



LAMAR UNIVERSITY
A CENTURY OF LEADERS

Faculty & Staff Convocation 2023
Dr. Jaime Taylor

Good morning, everyone! Welcome to the Staff and Faculty Convocation.

Before we get started, I'd like to give a special shout-out to all our new colleagues who have joined Lamar University. If you are a new staff or faculty member, would you please raise your hand?

Thank you! We're really excited to have you here as part of Cardinal Country, and we're very grateful you chose to be a part of Lamar University.

And of course, it's FANTASTIC to see all our returning staff and faculty. There's really something special about the campus buzzing with activity as everyone returns. I mean . . . it's a good ole "hot August day" in Texas, all the students are moving in, and the campus is draped in red and white everywhere you look.

It almost feels like we've been here before. Déjà vu, anyone?

Most of us have probably experienced déjà vu, but what's interesting to me is that it's not just a memory of the past. It's more like a reincarnation of the past. It's as if life has hit the rewind button, and we're walking the same steps, saying familiar words, and reliving familiar feelings. In those moments, time seems to fold back on itself.

As we gather here today on the cusp of a new academic year and the threshold of a new century for Lamar University, we can't help but sense the continuity. The echoes of the past reverberate in the present, guiding us as we step into the future. This upcoming chapter will present us with familiar elements, but it will not be a carbon copy. Our path forward presents unique opportunities, challenges, and victories that will shape the legacy we are about to forge.

Still, the way we mark this anniversary matters. Commemorating a centennial honors the generations of students, faculty, staff, and supporters who've shaped our university. It reminds us that we're part of something bigger, contributing to social progress and individual empowerment across the globe.

Right now, we have a rare chance to carry our founders' wisdom into the future. Their experiences, successes, and challenges laid the groundwork, but this revival isn't about repeating history. It's about building on it, infusing it with new perspectives and goals. We're

carrying forward the torch of our history while also igniting the fire of progress. Striking this balance honors our past, empowers our present work, and shapes the future we envision.

Now, I've been talking a lot about past and future, but in my view, appreciating both can help us to improve what we choose to do in the present.

In the recent legislative session, Lamar University achieved something absolutely INCREDIBLE. We earned the highest percentage increase in the Texas Higher Education Funding Formula among **all** 38 public universities in the state. This achievement is a testament to our unwavering dedication to Southeast Texas and the students who will one day lead the region.

Let me be clear: we earned this distinction--and the funding that comes with it--because we have worked to align our goals with the state's vision. We're producing more and more professionals who are essential to this region and beyond--and for that, I am incredibly grateful to each of you. Your commitment helps Lamar University shine as a true "center of excellence" in higher education. We've weathered unbelievable challenges and celebrated remarkable achievements. But our shared mission has always been clear: to transform lives through education.

And so . . . I'm very happy to announce that all faculty and staff will share in a well-deserved 3% raise pool. Your hard work, expertise, and commitment deserve recognition and support. You are the backbone of our institution, and you make a lasting impact on our students and our university as a whole.

Right now, I'd like to turn our attention to two pivotal aspects that will shape Lamar University's journey forward. In my view, these aspects are absolutely intertwined:

- the notion of success
- and the imperative of fostering a positive culture.

For Lamar University, success isn't a checklist of accomplishments. We are successful when we wholeheartedly embrace our mission and diligently strategize to make it a reality. Over the course of a century, Lamar University has consistently fulfilled this mission, and we built a legacy of excellence that stretches across generations.

But while this remarkable history of success deserves our admiration--especially on this, the anniversary of our first one hundred years--it's essential that we foster a positive culture to sustain it. A positive culture isn't just about workplace dynamics-- **it is a shared mindset that empowers us to achieve our best while also uplifting one another**. A positive campus culture unites us. No matter what anyone tells you about the benefits of raw individualism, to be truly successful, we must create an environment where every interaction is amplified--because each of us can derive value from the successes of others. You play a crucial role in supporting our bigger goals. I hope you'll take the opportunity to connect the dots between what you do every day, and how your work impacts students, alumni, and each other.

Ensuring that this kind of culture thrives means knowing our priorities and avoiding "initiative fatigue." It's not about doing more; it's about doing what truly matters. By channeling our efforts collectively, we maximize our impact. A positive culture will challenge you, while providing you with the environment and support you need to achieve things you never dreamed possible! At the end of the day, you will be stunned at the progress we make and the things we will accomplish together.

Over the past year, we have diligently refined our strategic plan to align with our second century aspirations. As we all recognize, plans can change--and we often have to adapt to changing circumstances. This is why our strategic plan must always be treated as a living, evolving document. But its foundation rests on a set of GUIDING PRINCIPLES that ground us and direct our path. These principles are the bedrock on which we stand, guiding our strategic planning as we plan for the future.

I'd like to briefly mention three of these guiding principles before we leave today.

First, the connection between Lamar University's brand and purpose runs deep. Our academic programs are designed not only to equip our graduates for immediate employment but also to ensure they are well-prepared for their long-term careers. This takes us back to our very beginnings, where community leaders opted for a technical or professional school rather than a teacher's school so that the institution's purpose would align with the needs of Southeast Texas. Today, we teach our students how to hone practical skills while fostering lifelong learning strategies, which empowers our graduates to navigate their evolving career paths with confidence.

In previous Convocations, I've discussed the transformative power of teamwork. A united university team mindset is absolutely unparalleled as a force multiplier. When we foster an environment of trust that welcomes diverse viewpoints and expertise, our most effective and innovative solutions will form at the intersection of ideas. If we can truly embrace this principle, we will shift our perspective on individual success, tying it closely to the attainment of institutional and unit-specific goals. By doing so, we collectively nurture an environment where the success of each unit contributes to the prosperity of the entire Lamar University community.

But the most vital guiding principle is our student focus. At the core of Lamar University's identity is an unwavering dedication to our students. Every employee's contribution, regardless of department, has a direct impact on prospective students, current students, and alumni. Recognizing the dedication of our faculty and staff in guiding students towards their aspirations is crucial. Your commitment shapes their success. As we begin this academic year, we carry the pride of our shared achievements. Together, we will continue to create a place where students thrive.

We've put together a comprehensive brochure reminding us of our shared purpose and direction. I encourage you to pick up a copy along with a commemorative coin, a lapel pin, and

a centennial t-shirt, as you leave today. Staff will be behind this curtain with the items. These tangible reminders will reinforce our dedication to the path we've charted.

Also, I want to invite all of you to join us for our community-wide centennial celebration on Sunday, September 17th. The event will kick off at 4:00pm, and promises to be a wonderful time for you, your family, and friends. Live music, a kid's area, and many more activities await. You can find more information on our website.

Thank you for being here at Convocation today. It is truly an honor to work alongside each of you here at Lamar University. I look forward to our remarkable journey ahead.