some critical, nuts-and-bolts matters. Today I want to talk about the most important asset we have at Pace. I want to focus on our commitment to supporting the people of Pace University.

Let me start with our remarkable students.

What I always say is true: Everything we do at Pace is in service to our students. Today, we know our students need even more from us.

That's why we expanded our Learning Commons academic support services. Students have access to tutors and other resources to help them with coursework in writing, math, science, business, computer programming, and other fields. In Fall 2023, nearly 1,800 individual students benefited from Learning Commons resources—a substantial increase from a year earlier.

We are piloting other course- and program-based learning supports. All UNV 101 sections within Seidenberg, for example, now include academic skills workshops. We're embedding tutors in certain chemistry and nursing sections. And the Learning Commons offered writing support to 161 individual graduate students during the fall semester.

We are also augmenting the First Year Experience to ensure that all students get off to a good start at Pace—including by adding new advisors.

And we are redoubling our efforts to build out, differentiate, and promote our experiential education opportunities. Not just because it's our heritage and our formula for delivering stellar outcomes, but because we know that students who participate in hands-on learning are more engaged, perform better, and are more likely to retain and graduate.

Experiential education includes academic research and on-the-ground field work. It includes time spent in classrooms and clinical settings, externships and simulation labs. It's academic competitions, civic engagement, and creative expression. It's work in the Art Gallery, the Blue CoLab, the Design Lab, the Entrepreneurship Lab, and the new Pace Entrepreneurship Studio. Internships, of course, are experiential education, too.

In two weeks we'll host a provocative panel on our New York City Campus. It will consider the future of the humanities, featuring the president of the New York Public Library and the chair of the National Endowment for the Humanities. We will highlight the experiential humanities we're doing at Pace.

In other words, it's clear that this type of learning is happening all across our University. It is helping our students to succeed. And we want to make sure it is all recognized and supported.

We are also committed to making sure our students have the mental health support they need. I've always said that it is crucial for students—many of whom are living on their own for the first time—to learn time management and to prioritize their self-care by eating well, sleeping enough, and exercising.

Mental health needs today are even greater. This is true nationwide, and it's true at Pace. Our New York City Counseling Center, for example, has seen a 154 percent increase in walk-in visits in the past year.

Over the last few years, we've launched the full scope of our wellness programming, led by our Center for Wellbeing. We're making university-wide efforts to combat food insecurity. We're offering mini-grants for new proposals to boost wellbeing. And we've partnered with outside organizations that help to support our community members, to name just a few efforts.

An important collaboration is our work with the RADical Health program, which offers training to help students build resilience. Over the past two years more than 400 students have completed the four-week program.

All this is in addition to the ongoing work of Pace units like the Counseling Center and the Division of Student Affairs. And starting this year, we are offering training to all Pace community members on all three campuses in Mental Health First Aid, so that we're sure people in our

community stand ready to offer the help needed. We're prioritizing front-line student-facing staff, and already more than 100 staffers have earned certificates.

We know these efforts are working.

This fall, we saw our first-to-second year retention rate rise to 76.7 percent. That's a big increase from a year earlier, 5.5 percentage points. It's the highest retention level we've reached since before the pandemic. It's a great accomplishment. We know we need to do more.

We will need to maintain that same year-over-year progress to reach our goal of an 85 percent retention rate in 2028.

And our work on graduation rates will require even more effort. Before the pandemic, we had made real progress. Then we were set back. For the most recent cohort, we achieved a six-year graduation rate of 61.3 percent, in line with the year prior. But over the next several years, as the classes impacted by the pandemic complete their college years, that rate is likely to come under pressure.

Our target is a 70 percent six-year graduation rate. The work we're doing now to improve retention will, in time, help us get there. And we're also making real efforts to bring back students who stopped out during the pandemic. But it will take all of these new efforts, and all of our commitment, to get graduation rates to where they need to be.

I want to make it clear that we are equally focused on delivering for the people who work at Pace.

We have always worked to be an employer of choice. We offer generous benefits. We provide opportunities for professional development and career growth. We know how important it is to support our faculty and staff.

Let me share a few facts and figures. In the last two budget years, we have invested \$66 million in our operations—separate from capital investment. A large portion was spent on student success initiatives, including the efforts I just outlined, new programming, and financial aid. About half was spent on faculty and staff.

After 75 faculty searches in the last two years, we now have the most largest full-time faculty since the fall of 2019. And the average staff salary has increased from \$63,000 in the 2018–2019 academic year to \$83,000 today.

We know we always need to do more.

We know wellbeing is a challenge for employees. The Center for Wellbeing has partnered with Human Resources to offer wellness programming for Pace faculty and staff.

HR also offers a range of regular programming to improve employee mental health and wellbeing. And all Pace employees have access to Aetna's Resources for Living program, which offers both resources for health and wellness and 24/7 access to immediate support and referrals.

The PaceWorks project to simplify and optimize many student administrative processes is helping to improve work at Pace by making processes more efficient, digitizing rote tasks, and freeing up staff members to spend more time on more engaging, fulfilling responsibilities.

Next month, we'll be fielding a new Great Colleges to Work For survey, to see how you think we've moved forward since the last survey, two years ago, and to gain insight into priorities for the future.

Based on what we learned from the last survey, we've been working to improve communication, including from senior leaders. We've overhauled the onboarding process for new employees. And we're focused on re-building in-person opportunities for employee engagement, development, and recognition. Employee Development Day will be back in-person in New York City and Pleasantville next month. We also got great feedback on our re-imagined Employee Recognition events last year—and this year's are coming in April.

We are committed to supporting our faculty in their academic ambitions. Professor Sonia Suchday is our new Interim University Director of Sponsored Research, and she'll be helping our scholars build strong applications that yield impressive grants.

Dyson faculty recently won a combined \$350,000 in new National Endowment for the Humanities grants to support experiential education at Pace. Earlier in the year, Seidenberg Professor Zhan Zhang won a \$500,000 grant from the National Science Foundation for his work on wearable technologies. Countless other faculty are winning new and continuing competitive grants and making real contributions to their fields. We're working hard to help faculty achieve more successes.

We are also working to expand international opportunities for faculty and staff. We have developed an International Expertise Inventory, where we identify those with region-specific expertise or connections and make it easier for others to connect with them. And Pace International is actively monitoring for funding opportunities that can help to support those international ambitions.

And, yes, we know that compensation matters, too. It's no secret that our budgets at Pace are tight and our resources limited. But we also know we need to be competitive, and our employees need to feel valued. We've been committing to salary increases each year. We've also maintained excellent and affordable health coverage.

Right now, HR is working in partnership with Gallagher Consulting on a major project for salary classification and peer benchmarking. We expect to receive recommendations this summer on

staffing levels and structure, spans of control, and salaries, and we look forward to sharing them with the community soon thereafter. This study will be an invaluable tool in ensuring that we can continue to attract and retain top talent.

We also know that adjunct faculty are an important part of our community, and we're eager to sit down with adjunct union leadership to start negotiations on the new contract.

We're all on the same team, and we want to do right by the people who work here.

Now, let me step back and offer a broader perspective on the next few years in higher education.

What we do at Pace happens within the context of the wider world. We are living in a difficult and challenging time. Politics have become both deeply polarized and all-encompassing, which to many can feel like a real emotional burden.

While the economy is thriving, housing costs keep accelerating and heightened interest rates are driving up the cost of living for many.

Devastating global conflicts—in Ukraine, in Israel and Gaza, and elsewhere—add to our distress, and for some of us pose life-and-death risks for friends and loved ones.

That's why we're investing so much in our new suite of wellness programs for everyone in our community. That's why our Student Affairs team is working so hard to engage with all students. This is when the proud and vibrant diversity at Pace becomes such a great asset for our University.

We are working hard to provide all the financial aid we can for our students. Our alumni and donors are stepping up to fund more and more scholarships, and I want to commend the Development team for reaching lofty new targets.

We are making real progress on our DEI initiatives. In the summer of 2020, we made the commitment that Pace would become an anti-racist institution. Since then, we've inaugurated some important new efforts, from Social Justice Week each fall to the addition of Anti-Racism Education courses to the Core Curriculum.

This year, I am pleased that we're launching the work of our Barry M. and Jackie Gosin Center for Equity and Inclusion, focusing on four key areas. The Gosin Center's signature events will kick off this semester as we begin a series of talks, conferences, and fireside chats.

Next week, for example, the Center will host Elizabeth Nieto, global head of equity and impact at Spotify.

The Center will also inaugurate fellowships for junior faculty and emerging scholars. It will start a small-group program for staff members to work together on DEI initiatives. And it will launch the new Gosin Network in Pleasantville, which will award retention scholarships to students who participate in designated courses or activities.

This work will make Pace a better community for all of us.

We also must remember that this remains a difficult time for higher education as a sector. Costs continue to rise, but tuition simply cannot rise at the same rate. As American birth rates decline and demographics shift, there are fewer students of traditional college age in this country, and particularly in the northeast.

We have known for some time about these challenges, and we've prepared for them. But that doesn't make them less challenging.

We set a goal to shift our enrollment mix to make our revenue less dependent on undergraduate enrollment. We are now at record-setting graduate enrollment.

We set a goal to attract more international enrollment. That's paying off as we're building new partnerships with universities in India, maintaining our pathways with China, and expanding our connections in other geographies where we believe there is demand for high-quality, English-language education, like Mexico and Egypt.

We set a goal to attract more continuing and online learners. We're doing that by launching new programs, building new collaborations, and offering shorter and more accessible certificates and badges, which allow adult learners to refresh and gain the skills they need without committing to a full degree program.

In other words, at Pace University we are ready for what's coming. That doesn't mean we're on a glide path. It does mean that we will need to be careful and responsible. It means we'll have to keep our belts tight and our eyes on the ball.

But it means we are going to be able to keep doing what we've been doing for nearly 120 years: providing access to the transformative power of higher education to all hard-working, ambitious students, regardless of their backgrounds.

In fact, these next few years will require us to do exactly what we teach our students to do. We will need to be smart and strategic, ambitious, and creative. We will need to work hard. And, just like our students and graduates, we are ready to do that work and take advantage of opportunities.

As an institution, this is our *Opportunitas* moment.

We need to remain competitive, so that students want to come to Pace and be a part of our special community. That's why we're working hard to even further build out and differentiate our experiential education offerings. We know that is something valuable, something we do well, and something that makes us stand out.

That's why we've been investing in facilities across our campuses—whether that's the new buildings in New York City, the new Cyber Range in Pleasantville, or the new security improvements for Haub Law. We need to offer students the spaces and resources that make clear our commitment to supporting them, and make prospective students want to be on our campuses.

It's why we're pushing so hard for program innovation, to make sure we're offering students the educational opportunities they want and need to succeed in today's economy.

That program innovation doesn't always mean new programs.

As Professor Kelley Kreitz and others have talked about so effectively, we are bucking national trends toward decreased humanities enrollment by structuring our humanities programs to give students the practical, hands-on education they seek. While English majors nationwide are decreasing, for example, ours are growing because we offer innovative, experiential courses that excite our students and prepare them for careers.

At the same time, it's also why we're adding new curricular offerings and new extra-curriculars, like Seidenberg's new BS in videogame design and, in that same vein, our wildly successful Pace esports teams. These things keep us current—and competitive.

But the best thing we can do to ensure Pace continues to thrive—and I want to be very clear about this—is to improve our retention and graduation rates. So much of what we're doing is in service of those goals. Student success must continue to be our north star.

Making sure that our students stay on track toward their educational goals and graduate on time is, at its most basic, the right thing to do. Students come to Pace to learn and to earn a degree, and we owe it to them to do everything we can to help them achieve that goal.

But increasing our retention and graduation rates will also help us address so many other concerns. Improving our graduation rate is one of the single best things we can do to improve our rankings and reputation, which will in turn make us even more attractive to students and their families. Improving graduation and retention rates is also the simplest way to improve our finances.

So, let me say plainly that Pace University in 2024 is in an excellent position. The state of our University is strong. We have some choppy waters ahead of us—all American universities and colleges do—but we are ready to navigate them.

Here is what I ask from all of you as we chart our course forward.

We need to collaborate internally. The real world is not divided into departments, or schools and colleges. And to meet the needs of the real world we must work together across divisions—as we’re already doing in fields like public health, business tech, or law and sustainability.

We must engage externally—with local stakeholders and the global community. We are making real progress on partnerships—with universities around the world, with collaborations like the New York Climate Exchange, with local and regional companies big and small. We must become even more national and international to truly thrive.

We must elevate our academic profile by competing aggressively for funding and placing ourselves at the forefront of the public conversation. I’m gratified on how well we’re doing on that front, and I’m excited to see us do more.

We must be prepared to adapt in service of our steadfast mission. We must embrace new technologies, pedagogies, ways of learning, and forms of education.

And we must support all of our people—the fundamental core of our greatness—as we do all of this.

Our work is cut out for us. We are making progress. We are improving those retention and graduation rates. We are building for our future. We are making Pace an even better place to work.

We are getting better and better at delivering for our students.

So let me close today by saying thank you.

Thank you to our committed faculty and staff, for all the hard work you do, for the wisdom and compassion you demonstrate, and for your commitment to our students.

Thank you to our deans and vice presidents for your leadership, and thank you to our Trustees for your vision and counsel.

Thank you to Provost Joseph Franco, who is doing so much to build bridges, generate new ideas, and move our University forward.

Thank you to the Development and Alumni Relations team, which is setting new records for giving each year.

Thank you, as always, to all the friends, donors, and elected leaders who support our work.

And, most of all, thank you to our students ... for your ambition, for your many accomplishments, and for inspiring us in everything we do.

Together, all of us, we will build a strong and powerful future for Pace, and we will make sure that we are always delivering on our historic mission of *Opportunitas*.

Let's do this.

And thank you.