

State of the University Address
President John M. Beehler
August 21, 2017

I am proud to report that the State of the University is strong and getting even stronger! It is truly a great time to be a Gamecock!

It is hard to believe that our First Lady, Dr. Pamela Beehler, and I have been here at JSU for over two years. We have already had many great memories beginning with our arrival and warm reception in front of Bibb Graves Hall on our very first day. We are just as excited about being here at the Friendliest Campus in the South as we were on day one.

Our first two years have been remarkable with lots of progress because of all of your hard work and openness to change. Together, we have accomplished a lot and, as a result, JSU has gained much momentum. There is a new excitement in the air and renewed spirit of pride among our alumni and many constituents. I call this phenomenon “JSU’s Renaissance” because JSU is clearly on the move and is getting noticed nationally, regionally and locally for all of our accomplishments in a very short period of time.

These accomplishments span across all areas of the university and reflect a balance between Academics, the Arts, and Athletics. I truly believe that all three of these areas must excel for the university as a whole to excel. While I could spend over an hour detailing all of JSU’s accomplishments over the past two years, I would like to give you an abbreviated version so we can celebrate the major accomplishments together. It is truly a time for celebration!

In *Academic Affairs and Student Success*, we have:

- Reorganized academic affairs substantially from four colleges to six schools where academic disciplines logically fit together synergistically enabling enhanced collaboration, marketability and growth.
- Been recognized nationally as a top producer of Fulbright Scholars with three - more than any other university in Alabama.
- Enhanced our academic facilities with about 30 classrooms redesigned across campus to facilitate active-learning spaces with state-of-the-art technology, a new Finance Lab for Business and Industry, and the new

Nursing Simulation and Respiratory Skills Labs for Health Professions and Wellness, among others.

- Renovated Sparkman and Daugette Halls into modern residence halls.
- Developed new niche academic programs including the Doctorate in Nursing Practice, MS in Social Work, MS in Occupational Therapy, BS in Forensics and BS in Respiratory Therapy, among others.
- Attained numerous reaccreditations for disciplines across campus.
- Revamped our Commencement Exercises with numerous new bells and whistles and new traditions, including Ringing of the Bell and Singing I'll Fly Away.
- Established a new Center for Excellence for Veterans which greatly expands services available to veteran students.
- Implemented the Transfer Pathways Program to provide a seamless transition between community colleges and JSU, thereby enhancing enrollment of transfer students.
- Improved our incoming freshman student ACT scores and GPAs to all-time highs.
- Improved our student retention and graduation rates to all-time highs.
- Achieved a NCLEX Pass Rate for our Nursing students to almost 94% which is well above the national and state averages and better than Alabama and Auburn.
- Developed and implemented our first Strategic Enrollment Plan resulting in JSU's first increase in enrollment in six years.

In *Music, Arts and Drama*, we have:

- Built a new Marching Southerners Practice Facility with artificial turf, lights, fencing, a building, a tower and parking – named for Mr. Jim Bennett, former Chair of the Board of Trustees.
- Had our first annual JAMfest (Jacksonville Arts & Music Festival) this past spring.
- Renovated the Art Gallery.
- Displayed award-winning student art in the President's House.
- Partnered with Jacksonville Opera Theatre and Oxford Performing Arts Center to produce an excellent production of Phantom of the Opera with rave reviews.

- The Marching Southerners and Ballerinas performed for the 75th Anniversary of Pearl Harbor.
- Performed many excellent musical performances, drama productions and artistic displays.

In *Athletics*, we have:

- Combined student-athlete success both academically and in sports competitions with 3.1 GPA or more each year and conference championships and NCAA appearances in Football (both years including National Championship Game), Basketball (first trip to March Madness), Softball (both years), and Golf.
- Coach of the Year Awards for Football (John Grass – OVC Coach of the Year both years and National Coach of the Year two years ago) and Softball (Jana McGinnis – OVC Coach of the Year both years).
- Cheerleader and Cocky national success (5th nationally both years for cheerleaders and 5th and 2nd place nationally for Cocky).
- New Adidas Contract and new Sports Medicine Contract with nationally-acclaimed Andrews Sports Medicine.
- New Baseball Stadium Project.
- New Scoreboard Project for multiple outside sports.
- New artificial turf, wall wrap, and scoreboard for Burgess-Snow Football Stadium.
- Renovated Pete Mathews Coliseum along many dimensions.
- Renovated the Tennis Complex.

In *Finance, Administration, and Operations*, we have:

- Refunded our bonds at lower rates resulting in almost \$8M in savings available for capital projects.
- Issued \$10M of bonds to finance the Sparkman and Doughtie Hall renovations.
- Planned and implemented the many capital projects and improvements on campus.
- Implemented a new transparent, collaborative process for budgeting and setting tuition and fees.
- Negotiated an exceptional Pouring and Vending Rights Contract with Coca-Cola with three times the value of the previous contract.

- Partnered with the JSU Foundation in an innovative public-private partnership (P3) arrangement for our new Fitness & Wellness Center Project.
- Greatly improved both speed of and access to JSU's wireless network across campus.
- Improved the quality of many things, including our campus security, campus signage, parking pass system, motor pool, phone system, mail processing, cyber-security, risk management, emergency preparedness, financial processes, and campus bookstore and other auxiliary services.
- Significantly improved our Human Resources policies, processes and infrastructure to facilitate hiring, developing, and enhancing the opportunities for advancement and benefits for our people.

In *Advancement, Community Engagement and Government Relations*, we have:

- Raised the largest gift in JSU history of \$2M for the naming of the new Baseball Stadium.
- Increased our Capital Campaign fundraising to \$27M – a \$9M increase in two years.
- Improved our website and social media capabilities to reach our target audience.
- Maintained our base budget from the Legislature and added two key new line items: Center for Manufacturing Support and Center for Best Practices in Law Enforcement.
- Partnered to help establish the Freedom Riders National Park in Anniston.
- Visited 9 out of 11 counties in our region with the President and his outreach team as part of our Regional Stewardship Initiative to unify NE Alabama and develop its first Strategic Plan.
- Worked with the JSU Board of Trustees to amend and improve its by-laws to facilitate enhanced governance and to restructure the Board Meeting format.

As you can see from this abbreviated summary of our accomplishments together over the past two years, we have a lot to be proud of and JSU is indeed on the move. However, we have only just begun and have a lot more to do to bring JSU to its full potential. Luckily, and most importantly, we now have a roadmap to our future success: our new Strategic Plan that we have developed together with all our constituent groups.

LINK TO STRATEGIC PLAN VIDEO

Recently, I attended a seminar for relatively new Presidents and they asked all of us to answer the following question:

How will your university (Jacksonville State University) be different five years from now due to your leadership?

Here are my answers:

- Positive long-run enrollment growth trend
- JSU will be a Carnegie Community Engaged Campus known for its regional stewardship and how it has helped Northeast Alabama improve, grow and prosper.
- Improved brand recognition for JSU due to improvements, success, and our marketing and PR efforts.
- Improved facilities and infrastructure – including a significant reduction of deferred maintenance.
- High student placement rates (90%+ for graduates across all disciplines in jobs and graduate school).
- Significantly improved relations with external stakeholders, enhanced fundraising, and a more philanthropic culture for JSU.
- New niche academic and student success programs with outdated, less relevant and unsuccessful programs phased out.

The good news is that all of these are consistent with our new Strategic Plan. The key is that for this vision to become a reality, it is important that we all take this vision to heart and focus on achieving it together.

In conclusion, I would like to make a few very important points:

First, JSU is committed to diversity across the spectrum. As the “Friendliest Campus in the South,” we are a welcoming and inclusive community to all irrespective of their race, gender, place of origin, religion, sexual orientation, political affiliation, etc. I would ask each and every one of you to live this commitment and to be open to the ideas and perspectives of all. A great university is a place of open dialogue to all perspectives. We welcome debate and we respect and consider others opinions in making our own decisions as to what is correct or right. There is simply too much intolerance and hate in the world today and we do not want intolerance and hate at this hallowed place, this special university.

Respect one another and live every day our motto as the “Friendliest Campus in the South.” Always choose love and respect over hate.

Second, we must all live the theme of my inaugural address: JSU TIES. We must be Transformative, Innovative and Engaged for Success! We must transform our students into educated, ethical professionals and engaged global citizens. We must transform our region and be committed to its development and success economically, culturally, socially, educationally, etc. (i.e., Regional Stewardship). We must transform our University. These transformations are not possible unless we become more innovative and unafraid to try new things and to be open to change and new ideas. Finally, we must be fully engaged with our students, our community and our region and each other for this all to lead to success! Please ask yourself this question: What have I done to make JSU more Transformative, Innovative and Engaged for Success? It must start with each one of us and what we do every day.

Lastly, enrollment is everyone’s responsibility! If each of us brought in one additional student, we would never have an enrollment problem. Please do not think that enrollment is only the responsibility of our professional student recruiters. Everything you do every day at JSU has an impact on enrollment. The quality of student learning experiences and interactions with faculty both within and outside of the classroom is paramount. Customer service and how we treat visitors, students, and each other is critically important to our future enrollment and success. Please go the extra mile for our prospective students and their families, our current students, our alumni and for each other. It is only through these efforts that we can truly claim that we are the “Friendliest Campus in the South.” Please ask yourself this question: What have I done to recruit and retain students and what can I do in the future?

Another great incentive for delivering world-class customer service, quality learning experiences, and recruiting and retaining students is that our budget is highly dependent on tuition and fees (funded about two-thirds by tuition and fees). As a result, future employee raises are highly dependent on enrollment. There is a significantly greater chance of raises if there is an increase in enrollment.

For the upcoming fiscal year, I plan on giving employees at least a 2% raise due to all the progress we have made together.

Let’s have a great year! It is the Year of the Gamecock. Go Gamecocks!