

## University of Delaware President Dennis Assanis

### Presentation to Delaware Joint Finance Committee — Feb. 3, 2022

#### WELCOME

Good afternoon, **Senator Paradee**, **Representative Carson** and members of the Joint Finance Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the FY23 operating appropriation for the University of Delaware. We appreciate your time and attention today.

I have with me several key members of our academic and administrative team who are integral to advancing the opportunities we are discussing with you today so we can answer any specific questions you might have.

Before we begin, I want to express my concern — both personally and on behalf of the University of Delaware — about the recent threats at Delaware State University and other HBCUs. These incidents are extremely disturbing to everyone in higher education. Just as UD and DSU collaborate on multiple academic and research initiatives, we are absolutely committed to working together to stand up to racism and to live out our shared values of diversity, equity and inclusion on our campuses. Our Police Department also assisted with the response to the threats. I spoke with President Tony Allen this week to express our full support of him and everyone at Delaware State.

Turning now to today's hearing, I want you to know that the University values our close relationship with the State of Delaware, and we are grateful for the ongoing support and assistance that Gov. Carney and the General Assembly have provided.

**Prioritizing the community's health and safety**

- 100,000 COVID-19 tests on campus
  - \$5M to process tests in UD research lab
- >90% of students and employees vaccinated
- 620,000 masks purchased since March 2020
  - \$388,000 cost
  - Includes 417,000 KN95 masks being distributed through spring
- 75,000 rapid antigen tests
  - \$810,000 cost
- 80% of courses delivered in-person or hybrid format



UNIVERSITY OF  
DELAWARE

I want to start with a reflection on the pandemic which has presented all of us with unprecedented challenges. During the past two years, the University has navigated an ever-growing list of issues related to COVID-19: protecting the health and safety of students, faculty, staff and surrounding communities, innovating new ways to work and learn, ensuring the financial stability of our institution, and on and on. I am proud of the hard work and resilience of UD's students, faculty and staff during this time. Let me give you a few numbers that help tell the story:

- Since September 2020, we have conducted more than 120,000 COVID-19 PCR tests on campus through our surveillance program. We run those tests with our own staff in our own research laboratory, and this effort has cost us more than \$5 million in supplies and labor.
- More than 90% of our students and employees have been fully vaccinated; most have also received a booster.
- Since March 2020, we've bought about 620,000 masks at a cost of more than \$388,000. This includes the recent purchase of about 417,000 KN95 masks that we've begun distributing. Our widespread use of masks aligns with CDC guidance as we continue to cultivate responsible health and safety practices among our campus community.
- We have also purchased 75,000 rapid antigen tests at a cost of \$810,000 to provide a supplemental or back-up testing resource in our multi-layered strategy to mitigate the spread of the virus in our community.
- About 90% of our spring semester classes will be taught in person or in a hybrid format. Live, in-person interactions are critical to support the mental health and wellness of our students and the broader academic community.

Whatever the pandemic brings next, we'll take the necessary steps to ensure that the University fulfills its land-grant mission of providing the continuous education, research and services that Delaware needs for a strong future.



Our commitment to provide an excellent investment opportunity for the state will never stop.

Every time I meet with this committee, I'm so proud to share news about our students — including more than 8,600 Delawarean undergraduate and graduate students this year — who are achieving amazing things in our classrooms, laboratories and the greater Delaware community. And 50,000 UD alumni are living and working in our state, including thousands of healthcare workers and educators, as well as eight members of Gov. Carney's cabinet and 27 members of the General Assembly.

In addition, UD's expert faculty and researchers continue to discover solutions to the many challenges facing Delaware, from protecting the environment and providing sustainable sources of energy to helping communities and businesses thrive and grow.

As always, our commitment to developing a competitive workforce and driving economic development continues to evolve and grow. We are building UD's Science, Technology and Advanced Research Campus as a 21<sup>st</sup> century hub of innovation and entrepreneurship. As I've shared before, for every dollar the state invests in UD, we generate \$23 in the Delaware economy.

This year, our state is at a critical inflection point. While we are continuing to deal with COVID-19 surges, we need to be investing in our future to make our society healthier, more educated and competitive, and thus more sustainable. As we emerge from the pandemic, there are multiple challenges that must be addressed, especially in healthcare and education. These are challenges that, if we don't deal with them together now, will only grow larger and more complex in the years ahead.

The University of Delaware is uniquely positioned to help meet these challenges in our state. Today, I would like to present to you several proposals to address these critical societal needs, and I hope we can work together to identify most effective ways of investing state resources for our post-pandemic future.

## HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE

The first area of concern is Delaware's healthcare workforce.



Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, our state was facing a shortage of nurses and other healthcare workers. This was especially worrisome because of Delaware's aging population, particularly in Kent and Sussex counties.

Over the past several years, UD has worked to address this issue through several initiatives.

We've developed pipeline programs in Delaware high schools so students can take health science classes for credit. This also encourages students, especially those from underserved backgrounds, to choose UD and major in health sciences.

We've added advanced programs, such as Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner. UD has the only Nursing PhD program in Delaware, which is essential to growing our capacity to educate the next generation of nurses. Also, UD offers an accelerated program for baccalaureate-prepared students to receive their nursing degree in 18 months.

In other areas, we've added programs in Epidemiology, Speech Pathology, Medical and Molecular Sciences, and Biotechnology. These programs contribute to the whole healthcare workforce and help the state develop its biomedical industry. UD students provide much-needed support in Delaware's clinical sites during their training and part-time work. Also, UD now has several clinics that are open to the public to help meet their primary care, physical therapy and speech needs while also providing educational, research and clinical experience for our students and faculty.

Still, the emergence and spread of COVID-19 stretched Delaware's healthcare workforce to its limits. The Omicron surge of the past two months was only the most recent stressor on the system.



Last month, Gov. Carney and the Delaware Hospital Association reached out to see how UD could help, and in the past few weeks, more than 200 students from the College of Health Sciences have stepped up. More than 50 senior nursing students and 60 trained laboratory sciences students are working with Delaware hospitals in critical-needs areas. Students in speech pathology, behavioral health, nutrition, physical therapy and pre-med have also volunteered to in multiple ways.

We're proud of our students who volunteered in the state's time of need, and we're grateful that we could help. But this is a dramatic reminder that we need a long-term solution: We must increase the number of nurses and other healthcare workers in Delaware. We must invest in the future.

We see this moment as a critical opportunity to expand our nursing program. It is one of our most popular majors because we offer an excellent curriculum, and we're ranked [among](#)

[the top 10 programs in a 100-mile region](#). We get more than 2,500 applicants to our nursing program each year, but we only have capacity to enroll about 170 first-year students.

I want to point out here that we admit 37% of the Delawareans who apply to our nursing program, far above our out-of-state admission rate of only 17%. Delawareans are much more likely to be admitted to our nursing program than non-residents.

Our nursing students take their courses in small classrooms and labs taught by highly trained professors, and they receive extensive hands-on experience on campus and at Christiana Care, Beebe, Bayhealth and other clinical settings. This is also true for students in many other health-related fields. Frankly, this kind of education is extremely expensive.


**Expanding capacity in key academic areas: Healthcare**

**Request:** \$7.3M to expand capacity to graduate more workers in high-needs health sciences

**Proposal:**

- Add faculty and staff to increase the number of graduates in high-needs health science professions
- Working with Beebe and Bayhealth to increase number of clinical placements in southern Delaware

**Impact:** Graduate an additional 40 epidemiologists, 20 nurse practitioners, 80 nurses (MSN), 75 nurses (RN to BSN), 30 accelerated nursing graduates, 45 undergraduate medical/molecular science grads, 30 graduate medical/molecular science grads, 25 speech pathologists



UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

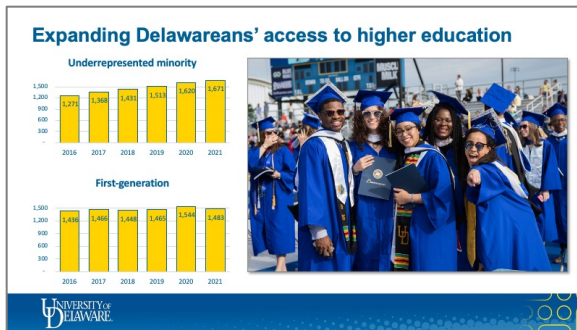
We would like to ask for your financial support to add essential faculty and staff so we can graduate about 345 more students in nursing, epidemiology, speech pathology, and medical and molecular sciences — all rapidly growing and critical areas for our future. We estimate the cost for this expansion to be about \$7.3 million that we hope you can support from state resources and/or ARPA funds.

Several years ago, we developed a speech pathology program at the state's request, which has helped fill the need for these specialists in Delaware. Last year, 80% of the graduates from this program took jobs in Delaware. But this is the first time we are requesting additional funding to expand our teaching capacity in nursing and these other areas. In parallel, we are already working with Beebe and Bayhealth to increase the number of clinical placements in southern Delaware.

As the past two years have clearly demonstrated, Delaware needs more healthcare workers, and we need to invest now to address near-term shortages and to grow Delaware's workforce pipeline for the future.

## EDUCATION

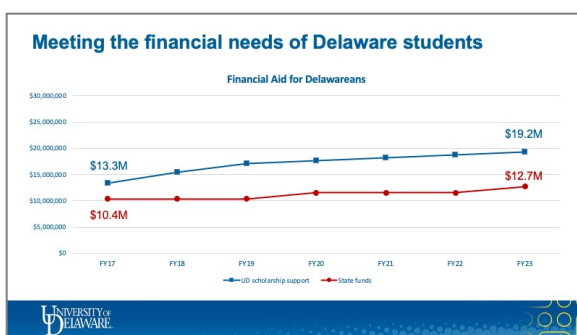
The second area of concern that I would like to call your attention to is education, and the University can help address this issue in several ways.



UD has always been committed to expanding access to higher education for Delawareans, particularly those from low-income, first-generation and underrepresented minority families. Education benefits the entire state, since residents who hold bachelor's degrees earn [an average of \\$32,000 a year more than those with only a high school degree](#). This translates into more money circulating in the economy, more people who want to live and work in Delaware, greater tax revenue for the state and lower demand on services like Medicaid.

We work to keep tuition and fees affordable for our students, and UD's costs are among the lowest compared to our peer institutions. However, we are concerned that the financial hardships created by the pandemic are putting college out of reach for too many Delaware students and their families. And this is a trend across the country.

Over the past two years, more Delaware students have come to UD with greater financial need because their family incomes decreased due to job loss or a reduction in working hours. Providing these students with additional financial aid has put tremendous pressure on the University's resources, which were already being stretched thin. We all want to support the educational goals of Delawareans, so I must again ask for your support to help us keep pace with the financial needs of Delaware students. We're simply not where we need to be yet.

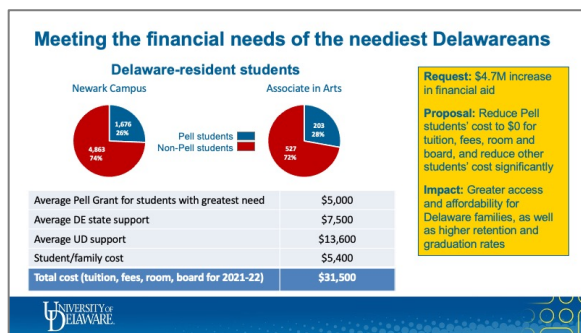


Since FY17, UD has increased its financial aid for Delawareans by 45%, while the state has increased its scholarship funding by 23%. This leaves us with a significant gap in funding for the neediest Delawareans. This trend is not sustainable. We strive to make UD affordable for every Delawarean, regardless of income level, but we can't do it alone.

This is why we developed the First State Promise Program for students seeking a four-year, bachelor's degree. It is designed to be comparable to other states' financial aid programs that provide support to their residents based on the student's family income.

First State Promise replaces the program we called the Commitment to Delawareans, which used a complex formula that focused on student loans. First State Promise is simpler for families to understand so they can plan for their educational costs.

Under the First State Promise, students whose families earn less than \$75,000 a year will pay no tuition and fees. That figure means that about half of the families in Delaware will qualify; those above that income level may receive other forms of aid.




Among the families earning less than \$75,000 a year, many students qualify for federal Pell grants, which go to the neediest students. Those grants cover about 16% of the cost of education for low-income Delawareans, with the state providing resources to cover another 24%. UD covers about 43%. That leaves 17% — or about \$5,400 — for the student each year. For many families in this situation, that financial obligation presents an obstacle that is simply too high to overcome.

We are very grateful that last year's one-time Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund was able to help so many students pay for tuition, housing or food costs during this challenging time brought on by the pandemic. At this point, though, we need other ways to provide this crucial financial support to our students.

We are requesting \$4.7 million from the state to fully fund the First State Promise program so that we can bring Pell students' financial obligation to zero. This will also significantly reduce the obligations for Delaware students who need some financial help but don't qualify for Pell Grants. This effort would be ramped up over a four-year period, starting with current students and then adding each new freshman class.

We are grateful that Gov. Carney has already included \$1.3 million toward this request in his recommended budget. We look forward to working with you and Gov. Carney to help us expand this program to help more Delawareans.

**Building on the successful Associate in Arts Program**



**Our AAP students**

- 28% Pell
- 19% low-income
- 35% first-generation
- 36% URM

**AAP's pathway**

- 61% earn AA within 3 years
- 88% of completers transition to Newark campus
- 78% of those students earn bachelor's degree

**Request:** \$1.4M increase in base funding for AAP

**Proposal:** Support new AAP space and programs in Wilmington, plus upgrade programs in Dover & Georgetown

**Impact:** Greater access and support programs to build engagement, leading to higher retention and graduation rates

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

## SEED AND AAP

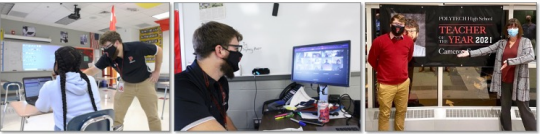
We are also grateful that Gov. Carney is recommending a \$1.6 million increase for the expanded SEED program, which now covers up to 10 semesters of education and allows non-traditional students to benefit, as well.

The state's SEED program is an important part of UD's Associate in Arts Program, or AAP, which serves a high number of Delawareans from low-income, first-generation or underrepresented minority populations.

AAP students are fully UD students who take classes taught by UD faculty in Wilmington, Dover or Georgetown. Class sizes are small, so students get more individual attention from instructors. More than 60% of them earn their associate degree within three years, which is nearly double the national average. About nine out of 10 students then transition to the Newark campus, where all their credits are accepted. And 78% of those students go on to earn their bachelor's degree. With the expansion of the SEED program, it will now cover these student's junior year on UD's Newark campus.

The program offers a significant opportunity with great value for these students, and over the past decade more than 2,000 Delawareans have started their education as AAP students and then earned their bachelor's degree in a variety of fields. Many alumni remain in Delaware to live and work in their communities.

**Strengthening Delaware through the AAP**



"The [Associate in Arts] program really set me up for success. It allowed me to adapt to college in a way that fit my needs. It's a smaller program — not just smaller class sizes but individual attention from advisors and professors who made sure I was staying on track."

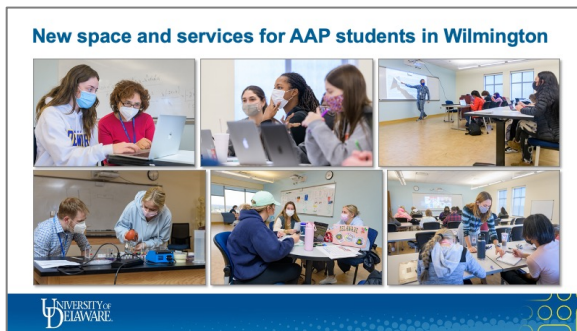
*Cameron Sweeney, BA 2011  
Polytech High School Teacher of the Year 2021*

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

One of them is Cameron Sweeney, whom you see here.

He graduated from Polytech High School, earned his bachelor's degree from UD in 2011 and now teaches social studies at Polytech. We're very proud that Cameron was named the school's Teacher of the Year last year.

Now we are working to build on the successes of this program.



You see here several photos of our new space for AAP students in the Community Education Building in downtown Wilmington. We have about 50,000 square feet on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> floors, which is more than double our previous space. There are 14 classrooms and a science lab on each floor. We also have space to provide enhanced services and programs to better support our AAP students and help them build a stronger Blue Hen identity that we expect will increase their retention and graduation rates.

We would ask you to consider providing a \$1.4 million increase in base funding for the AAP, which will help support this new space and new services in Wilmington, as well as upgrade our programs in Dover and Georgetown.

We also continue to pursue new partnerships with Delaware State University and Delaware Tech, and we are creating new pathways for students to pursue four-year degrees in engineering, healthcare and other fields. Some students could even start their degree through UD's Early College Credit Program, which allows Delaware high school students to earn a whole semester of UD credits while taking online courses alongside UD students.

### **ADDRESSING LEARNING CHALLENGES**

Another step we're taking to expand educational access is making sure we are ready to provide the programs and services that our students need, especially considering the pandemic.

**Supporting the academic needs of Delawareans**

**Request:** \$3.4M to respond to academic challenges related to COVID-19 pandemic

**Proposal:** Over the next two years, increase tutoring support and add:

- 10 academic advisors
- 20 learning specialists
- 5 career counselors
- 5 student life and co-curricular staff

**Impact:** Greater academic and co-curricular support for students, especially those from disproportionately affected populations



UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

As we all know, the past two years have been difficult for students at all levels, from pre-K through high school. In many families, students lacked computer access or had to share computer time with their siblings. Many students also couldn't get the academic support or other services they needed. And families struggled financially, forcing them to prioritize basic needs over saving for college.

Fortunately, we know what can help them: advising services, tutoring, student life programming, career guidance. The University has been providing these academic support services for years prior to the pandemic, and they have been proven to help students stay on track to graduation and achieve success in the workplace.

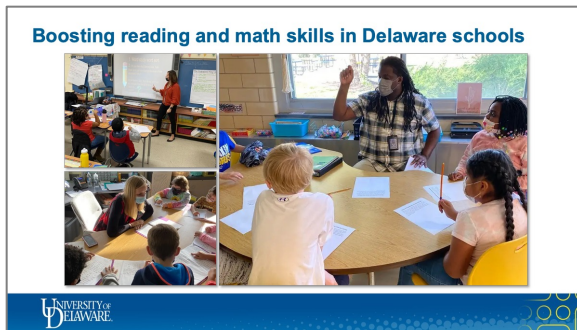
Now we need to elevate those services to a much grander scale. Otherwise, the pandemic-induced challenges will have a lingering effect on students coming into UD for at least the next several years.

We want to provide UD students with more academic advisors, learning specialists, tutors, career counselors and student life support staff. We would ask that you support this effort with \$3.4 million in state resources.

Ramping up these services will have the additional benefit of raising the retention and graduation rates of many of Delaware's first-generation, low-income and underrepresented minority students, which is an important priority for us, and for the state. In addition, we know that helping all students graduate on time lowers their costs and contributes to the development of Delaware's workforce.

## **STRENGTHENING SCHOOLS**

Finally, we continue working every day to support and strengthen Delaware's entire K-12 education system. We are proud to have prepared more than 2,500 Delaware public school teachers, or a quarter of the workforce in our state. That effort is extensive and growing, and I want to highlight just a few areas where we are making a difference.



You may already know about the highly successful Bookworms program, which is a literacy curriculum for students in kindergarten through fifth grade that was developed by UD professor Sharon Walpole. The program emphasizes daily reading and uses full-length fiction and nonfiction children's books that are challenging enough to engage and motivate students to read. Over the past six years, the Bookworms curriculum has been helping raise reading scores in the Brandywine, Lake Forest, Laurel, Milford, Seaford and Woodbridge school districts, among others nationwide.

Also, UD's Professional Development Center for Educators is helping educators raise students' math scores in Appoquinimink, Brandywine, Caesar Rodney, Laurel, Red Clay and Smyrna school districts.

What's more, UD's Delaware Institute for Excellence in Early Childhood has helped child-care centers reopen safely and remain open during the pandemic, as well as promote outdoor learning for young children. Also, UD's Center for Disabilities Studies led statewide mental health screenings for students ages 10 to 13 and helped special-education teachers use creative strategies and technologies to reach students with disabilities during remote learning.

These are just a few examples of the extensive collaborations we have with Delaware's entire education community.




UD is also preparing the next generation of teachers to work in Delaware schools. The teacher shortage in our state was serious before the pandemic and has become critical in the past two years.

Fortunately, our enrollment in teacher-preparation programs have increased by 10% over the past five years. Many of these students are Delawareans, and many out-of-state graduates remain in Delaware to teach.

Last summer, the first group of 18 students completed our new Teacher Residency Program, which provides a yearlong, paid posting in a Delaware public high-needs school. This “grow your own” program helps Delaware districts recruit, train and retain teachers, instead of losing them to out-of-state schools.

Also, the Delaware Institute for School Leadership at UD is helping to prepare aspiring principals throughout the state. Since 2017, the program has trained 26 people who now serve as principals or assistant principals, as well as 23 people who serve in other leadership roles.

**Expanding capacity in key academic areas: Education**



**Request:** \$1.5M to expand capacity to graduate more teachers

**Proposal:**

- Expand the Teacher Residency Program
- Create a program to certify middle-grade teachers and prepare/certify more special education, English learner and early childhood teachers
- Create a Delaware Teaching Fellows Program to recruit new Delaware students, provide financial support and forgive their loans if they teach in high-needs Delaware schools

**Impact:** 100 additional teachers per year to help address Delaware's teacher shortage

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

Now we want to expand the teacher residency program to connect even more of our students with the Delaware schools who need them.

That effort is part of our FY23 budget request for an additional \$1.5 million to graduate 100 more educators and help address the state’s chronic shortage of teachers. This request has two other elements:

- First, we want to create a program to certify middle-grade teachers, as well as prepare and certify teachers in special education, English learning and early childhood education.
- And second, we want to create a Delaware Teaching Fellows program to recruit the most qualified high school seniors in the state and provide financial support to prepare them to become excellent teachers here. If they teach in a high-needs Delaware school, their education loans are forgiven.

These initiatives are in addition to the creation of a 4+1 teacher-preparation program and expanded course offerings to help students graduate sooner.



As you can see, our appropriation requests for FY23 all support our goal of providing Delawareans with the healthcare and educational resources that our state needs now more than ever. With your support, we can ensure that Delaware not only recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic but actually emerges even stronger and more resilient than before ... with a bright and promising future ahead.

Again, thank you for your time and attention today, and we would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

###