



THE INAUGURAL ADDRESS

Thank you, Chair Denise O’Leary—and to all the University of Denver trustees. Your bold leadership, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, has been instrumental in our success. So many thank you’s and so little time.

Deep gratitude to all those I’ve had the pleasure to share the stage with today.

Mary Clark and Sarah Pessin—thank you for engaging in the important work of shared governance with me.

Ralph Kuncl and Kevin McDonald—I owe so much to you both for your advice, guidance and kindness. Tom Wolfe—your presence underscores the importance of the relationship between Iliff and DU. Thank you.

Dan Ritchie and Bob Coombe—as fellow DU chancellors, we work from the strong foundation you built; it is an honor to sit beside you. And we send our best wishes to Rebecca Chopp and Dwight Smith, who could not join us today.

William Walks Along—thank you for providing our opening blessing. I am truly honored by your words and presence here today.

I also want to extend my deepest gratitude to the other representatives from the Northern Cheyenne, Northern Arapaho, and Southern Cheyenne and Arapaho Nations, who have traveled to Denver as esteemed guests of the University. In recognition of your ancestral connections to the land upon which the University of Denver was founded, it is our honor to display the flags of your Nations on our stage. I also want to welcome all other Native American and Indigenous tribal leaders and community members from the Denver metro and Colorado Indian communities present today. Thank you for being with us.

To our student performers—thank you for sharing your incredible talents. You’ve brought such life to this ceremony. But more importantly, you remind us why we are here—helping new generations lead lives of purpose.

A big shout-out to the many amazing DU staff members who have worked so very hard to plan and execute this ceremony and all the events leading up to it.

To all in attendance, thank you for participating in today’s time-honored tradition.

Finally, I thank my family members, many of whom traveled far to be with us. It is a special joy to have everyone together—the first in a long, long time. And, of course, a very special recognition goes to my very best friend who, as luck would have it, happens to be my wife, Maurin.

Now—this installation is unique. Because of the delay of this ceremony necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, I have sat in the chancellor’s chair for over two years now. Not only has the chair become more comfortable, you all have also gotten to know me. So, it will not come as much of a surprise that I want to begin with some numbers: 3, 19 and 3 again.



We'll start with the first: 3. For the next 15 minutes or so, I want to take us on a 3-word voyage. We will use determination, grace and optimism to explore the character of the University of Denver, to seek out new ways to improve and boldly commit to the well-being of future generations.

Next, 19. If you haven't already guessed by now, for your listening pleasure, there are 19 unique Star Trek references. And a bonus reference to the Lord of the Rings. Because one does not simply install a chancellor who wears Converse All-Stars every day and expect a speech without a few surprises. (Oh, by the way, if you are counting, we've covered 2 Star Trek references already as well as the bonus reference.)

And then, our final number: 3. During our time together, I am pleased to make 3 major announcements about DU and our future.

The course is laid in. Engage.

So, determination is the first stop on our 3-word voyage.

At DU, we are dedicated to our students. We are dedicated to the public good. And yet, that word—dedicated—falls short of describing the true character of this University. Determination is a much better word, as it captures DU's relentless drive for courageous excellence.

For example, throughout the pandemic and beyond, we have been determined to protect the health and safety of our community members. Because we know that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few (or the one).

We are also determined to transform ourselves by making DU more diverse, equitable and inclusive. We are deeply committed to our DEI Action Plan, Native American and Indigenous Initiatives and the Black Community Initiatives. In short, we embrace what a certain visionary screenwriter believed: "Humanity will reach maturity and wisdom on the day that it begins not just to tolerate, but to take a special delight in differences in ideas and differences in life forms." What I think this certain, fabled screenwriter understood, and we too at DU understand, is the importance and moral imperative of being a welcoming community to all, for the good of all.

But there is another area where DU can, should and will focus its relentless determination.

As so many of you know, this past summer (and indeed too many summers before it), Denver and Colorado struggled with drought and poor air quality. Both of which can be reasonably attributed to the effects of climate change. This is a politicized issue, but one thing is undeniable: Today, DU produces 53,280 metric tons of carbon each year. These emissions, along with emissions released across the Rocky Mountain West, impact air quality in the city we love to call home.

Currently, DU is on target for carbon neutrality by 2050. Yet clear evidence indicates that 2050 is not soon enough to play a meaningful part in the fight against climate change.

Indulge me for a moment as we revisit President John F. Kennedy's 1962 speech, "We choose to go to the moon."

"We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too."



So too with carbon neutrality. We at DU choose to be carbon neutral not in three decades, but in this decade. We choose to do so because of the challenge, because of our relentlessness, and because we are determined to do the right thing. So, our first announcement is that we will set ourselves the bold goal of carbon neutrality, not by 2050, but by 2030. We do this not because it is easy, but because doing so will push us to be our best.

Collectively, we must plan carefully. We may have to make sacrifices. But these sacrifices pale in comparison to the consequences we will face—and the next generation of students will face—if we don't act now.

It will take all of us to achieve success—or Qapla', if you speak Klingon. Our determination to ensure DU is a carbon-neutral institution by the end of this decade is a marker of our relentless ambitions and of our relentless hope for the future.

From determination we turn to grace. You know grace when you see it, and the world could certainly use a lot more of it—especially as we wrestle with complex issues. A lack of it, and a lack of meaningful, thoughtful discussion, is threatening our democracy.

We struggle with civil discourse—the act of listening across differences, seeking truth and artfully persuading. Instead, we gravitate toward echo chambers, which often seed discontent, hatred and even violence. We behave like Borgs—a collective capable only of group think, coldly assessing others, wanting nothing less than full compliance. But here on Earth, in this country, resistance is not futile, and universities should lead it. Because we are educators, not mindless automatons.

And yet, universities also struggle with civil discourse. We too have our echo chambers. Our Borgs. In higher ed, we must teach our students to approach difficult conversations with grace. We have an obligation to teach not what to think, but how to think, to discern truth and to listen gracefully across differences.

We are capable of more.

For civil discourse to flourish, and for students to hone the skills they need, we must uphold the principles of free expression and speech. The moment speech is censored, a chain of oppression is formed. Students need to know about—and use!—their right to free expression. This is so important for all of us at DU because free speech protects academic freedom, which in turn promotes new ideas. Indeed, just this morning, the Nobel Peace Prize for 2021 went to Maria Ressa and Dmitry Andreyevich Muratov “for their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace.”

I am proud that DU is a free speech university. Yet do we do enough? Can we do even more to protect free speech and academic freedom?

But free speech is not enough.

For civil discourse to thrive, we must also embrace intellectual diversity, so that our students are exposed to a variety of ideas, theories and perspectives. It is through exposure to ideas across a spectrum that students will develop the deep listening skills they will need to live lives of purpose. Where better to do this than a university campus? Who best to guide our students than DU's exceptional faculty? And when best than right now?



But intellectual diversity is not enough.

We must go further and dedicate ourselves to being what writer Jonathan Rauch calls “truth seekers”—individuals who eliminate the impossible and seek what remains, however improbable. In essence, fact checkers. Can we as a university dedicate ourselves to seeking truth? Can we help every student become a truth seeker? Can we identify principles that guide us as truth seekers?

Without question, we should. There is so much opportunity to advance civil discourse, and we can change the present:

- Let us review our current principles of free expression and ask whether they do enough to protect free speech and academic freedom;
- Let us broaden our intellectual diversity by engaging with the ideas of academics, thought leaders and creatives with differing views; and
- Let us develop principles and standards of truth-seeking and embody them alongside our students.

With these activities, we will take a giant leap for civil discourse.

Now meaningful civil discourse requires commitment. So, for my second announcement, the University of Denver is dedicating \$1 million to an institution-wide initiative for civil discourse where, in partnership with our value of inclusivity, grace and respect form a prime directive.

We do all of this not to be polite or to pretend that all is well even in heated debate—we do all of this in service of recognizing one another’s humanity. To truly understand one another, we need to listen actively; express authentically; and lean into the formidable challenge of finding common ground, sometimes even amidst a great deal of passion and pain.

Doing all of this—protecting free speech, embracing intellectual diversity, promoting truth-seeking and nurturing civil discourse—will differentiate DU and, most importantly, serve the public good and make the world a better place. Let’s make these the principles, the values we protect here at DU. Let’s make it so, and with grace.

We come to our last stop on our 3-word voyage, and it is right and proper to finish with optimism. What sets American higher education apart is its devotion to a residential education where students live and learn in one environment. In many ways, students develop intellectually, emotionally, physically and even spiritually during their time at the university.

This is why we are so proud of our space for first-year students, the Dimond Family Residential Village, and its focus on building community and belonging.

Yet the concept of American higher education as we know it is undergoing massive change. Fewer high school graduates, changing demographics and rising prices are forcing some colleges to close, others to merge, and still others to change their very nature and become purely online education providers.



DU is not immune to these changes. While we will increasingly explore online programs, our residential programs and experiences continue to define us. Developing the whole student is the core of who we are. We will never eject our core. So you might ask: How will we preserve our core? Well, let me tell you!

At DU, we are rebooting the student experience, retaining the engagement that students yearn for while being intentional about the skills they need to build lives of purpose.

We are redesigning the experience by building engaging facilities dedicated to the student experience. These buildings matter because spaces matter. Where we work, learn, teach and connect powerfully impacts our well-being. Our shared spaces on campus, old and new, are the stages on which our students build their aspirations, depth of knowledge and lifelong relationships.

Like our Community Commons, which has become the social nexus of campus.

Or the Burwell Center for Career Achievement, the career nexus.

Or the iconic Ritchie Center, the wellness nexus.

Or the Newman Center, where we are today, our performing arts nexus.

Or the Anderson Academic Commons, the intellectual nexus.

But where the reboot really takes form is in our universal 4-Dimensional Experience. In the 4D Experience, which welcomes every DU student, the world-class learning University of Denver students enjoy in the classroom is complemented, deepened and applied during experiences outside the classroom. The moment a first-year student arrives on campus, they intentionally design their DU experience—tailored to their interests and aspirations. From clubs, sports, mentoring, career training, internships, study abroad and so much more, the 4D Experience connects students' intellectual growth with their well-being, their career aspirations and their character development to serve them over a lifetime. The 4D Experience is the gestalt of our reboot—the sum of all the individual parts of the DU experience. Our optimism, then, has been and always shall be based on our belief in our students. Our students are our past and our future. And the 4D Experience is our map.

Oh, and one last thing. One cannot glide through the 3-word voyage without a Kobayashi Maru—a final challenge. Since the launch of the 4D Experience, we've long known that wellness and character will be our secret ingredients. If students can truly explore these dimensions of the 4D Experience, we will stand out among the other great American universities.

But what we need is an accelerator. A space in particular that challenges students and encourages them to reflect on their values, behavior and states of mind. A space that creates an environment where barriers between students come down and bonds can be built in their place. A space where students can immerse themselves in the outdoors and restore through its healing powers.

A space in our backyard: the Rocky Mountains. With the best Star Trek aspirations—a final frontier. Today, for our third and final announcement, I am delighted to share that with a generous gift from a DU alum, we now have that special space for today's DU students and for future generations. Welcome to the James C. Kennedy Mountain Campus at the University of Denver!



The Kennedy Mountain Campus opens up a whole new universe of the DU student experience through outdoor leadership, training and living. Every DU student—and I mean every student—will enjoy immersive visits to the Kennedy Mountain Campus, embracing a co-curriculum inspired in part by Colorado Outward Bound, where they will learn about themselves, their character, their well-being, each other, and especially about the great outdoors. It is truly an accelerator for the 4D Experience. But it's one thing to hear about the Mountain Campus. Let's see it!

[Video plays]

This is a landmark moment for DU. The Kennedy Mountain Campus will be a destination for connection and learning for all of DU's students from all backgrounds, experiences, orientations, races, religions and perspectives. It will be a place to find and build common ground. Barriers will be broken. Bonds will be created. Organically.

DU will be the only university that truly integrates an urban experience and a mountain experience. A university that accelerates the development of a student—their intellect, their career, their well-being and especially their character—by serving the public good in the stimulating city of Denver and in the inspiring Rocky Mountains.

This is DU's strategic direction—the sky is the limit. And fortune favors the bold. Our voyage comes to an end. Our three words—determination, grace and optimism—are the character of DU, past, present and future.

To the students, faculty, staff, trustees, alums, friends and donors, colleagues from universities around Colorado and the U.S., thank you being part of a rich tradition in higher education and for engaging in serious reflection on the state of the world.

It is an honor to serve as DU's chancellor. I believe so deeply in this institution, in this community. Every day, but especially today, I am humbled to work alongside you all in our work to build a better, bolder future.

And for those of you keeping track, I'm at 18 references so far, so you know how I'm going to finish this: May the University of Denver boldly live long and prosper.

Thank you.