First of all, welcome back! The start of another academic year is always an exciting time in the life of a university, and we have much to be proud of as we look ahead to the coming year. Undergraduate and Graduate applications to RIT reached all-time highs last year. As a result, our Freshman class is the biggest and most talented ever, and increased returning student and graduate student enrollment numbers will push overall enrollment to over 18,500 this year. In fact, RIT’s record of progress over the past eight years is nothing short of remarkable, as the charts being displayed so eloquently confirm. Not only is enrollment up, but student quality, selectivity, and diversity are all up markedly during this period. The percentage of AALANA students in our Freshman class, for example, is the highest ever, and international student enrollment is up strongly even here in Rochester. Remarkably, fully 41% of our Freshman class is made up of AALANA, ALANA, deaf and hard of hearing, and international students. Talk about diversity!

And enrollment at our international sites is also expected to be up this Fall, with the first students enrolled in two partnerships we are launching in China expected to matriculate in September.

This unexpected enrollment growth, especially in the Freshman class, is already challenging us in areas from housing to advising to additional course offerings, and you need to know
that I am very well aware of the pressures you are all under to accommodate this growth. We have already allocated additional resources to meet these demands, and we will do more if conditions warrant. The most important thing, of course, is to warmly welcome these new students into the RIT family and to work hard to ease their transition from home to campus. After all, this is a happy problem that many of our peer institutions wish they had.

Enrollment and student quality are not the only things that are moving upward at RIT. New contracts and grants supporting research at RIT reached a record $62M last year, and the total of new funds raised from government, corporate, and philanthropic sources exceeded $100M last year for the first time in RIT’s history. In fact, RIT is now among the top 60 private colleges and universities in research expenditures, a far cry from where we were just a few years ago.

During the last academic year three of our young faculty won NSF Career Awards, a number comparable with many R-1 universities nationally. Four of our students won Goldwater Scholarships, an achievement matched by only seven other institutions, and three won Fulbright Awards. And two RIT students took the top gaming prize in Microsoft’s U.S. Imagine Cup National Finals.

To add to what was clearly a banner year, both our mens’ and womens’ hockey teams reached the elite eight in NCAA
championship competition, and our mens’ lacrosse team finished 21-1, the best record in RIT history.

And while I’m talking about the achievements of our students, congratulations to incoming SG President Nick Giordano and his team for putting together the “Good Bye, Good Buy” program, in which discarded furniture, food, sundries, and other items left behind by departing students can be purchased at a fraction of the original price by incoming students. What a good idea! And it supports our sustainability efforts as well.

This Fall we also celebrate the opening of our new Clinical Health Sciences Center, with state-of-the-art teaching classrooms and laboratories and a walk-in clinic to be operated by our Alliance partner, the Rochester Regional Health System. If you haven’t yet visited this facility, I encourage you to do so. It is a great example of how far we have come since we established our ninth college, the College of Health Science and Technology.

Although I am so proud to serve as your President, these accomplishments are really yours, not mine. What you are accomplishing at RIT occurs very rarely in academia – the movement of an institution from a regional to a national and internationally prominent position among its peers. This will be your legacy, and I hope that you take well-deserved pride in these achievements.
As a further indication of our progress, this summer saw two significant announcements that serve notice that, even with the progress made over the past decade, our best days lie ahead of us. First, Governor Cuomo came to campus to announce that New York State will provide $13.5M in support of a new facility on our campus for Magic Spell Studios, our visionary initiative to exploit the increasing synergies within our nationally ranked computer gaming and film and animation programs. These funds will be augmented by $17M in corporate and private support and will allow the construction of a state-of-the-art facility that will result in increased enrollment in these programs, effective commercialization of the products coming out of them, and the assumption by RIT of the leading role in the huge emerging field of digital media.

Oh, and we intend to add some additional classroom and laboratory space in the new facility to help accommodate increasing enrollments in other programs.

Second, Vice President Biden came to Rochester to announce that a coalition led by SUNY-Poly, the University of Rochester, and RIT is the winner of a nationwide competition to lead an advanced manufacturing institute in the area of photonics. AIM Photonics, as the institute is to be called, will be supported by $110M in Federal funds and $240M in State funding over the next five years. RIT’s contributions will be in the areas of device prototyping and packaging, and the funding we are to receive will allow for a significant modernization of our microelectronics clean room facility. There is a very real
possibility that this Institute could lead to a second industrial
revolution in Rochester based on photonics, optics, and imaging
science, and RIT is well positioned to help lead this effort.

These announcements come at the same time that we begin
to implement our new strategic plan, *Greatness Through
Difference*. Work is already underway on many aspects of the
plan, including goals for total, female, and AALANA STEM
graduates, identifying strategic areas of research excellence,
encouraging cross-disciplinary and cross-college teaching and
research, and improving our overall organizational agility as a
means of meeting our ambitious goals.

While some aspects of the plan can be funded through
reallocation and new revenue sources, many of our goals will
require greatly increased fundraising efforts across our campus.
For this reason, we are currently in the quiet phase of a
fundraising campaign, called *Greatness Through Difference –
the Campaign for RIT*, intended to generate increased support
for RIT from philanthropic, corporate, and government sources.
Over the next few weeks, I will visit each Division and College
to introduce the campaign to faculty and staff in more detail. Its
success will depend upon the efforts of all of us. The ultimate
goal for the campaign will be set at the end of the quiet phase in
about two years, but I can tell you that this will be the most
ambitious fundraising effort ever undertaken at RIT, and one
that will be crucial to the implementation of our strategic plan.
As many of you know, RIT has also begun work on the self-study required by Middle States for our accreditation review in FY2017. MSCHE Vice President, Sean McKitrick visited RIT on May 13, 2015, in preparation for RIT’s decennial reaccreditation process. Dr. McKitrick spent the day meeting with campus stakeholders and the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees. Following this visit, RIT’s self-study design was approved by Middle States. We are now all systems go for preparing the self-study. More to come in the next academic year.

Our NSF-supported ADVANCE RIT program, aimed at addressing the challenges of female STEM faculty at RIT, continues to make real progress in addressing employment inequities and implicit and explicit bias related to this group. They will need the support of all of us if further progress toward this important goal is to be made. In order to demonstrate our support for this program, the Provost and I will both become Co-PI’s on this grant, and we will work with the ADVANCE RIT team, led by Margaret Bailey, and all of the colleges to ensure that RIT becomes a model of inclusive excellence in this area.

In conclusion, RIT is on the cusp of greatness. Every measurable indicator is up, and our graduates are increasingly making us proud all over the world. Let’s not stop now!