April 21, 2017  •  Inaugural Address  •  Capital University

THE PROMISE OF PURPOSE

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Sixteenth President of Capital University

Thank you, Chair Ostrowski, for your kind words, for your belief in Capital University, and for bringing me here - where I am meant to be. Thank you.

Good afternoon, CapFam!

Thank you all for gathering together to celebrate Capital University – our past, present, and future. I am humbled by the opportunity and responsibility to build on my predecessors’ legacies and lead Capital University to its third century. I am grateful for your warm welcome, and I am resolute in the trust we are investing in one another to build and embrace our future.

I extend a warm welcome to:
- Students
- Trustees
- Bishop Dillahunt
- Reverend Dr. Wilhelm
- Reverend Wachtman
- President of Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Reverend Dr. Barger and the Trinity family
- Congresswoman Beatty
- Mayor Kessler
- President Emeritus Bowman
- President Emeritus Langevin (with us virtually from his home in Florida)
- Esteemed Faculty and Staff
- Our dedicated Senior Leadership team
- Alumni – with a special greeting to the reunion Class of 1967
- Bobby Hackett, President of the Bonner Foundation, who lives his life’s purpose in a way that inspires me deeply
- Several current university presidents who have been valued colleagues, generous mentors, and treasured friends to me
- Distinguished delegates from higher education institutions and organizations around the country
- Distinguished neighbors from our Columbus, Near East, and Bexley communities
- Dear friends and family

I am humbled and touched by the presence of many people who have played crucial roles in my life. I am grateful for each and every one of you for challenging me and helping me grow, and for the generosity of your love and support as my passion and purpose have had no choice but to be pursued.

It is so special to have my siblings, brothers- and sister-in-law, and niece to share in this celebration. We were privileged to have parents who prioritized education. I am proud of each and every one of you for forging your own impressive paths, and I thank you for bringing such wonderful children into our world. And Yes, I am still in college after all these years!
And it is with honor and joy that I am joined by my husband, Dr. Bill Ball, and our daughters, Sophie Paul and Martha Ball who joins us virtually from Denmark. I deeply appreciate the love, generosity, and sacrifice each of you has given to me. I can think of no greater demonstration of love than to help someone fulfill their life’s purpose. I am dedicated to you and your beautiful purposes in our world.

I am humbled by the community spirit and love that has been infused by so many into this celebration. The inspiring and touching greetings – thank you, all.

The generous sharing of talents by our students, faculty, staff, and alumni
- Trinity Lutheran Seminary and the Gospel Choir for our inspiring service this morning
- The Chapel Choir and Philomel Vocal Chamber Ensemble, under the direction of Dr. Lynda Hasseler
- The Symphonic Winds, under the direction of Dr. Jeffrey Gershman
- Dr. Kevin Griffith, professor of English – who brought the Power of Purple alive with his inspiring poem!
- Our ROTC cadets who presented the colors
- And a host of students, alumni, faculty, staff, and friends at Fahlgren Mortine whose convergent media talents will soon be revealed in the telling of our Capital story.

Many have been involved in the planning of every meaningful detail of this week-long inaugural celebration. Please join me in thanking the Inauguration Planning Committee, our many student, staff, and faculty marshals and volunteers, Emma Mulvaney, and especially Nona McGuire, the mastermind of it all.

I have so enjoyed being a student of Capital University over the past year, learning from as many perspectives as possible about our heritage and history, and our present and future. I have loved the many conversations we have shared – faculty, staff, students, alumni, trustees, community leaders and neighbors – you have been generous teachers and thought partners. Your passion, honesty, character, deep commitment, integrity, and good will are inspiring. Thank you. I look forward to continuing our conversations and learning together for years to come.

Deep Roots

I am mindful of this year’s celebration of Martin Luther’s legacy, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. Luther’s passionate questioning and critical thought catalyzed a revolution that has profoundly impacted education and social welfare, social and political participation and leadership, and individual values and ethics – revolutionary ideas that we are still learning and evolving today.

Luther’s legacy defines the founding of Capital University. He advocated for education for all people, asserting that education is imperative for the reform of both society and religion. In one of his 95 Theses, he stated, “a city’s best and greatest welfare, safety and strength consist rather in its having many able, learned, wise, honorable, and well-educated citizens” than in “mighty walls and magnificent buildings” (English translation by A. Steinhaeuser, Luther’s Works. Vol. 45, Philadelphia: 1962, 355-6).

Luther opened each individual’s right to study and question the Scriptures and other writings for themselves. He prioritized a holistic education including the classics and liberal arts, scientific investigation and endeavor, music, and
engagement with nature. He advocated for learning ruled by love not fear, including opportunities for self-expression and learning through engagement with persons and practice. He believed we should find joy in learning.

His assertion of individual and religious freedom and liberation – cloaked at times in conflict, and fed by courage and vision – inspires our embrace and honoring of all individuals – across difference and divide – there are no unimportant people. To Luther, every life has purpose, every individual has contributions to make to society.

In Luther’s teachings, we find the heart of our University’s mission. Indeed, Capital University’s purpose has been purpose for over 180 years.

It is in this calling to live our purpose in society that we find the stimulus for the perennial questioning, rediscovery, and renewal that defines Capital’s nearly two-century trajectory.

Today, we honor the deep roots grown by our heritage and history. We gain strength and courage from these deep roots to continually stretch and reach for the sake of our purpose, for the sake of our world. To continue to honor our mission, we must continually question, rediscover, renew, and repurpose for today and tomorrow to ensure that we are living our purpose in – and for - society.

In preparing for today’s inauguration, I was inspired by alumnus Fred Daffler’s tireless loving care of the Capital archives, so I sought out the vision of my predecessors through reading as many of their inaugural addresses as could be found.

Every address proclaimed that there was never a more important time for the vital role of a Capital education for social advancement and well-being. Every address lamented the tumult and challenge besetting the field of higher education. Every address called on the imperative of higher education for addressing a host of social problems. Every address beckoned our community to come together in support of the temporal imperative of our mission.

And here we are again, facing a critical imperative. There is no more important time, challenges abound, our society needs us. What is our response at this moment of renewal?

I will state it again: Capital University’s purpose has been purpose for over 180 years.

**Capital’s Purpose is Purpose**

At Capital, we have long endeavored to ready and release each student’s purpose to improve the human condition. But, to date, our society has been dominated and driven by other paradigms. Some would say that our purpose mission has been tangential to the practical needs of society, as our world has progressed from an agricultural to an industrial to a knowledge economy. Higher education institutions have all too often become followers transmitting the dominant meme of the moment rather than leading by drawing upon their deep traditions of truth and purpose to be transformative agents of cultural change. They have concerned themselves more with building a model that meets the economy’s demand of the moment than shaping those who will define a better demand.

Now, as a society, we find ourselves disillusioned by existing paradigms, and we are yearning for something more. We are facing complex challenges that are not resolved by our current categories of knowing. We are craving connection
while increasing physical isolation. Our struggle with the diversity of humanity seems to be regressing.

Without meaning and purpose, we – individually and collectively – stagnate. We feel an inner emptiness, and we fall prey to anxiety and fear and the self-defeating conflict between us versus them. Without meaning and purpose, we fail to reach our potential, plummeting us to unhappiness, conflict, and even despair in questioning the value of our life not fully lived. We need a new paradigm to guide us forward.

You have heard the word purpose many times from me already today, and you will hear it many times more. That is because Purpose is emerging as the next imperative for unleashing social progress.

Now the world is catching up with us!

We have a powerful opportunity to Lead. With Purpose.

Our success will lie in our ability to hold, respect, and renew our fundamental mission, our commitment to purpose.

The Promise of Purpose

I have heard many lament what they see as the passing of the strong work ethic of generations past. Yet for so many before us, a society disconnected from purpose may have resulted in hard work and prosperity but at the expense of passion, life satisfaction and quality of life. We have missed so much potential from lives lived with frustrated or unrealized purpose. Because of the struggles of those who came before us, whom we honor, we advance to the next question of our time. We owe it to them, with our privilege and freedom, to pursue the promise of purpose.

Purpose isn’t limited to a cause, a calling, or a single role one is destined to play in society. Purpose is the engine that drives meaning in our work and in the world. It is different for each of us, and it will shape-shift as we progress through life and work.

Our complex challenges today require us to see the world with a broader, more holistic perspective. As individuals, there is a new value to bringing all of who we are to bear in how we learn, live, and work. We are recognizing that organizations are living systems, with so much more human potential than has yet been realized. We are increasingly aware of humanity as community – we are all interconnected, the subjugation of one is the subjugation of all, and we need each individual’s uniqueness to find new paths forward. These are values that have guided Capital University for nearly two centuries.

Capital University is an ideal learning community to wrestle with these deeper questions – to take up the work of society’s yearning for humanity’s higher hopes and aspirations. Universities should embrace the unknown as readily as the proven, so that the new and undefined can be defined and solved wisely, inclusively, and appreciatively.

Some of the questions that should drive our learning community are:
How do we discover and integrate all of who we are, unleashing our purposeful power and potential for the good of our world? How do we guide the creation of organizations, communities, and relationships that draw out more of our human potential and promise? How do we boldly blend different ways of knowing and unleash our creative potential to bring
something new to the world and to solve significant problems? How do we muster the courage to identify and call our
fear in all its forms, and then the grace to teach and replace fear with trust? How do we support each individual to be the
truest expression of themselves, and to contribute that purpose to humanity and our world?

A Purpose University in a Purpose Region

At Capital University, we find ourselves at a most powerful inflection point in the history of our local community. Our
metro region is moving and shaking, proudly boasting significant population-growth projections. More and more people
are drawn to the dynamism of this smart and open capital city of Ohio. Will this be growth for the sake of growth? Or
will it be growth for the sake of human progress?

Growth for growth’s sake too-often leads to human detriment and deterioration, surely not what we want for our
community. It misses the power of humanity for purposeful creation. To guide purposeful growth, we must reflect on
the purpose and promise of growth. What is our aspiration with growth? How shall we live? How shall our children,
and our children’s children live? What is our hoped-for future? Our challenge – and opportunity – is to stretch ourselves
toward higher ground, not growth for growth’s sake. Instead, we must embrace growth for lifting up all people - progress
that is purposeful. Capital is poised to be an agent in shaping this vital pursuit.

Universities should expose these important conversations – on campus, throughout their communities, and around the
world. They should reflect the heartbeat of their neighborhoods. There should be no blind spots, nothing worth seeing
left unseen. At Capital, we attract originals who believe they are in the world for a reason, and they strive to discern this
reason so they live, learn, and lead with purpose. Ours is a community that is excited by -and excites- the human spirit.
We inspire and ready individuals to take an active part in advancing humanity through purpose and passion.

Our goal is not to be better than others – it is to be better than ourselves – to leave this world better than we found it.

Our purpose is purpose. And we bring our purpose – our energy, risk-taking, imagination and belief in building a better
future - to Columbus’ pursuit of purposeful growth, community, and quality of life for all.

We bring a delicious diversity of students into the Columbus community to discern their purpose. In this powerful
process of purpose discernment, Capital students engage in meaningful experiential learning throughout all sectors of our
city. This reflective process is decidedly alive with potential and promise – an energy that reverberates throughout our
community. This active engagement generates a feeling of contribution and belonging that takes root, resulting in a very
high percentage of our students staying in the Columbus region after graduation to live and work – with purpose.

Capital University claims its place as our capital city’s university because it is a purpose university in a dynamic purpose
region that strives for growth that lifts the community for all.

Students who choose Capital are driven to spend their lives in meaningful work and they want to be prepared for that in
all ways. They are not at Capital to escape, but to take their place in the community and the world. They want a college
experience that is not withdrawn from the real world, but embedded in it as a powerful learning community that readies
them for life. Our focus at Capital University is to graduate Purpose Ready students – graduates who are ready to learn,
live, and lead with purpose for the good of society and for the sake of our world.
As a result, our alumni and students who are bold enough to seek out work that lives their purpose, have an unmatched work ethic. They have learned that finding purpose in their work is an asset for themselves, their employers, their families, and their communities.

We are Ready

This alive learning process launches Cap alumni into a lifetime of living, learning and working with purpose. Indeed, the full University shares in this dedication.

We are ready – and eager – to:

Learn and Create. With Purpose. We yearn to feel intensely human. We embrace the complexity of humanity, rather than hiding in its fragmentation and anomie. We seek a whole and integrated life, fusing personal, civic and professional commitments. We believe that learning is a holistic pursuit, including broad, deep, and rigorous academic study; ideological inquiry to discern one’s values and relationship with religion; and social, relationship, and community development. We are not a refuge from the real world. We believe that powerful learning happens through engagement with real-world challenges, communities, organizations – and through trial and error, failure and success.

We are ready – and eager – to:

Partner. With Purpose. Our students learn best through immersion in communities and workplaces of purpose. We want to “use ourselves well” as part of committed community – with others committed to “using themselves well” for the good of humanity too. Together, let’s tackle some of our community’s challenges, let’s unleash human potential and purpose in our corporations and communities, let’s help the next generation of citizens and leaders – of all ages – be ready for learning, living, and working for the good of our world.

We are ready – and eager – to:

Moblize. With Purpose. We are ready to take risks for the good of humanity. We want to be part of making a difference in a big way. We bring high expectations. We crave groundbreaking or unprecedented moves forward. We believe the intersection of liberal or liberating education with practical and professional learning will enrich humanity and help us imagine and create a more meaningful future. We create bold blends of people and ideas to chart new paths forward. We think there is new potential in the convergence of disciplines and sectors.

We are ready – and eager – to:

Unite. With Purpose. As humans, we live and thrive on connection - a feeling of belonging in community. But at Capital, our unity does not mean uniformity. We celebrate humanity’s full spectrum and each individual’s gifts. The Power of Purple inspires us, showing us a way to question, learn about, and reconcile difference. We invite our neighbors to join us in creating a model inclusive community, in which all voices are welcome and heard, our implicit biases are made conscious, we learn from one another through our commonalities and our differences, and all are lifted. Let’s work together to foster inter-religious dialogue and learning, experiences that build empathy and perspective on people we have
defined as “others” or “different,” and let’s define inclusive leadership strategies and skills so we can generate leaders for inclusion near and far. Let’s also work together to ensure that local population growth is shaped by guiding hands and hearts of human purpose and quality of life for all.

CapFam is eager to strive, reach, hope and grow – with and for our communities.

The power before us is in the hope and promise of lives unleashed by passion and purpose. Our students and alumni show us clearly the power of embracing a life of passion and purpose with the hope and expectation of a better future. Growth for social progress inspires us to dream higher, reach further, and work harder. CapFam brightens our world – individually and collectively. Are you ready!?