Toni: Howdy?

Audience: Howdy.

Toni: My name is Toni Eubanks and I’m the Chair for the University Staff Council. I’d like to extend a friendly welcome to everyone in the audience as well as everyone who’s watching online today. Thank you for joining us. The University Staff Council is committed to improving the university and the working atmosphere for all staff at Texas A&M. I encourage you to contact your USC representative with questions, ideas, concerns, and even consider running to represent your division or college. Our election process will begin this month and we need motivated people like you to move our staff body and our university forward. It is now my honor and privilege to introduce to you our guest speaker today.

As President and Mrs. Young near the end of their first year at Texas A&M we’re starting to experience the benefits from their strategic vision and philosophy of what sets Texas A&M apart. We greatly appreciate the strong support of staff that both of them have demonstrated. One example is Staff Appreciation Week which was much bigger and more relevant than in previous years. We’re grateful that President Young could be with us today to share more about his vision and to answer your questions. Please help me welcome President Young.

President: Toni, thank you. Howdy?

Audience: Howdy.

President: Toni, thank you for that extensive introduction. I am very grateful for the work that the Staff Council does, it really is enormously helpful. I’ve been on much of a listening tour for this past year and found that the Staff Council has helped me understand this university in ways that otherwise would have been impossible and do an enormous amount of work on your behalf. Thank you for what you and all of your colleagues do or the Staff Council. Now there are four bottles of water up here. I promise this, it’s not a four-bottle-of-water talk. I’m really delighted to be here and let me say that in two different ways. One is I’m delighted to be at Texas A&M University.

This is a really special place and I want to talk a little bit about that because I think that helps formulate the vision for what this university is, what we can do together, and from my perspective, how central the staff is to accomplishing everything that we really want to accomplish as we go forward. It is a very special place. Also I have been warmly welcomed. Both Marti and I have been very warmly welcomed, not just with friendly howdies but with your insights and perspectives, questions, suggestions, given with various degrees of enthusiasm and forcefulness about the university. That has been enormously helpful and has helped me understand better who we are and what we could do.

Now in many cases the question of who we are is not a terribly important question for a
university. Universities do research, they do teaching, and they do service, done it for thousands of years, and that's pretty standard. I've been in great universities where they do that and do that well. We certainly do that here at a very high level. There's also something very distinctive about this university that I've been working to get my mind around to get a sense of what is unique about this university. What does it do? Why does it matter so much? I'm not sure I have full answers to that but I'll just give you a couple of thoughts because it really does help shape everything I think about what we want to do together. Helps me think about what are the underlying principles, what really do we stand for and what do we do.

Let me give you a little bit sense of what I think that is. I think at a very fundamental level this is really kind of a very self-conscious intentionality about our work. We have this commitment to excellence, to integrity, to service, but it really is basically doing work that matters, that makes a difference in the world. It finds articulation in a lot of different words we use a lot around the university. They're not casually used. They're words I think with real meaning here. We talk about service, we talk about leadership, we talk about making the world a better place, about making a difference, we talk about the grand global challenges and addressing those.

All of those really when put together really talk about this institutional ethic that we attract students, we attract faculty, we attract staff, really want to live lives with meaning and impact, to want to build a better tomorrow together, to want to do things that really do fundamentally make a difference as we engage in that space that universities engage in, that space of learning, of discovery, of impact. We all arrive here, there's this ethic that this campus works together to try to channel that inclination, channel that desire, channel that instinct into something memorable, something actionable. We produce scholarship of great moment and great impact and we produce students who are not only scholars but really citizens of substance.

That in my experience is not something that universities generally wrap their minds around. It's not an ethic you find as pervasive and deep and embedded anywhere I've ever been or seen as you do with this university. It comes from a very deep place too. I find that very interesting, everybody I talk to, people who want to make the lives of other people, of communities, of the nation, of the world better and do it with a real kind of passion, I mean something that really approaches love. I know that's not a word we hear a lot in the context of a university, but we do have an opportunity to be in a place where we know that it allows us to express in our actions our love for other people, our love for these students, our love for our communities, for our nation.

That's a very special opportunity in many ways and imposes on all of us, but particularly on me, I think, a very important responsibility to ensure that we do everything we can to allow people to realize that passion, to express that passion and action that really does make a difference and provide you with the resources to allow you to do what you came here to do at this university. It's not rhetorical, it's consequential, I think. These are not just words, I think these are words that really do shape and have meaning and matter at this university. Let me talk a little bit about large vision for the university. I've had a chance to express some of this in a faculty forum recently which some of you may have
seen or read about, and if so, talk among yourselves and I'll talk to everyone else.

It really has to do with surrounding ourselves and thinking about our core missions. We often talk about there's teaching, research, and service. I would redefine those just a little bit differently. It's not just about teaching, it's about learning. We do here have this passion for imparting knowledge and connecting students to that knowledge to real, meaningful opportunities to make a difference. In that context I'm going to talk some about things that we really want to do to even deepen and enhance that kind of learning opportunity for our students. Then we talk about research, but it really is more than research. It's really discovery. We have people who have a passion and love for their respective fields, for the creation and dissemination of knowledge that really improves the lives of people in meaningful ways.

In addition, we have earned our moniker as one of the top academic and research universities in the nation, but done it by impactful scholarship and practical purpose-driven research in a way that is very meaningful. Then sometimes we talk about the third obligation of the university which is service. I think of it even more broadly than that. Service sometimes we think narrowly of going and painting the neighbor's fence, which is a wonderful thing, don't get me wrong. We do that but we do much more. It's work that has real impact, that makes a difference. We have the attention of interested minds here at this university and if we have to stay true to our efforts with that kind of impact we want to have, we really do make that fundamental difference.

These kinds of ethics run through virtually everything that goes on here. We have an opportunity here, I think, at this university every day to create knowledge and to communicate to students with their fresh passion and their visions for their world how who take the interactions here and do something. That is important, they make their world, the world that we've given them, they turn that into their world. That's what this university really thinks about in a very self-conscious way every day, one student at a time, one research project at a time, one form of impact at a time. The success is really palpable. I hope everybody understands what a remarkable thing they have done here collectively. As you look across this university, survey of business leaders worldwide, top institutions form which they recruit, they looked at the top Forbes 100 companies.

New York Times survey said that we were 8th most desirable among all the public universities in the nation, number one in Texas. The Wall Street Journal said we're number two in the nation just behind Penn State. Money Magazine said we're the number six public. You think of 4,300 universities in the United States alone and realize the impact that that has in terms of the desirability of the kids who come out of this campus and the jobs that they take, they're well-trained, they have the highest starting salaries in Texas and nevertheless we manage to educate what Texas looks like. We have 26% of our students this year in our entering class who are first generation, who will change not only the trajectory of them but the trajectory of their families going forward. We have 23% are underrepresented minorities as well.

We have consistently been able to improve both retention rates and graduation rates going forward. We're now number one in Texas in the graduation of minorities. That's
an exciting development. We’re tied for number one in graduation rates overall. Debt is well below the national average. People forget that sometimes. You hear a lot of dialog about the cost of education, and it is something that we think about constantly and worry about constantly. There is a model that seems to work. Right now if you look at the past three years, each of those years the percentage of our students graduating with debt has actually gone down. It’s gone down from 46% to 44% to 42%, so less than half of our students are graduating with debt, which is compared to the national average about 70% are graduating with debt.

That is a real accomplishment and a great deal of the credit for that goes to the efficiency that you generate out of the work you do, the people here in this room. The amount of debt has gone down. The national average is about $37,000, $38,000, our students three years ago were graduating with about $28,000, then $26,000, and this last year about $24,000. There we go, got that right. See, I’m just trying to see if you’re listening, I’ve just got to check that out. We’ve seen both the percentage go down and the amount of debt going down and that is exciting. So many other things, I could talk about the number of nationally ranked departments we have here. We have nationally ranked Vet School, Engineering School, our executive MBA program and our regular MBA program, and the list just goes on and on of nationally ranked programs.

We have a law school that actually was acquired by the university a few years ago, moved into the rankings more quickly than any unranked law school ever had in one year, moved up 38 places this year. That’s a sign, I think, of when this place takes something over, the commitment, the engagement really makes a difference. Now I want to be clear that we’ve done this against a pretty challenging backdrop. The backdrop has been one of challenging funding. We are clearly funded less than virtually all of our peer institutions. That’s true when you look not only at State funding per FTE but you also look at tuition dollars. We are very fortunate this last year the Legislature has begun to reinvest back in higher education after some disastrous years, but we’re still not at the level per FTE that we were in 2006.

I want to be clear that we know these challenges exist and that we nevertheless accomplish these things against the backdrop of these somewhat significant challenges. Other kinds of challenges as well, I mean we’re seeing the funding streams change to be sure, we’re also seeing the financial demands change. I mean if you think about a university 20 years ago, 30 years ago maybe, the amount of money spent on technology really was largely reposed in those remarkable inventions, the IBM’s electric typewriters. Thirty years later you’re spending $100 million on technology every year that wasn’t even in the budget at that point, without any substantial increase devoted to that particular. We do have challenges and I want to be clear about that.

What it means is we must continue to be really very strategic, keep an eye focused on excellence but always focused on ways in which we can do what we do at the highest level but do as efficiently and effectively as possible. We need to be open and honest, both with each other, we need to be transparent. We need to have a collaborative decision making process to get the best ideas out of everybody. In fact I’ve even got some wonderful questions here which have stimulated my thinking about some
additional things we can do. We need to embrace that technology and use it in ways that enhance the work that we do. We need to be innovative, we need to support the staff more robustly than we have in the past. I think that’s absolutely critical going forward.

One way of summing all this up is to Ernest Rutherford who was a wonderful polymath physicist in England, had a great institute many years ago, got his staff together one day and said, “Now we don’t have any money so we’re going to have to think.” That’s kind of where we are, is that we know that there are not going to be dramatic infusions of additional resources, so deploying those in ways really make the most difference for this university becomes important. We realize at a really fundamental level that much of the burden over the past few years has really fallen on staff. We’ve had over the last five years a .6% increase in students, we’ve had about a 12% increase in faculty, and we’ve only had about an 8%, 9% increase in staff.

We know what we’re asking is fewer people to do a lot more with less. That’s really clear and we understand that. I want to talk about two things in particular today. I’m going to give a little bit of an overview of some of the sort of large scale ambitions we have for the university going forward, but then talk a little bit about two issues. One is how do we grow staff in the mission critical areas, because we need to do that in some areas to be sure, and how do we better support the staff? Those are the two issues that I want to talk a little bit about. Let me talk a little bit about sort of larger ambitions for the university. I’m going to skip over a lot of these pages. I had a lot of stuff I was going to tell you but I don’t know that you really, you know, you don’t really care about that, and that really would make it a four-water-bottle talk.

One thing we want to focus on a great deal going forward is to expand our interdisciplinary research and teaching here at this university. Many of the things that we have great strength in, in looking at this university require analysis from a variety of different disciplinary perspectives. Very hard to see us able to solve and address and make contributions to many of these areas without putting together people from a range of disciplines who may be approaching the problem from quite different perspectives but nevertheless need to think about it collectively and see how the work they’re doing in one discipline enlightens, illuminates, and relates to the work doing in another as they’re both designed to think about what is the solution to that moving forward.

There are many areas in which I could go on and talk about that, but we will be putting resources into that because that is essential. We have a great deal of that going on, we frequently don’t know how much we have going on, and we frequently don’t know how many people we have focusing on different areas. To give you a small example is energy, developing an energy institute to look at the issue of energy. As we began to look at it we thought we had 50 or 60 professors who might be thinking about that from different perspectives. It turns out once we actually did a much more careful drilldown it was closer to 250.

That’s important because everything from looking at energy to molecular level to the
engineering and structural level, to all the different alternate kinds of energy we can think about, to the policy issues related to how one creates an economic environment where we really do move to those alternate energies becomes very important, as well as knowing what are the scientific consequences of the use of that particular kind of energy. Across the board we can’t really think about it without a whole lot of people around the table, and that’s just one example of the number of areas in which we’re going to try and ease the creation of platforms where professors can work together and students can work together on these grand global challenges but in this interdisciplinary way.

Secondly, we are thinking a great deal about how we expand these high impact transformational learning experiences for our students. That’s not always essential at every university. Many universities the students can be passive receivers of information and that works out just fine because that suits them perfectly for the career for which they have an ambition in and intention. At a Tier 1 research university like ours the need to bring students in and to help them develop their own conceptual capacities in the most deep and powerful way is an absolute obligation on our part, and providing opportunities, and we provide a lot of those. Some of those are opportunities to work in collaboration with a professor in a research space.

They may be in a research lab, and every lab I go to I see undergraduate students as well as graduate students in there. May be Capstone projects, it may be international opportunities, something else that we really want to see ourselves expand, which allow you to see the world through a very different prism, that allow you to think seriously about the presumptions and the assumptions you make about your own world. Expanding entrepreneur and innovation opportunities for the students, which again allow them to draw together information from the discipline and create their own conceptual frameworks towards problem-solving.

All of these kind of experiences, we’d like to be able to promise every student who walks across campus that you will have one of those opportunities or more, they will be available to you, and deepen those experiences as well. We also want the enhanced technology, essential on the research side. We now have a capacity to acquire more digitally-based information than one can possibly imagine. We need the capacity to understand that, to analyze that, to use that. It will illuminate our world in ways we can’t even imagine at this point, but we need the technological infrastructure and basis to make sure that our professors are capable and our students are capable of doing that. That becomes another important.

Then let me also stress the area of diversity and inclusion. Now I stress that as a major ambition, and let me talk a little bit about that for a second. In many ways from my perspective, I’ve been in higher education much of my life and had opportunities to think about and address this issue in many different ways. It has always seemed to me a powerful and a deep moral and ethical imperative. To give you for me the most riveting moment, I had an opportunity some years ago to serve on the Brown versus the Board of Education 50th Anniversary Commission. In the context of that we were given an opportunity to meet the plaintiffs from that case. Now they were young children at the
time, they were now adults.

We asked them, they obviously were not deeply involved in the legal strategy and aware of the impact to be sure but at the time not that perspective. That perspective was a very personal one. The sacrifices their parents made, lost their jobs, ostracized from the community, death threats. In Virginia they closed down the schools rather than integrata them in a number of school districts. I had an opportunity to talk to a number of them and said, “Why did your parents do that? Why were they willing to make that kind of a sacrifice?” They said, “Because they believed that was the only route for their children to realize the American dream.” As an educator I thought what an obligation that imposes on me. That is our obligation, I believe, in a most profound and deep way.

Let me add to that that I also think it has significant professional and practical imperative for our students as well. We’re sending them out into a world that if they can only deal with people who have the same background and experience that they do, they will fail. You know the old joke that what do you call an Aggie five years after graduation?

Audience: Boss.

President: Boss, right? That won’t be true. That won’t be true if we can’t help our students, whatever their background, sit around a table with 10 people who look very different than they do in terms of their experience and their background and draw the best out of those people. That’s what we need. This is a profound and deep practical imperative as well as a moral imperative for this university. Finding ways that we can deepen and enhance that experience on the part of our students and help them learn from it becomes a very important dimension of what we need to do going forward. It even goes beyond that, I think. It goes beyond that in the following sense as well, which is I talked a little bit earlier about the research we’re doing and the grand global challenges.

As you think about that, realize almost everything we’re addressing and trying to solve maps almost directly on the socioeconomic structure. I mean if you think about where environmental impact is, where are the adverse environmental impacts around the world? They tend to be very heavily loaded into the third world countries. Where are the environmental impacts in the United States? Take a map of poverty and a map of lead-based water, and it’s the same map. Take a map of crime and socioeconomic, it’s the same map. Higher education, if you come from the top quintile of the socioeconomic status your kids have an 85% chance of graduating from college. If you’re in the bottom 20% they have a 9% chance of graduating. That’s unacceptable, and if we’re going to address these kinds of grand global challenges we cannot not think about this.

This becomes not only as I say from my perspective a deeply ingrained moral and ethical imperative for this university as for all universities, but has very, very practical applications both in the learning space and in the research space, and we’re going to work to try and do everything we can to support and sustain that as well. We also are going to do a better job communicating in two ways. One is internally. I talked a lot
about the need I believe for as collaborative a decision making process as we can have. Universities tend to be collectives. I always remind people that the notion of being President, the critical word is preside, that I know there’s a little bit of a military tradition at this school, but believe me it’s historical, it’s not relevant now.

That's also important because the more we collaborate, the more we get the best ideas from everybody the better we will be. It's not accidental, if you look historically, take the Renaissance and ask how many institutions existed then still exist now. It's about 85 in the Western world, I'm going to set aside China where they all still exist, but 85. Sixty-something of those are universities, because what we do is so important, but also because we have been collectives that really take an enormous amount of engagement. We're slow at decision making to be sure, but the decisions we make overwhelmingly tend to be really good if we're in that collaborative space. Internal communication really has to expand, I think, in important ways.

External communication does as well. We need to help the world understand better who we are, what we do, and why we matter, because as we do that it will attract resources to help us do what we do even better. We will find increasing partners. Even in the last year I am surprised at the number of partnerships that have fallen in our laps that really have the potential to advance significantly our missions. Now I'm going to take shameless credit for them and pretend I stirred them all up. The truth of the matter is they came because people know more about this university and understand what kind of a partner we are, and if their ambition is to do X, we are an awfully good partner to help them accomplish that.

We're seeing that again and again and again to the point that I've got a stack of emails I've got to return to people who want to partner. Half of them don't make sense but the other half could be extraordinarily interesting opportunities. The more we communicate that the more we'll help. If we want prospective students to understand what a unique opportunity this is. Not for everybody, but for kids for whom these values resonate, who want to live these lives of meaning and be citizens of substance the way this university produces them. Students who have that instinct, we want them to know what an opportunity exists here. We want to know philanthropic opportunities. We are a tremendous place for people investing.

If you want to accomplish something with respect to feeding the world, there is no better place to put your resources than that College of Agriculture. If you are intensely interested in what happens to animals and that relationship between animals and humans in terms of the health perspective, there's no better place to put money than in our Vet School and in our Medical School. If you want to think about alternate energy, and believe me we need to, there is no better place to put money than in the Engineering School. If you want to think about diagnostics for ways in which we understand the world but also understand medicine and so forth, there's no better place to put money than that College of Architecture. The list goes on and on.

People need to know that in order for us to really be successful at doing it. Let me get a little more specific about staff. I think I sometimes I keep trying to come up with
analogies that really make sense. I think my favorite maybe is you’re the wheels on the bus. It may be a great bus, it’s not going anywhere or doing anything without staff. How central you are to this university I cannot overstate. I want people to understand that and I want you to understand my appreciation for what you do and recognition that it’s been done, even over the past few years, with some challenges. One of the challenges we really need to address is we need to grow staff, particularly in critical areas, and we need to decide what those critical areas are.

Now I think everybody rightfully believes, rightly, I want to stress rightly, that whatever office you’re in you could use two more people, maybe four. Nobody doubts that. We don’t have the resources to do that. What we have to do is, as Rutherford said, we’ve got to think. We’ve got to figure out where we’re going to grow staff, where it is most mission critical in terms of holding back our progress. You’re going to have to help us identify those areas where we do it, and then we’ve got to generate the resources to do that as well. Okay, we’re one bottle now. Secondly, we need to enhance our support for the staff and we really understand that.

Part of it has to do simply with salaries. We’ll be putting, from the central administration, 3% in for merit raises for everybody and asking the departments to consider matching that with another 1%. Is that enough? It’s not half enough. It’s what we can afford to do right now. We’re not asking the departments, I think in years past we’ve asked the departments to share half of that, we’re not doing that this time, we’re trying to take the entire 3% and then let them add some additional money in from budgets if they’re able to do that. We want to expand benefits in other ways as well, some of them small but meaningful.

For example, I don’t know how many of you have used 2nd, you all look very healthy so you may not have used 2nd.MD yet, but small things like that that give you a chance to enhance the quality of the medical care that you get, things like that that we really are looking at on a very regular basis to find ways where we can support. We will be looking out in the community ways in which we can partner with some institutions to see if we can get you discounts, to see other things we can do. Again we realize this is sort of at the margins but we hope a sign both of our intention to do what we can do but also to help. Also want to work to make the workplace a place that is of more benefit if not directly financial, but benefit in other ways that make your lives better.

We will expand the resources available for staff development. We are adding, in the past as you know Galveston and HSC come under the umbrella of the university now. We’re expanding the opportunity for staff development, so courses, seminars, things like that that may help you do your jobs better, may help you advance to other jobs if you’re so inclined, but we will be expanding that as well. Also on the wellness front, as you know we are instituting a policy based on a challenge from the Chancellor to give everybody 30 minutes three times a week to go exercise, and we’re kind of getting that straightened around, telling supervisors that we want to see you out there doing jumping jacks and playing volleyball during your lunch hours.

Let me be clear, it doesn’t have to be that. We want you to take a little bit of time and
do whatever makes you feel better. If it’s meditation, great, if eats Dunkin’ Donuts, we’re not sure about that. We’re going to make that time available. We do as you know have some exercise, three exercise classes that we offer in one of our buildings, we’re expanding that to two more buildings as well, and over time hope to expand that to a lot more buildings, as well as create opportunities over time to use lunch hours in a much more productive, robust way, with perhaps loading docks and garage gyms and everything around the campus to let people use that time as productively as they can.

We’re also have worked with the producers of Fitbit; we’re going to actually give away about 500 of them and then have a discount. Do we have the discount worked out yet, [Shanella 00:34:16]? We have a discount for Fitbits for anybody else who wants to use those as well. There’ll be additional health and wellness resources going forward. Also want to give you we’re going to roll out programs over time that will give you opportunities to use all the resources of the university better. Easier access to things that go on, on campus, to plays, to games, to anything that you think you’d like to bring you and your family to as well. We want this university to be widely open and accessible to you for purposes that make your life a little more fulfilling in any ways that we possibly can do that. There’ll be more of that coming forward as well.

Then there has been a great deal of work done and thought given to creating some tuition assistance programs for the university. Very grateful for the terrific work that the Staff Council has done on this and I’m very pleased to announce that we will be inaugurating this fall a tuition assistance program. It will be $1,000 per class up to two classes in the fall, in the spring semester for full-time employees who have been here a year. More details of that will be forthcoming. That will cover roughly in almost all cases about 80% of the tuition that you would otherwise pay to take. Because we want, again, want to make as many of these resources available as we possibly can.

I could go on at great length about many things that we’re working to do here at the university but let me conclude with, I always had a colleague at Columbia who said I have two one last thoughts. One is that we want to work to create the best possible working environment that we can. We want people to get up in the morning, know that when they come to this university, not only will they be treated with dignity and respect but given the resources and the scope to do the job the way they want to do them. We will need a lot of guidance and help and counsel from you as to what makes that most possible. I think I’ve mentioned a few things today many of which have come up from staff as ideas that would be good. I’m sure there’s much, much more that we can do and we’ll be doing going forward.

I end where I started with a recognition of how really important you are to the university. I hope you understand our deep appreciation, how proud we are of what you do, how so proud we are of what you have created here at this university, because I know after a long experience in academic institutions how essential staff is. We don’t always say that as clearly or as often as we should, and I’m hoping to correct that as well. You will know what we appreciate and what we feel about the work you do, but at the same time I hope you understand that we’re also going to try to put action. This is a place where talk is not the end of the day, action is the end of the day. That will be even
more forthcoming.

I hope at least some of what I've talked about suggests at least a start in that direction, building on what is already a good base of things going on here at this university. Thank you. Now I have a few questions, not for you but that have been sort of given to me and then I'll be happy to take questions as well. One of the questions which I really appreciated was what happens when there are things that go on in the workplace that you just think inappropriate. They may take two or three different forms. They may take the form of you think that there's some unethical behavior going on or it may be that you think you're being bullied or mistreated or discriminated against. What's the recourse for that? There are some recourses.

We have under employee relations an opportunity to assist individual employees, you can call a number. You don't go through your supervisor, you call directly and you can talk about what it is that is happening in your workplace and they can find ways to try and address that. Now the question I need answers going forward is that we had this system in place, it would be very helpful to me to know whether that's adequate. For those of you who have experienced that and engaged employee relations, has it worked, has it helped you? If the answer has been less than satisfactory, let me know and we will see whether there are other things that we need to or can put in place to deal with that.

There are also by the way hotlines you can call for the unethical behavior where you simply can remain anonymous, report what you think is a problem, and we do have an investigative process where we include not only people from the university but auditors from the system office who come in and will examine things with respect to which the whistleblower complaints of any sort. That process is largely in place. I'm more worried about how you are treated in the workplace. If you think there are problems there, again, we have a path and we have some resources. If you have engaged them and not found them satisfactory, that would be really an important data point for us to have to see if we need to do more in that regard.

That was one question. Second question was is there any thought given to a university-wide rotational program for high potential staff where you could have specialized training perhaps for career progression, et cetera, et cetera? We do offer a number of courses and conferences and the like really designed to help people do exactly that and progress through that. I'm not sure we have anything quite as intentional or structured as this and I'm very interested in it. I'm actually going to hope, I don't know if the professor or lecturer who suggested that is here but if he is I would love to talk to you, because I think this is potentially a really interesting idea. Then this will shock you, I'm sure. You will be very surprised at this question. We got a question about parking.

I know some of you, but if you indulge me for a moment because I know you're not interested in that. Question was we're paying so much and there are lots of potholes in the parking lot. Okay, let me try to put this in a little perspective. The answer to that is probably yes, yes, yes. We are slightly below most of our peers in terms of what we really charge for parking, way below UT but of course parking in College Station should
be cheaper than in Austin. It is the case that the parking facilities largely support themselves and that we are in the process of having to expand parking with additional garages that need to be built on the campus and expand parking more generally speaking.

What has happened in the past as I looked at the numbers in light of this question is that we have generally kept parking sort of here, the cost for parking here, and then all of a sudden reached a crisis and then we jumped it way up, and then it stays here, jumped up. We’re trying to build in a more smaller percentage increase that occurs on sort of an annual basis for the next three or four years, and part of it devoted to try to improve some of those parking lots. You’ll be happy to know that the parking lot in the Williams Building on the south side of that is going to be closed down really soon because it’s terrible too. Even I will be probably riding my bicycle to work. There is no really happy solution to parking if you actually have to maintain it and pay for it.

We’re trying to keep the cost as low as we prudemtly can consistent with providing services. That deferred maintenance of parking lots has been one of the big challenges because we had up until a year ago sort of had one of those plateaus where all of a sudden we reached a bit of a crisis. We did not jump it up dramatically but rather coming up with a much smaller glide path to get up to where we need to, simply to maintain them at the level they need to be maintained. I’m certain that’s an entirely satisfactory answer to everybody. Somebody once said that a faculty is a group of disparate individuals all united by a shared concern over parking, and there’s probably some truth in that. That may have been the last question.

Somebody asked, they said that they have seen a significant increase in the amount of money in research coming to the university over the past three years. Are there incentives to research personnel like scholarships or research awards that will be included in research investment plans? We will be expanding the support services for research. Much of the support service for research actually in the administrative side had been in the system. We took that over a few months ago and have been trying to reform that in ways that really better suit and serve the university in terms of grant writing and grant administration and so forth. That part of it we’ll see an expansion of personnel just because it had been cut to a point that it was really preventing us from getting research grants.

We are happily seeing people who had quit under the prior regime actually coming back, very strong people coming back. There will be some expansion there. The rewards and incentives to them will be much like those for the rest of the university. We don’t have sort of anything specially designed in that regard. Then the second question is support personnel within the laboratories and so forth. That is very much a function of how the principal investigator structures the grant proposal, because most of the funding for that support actually comes directly from the grant itself. We would again like to find ways that help people engage even more effectively in that process, and if some sort of either scholarships or incentive awards may help that, we’re always really open to that process as well.
Now that we have SRS back in the university, I think we’re going to be able to better look at that and understand what we might do. With that, those are the only questions that I was asked. I’m sure there’s no other issues of burning concern, but in the event there might be I would be happy to take some questions from the floor. I know the first question’s sometimes hard, we can start with the second and then come back to the first.

Speaker 1: Yes sir. We have an anonymous question that came into the Council. It reads as follows, prior to the PWC report, salary savings from temporarily vacated positions were a vital source of funding for unexpected expenses and budget overages. Now that those funds are being swept from our accounts, how are the funds being utilized and can we expect to be able to use those funds again at departmental discretion?

President: The answer, I think, is that they never could not be used at departmental discretion in the following sense, the funds, as I understand how PWC recommended it be structured, what we adopted is the funds are swept up. People have to understand that there is, at the end of the day, virtually no expenses at the central administration, so they’re all redeployed. The question of where they get redeployed to is largely a matter of the deans, and the department chairs, and the faculty, and the staff saying, we have lost these employees and that’s okay, we see money swept up, but we see these functions that really need to be done and we are significantly underfunded here for critical missions and so some of those swept up funds need to be invested here or here or here.

It's not as though those funds are not available to the university, they’re available. I think the idea, and we certainly will take a regular look at how this is working, but the idea is to be even more strategic about those. Because simply historic patterns of funding are not necessarily reflective of where funding should flow right now. If we simply say all money is going to stay where it's always stayed, that necessarily isn't as strategic as we need to be in a fairly limited resource environment. Sweeping that money up I think was designed in some measure to allow a somewhat more strategic distribution of money as the university changes and transforms.

Speaker 1: We do have another anonymous question that was brought in. It reads as follows, in the past few years while insurance cost for individuals have remained fairly stable, the employer contributions have gone up significantly. Are there any plans for assisting departments in being able to fund these increases to keep them from undercutting other key budget needs?

President: Welcome to the healthcare system in the United States. The challenge I think that is being faced around the United States is significantly increased healthcare cost on an annual basis. So far the decision has largely been to not impose dramatic increases on the employees to the extent we can help it. It's got to come from somewhere. If it came from the central administration it just means we have to sweep up more money somewhere else. We distribute that money, all that money, but if it comes from the central administration, which we could do, we can't distribute as much. It's all green and it depends which pocket we want to take it out of at this point. I think one of the real
questions for us is can we bend that cost curve?

I think programs like wellness, works, and other sorts of programs, the hope is we can begin to bend that cost curve a little bit. We’re going to do some other things I hope that might have some impact as well. We are going to try and set up some employee clinics around the university. Starting with one at the Health Science Center so that you don’t have to take an entire three quarters of the day off work to go a doctor’s appointment just simply because you have a sore throat, but could do that in a relatively efficient, quick way. We’re looking at how to sort of subsidize that but again that might reduce overall our healthcare bills. There are lots of things that we need to be thinking about in terms of trying to bend the cost curve, but if we don’t bend the cost curve then it’s either the university pays for the increases or the employees pay for the increases.

So far we have chosen largely for the university to pay for it. Maybe over time in the short turn until we can really bend that cost curve there may be more sharing that would be useful but it really does have to come out of somewhere.

Speaker 1: This a question that was submitted, had to do with the Cain Hall demolition last fall but they just wanted to get an update on buildings and roads and how those are planned and the execution for those plans.

President: Buildings and roads. Let me say just two or three things about it. Cain Hall, the demolition and move of Cain Hall I think was accelerated on an accelerated schedule that if we’d had more time might have been done in a slightly more optimal way, but the exigencies of prior commitments that the university had made really made that impossible apparently. On the other hand, built into that we whined enough that we got a significant infusion of money to sort of rebuild Cain Hall I think in what will be a much more useful structure for the kind of student services. Now there’s some dislocation to be sure while it’s being built. We looked at a whole range of alternatives and where to locate those and finally ended up locating them in a way that seemed the most effective to keep them at least as colocated as we could.

It was far from optimal, believe me, and we clearly understand that. Since the construction of Cain Hall is on a somewhat accelerated schedule hopefully that will be a relatively short-lived development. There will be different traffic patterns, to be sure, when the hotel goes up. The parking garage is going up first then the hotel and then Cain Hall being simultaneously built. There will be different traffic patterns there to be sure. That's not the only traffic pattern I think useful to think about at the university. One of the things that we've done over the past few months is actually ramped up the review of the campus master plan which is 10, 12 years old, thinking it's really time to rethink that. Part of the rethinking that we've really asked the group to engage in is to do two or three things at campus.

One is to look at ways in which we create more spaces for students and staff and everybody to kind of to walk, to gather, to create more softer edges at the campus, more park-like space, more green space around campus. I think we've got some ideas that may facilitate that on sort of both ends of the East Campus. Second goal is greater
connectivity between East and West Campus. Right now a railroad track is a bit of a barrier and we really need to think about how we can make that much easier, particularly as we think more about expanding interdisciplinary work, doing that becomes important. Thirdly, I’d like to see us think through what a process might look to push more of our parking onto the periphery of the campus and create a much more walkable campus.

Now to do that effectively requires us to have a very effective transportation system. We’re 5,500 acres and you’re going to have to have your car if you have to move from one side of campus to the other. How could we create transportation systems? We just had a conference that the TTI sponsored at our suggestion, where they brought in all sorts of high tech companies and invited them to consider experiments and using our campus to be the laboratory, one of which will be autonomous vehicles. Could we create a bus system run by autonomous vehicles so it would be very regular, make sure we could all get to where we need to get but leave our cars then on the periphery of campus and create a much more open green campus.

All of that’s really under consideration right now, and you’ll see ideas will be floated and solicitation of your input will be coming over the course of the year as we engage in this planning process. Probably a longer answer than you wanted but wanted to know which parking space was going to be, I’ll bet, but.

**Speaker 1:** There’s another questions about outsourcing. The general question is what is the long term advantage of the recent outsourcing from a few years ago and the disadvantages and do you foresee any of these other outsourcing in the future.

**President:** I think the principal advantage is really reposed in the question of can a company whose sole focus is a particular thing do it more efficiently and more effectively than the university could under its system? I think the answer is, if you look at universities around the country, the answer is a resounding sometimes. I think as we watch the outsourcing here, that’s the exact question, which is what is the cost to the university for the services that are being secured, and is it more efficient and effective than we could do it under our own umbrella? Then can we redeploy those savings in the core academic missions of the institution? I think that remains a constant point of study and consideration all the time. We don’t have any additional plans for expanding outsourcing right now.

I don’t know that we’re institutionally opposed to it, but I’m not sure that we see avenues and venues for doing that in addition to what we’ve done. What I think we do want to do in the context of this outsourcing here though is we also want to assure that the employees who are now working for SSC or Chartwells or somebody understand they are as critical to the university and its well-being as somebody whose paycheck I’m still signing. We have done some work to include outsourced employees, and in all of our staff appreciation events, outsourced employees and eligibility for any performance awards and things like that. We will be working closely with our outsource partners to ensure that whatever benefits we’re trying to offer and opportunities we’re trying to offer to our staff will also be available there.
I want people, again, whoever signs your paycheck I want them wearing an A&M t-shirt and want them to feel like that because their contribution is every bit as significant today as it was a year ago before they were outsourced.

Toni: Okay, we’re out of time. I’d like to thank President Young again for being here.

President: Thank you.

Toni: I would also like to thank all of you for being here, and those of you who are watching we’re going to have a reception just outside these doors where President Young, you can come say hi and meet him. If there’s any questions that you still have that you were not able to ask or if you think of any later, please email us. We’re always interested to hear from the staff. You can email us at staff@tamu.edu. Thank you so much.