

Joint Finance Committee presentation

2:15 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 5, 2026, JFC Hearing Room, Legislative Hall, Dover

[As prepared for delivery]



Good afternoon, Senator Paradee, Representative Williams and other members of the Joint Finance Committee.

I am grateful for this opportunity to present the University of Delaware's operating appropriation request for the FY27 state budget. Several members of the UD team are here with me today to answer any questions you may have.

I came to the University of Delaware in 2022 to serve as the University's provost. I found exactly what I was looking for:

- a driving focus on the intersection of research and education so that as an institution we can take on the most critical challenges;
- a strong, interconnected community with a fabric that entwines the critical sectors of higher education, business, manufacturing, government, and public service; and
- a dedication to engaged service at the local, state, regional, national and international levels.

This is indeed a very special institution in a very special state. And I am grateful for the partnership that has been forged, and for the support from the General Assembly and governors over the years.

Any such partnership only works when the needs of both parties are met. Rather than starting from an articulation of *our* needs, this request reflects UD starting from a position of asking what the state needs, then determining how we can help.

Since July, when I stepped into the role of interim president, and now continuing as president, a top priority for me has been getting to better know the state and its needs.



And so, I have spent the past seven months listening to, talking with, and visiting Delawareans throughout all three counties.

- I recently had the pleasure of meeting with many of you and also members of the Bond Committee and other state legislators from southern Delaware
- I met with the mayors of Lewes, Newark and Wilmington and we focused on the issues that we can partner on, such as teacher preparation and medical education; housing; and poverty and literacy, respectively.
- I met with legislators and state officials and we identified how we could partner together, such as presenting a “Know Your Rights” panel with Attorney General Jennings and Representative Gorman last fall.
- I met with our federal delegation, and my meeting with Congresswoman McBride consisted of a discussion of federal action impacts, identification of shared priorities and a sidebar into political history.
- I have also been meeting with members of the Newark City Council and will be attending the city council meeting on Feb 9th.
- And I will be participating in the inaugural Lewes State of the Community forum on Feb. 17th alongside Mayor Amy Marasco, Cape Henlopen Superintendent Jenny Nauman and Beebe Healthcare President and CEO David Tam. I’m looking forward to sharing some ideas and getting feedback and input from the community there.

I will note that I do not consider these meetings to be meet-and-greets that are now completed. Our effective work together means getting to know each other and aligning our goals and plans and outcomes. And so, I look forward to our future conversations. I am grateful to Rhett Ruggerio, Albert Shields, David Bentz and Caitlin Olsen for their help in creating and fostering these connections, and to all of you for saying yes to these meetings.

I have also valued the time I’ve spent with community members. Over the summer, I was thrilled to spend time at the Delaware State Fair. I’ve cheered on our Fightin’ Blue Hens with fellow fans at the 68 Ventures Bowl in Alabama and at other tailgates, games and matches. I celebrated the newest inductees of the Delaware Women’s Hall of Fame, I have welcomed new business leaders to our Delaware community, and I participated on a panel to support women

returning to education with a fresh start, as well as the Women's Leadership Conference hosted by the New Castle County Chamber of Commerce.

In all these conversations, it's clear that trust and understanding are critical components of the relationship between UD and the state.

That's why I want to address recent news stories you may have seen about a set of UD research projects on the legacy of enslavement at the University and Black history of the Newark community.

Let me start with the background:

Near the end of the last academic year, as part of a broader review of program websites, a number of websites were taken offline. One of those websites also housed academic materials and publications, and those materials came down with the site. This was not intentional and not a decision to remove academic work.

That was a mistake.

Those materials and publications were always meant to remain online and publicly accessible. Prior to this week, we had been working with faculty to restore access to the material, but we did not move quickly enough to make that happen. We should have had this done before the start of the semester, and we mobilized this week to get this done.

We understand the community's frustration. Simply put, we could have — and should have — done better.

Most importantly, I want to emphasize that this was not a decision to remove or suppress academic work. Our commitment to academic freedom and an inclusive campus has not changed — and will not change.

This commitment is absolutely essential to us; it's central to who we are and how we work and what we do. We will not let external pressure determine what our faculty can research, what our students can study, or what history we choose to preserve and share. That is not who we are. We will always navigate the federal landscape responsibly, but we will not abandon our values in the process.

So let me tell you what we are doing now for the long term to show our commitment to these values. We are going to continue to support scholarship that explores the full history of our university and our community. We are going to continue building a campus where every student from every part of this state has what they need to succeed. And we are going to do the hard work of making sure that our university reflects and serves all of Delaware, because that is our mission and our obligation.

I talk about this today in a budget meeting because it matters. It matters to people throughout Delaware, because virtually everyone in our state has at least one connection — sometimes *many* — to the University.



More than 8,500 Delawareans are enrolled as students at the undergraduate, graduate or professional level.

We also have about 50,000 alumni throughout the State — healthcare workers, educators, social workers, entrepreneurs, business leaders, farmers, performing artists, engineers, scientists, public servants and so many more.

So many of our faculty and staff are lifelong residents with deep roots in Delaware and are incredibly proud to be here, in Delaware. I held a series of townhalls last fall, and one question I asked was “who are we?” as an institution. Over and over and over again, I heard about the importance of serving Delawareans, and how that defines our enduring mission.



This service takes many forms:

Thousands of older Delawareans are taking classes through our Osher Lifelong Learning Institute — one of the largest and most active Osher chapters in the nation.

Tens of thousands of Delawareans benefit from UD's Cooperative Extension, our health clinics and our research in science, agriculture, corporate governance, public policy, aquaculture, community resilience and many other fields.

A different form of service is seen in our role as an engine of economic development within the State.



We just completed a new economic impact study that shows UD provides a strong return on the state's investment every year.

For example:

- The University has a nearly \$2.4 billion impact on Delaware's economy.
- Spending by the University also generates more than \$1.2 billion in labor income and supports more than 15,000 jobs in Delaware.
- And as a result of their University of Delaware degrees, our alumni earn an additional \$1.1 billion a year to support their families and communities.



So, while UD has had a significant and lasting social and economic impact on Delawareans, I think we can do more.

We should no longer be satisfied with our impact on the state being a byproduct of what we do as a university but instead make addressing the state's needs an intentional focus of our work.

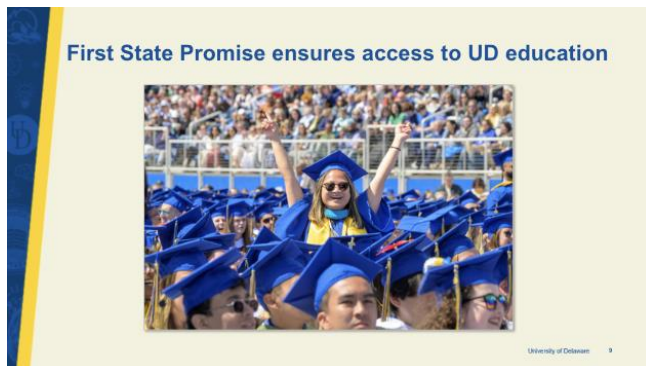
As such, we structured our FY27 appropriation request to align with what I have heard in months of conversations and meetings and with the priorities that Governor Meyer has laid out:

- Ensuring affordable access to world-class educational opportunities for Delawareans;
- Increasing the number of healthcare workers to meet the needs of Delaware's growing and aging population; and
- Training more K-12 teachers to educate the next generation of Delawareans.

I would like to take you through each element of our request.



The first one focuses on enabling the success of our Delawarean students by providing them with essential financial aid.



We are requesting a \$2.5 million increase in our operating appropriation for UD's First State Promise program to address the financial need of Delawareans, which has outpaced state funding support.

First State Promise is an example of UD's commitment to provide an affordable education for all Delawareans. It gives families a predictable financial pathway for paying for their students' education, each year helping about 1,600 students and their families.

About two-thirds of those students come from families earning less than \$75,000 a year. First State Promise covers full tuition and fees, while students below \$35,000 a year also receive room and board. The number of students in this program has grown over the last three years, and we are grateful to the state for its support in making a college education possible for these families.

In this current academic year, the State allocated \$7.5 million toward First State Promise. The University provided an additional \$20 million from our own funds to cover financial aid to those students.

Through First State Promise, we also provide partial aid to students from families earning between \$75,000 and \$100,000. The University provided an additional \$5 million this year to support these families.

Without additional support for this important program, UD will need to cover the growing financial aid needs, and that means less available to spend on academic advising, tutoring and co-curricular activities to keep students enrolled and on track to graduation. We need your help to fulfill the promise of an affordable UD education for all students in our state.

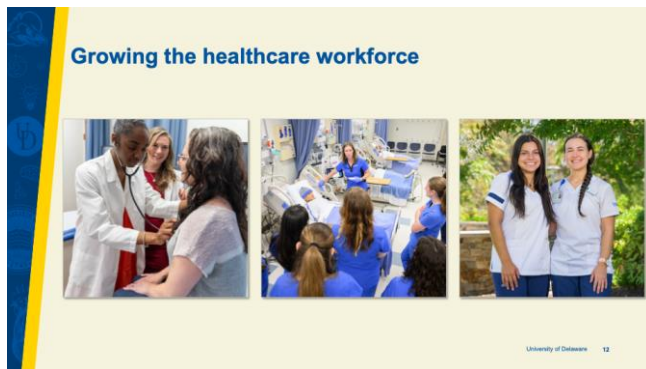
We're also focused on addressing some of the most pressing needs of communities in southern Delaware, which brings me to the next part of our request.



As the major R1 land-grant, sea-grant, space-grant institution in the state, we should be more fully present across the whole state. And our Commitment to Southern Delaware provides a concrete set of actions to live up to this expectation.

First, we want to build and expand programs in southern Delaware to help address the State's critical shortage of nurses and teachers.

Let's discuss nursing first.



Rural communities in Kent and Sussex counties face persistent gaps in access to healthcare. There simply aren't enough skilled workers to meet the needs of the growing, aging and vulnerable populations there. The economic impact study I mentioned earlier noted that Delaware will have almost 100 more nursing job openings than qualified candidates each year over the next decade.

In the past several years, we've developed and strengthened programs to increase the healthcare workforce in Delaware. Brandywine School District middle schoolers engage in simulation activities with nursing students, and high school students can take health sciences classes for UD credit. We've added advanced programs in pediatric primary care, adult gerontology, epidemiology, medical & molecular sciences and biotechnology. With the state's financial support, speech and language pathology and social work, with additional interest in midwifery.

Our excellent undergraduate nursing curriculum is ranked among the top 6% nationally, and it's one of UD's most popular programs. This year, we had more than 3,000 applicants to the nursing program, but we only have the capacity to enroll about 170 first-year students. I am proud that our acceptance rate into this highly sought program is higher for Delawareans (at 43%), compared to our out-of-state students (24%).

To build the healthcare workforce, we launched the School of Nursing Bayhealth Scholars Program, now in its second year, which provides senior nursing students with a \$10,000 stipend and clinical experience at Bayhealth. In return, they are required to work at Bayhealth for two years after graduation.

We are also working to create a Nurse Practitioner Scholar Program in Southern Delaware through our partnerships with healthcare systems in the area, such as Beebe and Bayhealth. The program would immerse advanced students in full-time, two-year clinical training experiences that combine intensive mentorship, site-specific education and post-graduation employment pathways.

By embedding this program in the most vulnerable communities, we can increase healthcare access for residents while also increasing the likelihood that students will become integral members of those communities and choose to continue serving there after graduation.

This program also complements the State's proposal for a grant through the federal Rural Health Transformation Program. We're proud to support that proposal through our research, our partnerships and our other projects that are focused on better health outcomes, greater economic resilience and more equitable access to care.



We want to take a similar approach to increase the number of teachers in Delaware. While the State has made admirable progress recently in addressing the teacher shortage, we know that there is more we can do together.

UD is proud to prepare so many of Delaware's K-12 teachers. We have made significant investments in recruiting Delaware high school students into the teaching profession, with our pipeline approach resulting in a 45% increase in applications from Delawareans for next year.

Also, about 80% of our Delaware resident students who graduate with an education degree stay to teach in Delaware each year, and many non-Delawareans also come to UD for their degree and stay after graduation to begin their careers here.

One of our most successful initiatives is the Teacher Residency Program. Now in its sixth year, the residency program provides a yearlong, paid position in a Delaware public high-needs school. So far, 91 students have completed the program, with 80 of them continuing to work in a Delaware school after graduation. In fact, the latest hiring survey by the state Department of Education found that districts commonly recruit new educators from among their student teachers and from those in yearlong residency programs.

We want to leverage the success of these types of grow-your-own initiatives. Our proposal is to build on our current two-year elementary and middle school teacher education associate degree program to deliver a bachelor's degree in teacher education in southern Delaware.

This would include delivering the "third year" of coursework after the associate degree in southern Delaware. Students would then enter a teacher-residency program in their fourth year in the southern part of the state. The program would ultimately lead to a full bachelor's degree to ensure graduates are qualified to teach in Delaware.

Funding critical nursing and teaching programs



Nursing

- 8 scholarships — \$308K



Teaching

- 18 scholarships — \$692K
- 5 education faculty members to support the associate degree program — \$500K

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Together, these proposals to increase the pipeline of nurses and teachers will make a significant difference for the communities in southern Delaware.

To make them a reality, we need your assistance. This portion of our request totals \$1.5 million, which breaks down to:

- \$308,000 for eight scholarships in nursing
- \$692,000 for 18 scholarships in teacher preparation
- \$500,000 to support five education faculty members to deliver instruction in the third-year curriculum in southern Delaware

The scholarships are essential to remove financial barriers for students who want to pursue these careers. These scholarships are independent of our First State Promise scholarships and will be used to directly recruit and enroll students into these specific programs.

In order to expand these programs, we also need to invest in our physical assets in southern Delaware — namely, build affordable student and workforce housing, as well as classroom and convening spaces.

Investing in UD's resources in southern Delaware



Public-private partnership to develop the Dalber Residence Complex in Lewes



Improvements to Sharp Research Station and space for associate pathways and Osher Lifelong Learning Institute

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These projects are integrated with our operating request and appear in our capital appropriation request. I will close by touching on them briefly so that you can see how all these initiatives are essential to our broader Commitment to Southern Delaware.

One project involves the Franklin C. Daiber Residence Complex near the Hugh Sharp Research Station in Lewes. Daiber is home to undergraduate students who study at the Sharp Research Station and doctoral students in the School of Marine Science and Public Policy, some of whom have partners and spouses who reside with them at the complex.

The complex is dated and insufficient to support the expansions in our academic programs. We are pursuing a public-private partnership that could develop the site to include a mix of affordable student and workforce housing. Our capital appropriation request will help with site planning, programming and infrastructure updates in coordination with the City of Lewes.

We're also hoping to build classroom and convening spaces on the Hugh Sharp Research Station itself.

Because of the site's current infrastructure, we don't have the size or spaces needed to offer coursework in some of the critical industries in Sussex County, such as medical education and teacher training. We also need a permanent facility to support our Osher Lifelong Learning Institute which is housed in cramped rented space, and our associate pathways – currently in Dover and Georgetown. We have had multiple conversations already with officials in Lewes and this effort reflects our partnership. And we are at the initial stages of exploring a parallel effort to create classroom spaces at Carvel and the Paradee Centers.

Our capital appropriation requests would be used for infrastructure improvements at the Sharp site, including upgrading utilities, roads, signage, traffic control, curbs, drainage, and street lighting.

These capital investments will help us to advance additional state interests, such as developing the aquaculture industry and building out workforce needs in the blue economy.



Finally, you asked us to provide an update on the impact of federal actions on our research operations. Simply put, it is significant.

So far, we have seen the federal government terminate 47 research grants totaling \$36.7 million. We've been able to get six of them reinstated, but that still leaves a \$34 million impact on our research enterprise.

That impact threatens the ongoing work of 11 postdoctoral researchers and 87 graduate students. Their research is helping to advance discoveries and innovations in critical fields, including energy, agriculture, technology, health, education and more.

Fortunately, through philanthropy and other funding sources, we've created continuity grants to support faculty and students affected by the terminations. Without that help, many of those graduate students would be unable to complete their degrees.

But it's not a long-term solution. That's why your continued support for our operating requests is so important, especially this year.



As we've shown, our appropriation requests help advance the state's priorities in key areas — ensuring that Delawareans have affordable access to UD's high-quality educational opportunities and increasing the healthcare and K-12 teaching workforce, especially in southern Delaware. These are not simply investments in the University of Delaware — they're investments in a strong future for our entire state.

I'll close by thanking you for being such incredible partners to the university over the years. We are proud that we can build upon this solid partnership to work together for a strong, vibrant, and healthy state, where UD emphasizes as a starting point the needs of the state.

Thank you for your time and attention today, and we'll be happy to answer any questions you might have.

President Laura Carlson presentation
to Joint Finance Committee

February 5, 2026



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