

**State of the University Address
President Larry H. Dietz
Thursday, September 20, 2018**

Thank you Senator Kalter.

Students, faculty and staff members, alumni and Redbird friends—good afternoon and welcome. I appreciate your taking the time to join me for my fifth State of the University Address as President of Illinois State University.

I would like to take a few moments to make several introductions. When I introduce you, please stand, and members of the audience, please hold your acknowledgements until all have been introduced.

From the Board of Trustees of Illinois State University

- Bob Dobski
- John Rauschenberger
- Sarah Aguilar, Student Trustee

Leaders in state and community governance:

- State Representative Dan Brady
- From the Town of Normal
 - Mayor Chris Koos,
 - Council Members - Kevin McCarthy, Scott Preston, Kathleen Lorenz, R.C. McBride and Chamberly Cummings, and Town of Normal staff leadership Pam Reece, Teri Legner and Sally Heffernan.
- Leaders in campus shared governance: Susan Kalter, Ron Gifford, Bob Blythe and Michael Rubio.

And my Vice Presidential leadership team:

- Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, Dr. Jan Murphy
- Vice President for Finance and Planning, Dan Stephens.
- Vice President for University Advancement, Pat Vickerman.
- Vice President for Student Affairs, Dr. Levester Johnson.

Also joining me today and every day—Illinois State University's First Lady—and my First Lady for many happy years, Marlene Dietz.

Thank you all very much for joining us today.

A couple of special welcomes to begin with: First there is a group here this afternoon that is acknowledging a milestone—in fact, they are going to be celebrating all year, and they want you to join them.

They are students, faculty, staff members and alumni from Mennonite College of Nursing. The College, this year, is marking one century of excellence, with 20 of those years as part of Illinois State. The Mennonite Sanitarium Training School—as it was originally known, was founded on January 23, 1919. The first commencement ceremony was held in 1922 with 15 graduates. This past spring, MCN proudly conferred more than 200 undergraduate and graduate degrees. During the past 20 years, the College has increased its undergraduate enrollment, added two sequences to the master's program and created a doctoral program that includes a doctor of philosophy in Nursing and an online doctor of Nursing Practice, as well as an accelerated bachelor of science in Nursing option. The College has also received recognition from Advocate Health Care as a preferred provider of nursing education to its employees. We are very proud of everything Mennonite College of Nursing has accomplished, and look forward to a future that, as in the past, celebrates the college as a leader in nursing education.

Could those associated with Mennonite College of Nursing please stand and accept our congratulations?

Thank you.

One more special group I want to acknowledge is our first cohort of INTO Illinois State University students. During my 2016 State of the University Address, I announced a goal to increase our international enrollment to 5 percent of total enrollment within 5 years and 10 percent of total enrollment within 10 years. These percentages are consistent with most Universities of our size and mission, and do not adversely impact State of Illinois students who wish to attend ISU.

This fall—the first group of 64 international students recruited by INTO University Partnerships arrived on the Illinois State campus to start their journey as Redbirds. The students represent 16 countries, and we are thrilled they are now part of the University family. Joined by their faculty and support staff members, many of them are here today—and I'll ask them to stand, so please help me give them a big ISU welcome!

Thank you.

As we look to increase our international presence, Illinois State's freshman enrollment this fall is the second largest in two-and-a-half decades. A total of 3,689 freshmen are enrolled at ISU for the fall 2018 semester, and if that number sounds remarkable, our diversity statistics are even more so. 34 percent of our freshmen are persons of color. We achieved a 38 percent increase in African-American freshmen and a 31 percent jump in Latino/Latina freshmen.

Through a variety of programs and initiatives, and the passionate involvement of many areas of campus, we are making this institution a more inclusive and welcoming environment, and this year's enrollment is a reflection of those efforts. We still have a long way to go, and in fact, achieving diversity is perpetually a work-in-progress, but congratulations to everyone involved in recruiting, enrolling, and teaching and supporting this impressive freshman class.

Our total enrollment this fall is also quite impressive—20,635 students—which follows a 2017-2018 academic year that saw more than 5,400 students graduate—one of the biggest graduating classes in memory. In fact, over the last five years, Illinois State's total enrollment has averaged 20,776 placing us only behind two University of Illinois system schools.

Last week, Board of Trustees Chair Rocky Donahue, and I sent a letter to the governor, legislative leaders, and every single member of the General Assembly. We reminded them that over the past few years, the unfortunate narrative of declining enrollment and out-of-state student migration has cast a shadow over Illinois public higher education. But we also stressed that Illinois State University is not, and never has been, part of that narrative. Throughout this period of economic and political challenge, Illinois State has remained a strong, stable and affordable option for Illinois families—facts that I asked our lawmakers to share with their constituents.

I am also encouraged that we begin the academic year with a full fiscal year budget. The 2018-2019 operating appropriation for Illinois State is \$66.3 million, a 2 percent or \$1.3 million increase over the University's FY18 appropriation. Although the appropriation is the second smallest in two decades, excluding the budget impasse years, I appreciated the efforts of the governor and legislature to act in a timely manner and provide a source of predictable public support.

The spending plan also includes nearly \$66 million in capital funding, with almost \$62 million targeted for the Fine Arts Complex construction and renovation project. You might remember the funding for that project was approved almost a decade ago but remained stalled with a frozen capital budget. About two weeks ago, Governor Rauner and our local legislative leaders announced the release of \$5.26 million in capital funds—which will assist with critical repairs to that facility, and to replace the roofs on Turner Hall and the Ropp Agriculture Building. Meanwhile, I urge our state leaders to release the remainder of those funds quickly so we can continue moving on the Fine Arts Complex, and other important maintenance projects.

Even with our challenges, the Illinois State of today remains one of few current public university success stories—bucking the trend of declining enrollment, and the resulting financial calamities of employee layoffs, program curtailments and student housing closures. Our enrollment is strong—classrooms, laboratories and studios are consistently full, and our campus housing is at or near capacity.

The University has not been forced to cancel classes, remove teachers from the classroom or pull student support staff members from their offices. ISU also remains affordable, with a

tuition, fee, room and board package that places the University in the lower half of the Illinois college investment scale. At the same time, the University distributed \$45 million in need-and merit-based aid last year to make attendance more affordable for our students with financial need.

I am excited to announce today, that Illinois State is implementing several powerful new measures to make the University even more affordable, accessible and attractive to prospective students.

In association with Illinois' AIM High initiative, Illinois State is adding an additional \$4 million to assist students with financial need through our Redbird Scholarship program. Beginning with this fall's application process, all students with a high school grade point average of at least 3.0 and an ACT of 25 or SAT of 1210, will automatically qualify for a Redbird Scholarship of at least \$1,000 and as much as \$4,000 per academic year.

Next, we are reaching out to students from right here in McLean County. Well more than half of our student population comes to campus from Chicago and its suburbs, but about 1,000 McLean County students attend ISU each year. We are committed to growing that number with a new opportunity called the McLean County Scholarship.

Each year, five McLean County students will win four years of free tuition through a competition based on the student's leadership, community service and civic engagement in this county. Each of these scholarships carries a present-day value of \$50,000. In addition, every McLean County student who applies for the award will automatically receive a one-time \$500 scholarship to ISU just for participating. As you know, one of Illinois State's core values is Civic Engagement, and this is another way to put our money where our values are.

Finally, we are offering a new Alumni Legacy Scholarship. Again, beginning with this year's application process, students, who have a parent or grandparent that graduated from Illinois State, will receive a \$500 scholarship each year for up to four years. Our alumni proudly invest in Illinois State University, and we want to do even more to re-invest in their loved ones.

With all of this news, I also want to tell you something about Illinois State University's student commitment that is not news. For many years, Illinois State has been fully invested in our students with the greatest financial need, and we will continue to provide nearly \$13 million in ISU Access Grants annually to serve students from families with the lowest income levels. Combined with MAP and Pell grants, these students generally pay little or nothing in tuition and fee dollars. In fact, our Access Grants even cover a portion of the student's housing charges. We don't make a big deal out of it—we do it simply because it's the right thing to do.

As Illinois State grows with an even more diverse and engaged student population, we face a challenging irony. Our high enrollment, combined with stagnant or receding state budgets, results in Illinois State University students being funded at the Illinois Board of Higher Education-reported level of \$3,551 per FTE student—that’s 45 percent lower than the overall state average of \$6,579.

Although ISU receives the fourth largest appropriation among the public universities—our consistent strong enrollment lowers the actual appropriation per student.

One of my many goals for this year is to convince our state government leaders that true performance-based funding is funding that rewards high-performing universities—those that enroll students who persist, graduate and get the jobs that make them tax-paying Illinois citizens.

I want to make this clear—I am not asking for a handout, and I am not tone-deaf about the continuing financial challenges facing this state. In my five years of attending House and Senate higher education appropriation hearings, my testimony has never included a request for greater and greater amounts of funding.

But what I have always respectfully requested—and what I will continue to request— is a fair, equitable and predictable formula for the state to support its public universities—and Illinois State is among the highest-performing public institutions.

Meanwhile, I continue working with university finance leadership to support our high-performing faculty and staff members. To that end—for the third straight year—I am announcing a merit-based 2 percent mid-year salary increase for faculty and staff members who don’t already have negotiated contracts in place.

The non-retroactive increase will be effective at the beginning of the 2019 calendar year. As I have said the last two years, I understand this represents a modest increase, but I do want to compensate our faculty and staff to the extent I can while still be fiscally responsible.

Certainly, our grandest financial bright spot has been in the area of fundraising, both in annual giving commitments and through our comprehensive campaign—*Redbirds Rising*. For this just-past fiscal year, Illinois State enjoyed its second-highest fundraising year on record, raising more than \$21.9 million in private support.

This marks the University’s fourth consecutive year surpassing \$21 million in funds raised. FY2018 gifts supporting scholarships, faculty and staff, programs, research, technology, and facilities, included \$8.6 million in student support. More than 11,000 alumni contributed, and donors created 62 new scholarships. Our total endowment now surpasses \$126 million.

Meanwhile, we enter the stretch run of *Redbirds Rising*—the campaign to secure Illinois State’s future of scholarship, leadership and innovation. More than 45,000 donors have already contributed over \$123 million in gifts and commitments since the campaign’s quiet phase began in July 2013—and our University Advancement leadership and staff is leading the charge to meet and even surpass our goal of \$150 million.

Of course, at the heart of *Redbirds Rising* is our donors—the people who invest in a future of excellence for Illinois State. Our *Redbirds Rising* totals thus far include \$53 million dedicated specifically for student support and 150 new scholarship endowments. Many of the faculty, staff, students, alumni and Redbird friends in this room today have already participated in *Redbirds Rising*, and I humbly thank you for your gifts of treasure, as well as your many contributions of time and talent.

This afternoon, I’d like to introduce you to one special benefactor. Warren Stephey is originally from Lexington, Illinois—about 15 miles north of here, and home to our University Farm. Warren attended Illinois State *Normal* University to pursue an Agriculture Education degree. His student teaching experience helped him determine that teaching was not the path for him. Instead he pursued a career in Agribusiness, working for Purina and eventually starting his own company, as a commodities broker.

As part of *Redbirds Rising*, Warren established the Stephey Agriculture Scholarship to benefit Agriculture students at Illinois State. I would venture a guess that there are quite a few Redbird alumni in this room today, but probably not too many from 1953. But, Warren is proud of his Redbird heritage and his affiliation with the Agriculture Department—and I am so happy he joined us today—Warren—could you please stand for recognition?

Thank you, Warren—I think part of the goal of *Redbirds Rising* is to celebrate the people who give and give back to their alma mater and Warren is a terrific example of our engaged and passionate alumni.

The tens of thousands of people who make gift commitments to Illinois State are—in a very real way—investing in success—and this past year has been one of the most successful for our University and, for our faculty and staff members.

Our Metrics of Excellence continue to place Illinois State at nationally high levels. Once again, ISU was ranked among the top 100 public universities by *U.S. News and World Report*. Our graduation rate of 68.8 percent is 10 percent above the national average, and our 80 percent retention rate remains among the highest in the nation.

Meanwhile, we rank among the lowest in the nation for our student loan default rate, which stands at 3 percent compared to the national average of 11.5 percent. Illinois State students stay in school—they graduate—they graduate on time—they get good jobs—and they quickly repay any modest student loan debt. Added to that, one third of our students graduate with no

college-related debt at all. The national narrative of college students drowning in debt is indeed, another narrative that does not apply to Illinois State University

As our metrics shine a spotlight on the University, our faculty and staff stand in that light with individual and team achievements. Here are just a very few bullet points accolades:

- Erika Hunt, from Education, was awarded a \$3.1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education for work in Integrated Leadership.
- David Kopsell, from Agriculture, was elected the Education Division vice-president for the American Society for Horticultural Science.
- Lyndsie Schlink, our intrepid photographer from University Marketing and Communication, who by the way, attends more events than Dan Brady, won her eighth award from the University Photographers' Association of America.
- Jomo Sankara, from Business, received the National Association of Black Accountants advisor of the year award.
- Andrew Hartman, of History and Dallas Long, of Milner Library are just two recent Fulbright recipients, while more than 30 Illinois State faculty have been part of the Fulbright Program, bringing their global experience to the classroom. Meanwhile, we are welcoming five new Fulbright students to Illinois State this fall, including one from Afghanistan.
- Under the leadership of Dr. Jan Paterson, our Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning created opportunities for 1,031 volunteers, resulting in over 13,700 service hours. The Center also facilitated the creation of several new course-based projects by bringing together faculty and agency personnel and also launched *Redbird Impact*, a bi-annual publication that tells the University's civic engagement story.
- And just last month, ISU students, faculty and staff members and retirees joined with their counterparts at Illinois Wesleyan University, to break ground on their 25th home construction through Habitat for Humanity—an amazing collaboration and a wonderful way to serve our greater community.

These, of course, are just a tiny fraction of our thousands of success stories. At Illinois State, we credit much of the University's success to our vision—I am fond of saying we are good at planning our work, then working our plan. At the heart of every Illinois State planning process is the University's strategic blueprint for success, and for almost two decades, that plan has been called *Educating Illinois*.

This year, as the campus community shared in the revision of the document, it was given a new name—*Educate · Connect · Elevate*. Implementation of the five-year plan begins this semester with four strategic directions: Enhance Strength and Stability, Foster Innovation, Nurture Diversity and Inclusion, and Enrich Engagement. As a University community, you also included two additional values: Collaboration and Respect. Hopefully, you will agree these new values were already an integral part of our culture, and they are given added emphasis in the revised plan.

Following today's address, members of the *Educate · Connect · Elevate* implementation team will be in the CPA lobby handing out booklets describing the updated plan. As you read—you will notice the word "Inclusion" has been added to the Diversity value. The expanded value is intended to convey that while you cannot achieve excellence without diversity, you cannot claim diversity without inclusion.

As *Educate · Connect · Elevate* is implemented, University leadership will also be implementing many of the recommendations of the Climate Assessment Task Force. Since January 2017, the Task Force has worked with the entire ISU community to recommend new and enhanced diversity and inclusion initiatives. This fall, the Task Force Sponsoring Leadership will issue a report on the implementation of many of those recommendations. Some of the steps include enhanced web and print promotion of scholars and students of color—increased diversity in the University Speakers Series—providing more gender-inclusive facilities—and expanded services provided by Event Management, Dining, and Hospitality to better fit students' cultural, religious, or medical dietary needs.

Student Counseling Services has launched a new group program specifically designed to provide support for students of color. The program provides a safe and supportive space for students of color to process, discuss and give voice to the wide range of concerns.

We have also initiated a process to establish a multi-cultural center on campus. Representatives from the divisions of Student Affairs, Academic Affairs, Finance and Planning, and University Advancement have formed a group including students, faculty and staff to research successful multicultural centers at other universities and establish best practices for a center at ISU.

These are just a few of many measures being implemented—the full report comes out in about a month, and we will distribute it across campus.

You can also follow our story of diversity and inclusion through the University's nationally award-winning electronic newsletter, *Identity* and the Climate Task Force website. I am grateful to the Climate Assessment Task Force for their efforts, and I thank everyone who contributed to their recommendations through meetings and communications to me and to Task Force leadership.

As we continue to plan our work and work our plan, you can be proud that each member of our campus is a reflection of Illinois State's core values, and each one of us contributes to making diversity and inclusion a priority.

In addition to implementing our updated strategic plan and Climate Task Force recommendations—other important goals this year include the further development of our new and popular Cybersecurity major. As Dr. Kalter earlier referenced, we will also continue to formulate an Engineering major focusing on Mechanical and Electrical Engineering. This year's work will include the development of an Engineering business model and discussions on using existing facilities or including new construction.

On the topic of construction, in addition to the Fine Arts Complex, we have several projects on our priority agenda this year:

- The Bone Student Center revitalization continues this year with more interior remodeling and work on the two-story Welcome Center. That project is slated to be finished in the spring of 2020.
- The Cyber-Security classroom initiative for Julian Hall is underway with the completion of designs and preparation of construction documents. Meanwhile, two temporary Cyber Security classrooms were renovated and outfitted in Williams Hall to meet the interim Cyber Security classroom demand until construction is completed at Julian.
- The Watterson Dining Commons Expansion is well underway with completion expected in Spring 2019. Construction started on this addition and renovation project in July 2018.
- And, a Master Plan for Milner Library was completed this past summer, outlining the overall comprehensive redevelopment and upgrade plans for Milner. Construction started in August on the plaza deck replacement project, and there are some additional related Milner projects that are currently in the final design phase.

I have also initiated an update of the Campus Master Plan: 2010-2030. The revisions will include Master Plan projects that have been completed, those that are in progress, as well as recommendations for Master Plan actions that have not yet been addressed. Maintaining, renovating, and building new campus facilities keeps Illinois State physically and technologically up-to-date, and enhances the University's attractiveness to prospective students and their families, as well as faculty, staff and visitors.

Equally important are campus grounds—lawns, landscaping, trees, sidewalks and roads. Each year, I receive numerous compliments about our beautiful and award-winning campus grounds, and while I always say “thank you,” I also know I’m not the one who is making the place so appealing. So, this afternoon, I’ve invited a few of the Grounds and Horticulture staff to stop by for acknowledgement. Can you fine folks please stand so we can all give you a round of applause?

Thank you.

There has been a lot of recent applause for our student athletes and their coaches, staff and leadership. The 2018-19 season is well underway, with volleyball, cross country, soccer football, and golf, following a year which saw the Redbirds win championships, earn conference and national honors and excel in the classroom as well.

The Illinois State track & field and cross-country program was named the Missouri Valley Conference 2017-18 Program of the Year based on their performance. The Redbirds claimed three first-place titles during the 2017-18 season, including a sweep of the 2018 Valley Indoor Track & Field Championships, their first since 1997. Player and Coach of the Year honors, All-

American and Academic All-American recognitions followed for Redbird student-athletes, who look to win more awards and team titles during the 2018-19 athletic season.

The team and individual successes were complemented by a tremendous effort in the classroom, as Illinois State student-athletes set a new semester departmental grade-point average record of 3.24 during the Spring 2018 semester, topping the previous mark of 3.23 set during the previous four semesters.

For the second-straight year, a Redbird student-athlete was also selected as a Robert G. Bone Scholar for the 2018-19 academic year. Volleyball senior Ali Line became the third Redbird student-athlete in the past two years, and just the third since the 2011-12 academic year, to be named a Bone Scholar, the top undergraduate honor bestowed at Illinois State. I congratulate Athletic Director Larry Lyons and his coaches and staff, and I hope you will all take some time this year to support our student athletes by attending their competitions.

I close this year's address in the same fashion I began last year's message—with a simple and humble thank you for the support you have afforded me and Marlene since we became President and First Lady four-and-a-half years ago.

Once again this year, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*—the leading publication in our field—ranked Illinois State as a “Great College to Work For.” In fact, for this past year, the University exceeded the number of rankings previously received, now reaching 11 categories out of a possible 12, and again, placing ISU on the “Great Colleges to Work For” honor roll.

This national recognition is the reason I took extra time today, to introduce to you several individuals and groups. The *Chronicle* ranking affirms my belief that it is people who make places, and that Illinois State University is a place full of wonderful people—working diligently to achieve our motto, “Gladly, We Learn and Teach.”

We don't agree on everything all the time—but we meet our successes and challenges as a community, and we act on behalf of our students with the University's mission, vision and values in our minds, and more importantly, in our hearts.

Thank you for your time and attention today, thank you for all you do to make Illinois State-Illinois' first and finest public University, and, of course, GO YOU REDBIRDS!