

President's Letter

The State of the University, February 2018

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In the past year we have celebrated festive ribbon-cuttings for several major facilities on campus. We opened the Julis Romo Rabinowitz Building, which provides a new home for the Department of Economics; the Louis A. Simpson International Building, which brings together many of Princeton's international initiatives; and the Lewis Arts complex, which elevates the quality and visibility of the arts at Princeton in fantastic and exciting ways. The complex's opening was a multi-day gala, an explosion of artistry and imagination at venues across the campus. It showcased the brilliant talents of Princeton students, faculty, and alumni, and testified powerfully to the vision that led President Shirley Tilghman to conceive the arts initiative and Peter Lewis '55 and other friends and alumni of the University to support it so generously. I was delighted to see so many people from our campus and the surrounding communities at Lewis Arts events.

For me, these ribbon-cuttings were all the sweeter because I experienced them as the culmination of more than a dozen years of careful planning and dedicated effort. When I joined President Tilghman's administration as her provost in 2004, we were already talking about the possibility of an ambitious initiative in the arts, a new building that would provide first-class facilities for the Department of Chemistry and make the old Frick Laboratories available for other purposes, the need to unify the Department of Economics under a single roof, and the synergies that would result from co-locating our international programs. People across the campus invested significant time, energy, and hard work in the projects in the years following 2004. Alumni and friends provided generous and critical support. Students and faculty today are benefiting, as will their successors for generations to come, from plans that germinated more than a decade ago.

One important component of that planning process was our last campus plan, published in 2008. That plan, referred to as the 2016 campus plan because of its planning horizon, recommended sites for the Lewis Center and many other projects completed during the last decade. Two months ago, we published the 2026 campus plan, which provides a planning framework to guide campus development over the next 10 years in a 30-year context. The campus plan envisions how Princeton might implement the priorities identified in the strategic framework approved by Princeton's Board of Trustees in January 2016. If you want a preview of places where we might celebrate ribbon-cuttings over the next decade and beyond, have a look at the [new campus plan](#) and the [strategic framework](#) underpinning it.

Crucial to all of our planning is a fundamental conviction about Princeton and other great universities: namely, that these rare and extraordinary institutions are forces for good—places that have the capacity not only to transform the lives of the people who study, teach, and work at them but also to address the world's most urgent problems, add to its cultures, and enhance the connections that bring human beings together on behalf of shared purposes and values. From my conversations with you on this campus and with our alumni and friends, I know that some

version of that conviction is shared by nearly all of us who have been fortunate enough to be a part of this community.

In the broader American community, however, higher education is increasingly a focal point of partisan political division. That trend was evident in the recent tax reform legislation, which included several provisions directly targeting colleges and universities. I will return later in this letter to the projects anticipated by our strategic and campus plans, but I would like first to address some of the questions that Princetonians have been asking about recent political developments and their implications for the University and higher education more broadly.

Effects of the tax reform bill

I spent much of my time in November and December working closely with Princeton's superb director of government relations, Joyce Rechtschaffen, to oppose an array of measures contained in the tax reform package that was eventually signed into law on December 22, 2017. Joyce and her deputy, Julie Groeninger, labored tirelessly and effectively on behalf of this University's students, faculty, and staff. I am grateful to them, and to all of the faculty members, graduate students, undergraduates, alumni, staff, and friends who lent their voices and energy to the cause of higher education over the past few months, whether publicly or behind the scenes.

We campaigned along with our allies to defeat some of the tax bill's disturbing provisions. The House version of the tax bill, for example, included a noxious clause that would have taxed graduate student tuition waivers. Universities throughout the country provide such waivers to graduate students who serve as teaching or research assistants. Very few students could afford to pay the proposed tax, and it would accordingly have damaged American graduate education either by making it more costly to universities or by deterring students from obtaining graduate degrees or both. Fortunately, the Senate bill did not include the provision. Perhaps because it would have affected universities and students in nearly every congressional district in the country, the measure eventually attracted Republican opposition in the House as well. It was not in the final version of the legislation.

The House bill, if passed without changes, would have adversely affected our community and our University in other ways as well. For example, it would have eliminated our ability to provide tax-exempt tuition benefits for the dependents of our employees. The final bill preserved our ability to offer that benefit, which is important to faculty and staff employees throughout this University. The House bill would also have eliminated our ability to use tax-exempt bonds to finance new construction; the final bill preserved that option but removed the ability of private colleges and universities to refinance existing debt on a tax-exempt basis.

One provision that survived was a new 1.4 percent tax levied on the "net investment income" of Princeton and around thirty other colleges and universities. This measure withstood extensive criticism and opposition partly because, unlike other provisions directed at higher education, it was sculpted to apply only to a small number of institutions, most of them concentrated in states that tend to vote Democratic. The tax affects only private institutions with more than 500 students and assets valued at more than \$500,000 per full-time student.

Many people have asked me how the tax will affect Princeton's budget and programs. Unfortunately, quantifying the tax's impact is not easy. One possible starting point is the Joint Committee on Taxation's report, which estimated that the tax would generate \$1.8 billion in revenue for the federal government over the next decade. There is no way to tell whether this estimate is accurate. If it were, Princeton's tax payments would likely average more than \$20 million per year. The actual effect of the tax will depend on the regulations developed by the Internal Revenue Service to implement it; the terms used in the statute raise a number of complicated technical and legal questions.

Whatever its size, the tax applies to endowment income rather than directly to operating revenue. For that reason, its effects will be felt mainly through a long-term erosion of this and other universities' ability to preserve program quality, pursue new initiatives, or enhance affordability. To take just one example: Princeton's 2016 strategic framework called upon the University to increase the availability of sixth-year funding for graduate students in the social sciences and the humanities. It also called for increased University contributions to research programs supporting graduate students in the sciences and engineering. Endowment growth enabled us to implement these recommendations immediately while maintaining our commitments to, among other things, the nation's best undergraduate financial aid program, competitive faculty salaries, and effective support for world-class research programs. To the extent that the new tax limits endowment growth, Princeton's trade-offs among priorities in the future will be more difficult, and our ability to pursue or sustain endowment-assisted improvements to the University's affordability, teaching, and research will be more limited.

We hope, of course, that the impact will be small rather than large, and my colleagues and I in the administration will work to ensure that Princeton can maximize its ability to achieve all aspects of our teaching and research mission. But whatever the immediate impact of this tax, it tarnishes a longstanding principle that has been important to the extraordinary success of American higher education. Until now, our government has in general recognized that it should not tax charities (which by definition are using their earnings to serve a public good) to add dollars to the federal treasury or close a revenue gap. This bill recklessly compromised that principle. As commentators from across the political spectrum have pointed out, the bill thereby sets a dangerous precedent. One of our highest legislative priorities in the coming years must be to ensure that this erosion in the capacity of colleges and universities to pursue their missions is not replicated or exacerbated. As part of this effort, we need to continue to explain how endowments assist students, research, and the country.

Higher education and the political divide

As important as the tax bill itself are the political trends that accompanied it. Many commentators have pointed out that the bill came on the heels of public opinion polls by the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Gallup Organization showing rapidly polarizing opinions about higher education. Just two years ago, both Republicans and Democrats told pollsters that they thought colleges and universities were a positive force in American society (though a higher percentage of Democrats than Republicans held that favorable view). Over the last two years, Republican responses to this question shifted dramatically, so that a majority of Republicans told Pew and Gallup that they thought that colleges and universities were having a negative impact on society

overall (whereas Democratic opinions of colleges and universities grew even more positive).¹ Some analysts contend that the possession or lack of a college degree is becoming a significant driver of voter behavior in the United States and Europe.²

People have offered many explanations for these developments. Some commentators blame colleges and universities for losing public support. They point to college costs and student debt levels; campus protests that have disrupted speeches; perceptions of political bias on university faculties; or concern about the fairness of admission policies, among other factors. They have recommended that universities implement reforms to assuage higher education's critics and conduct publicity campaigns to change their minds.

We must take the long view when assessing these diagnoses and prescriptions. Events like the ones at Middlebury College, where Charles Murray was prevented from speaking and assaulted (along with his host, Professor Allison Stanger), have undoubtedly damaged the standing of colleges with the public. Understandably so: such incidents are outrageous and unacceptable. But poll numbers that fluctuate in response to headline-grabbing incidents can rebound when attention shifts.³

We should aim for a rebound but not expect that it or we can eliminate partisan divisions about higher education. Here, too, history is informative: many of the criticisms directed at higher education today have a long pedigree. Present-day complaints about campus culture, for example, have more than a little in common with much older ones, such as William F. Buckley Jr.'s *God and Man at Yale*, published more than a half-century ago in 1951. We should neither exaggerate the force of such critiques nor suppose that a public relations campaign will end them.

We in colleges and universities must stick to our principles. We should pursue our mission steadfastly and tell our story as clearly as we can—even if portions of that mission are unpopular or controversial. We should not underestimate either the importance or the difficulty of telling our story. Indeed, the sheer complexity of university budgets may have been one of the most important factors leading to enactment of the endowment tax. American families today understandably worry about the cost of a college degree. Some policy-makers who are concerned about this problem mistake the relationship between endowments and affordability: they wrongly regard endowments as unused 'rainy day funds' when endowments are in fact a critical, actively used source of annual support for teaching, research, and financial aid. At

¹ For the Pew results, see "[Republicans Skeptical of Colleges' Impact on U.S., but Most See Benefits for Workforce Preparation](#)," *Pew Research Center*, July 20, 2017; For the Gallup results, see "[Why Are Republicans Down on Higher Ed?](#)", *Gallup News*, August 16, 2017.

² See, e.g., Andrew McGill, "[America's Educational Divide Put Trump in the White House](#)," *The Atlantic*, November 27, 2016; Robert Ford, "[The New Electoral Map of Britain: from the Revenge of Remainers to the Upending of Class Politics](#)," *The Guardian*, June 10, 2017.

³ A useful and appropriately qualified interpretation of the poll data appears in Doug Lederman, "[Is Higher Education Really Losing the Public?](#)" *Inside Higher Education*, December 15, 2017.

Princeton, for example, we rely on endowment payout for more than half of our operating revenue every single year, regardless of whether endowment returns for that year are positive, flat, or negative. Princeton's endowment enables us to ensure that a Princeton education is simultaneously excellent and affordable.⁴

We must search for new and more effective ways to tell the story of higher education. When doing so, we should change our programs and activities only when our mission and values justify doing so, not in an attempt to boost poll numbers or burnish our image. For example, Princeton pioneered an all-grant, no-loan financial aid policy in 2001 not because it was popular but because it increased our ability to attract talented students from all backgrounds and empower them to make a difference in the world.

With that same principle in mind, we have advocated vigorously for our Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students and for immigrants from all nations. Together with Microsoft and one of our undergraduate students, Princeton sued the federal government on behalf of DACA beneficiaries. In addition, I became a founding member of the Presidents' Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration, and I have written to congressional leaders and the White House urging swift action to preserve the DACA program. We will continue these efforts because we recognize that Princeton has depended since its inception, and depends today, on the talent and contributions of newcomers to this country. We are proud of the wide range of nationalities represented in our undergraduate and graduate student bodies, on our faculty, and on our staff.

Another example: over the last decade, we have nearly doubled the number of students in the entering class who are first-generation college students or Pell grant recipients. These students make up 29 percent of this year's freshman class. We began focusing on the importance of increasing socioeconomic diversity at Princeton before the issue began receiving significant attention from journalists and others. We did so not in response to political breezes but because of an unwavering belief that we must attract and enroll extraordinary students from all backgrounds who will improve the University and increase our impact on the world.

We should respond in the same spirit to questions about other topics attracting political attention, including ones pertaining to political diversity or free speech. For example, one of Princeton's Nobel Laureates, Sir Angus Deaton, has expressed his worry that "many academics live in liberal, cosmopolitan bubbles, little penetrated by rumblings from outside the walls."⁵ We need to take such challenges seriously because viewpoint diversity matters to the quality of our teaching and research. Our truth-seeking mission depends on robust discussion and on an unflinching willingness to confront and analyze a wide range of ideas. But that same truth-seeking mission precludes us from making changes to achieve some politically driven notion of "balance" or to appease partisan critics.

⁴ Kiplinger ranked Princeton at the top of its 2018 list for "best values in higher education." See "[Kiplinger's Best College Values, 2018](#)," *Kiplinger*, February 2018.

⁵ Angus Deaton, "[US Universities Dangerously Isolated from Society](#)," *Times Higher Education*, February 1, 2017.

Free speech and inclusivity are two of the values that define this University's mission, and they demand special and sustained attention because of recent events that have generated a swirl of partisan politics and media commentary. Politicians and journalists—and even some educators—have treated commitments to free speech and inclusivity as though they were in conflict with one another. That is a mistake. Our mission requires that we attract talented students and faculty members from all backgrounds and that all of these people engage vigorously in the exchange of ideas, learn from one another, offer their own perspectives, and subject both other people's views and their own to contestation and revision.

The values of free speech and inclusivity are difficult and demanding ones. They depend not only on formal policies but also on a supportive culture. Students, faculty, and staff must not only embrace the values but also reflect upon and discuss their implications for our community. For that reason, when I selected Claude Steele's *Whistling Vivaldi*, which addresses stereotyping and its impact on education, as the Princeton Pre-read three years ago, we distributed the book broadly around the campus. It provided one important opportunity for Princetonians to engage with scholarly debates about the meaning of diversity and inclusivity.

We will likewise broadly distribute this coming year's Pre-read, *Speak Freely: Why Universities Must Defend Free Speech*. Princeton's own Professor Keith Whittington authored the book, and the Princeton University Press will publish it this spring. *Speak Freely* takes its bearings neither from legal norms like the First Amendment nor from general ethical principles, but from the truth-seeking mission of Princeton and other great universities. Professor Whittington treats sympathetically and insightfully campus controversies, both at Princeton and elsewhere, that have often been misunderstood or mischaracterized by outsider commentators. I hope all of you will join me in reading his book and discussing its claims.

Free speech and inclusivity are themselves, of course, topics of scholarly debate. I would anticipate, and indeed hope, that people will disagree with aspects of Professor Whittington's argument. We will look for ways to sponsor discussions about free speech in the upcoming academic year, and we hope that academic and co-curricular units on campus will do so as well.

We will also continue to push ahead with initiatives to support inclusivity on the campus. Our "[Many Voices, One Future](#)" website chronicles progress and ongoing activity. I want to draw special attention to one area where our University has made significant strides. We have undertaken a variety of projects to diversify campus names, artwork, and symbols so that they illuminate Princeton's history in a way that is simultaneously more faithful to the facts and also more representative of the community we are today and aspire to be tomorrow. Here are a few of the steps taken over the past year:

- The Board of Trustees accepted recommendations from the Council of the Princeton University Community Committee on Naming to name the former West College as Morrison Hall in honor of Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison, to move the name of President Harold Dodds from Robertson Hall's auditorium to its atrium, and to name the auditorium in honor of Nobel Laureate Sir Arthur Lewis.

- Professor Morrison joined us to cut the ribbon for Morrison Hall in November, and the Lewis family will join us to celebrate Arthur Lewis Auditorium in April.
- Our joint student, staff, and faculty committee on campus iconography has solicited suggestions about new portraits that will be commissioned to diversify the range of Princetonians represented on our walls.
- We will soon receive recommendations from the committee that was appointed to propose a highly visible commentary on the complicated legacy of Woodrow Wilson.
- Thanks to the scholarship of Professor Martha Sandweiss and her colleagues and students, we experienced a remarkable weekend of scholarship, art, and events exploring Princeton's historical relationship to slavery.

These powerful events and activities exemplify how free speech and inclusivity intertwine and support one another in the context of Princeton University's mission. They address sensitive topics not by censoring or confining speech, but rather by forthrightly addressing questions that have too often gone unasked, by expanding the perspectives represented in our artwork and campus symbols, and by provoking further discussion. They demonstrate the power of a culture of vigorous engagement and disagreement generated by encouraging people to express and contest ideas, and by bringing talented people from diverse backgrounds into meaningful conversation with one another.

Strategic priorities and the evolving campus

Political trends and opinion polls aside, the value of higher education—at Princeton and elsewhere—remains clear and powerful. Princeton and the world's other great universities have a rare capacity to benefit society. Our strategic planning process asked how Princeton could best put that capacity to use. The resulting framework identified important opportunities for Princeton to contribute to the world by attracting and educating a greater number and variety of students, pursuing new areas of teaching and research, and enhancing the impact of the University's teaching and research by growing our commitment to service and our engagement with the innovation ecosystem. The completion of the campus plan is an important additional step in our progress toward the future. Some, though not all, of Princeton's priorities require new buildings and facilities, and the campus plan identifies where those buildings could go if we can raise the funds needed to construct them.

I hope that every member of our campus community will take a few moments to browse through the campus plan (as indicated earlier, it is available at <https://campusplan.princeton.edu/current-campus-plan>), or, for those who prefer an abridged version, the homepage story that announced the plan's completion (<https://www.princeton.edu/news/2017/12/05/princeton-issues-planning-framework-guide-campus-development>). Both the homepage story and the plan itself contain maps and diagrams that convey our thinking about the campus more quickly, vividly, and precisely than any prose that I might muster in this letter. For these purposes, at least, a picture is worth far more than 1000 words!

I do, however, want to highlight some elements of the plan that I think especially worthy of your attention. One is the vision for the Lake Campus on lands south of Lake Carnegie that the University began acquiring almost a century ago, foreseeing that its mission would eventually require their use. By thoughtfully developing this portion of its campus, Princeton can support priorities that would be difficult or impossible to accommodate on the north side of the lake. These priorities include housing more graduate students, relocating and improving athletic facilities, and facilitating collaborative ventures between the University and external partners.

The ability of the Lake Campus to accommodate joint ventures may well prove critical to Princeton's research and teaching in several departments. In computer science and other fields, faculty and students can tackle a wider and more interesting range of questions if they have access to databases, computational power, and research facilities created by private companies. That is one reason why we increasingly see top researchers in some fields moving between universities and private companies. As Princeton collaborates with partners outside academia, we will need to make sure that we preserve and extend the values that define our academic mission—but we also need to recognize that if we do not somehow accommodate such partnerships, we will erode our ability to achieve world-leading scholarly excellence in some of the most exciting fields of this century.

We anticipate that the Lake Campus will in time also provide venues where Princeton students, faculty, and staff can launch non-profit or for-profit firms that will leverage the beneficial impact to society of their ideas and discoveries. Such entrepreneurial efforts need not wait on the Lake Campus, of course. Indeed, they have been growing for some time, and in January we opened the Princeton Innovation Center, an incubator with both wet-lab and dry-lab facilities. Princeton researchers and others can rent space at the Center, launch ventures, and participate in a vibrant entrepreneurial community. The Center responds to a vision we have heard described many times over the past decade by members of our world-class faculty and others on campus and in the surrounding municipalities.

A second important element of the campus plan proposes a site south of Poe Field for the University's next two residential colleges. To use it for two colleges, we would have to relocate the University's outdoor tennis courts and softball field to the Lake Campus. We would also have to move Roberts Soccer Stadium and Myslik Field onto the practice field now situated adjacent to them; we would then construct a new practice field at another site.

A single additional residential college would enable Princeton to expand its undergraduate student body by 125 students per class, an increase of nearly 10 percent. Princeton now turns down a higher percentage of qualified applicants than at any point in our history, many of whom are every bit as qualified as those whom we accept; we can execute our mission better and with greater impact if we are able to take more of these students.

If we are able to build two new residential colleges simultaneously, we could not only expand by 125 students per class but also renovate some of our existing housing stock that is less suited to our residential life program. We would also be more able to provide opportunities for students in all of our residential colleges to live in the same college for their entire Princeton

experience, should they wish to do so. Initial conversations with alumni and friends of the University about supporting these possibilities have been encouraging, and my colleagues and I will continue our efforts to raise the funds needed to begin construction of the two colleges.

A third important feature of the plan is a proposed site, on the north side of Ivy Lane, for new academic buildings to house programs in data science (including the Department of Computer Science), engineering, and environmental studies. New construction at this location would provide Princeton with the twenty-first century facilities that are required to address some of the most intellectually interesting and urgently demanding questions of our time. The plan shows how Princeton might eventually reconstruct all of the programs now housed in the Engineering Quadrangle along Ivy Lane and adjacent sites. The plan does not, however, specify a timeline for achieving this goal. Even if donors are generous, the envisioned projects would likely span more than a decade.

By its nature, the campus plan focuses most attention on potential sites for new initiatives, but readers should bear in mind that the University must and will continue to invest in its existing programs and buildings. For example, the strategic planning Task Force on the Future of the Humanities listed a thorough renovation of the Princeton University Art Museum as one of its three highest priorities. Friends and alumni of the University have volunteered significant support for that project already. In light of their enthusiasm and leadership, I am optimistic that we will be able to proceed with this project in the near future, though our ability to do so remains contingent upon hitting fundraising targets.

As is no doubt evident already from my comments, Princeton's ability to push forward on the priorities imagined in our strategic framework and envisioned in our campus plan will depend on the success of our fundraising efforts. Preparations for the University's next capital campaign are now well underway, and I am talking about Princeton's aspirations, achievements, and needs to large gatherings and small groups around the world. When doing so, I find that the most compelling way to communicate this University's values and strengths is by focusing attention on the tremendous people who make Princeton so special. I accordingly want to close my letter this year by thanking you for all you do to advance this University's mission of teaching, research, scholarship, and service, and by encouraging you to join me in telling the world about what Princeton does and why higher education matters so urgently to our society and our future.