

Dear Colleagues and Students,

The first full day at a university is always a challenge: You have to memorize new names and faces of professors and students, learn where all the important buildings are, and develop the skill of discreetly peeking at your campus map occasionally when you suddenly find you're in a place that doesn't look at all familiar. I think I will have a great deal of empathy for Ohio University's incoming freshmen this fall because of these renewed type of experiences.

While sometimes nerve-racking, there's also something wonderful about the first day of a new experience, isn't there? Aside from having a new beginning full of potential, you have the opportunity to take stock of not just what you want to be, but the great opportunities you have to advance the institution you now call home. Figuring out what Ohio University can be starts with knowing what it is, and my first official day has given me some powerful insight into the hidden gems that exist all over our campus.

This morning, after getting my University identification card at the Bobcat Depot and visiting with other students and parents in town for Bobcat Student Orientation, I met with faculty of the Scripps College of Communication who are helping students develop augmented and virtual reality applications in Ohio University's new Game Research and Immersive Design (GRID) Lab. Seeing our students develop the technology of the future was thrilling. It is always awe-inspiring to remember that the things we learn in our undergraduate education will serve us as we progress through life. I recall often upon the lessons I learned as a young geography student at Montana State University when I am working on my current research.

Later in the morning, I stopped by the Konneker Research Center to meet with Distinguished Professor John Kopchick, his colleagues and student researchers, who are studying the role of growth hormones in obesity and the development of diabetes. Dr. Kopchick is working with students in the Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship (SURF). This program gives undergraduate students interested in medicine and medical research the kind of hands-on skills, education, and tools they need to make a splash in medical school and in the world.

I remember seeing Dr. Kopchick hood one of his students at the 2017 Graduate Commencement Ceremony this past April. Watching him work now with the SURF students made me wonder if he would one day be one of their dissertation chairs, too: coaching and cheering them on to successful defense of a dissertation examining innovative biomedical therapies, and then ushering them onward to a bright career. Seeing the mentorship in which our faculty engage, from freshman year to dissertation defense, is a testament to their love of teaching and desire to pass knowledge into the future. I am delighted to see such enthusiasm for innovation thriving at Ohio University!

I had the honor and privilege to eat lunch in Nelson Dining Hall with a small group of our incoming freshman and their parents who are in Athens for Bobcat Student Orientation. We had a great conversation about their futures and the future of the University they are now calling home. The time flew by!

When I returned to Cutler Hall, I made two very important executive decisions:

- 1 I decided to join the coalition of other university presidents, mayors, governors and business leaders around the country to reaffirm Ohio University's commitment to sustainability by signing a national declaration through the group *We Are Still In* that says OHIO will continue to support climate action to meet the Paris Agreement. This is not a political statement. This is a promise to uphold the sustainability measures Ohio University already has in place for the good of the planet. I feel by signing this petition, we are sending the message that we intend to continue being a national

leader. You'll remember the Environmental Protection Agency recently recognized Ohio University as one of the nation's leading green power users and OHIO's sustainability efforts have gained regional, state and national acclaim. It is important we not lose the progress we have achieved.

- 2 I also named an interim executive vice president and provost to replace Dr. Pam Benoit while the University embarks on a nationwide search process. I recruited Dr. David Descutner, who, as you know, most recently occupied the role of interim president. He has been a tremendous asset to me, personally, in recent months. It only makes sense for the two of us to continue working closely as I continue to transition into my new role. I know his institutional knowledge and experience in academia will serve the University well in this interim capacity.

Today has provided me with the inspiration to start envisioning what the future could hold for Ohio University. What are your dreams for our University? Drop me an email at president@ohio.edu to let me know. Let's shape our future together!

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Duane Nellis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

M. Duane Nellis, Ph.D. President

P.S. [Check out the video from my first day!](#)