



Building Community Resilience for a More Equitable Future

President Ana Mari Cauce
wələbʔaltx^w - Intellectual House, University of Washington
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Remarks as prepared for delivery

Thank you, Robin, and thank you all for joining me for this annual tradition. I want to give a special welcome and thank you to Regents Ayer, MacPhee, Pogolian, Rice, Riojas, and Tamaki who are all joining us remotely.

It's always a pleasure for me to be here in wələbʔaltx^w - the Intellectual House, which serves as the campus “home” for our Native American faculty, students and staff. Its warmth and spirit has made it my venue of choice for deep conversations with our entire community. So, today, as we honor Indigenous People's Day, let me begin by acknowledging that I am on the land of the Coast Salish peoples, which touches the shared waters of all the tribes and bands within the Suquamish, Tulalip and Muckleshoot nations. The tribes and people descended from those nations remain a vibrant and vital part of our community.

As I stand in this beautiful place for gathering and connection, I am keenly aware of the physical distance between us, but I know that no matter where we are, our community remains united by shared values, our commitment to each other, and to our mission of education, research and discovery, and public service. This talk provides me with an opportunity to reflect on that shared mission as we begin a new academic year.

I'm often asked about my vision for the UW, and my answer has always been simple — to be the top public university in the world in terms of impact. No matter what you're studying — be it contemporary African American literature, medieval history, quantum physics, or clean energy, I know you are making connections between your work and the problems and challenges we face. It might be the challenges we face right now, like the pandemic and climate change, or those that have been with us since the very founding of our country, like racism.

You are capable of incredible things; that's been so crystal clear this year as everyone has demonstrated amazing adaptability and creativity in the face of huge challenges. And in just a few moments I'll mention a few of the individual accolades that members of our community have received that make us all proud. But today I will primarily focus on the power of community and on the work we

need to do collaboratively to ensure that our community is, and remains, resilient in the face of the multiple challenges that we face today, and those that will undoubtedly continue to come our way in these unsettling and uncertain times.

So, let's start with the good news — This may not be a moment for unbridled celebration; this year's losses have been staggering. But, there are also many bright spots — and it's great to see our peers and the world continue to recognize the extraordinary work that you do.

I've said before that rankings for the sake of rankings are not what drives us or our work. They are only as valuable as what they measure. And at a time when universities and colleges around the country tout their commitment to inclusivity, it's a travesty that some ranking systems give us points for exclusivity – as the University FOR Washington, we never seek to be celebrated for the number of great students that we simply don't have room for.

We seek to be counted for who we are, the values we hold, and the outcomes and impact we achieve. So I'm especially pleased that our University is consistently recognized for excellence in categories that DO reflect that. When we rank highly for the quality of our scholarship and research, the value we create for students, the global reach of our innovation and impact, and our commitment to public service, it tells us that we're getting it right.

Reuters, for the fifth consecutive year, ranked us the most innovative public university in the U.S., and the fifth most innovative university in the world. This year's Academic Ranking of World Universities, which measures the value of our faculty's research and scholarship, ranked UW 16th in the world, and number three among U.S. publics. This speaks to our leading role in expanding humanity's knowledge and understanding. And, it's no surprise that in the Washington Monthly's National University Rankings we're number 16 based on our contributions to the public good in promoting social mobility, research and public service.

It's also a real point of pride that Money Magazine, Washington Monthly and CNBC all celebrated the UW for providing exceptional value to undergraduates. Both UW Tacoma and UW Bothell have been singled out as top schools in the nation for providing return on investment, especially to students of modest means. And for veterans seeking a welcoming place to transition to civilian life, it's great to know that the UW is ranked among the best universities for veterans.

We also have many, many graduate and professional schools at the front of the pack in training skilled healthcare providers and scientists, including in nursing, pharmacy, dentistry and social work. We have top ten programs in public policy, education, business, information and computer science, engineering, and in a range of environmental, social, natural and physical sciences as well as in the humanities. I don't have time to name them all, but year after year, our graduate and professional programs are recognized for producing the talented PhDs and professionals whose contributions our world urgently needs.

Among all these laurels, one designation is especially reflective of who we are. This January, an in-depth assessment by the Carnegie Foundation recognized all 3 campuses for their high level of community engagement. And last election cycle, we received a platinum seal for our voter participation efforts and results. And while the Apple Cup lies ahead of us, our student athletes already beat the Cougs for voter registration with 100% of our eligible student athletes in football and basketball registering. Go Dawgs!! And to all of you who can vote, make sure to VOTE!

Speaking of our remarkable students, a handful of their many, many achievements bear special mention, including 22 students and recent alumni who were named Fulbright Students, continuing our tradition of being a top producer of Fulbright students and scholars. This year we also had two Udall Scholars, Sierra Campbell and Taylor Owens, who were selected for their commitment to Native health and environmental scholarship. And senior Ginny Burton was named a Truman Scholar, the premier graduate fellowship for those pursuing careers as public service leaders. Ginny, who attended the UW with the help of the Post-Prison Education Project, is a wonderful example of the transformational role of higher education.

Staff members across the University are also recognized as leaders in their field, for example HFS Director Pam Schreiber, was elected vice president to the executive board of the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International. And thanks to everyone at HFS working so hard to help nurture a safe and fun community for our students.

Among our faculty, we recently announced recipients of TWO Breakthrough Prizes – sometimes called the “Oscars of Science” – one for Professor David Baker’s innovation in developing novel proteins at the Institute for Protein Design and the other to a team of UW physicists, Eric Adelberger, Jens Gundlach and Blayne Heckel, whose work is expanding our understanding of the forces that hold the universe together. Political science professor Megan Ming Frances was named a Freedom Scholar for her research and organizing for a more just and fair society. And mathematics professor Tatiana Toro was awarded the Blackwell-Tapia Prize for her work promoting diversity within the mathematical and statistical sciences. Professor Toro was also elected this year to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences together with Professor Trisha Davis, chair of the Biochemistry department, and I’m incredibly humbled to also have been so honored.

I could spend an entire hour or two just talking about all the good work that we have accomplished this year. Like rankings, awards are not the point, but they are an indicator of the kind of talent we have in our midst. Everywhere you look, you will find dedicated, talented people who recognize that building healthy, resilient, and equitable communities is everyone’s work.

Since the advent of the pandemic, we have witnessed with stark clarity what happens to communities that are not built to be equitable, just or healthy: the outcomes are devastating. Worldwide, more than a million have died, and the U.S. has borne a grossly disproportionate share of those deaths.

Millions more have been sickened and it's still too early to know what long-term health problems the virus may yet cause.

For those careful and lucky enough not to get sick, the economic costs have often been nearly as catastrophic. Millions have lost their jobs or had their hours or wages cut. Economic hardship is rapidly threatening to become a serious housing and humanitarian crisis. The UW has not been immune to the damage, and our own personnel have been affected. While people will always be our top priority, the reality is that we are faced with hard choices, especially those units that are self-sustaining and depend on a thriving community of users and patrons to operate.

I promise you that we are working hard to protect jobs and benefits wherever possible, but this is a marathon not a sprint. Voluntary give-backs by senior leaders, the difficult decision to eliminating annual merit this year, and for some units the even more difficult decision to take furloughs to avoid more layoffs were important steps. But we know these temporary solutions have limits as the effects of the pandemic stretch on longer than expected. We must continue to work with our state legislators to make clear that any state-mandated reductions will result in even tougher choices. We promise to keep you updated and to involve you as much as possible as our choices and decisions unfold.

We also need to recognize the challenges faced by faculty, staff and students with caregiving responsibilities, related to children, the elderly, or those suffering from COVID. These responsibilities disproportionately affect women and even more so those that are Black, Indigenous or People of Color and/or low-income, given their disproportionate representation amongst essential workers.

And, let's take a moment to thank all our essential workers!

Provost Richards and I are asking everyone – especially managers, supervisors and academic leaders – to provide maximum flexibility and understanding. Caregivers are also essential workers and when we support them, we strengthen the network of ties that benefit us all.

For students learning remotely, inequity is also a factor. They may lack good internet access, technology tools, or a quiet space to study and attend classes. If you are a student facing extra challenges, reach out and let your instructors or advisors know. We are here for you — your success is our success.

In every instance, the suffering caused by COVID has landed disproportionately on BIPOC communities. The disparities in COVID impacts are the more-visible manifestation of long-standing disparities in everything from healthcare to education to economic opportunity. This is why Dr. Ben Danielson, a UW School of Medicine alumnus and leader of the Odessa Brown Children's Clinic in south King County, recently described COVID as “the great revealer.”

He went on to say that a “recovery” implies that we just get back to the way things were. But the status quo was broken before COVID arrived. For the those who were barely keeping their heads above water before the pandemic, a return to “normal” doesn't hold much appeal.

Instead, he proposes an “equi-covey” because we need a new normal. An equi-covey will require meaningful infrastructure investments in communities that have been overlooked and

underinvested in for generations. The need for universal access to healthcare, high speed internet, and accessible and affordable childcare and higher education are just a few of the areas where further investments are needed.

In this COVID era, disparities between hard-hit communities and those less affected further fuels the divisiveness which has stymied us from mounting a united battle against the virus. In a very literal sense, inequity is killing us.

To achieve an “equi-coveyry,” two things must occur: we must stop the spread of COVID and we must build a society that is better equipped – economically, socially and philosophically – to address the next global crisis. COVID will not be our last novel virus, this won’t be the last summer that wildfires threaten our air quality, and BIPOC communities are still suffering under structural racism that enables racist violence. The University of Washington has the reach, talent and motivation to positively affect all of these challenges.

On the scientific front, the UW has become a world leader in the effort to understand, control and vaccinate against the virus. The heroic work of our frontline healthcare providers and support staff have saved lives and helped to curb the spread in our state, including rural eastern Washington, where the UW School of Medicine has just broken ground on a new teaching facility in partnership with Gonzaga University.

Since we first learned about the novel coronavirus, our researchers, epidemiologists, data scientists and public health experts have been working to understand, track, treat and eradicate the virus. The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation has been a global leader in modeling the spread of the virus, informing evidence-based policies. We are now getting a constant, real-world lesson in WHY we established the Population Health Initiative: the health of anybody, truly, impacts the health of everybody.

UW virology has supported widespread COVID testing, sampling rural and urban underserved communities. And speaking of testing, two weeks ago, we launched the Husky Coronavirus Testing program, in partnership with the Seattle Flu Study, the group that reported the very first COVID case in our country. If you are a member of the UW community who will be on or near a campus at least once a week, please make sure you are enrolled.

At a time when too many scientific endeavors have become politicized, it is paramount that the integrity of this scientific process be preserved. The world must have confidence that any working vaccine has been developed and tested safely and thoroughly. Last week, we joined Johns Hopkins University in sponsoring a symposium to advance this case on the world stage with the help of speakers including Dr. Anthony Fauci and Francis Collins. And our interdisciplinary Center for an Informed Public was recently awarded an NSF grant to determine how facts and data can correct the spread of misinformation about the pandemic.

Collaboration is the key to success. And equity must be a chief consideration in this process. Across our full range of disciplines and programs the UW is working to address the root causes that have

made our society such fertile ground for this pandemic. For the “equi-covery” to take place, failed structures and systems must change. Change at scale requires new knowledge and understandings, narratives and perspectives.

There is no vaccine for racism. We can’t take a pill to undo a system that incarcerates Black people at five times the rate of Whites. No single act will erase centuries of stolen labor and opportunities denied to build generational wealth. Our scholars are also engaged in the kinds of research, artistry, organizing and community building that can be an important element to remedying inequity. We cannot do it alone – it requires policy makers, public will and investment – but the work happening here is essential to advancing racial, social and economic justice. This work had been underway for decades before COVID hit, but it too often has been undervalued, something that must change so the work can continue with even more urgency, greater visibility and public engagement.

In a recent review paper in *Science* where he was lead author, Christopher Schell, an urban ecologist at UW-Tacoma wrote about how “Racism is destroying our planet, and how we treat each other is essentially structural violence against our natural world.” And Melanie Malone, geologist and soil scientist at UW-Bothell, is studying contaminants in urban community gardens, showing us how almost anywhere you look, the effects of structural inequities show up.

And to illustrate how academic work can turn into impact, it was UW sociologists Katherine Beckett and Heather Evans whose analysis of the role of race in sentencing helped convince the Washington State Supreme Court to abolish our state’s death penalty. Angelina Godoy, Director of the Center for Human Rights, was among the first to raise the alarm over children being deported by ICE, paving the way for King County to take action by banning those flights.

There is no discipline or part of the academy that doesn’t have a role to play in this work. For example, last year, the Meany Center’s World Dance series engaged in a season-long exploration of empathy, encouraging audiences to step out of their own comfort zones and enter into another’s perspective.

Across our three campuses, through programs like the Dream Project, STARS, and the Brotherhood Initiative, dedicated people are working to ensure that students who have historically been underrepresented in higher education can thrive here. Success in college is also about seeing a place for yourself and developing a sense of belonging. From the New Burke to the Samuel E. Kelly Ethnic Cultural Center and Q Center to the Student Diversity Center at UW Bothell and the annual Students of Color Conference held by UW Tacoma, we are committed to creating spaces (virtual for now) that foster a sense of belonging. For too long, campus life has been dominated by those from a limited and narrow slice of society. With that in mind, we recently dropped the requirement that UW applicants submit an SAT or ACT score, in part because it created barriers to application and entry for too many. But, no doubt, there is much, much more to be done!

We are particularly mindful of the extra burden our Black students, faculty and staff are experiencing as they have been forced to watch a nearly non-stop spectacle of their community members murdered on camera with all too limited accountability for those who have enabled or participated in those deaths.

We are undertaking a reimagining of campus safety that takes a more holistic approach and minimizes the presence of armed police on our Seattle campus while continuing to keep safety among our highest priorities. I will soon be announcing a town hall to engage in a discussion of what aspects of public safety can be better served by non-armed safety responders and/or by those with more mental health training and how to develop a more appropriate workforce to meet those needs. We are also securing additional funding for Black student groups and dedicating resources to recruiting more Black and underrepresented faculty, supported by two hiring initiatives led by Provost Richards. We have a lot of hard work ahead of us, and it is critical that this work be done collaboratively.

The world is beginning to wake up to the reality that racism is a public health crisis and I'd be remiss not to give a shout out Dr. Estell Williams and Edwin Lindo who led a march to bring attention to this fact, and to support Black Lives, because they do matter. When we launched the Population Health Initiative four years ago, we did so in recognition of the interconnectedness of human health and well-being. This month, we are marking a key milestone with the completion of the Hans Rosling Center for Population Health. As Dr. Ali Mokdad said in his talk last week to officially open the facility, "health happens in neighborhoods." If you missed that talk, I hope you will join us this Thursday, October 15, for a panel discussion on Creating a Better Normal.

The Rosling Center was made possible by a transformative gift from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, a boost of private philanthropic support for our work as a public-serving institution. For our mission to succeed, we need both public and private support – they complement each other but can never substitute for each other.

That is the philosophy at the core of our historic, ten-year philanthropic campaign, Be Boundless, For Washington, For the World, which was successfully completed this year. The campaign exceeded our ambitious goals and I'm deeply grateful to the more than 500,000 supporters of the campaign who gave through the UW to make a difference in the world.

Private philanthropy does some things really well – it brings our community together and designates resources for specific priorities, helping to create hubs of excellence that attract more excellence. But our core educational mission – our public mission – requires support and investment by the public through the state.

Bill Gates Sr. understood this very well. We lost Bill just a few weeks ago. He was a double Dawg who loved the UW with his whole heart, John Roberts, who sat with him on the UW Foundation board for a decade describes him as the "Mayor of UW", a very apt description— I can close my eyes and watch him belt out an exuberant, and loud, "Bow Down to Washington."

He believed in both giving back as a private individual and in advocating for sound public policies. Bill believed in “showing up” and he did so again and again, as a regent, as a volunteer, and in calling for sensible tax reform to fund public priorities that benefit everyone. Among his many legacies, he has inspired me, and so many who knew him, to carry that torch forward.

Despite how big and complex the University of Washington is, or how specialized any single part of it is, our purpose is clear: we seek to create impact that makes the world better — for all – not just the few, because in the words of my colleague Eric Liu, we’re all better off when we’re ALL better off.

Success will not manifest in one vaccine or the passage of a single law, but in the cultivation of resilient communities. We often hear about resilience as a personal characteristic. And yes, we should encourage people to reach for ambitious goals and to learn from setbacks. But true resilience is a characteristic not of individuals, but of communities. We can’t tell people to pull themselves up by their bootstraps when too many don’t have boots. Resilience requires communities to build safety nets to catch the most vulnerable; it requires those that are more fortunate to help lift up those who need it. If we’ve learned anything from this pandemic, it’s how our fates are interconnected. Our health and well-being literally rest in each other hands. So, make sure to wash them!

In resilient communities, when one person struggles – loses a job, gets sick, is the victim of a fire or flood – they can find the help and healing they need. Resilient communities have adequate resources that are equitably distributed. They have public safety systems that don’t victimize people. They have quality healthcare and the conditions that reduce the need for healthcare: safe streets, parks, healthy food, living wage jobs, great schools.

Ultimately, everything that we do at the University of Washington – in classrooms and labs, community engagement initiatives, in hospitals and clinics – works to support and promote resilient communities.

But, if we are to enable all communities to be resilient, we must continue to ensure that our own is – and to deal honestly with the ways in which we still fall short of that ideal.

Resilient communities are marked by the care and compassion that members show and give each other as we struggle to make progress on difficult, complicated issues and questions. Progress is seldom linear, there will be bumps and even setbacks along the way. We will not always agree on how to move forward, and at times compromise will be required to avoid stasis.

At times we will need to give each other grace. Grace is most definitely not a free pass for racist actions or language, for the willful disregard of others’ pain, or an excuse for callous cluelessness. and it does not preclude the need to apologize or make reparations when harms – even unintentional ones – occur. Grace is a recognition that even when we share values and goals, we each bring our own struggles and vulnerabilities to the table and our communications are filtered by both our own limited personal histories and our limited knowledge of the histories of those we are engaged with.

What I mean by grace is that we must recognize the humanity of others and that we are all incomplete in our efforts to learn and grow. I too am learning each day. But, without the presence of grace, we will not fully engage with each other out of fear that we will get shut down, or worse, if we say the wrong thing – or the right thing the wrong way – so we shut down before we even start.

John Lewis, a giant that we lost this year said, “Children holding hands, walking with the wind. That is America to me – not just the movement for civil rights, but the endless struggle to respond with decency, dignity, and a sense of brotherhood to all the challenges that we face us as a nation, as a whole... We bring our morality to politics, not politics to our morality.”

In the words of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, yet another giant we lost this year, “Fight for the things you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.” We move forward best as a community when we view those who disagree with us, or who may hurt us inadvertently, not as enemies to defeat or expel, but as potential allies to win over.

Together, I know we will continue the important work ahead of us, putting our talents where they make the greatest impact and lifting each other up through it all.

I’m honored and proud of all of you who have been working so hard to make our community better under extremely difficult circumstances, marked by many hardships and physical distance. The struggle will no doubt continue in the weeks, months, and yes, years ahead, but there is no community I’d rather be engaged with in that struggle. I know you will push me and hold me accountable. I pledge to put my sweat and tears, heart and soul into making progress on the goals and values that we share. At times I will ask for grace as we seek common ground and work together not toward quick and superficial fixes but toward lasting change

As the proverb goes “If you want to go quickly, go alone, if you want to far, go together.”