



**State of the University Address  
“Progress and Perseverance”  
David M. Carlisle, MD, PhD  
August 30, 2022**

Good morning to all friends of CDU, our board of trustees, distinguished faculty, alumni, students, and all the other guests who are joining us today in person as well as to those of you watching remotely. Thank you for attending our State of the University Address in this, the University’s 56th year. In fact, it was just this month on August 3<sup>rd</sup> back in 1966 when The Charles R. Drew Post Graduate Medical School, our original name, was chartered right here in South Los Angeles.

Where there once was a dirt field now stands the thriving campus you see around you today, and we are not done growing by a long shot. How did we get here? How did we go from a collection of trailers to a comprehensive university with 3 schools and more than 20 undergraduate, graduate degree, and certificate programs in the heart of this under resourced community? It took progress and perseverance, the theme of my address today. In these times, you can’t have one without the other, and we have been fortunate to have an abundance of both.

Speaking of being fortunate, it is especially nice to be able to hold this event in person on campus for the first time in three years. It is an honor to host you here.

Having this event take place in person for the first time since the pandemic was declared is itself an act of perseverance. We have remained vigilant and cautious with our COVID-19 policies and have steadfastly followed the guidance of public health agencies. We have administered over 80 thousand COVID-19 rapid tests to students, staff, faculty, and visitors to our campus since the start of the pandemic, essentially everyone who sets foot on campus. We remain the only major school in town holding these protocols in place. This has helped keep our on-campus instances of COVID-19 infections and transmissions to a remarkable minimum while allowing our operations to continue through the pandemic, and into the endemic, largely unabated.

Much has changed since COVID-19 came along and sent most of higher education back to the proverbial drawing board. The hurdles were especially high for schools of medicine and science such as ours, where teacher/learner interactions can be crucial to the education process. We have responded by making systematic changes that will extend beyond the current health crisis to improve the student experience for this and future classes of Mighty Lions. We find our reputation has grown during these troubled times. This has put us in an ideal position to attract and retain talented staff and faculty, while also deepening our valuable relationships with our partners and community alike. At the same time, we have managed to keep the unique qualities that make CDU a standout institution among its peers. As has happened previously, when the University is faced with a crisis, we persevere and emerge stronger. Progress and Perseverance.

Let me share with you that, for a moment, I honestly thought I might have to struggle to find enough to talk about up here today. The recently completed academic year took place during the very heart of the pandemic, through its peaks and valleys, from one viral variant to the other, and hampered further with campus closures. It wrapped up under the shadow of a worsening economy and a downright startling legislative climate.

All this oppressive weight surely would hinder CDU's momentum and impede any progress towards achieving our mission and vision, or so I allowed myself to think.

I was wrong. From every corner of the university, every department, and every program, came tales of heroic fortitude, stories of innovation and grit, and portraits of determination and dedication. Deep within in some of the darkest hours our society has seen in a generation, the spirit of progress and perseverance was burning bright within our students, staff, faculty, and extended community. Together, they had coalesced in unprecedented ways to adapt with grace while remaining fully on track and laser focused towards seeing the University's mission to fruition.

Therefore, I am here today to tell you that the State of the University is strong and fueled by the unwavering Mighty Lions spirit. The 2021-2022 academic year was a success on several fronts with numerous high points.

Our programs continued to innovate and shine. CDU's Master of Science in Biomedical Sciences program was named the best in the country by an independent evaluation, edging out big-name programs like those from John Hopkins University and George Washington University.

We hit measurable milestones in our quest to prepare students of all backgrounds to start or accelerate careers in health and medicine. CDU was ranked a top university in California for providing a high return on investment to low-income students. CDU was also ranked number two in the nation in terms of weighted return on investment overall. Another study, this one conducted by Yahoo Finance, identified CDU as one of America's five best colleges for high starting salaries, putting our University in the company of Massachusetts Institute of Technology and California Institute of Technology. Inclusiveness remained a cornerstone, with

CDU once again being identified as the second most diverse university in the nation in terms of faculty and student diversity.

Partners old and new stepped forward to join or support our mission. Philanthropist MacKenzie Scott surprised us with a \$20 million donation, a one-time gift that represents the largest private donation in the history of the University. The McMillan-Stewart Foundation endowed \$600,000 to CDU for student scholarships and also to support our Saturday Science Academy Pipeline Program. Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc visited the campus in July to make a five thousand donation to the University and our mission. ServiconCares set up the Mahdesian Family/ServiconCares Scholarship Fund for CDU, which will consist of \$75,000 per year over the next four years totaling \$300,000. I'd like to personally thank Mr. Mahdesian, in attendance today, for this generous gift.

Individual donors like William Barclay and former Board Chair and Trustee Marvin O' Quinn gave generously to support scholarships and student success. In March, we hosted author and civil rights leader, Shaun King and other dignitaries like John C. Yang, President and Executive Director of the Asian Americans Advancing Justice, Thomas A. Saenz, President and General Counsel of the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund, and Crystal Crawford, Executive Director of the Western Center on Law and Poverty, to discuss the future of voting rights and redistricting, a critical healthcare issue. We also received hundreds of donations, ranging from \$5 to \$1,000 from alumni, faculty, staff, and even students to show their support of our mission.

I could honestly fill the rest of my time today just acknowledging the generous financial support we received from organizations and individuals. I didn't even get a chance to mention we allocated more than 4.5 million dollars of Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds to provide financial relief directly to nearly 800 of our students.

But the support we received wasn't just measured in dollars. CDU forged new relationships to help further our mission and edge closer to achieving our vision of a world without health disparities.

The NFL tapped CDU to be a founding partner in a new initiative to increase diversity in sports medicine. Together we are aiming to expand and diversify the pipeline of students interested in pursuing careers in sports medicine. This fall, we will be sending two of our students to embed with the Los Angeles Rams, working directly with professional sports physicians and athletes.

Right here in South Los Angeles we teamed up with Compton College and Compton Unified School District to form a partnership that creates a special Three-Year bachelor's degree program. This will allow for students interested in health sciences to begin working toward their degree beginning their junior year in high school.

Our dedication to local communities, especially around the pandemic, earned Charles R. Drew University an award for Outstanding Community Partner from the LA County Department of

Public Health. This honor was presented to us directly by Barbara Ferrer, director of the department, and an important ally in our ongoing work with our neighbors across the county.

We also hosted representatives from CommonSpirit Health, one of the largest non-profit health systems in the U.S., to further a partnership towards creating a pipeline to help fill the diversity gap in nursing.

Meanwhile CDU faculty, a perennial source of pride for the University, continued to shine. The diverse backgrounds, knowledge, and experience that allows us to offer such a full and varied line up of programs represents a dream team of medical educators, researchers, and practitioners.

We recently hosted our 9th Annual Outstanding Faculty Awards to single out just a few of the many stupendous individuals we have on the team. Dr. Cynthia Davis, who teaches in the Urban Public Health Program, was given the Outstanding Professor Award for her superlative record of teaching, research, and service to the community.

Dr. Bikau Shukla, Assistant Professor for CDU's Department of Health and Life Sciences, received the Outstanding Teaching Award for his skillful and engaging teaching contributions to the University that further the institution's mission.

Anne Wicks, Assistant Director for our Master of Science in Nursing ELM Program, received the Outstanding Service Award for her tireless and valuable service contributions to the University and its students.

Our faculty represents the very best of CDU, and often represent CDU externally. For example, Dr. Omolola Ogunyemi, Director of the CDU Center of Biomedical Informatics, was recently named to serve on the Board of Regents of the National Library of Medicine. Dr. Anish Dube, Director of the Psychiatry Residency program, was appointed Chair of the Council of Children, Adolescents, and their Families for the American Psychiatric Association. That's not all. Dr. Sondos Islam, CDU's Chair of the Department of Urban Public Health was appointed to the Council on Education for Public Health's Board of Councilors, an independent agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education to accredit schools of public health and public health programs.

Our staff is full of amazing leaders who establish standards that inspire and encourage others to achieve their full potential, provide leadership, and influence decisions that positively shape and define our city and community. Earlier this year, we announced our Inaugural CDU Women of Distinction Recipients, honoring leadership and volunteerism towards improving the quality of life for others. Congratulations to Angela Minniefield, Dr. Monica Ferrini, Brittney Miller, Monika Scherer, Dr. Sharon Cobb, and Adrienne Milbourne-Thompson for that achievement.

You will find our faculty and staff on boards, at conferences, and in symposiums, acquiring and sharing knowledge and in general embodying the very values our institution is built on. They are pilgrims for our vision. We are proud and honored to have them as part of our team.

Another way CDU continues to leave a mark on the broader landscape is through our robust research enterprise. During the 2021-2022 academic year, CDU's research department and projects reached new levels.

CDU researchers turned up in *The Lancet* when the prestigious medical journal published a paper on important research underway at the University on vaccine safety and immunogenicity. The inclusion in the high-profile journal marked a proud moment for CDU and speaks to the growing reputation we have earned.

This level of visibility has been attracting additional support and resources for our research efforts.

This includes our participation in Beacon of Hope, a multimillion-dollar commitment from Novartis and the Novartis US Foundation with our fellow Historically Black Medical Schools. This partnership allows us to collectively strengthen clinical trial capabilities and improve the quality of inclusivity in clinical trials. This contributes to the improved health outcomes for communities of color and helps rebuild their trust in the healthcare system.

The National Institutes of Health stepped forward to award the UCLA/CDU Center for AIDS Research a five-year, 11 million dollar grant that will support research that addresses health inequities which contribute to the spread of HIV in marginalized communities. This project will also aid in developing the next generation of scientists in the field with a focus on promoting diversity in HIV research.

CDU was also awarded an Institutional Development Grant from the American Cancer Society totaling more than 2.7 million dollars to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in cancer research. This will assist us in creating a more inclusive research environment to address health disparities more and involve people of color into clinical research protocols.

These exciting research endeavors and others like them create unique opportunities for our students to develop and practice their skills while becoming champions for diversity in all aspects of medicine and health.

Speaking of our students, they represent the beating heart of the Mighty Lion spirit.

Take Christopher Martin, who was a fourth-year medical student in the Charles R. Drew/UCLA Medical Education program during 2021-2022. He shared that he entered medical school expecting it to be an isolating experience. He was pleasantly surprised by how warm and supportive the CDU community was. In his words: "I gained a new family."

David Ohnoki, a student in the College of Science and Health's Physician Assistant program who graduates this December, was motivated to enter the field after learning that the single best predictor of a person's longevity is which zip code they were born in. He shared that he saw his goals and CDU's were almost perfectly aligned. In his words, "I knew CDU was where I NEEDED to be."

Cielo Sanchez is another exemplary Mighty Lion. Her parents, both nurses, instilled in her the passion to become a medical professional. She developed an interest in the social determinants of health through her experience with her grandfather, who nearly died due to inadequate healthcare. She brought that passion with her to CDU. As an undergraduate student of Biological and Biomedical Sciences, she quickly excelled and showed the signs of leadership that we seek to cultivate in all our students. She went on to become the President of the Student Body and was named a recipient of the Mahdesian Family/ServiconCares Scholarship I mentioned earlier. She shared that she knew she was doing exactly what she needed to be doing, and exactly where she needed to be doing it...right here at CDU.

One story I would be remiss in not telling is of three Masters of Public Health students, Raiza Arias, Lashea Brown, and Daija Lofton, all part of the class of 2022. This year they worked together on a proposal they wrote and submitted in their Grant Proposal course for the 'Turning Point Alcohol & Drug Education Program.' It was funded at approximately 365 thousand dollars over 2 and half years. What an achievement.

Another story worth telling is of Jahmil Lacy, a second-year medical student. He has been doing amazing work in the Los Angeles community through an organization he started called TRAP Medicine that leverages the cultural capital of barbershops to promote health and healing in communities of color. Well, this year Trap Medicine earned a \$300K grant from LA County to support the outstanding public health work they have been doing.

How about Princelaurenz Hamlin? An undergraduate CDU student, Princelaurenz is an aspiring Cardiac Surgeon with hopes of ending Cardiac Disease. To his surprise, he was named an inaugural recipient of the Oprah Winfrey Leaders Scholarship. He was one of only 15 students selected from across the country for their academic excellence and leadership within their respective communities.

I could go on all day...but I probably shouldn't.

Where do we go from here as a University? The path is not clear of obstacles. Like so many higher education institutions in the pandemic era, we are faced with the challenge of keeping enrollment up so we can provide the most opportunity for the greatest number of students as we work to diversify the health and medical professions.

Expanding the number and scope of our programs remains a key strategy towards that goal. A giant step in that direction is the ongoing push to open our own 4-year medical program. I can't possibly say enough about how important and historic this proposed program is for our University. Of all our successes this year, perhaps the most significant is our progress and

perseverance towards creating this program and earning an accreditation for it. This has been an institutional, and more importantly, a community need for decades, preceding and even leading to the Watts Uprising of 1965. Its success will not only dramatically reshape CDU but also provide historic closure to what has been a vision for the University since its earliest days.

Dr. Leroy Randolph Weekes, a prominent obstetrician in the African American community, one of the leaders in the campaign to open CDU in the sixties, was among the original proponents of having a 4-year medical program at the University. He served four terms as chairman of Drew University's board of Trustees before he retired from the position in 1987. It was his wish that efforts to achieve this program would continue to move forward.

I am also reminded of Dr. Gus Gill, who held numerous positions at CDU throughout the years. He was the Chairman of the Department of Otolaryngology, President of the Faculty Council, President of the University's Academic Senate, and Director of our International Health Institute. In his later years, when his health was starting to decline, I would occasionally give him a ride home from campus. During one of those last rides, he turned to me, put his hand on my arm, and made me promise that one day, this university would have its own 4-year medical program.

Dr. Gill passed on in 2015. The aforementioned Dr. Weekes left this world in 1994. These are just some of the many big dreamers throughout our history who wanted this for CDU. Now here we are in 2022, hopefully on the cusp of seeing this become a reality. It's been an all-hands-on-deck effort that has seen our staff and faculty rise to the occasion in spectacular ways.

Where does this stand today? Representatives from the Liaison Committee on Medical Education, the body that accredits medical education programs, just recently visited our school and put it under the microscope in one of the final steps to accreditation. The feedback we received was very positive, and the LCME will meet in October to render a decision. Our fingers are crossed that more than half a century of work towards this goal is about to come to a close with a groundbreaking achievement.

If this isn't perseverance, then I don't know what is.

Launching such a program would represent significant growth for the University. But that is not where we stop. Not at all. We are exploring the 12.8-acre former site of Lincoln Elementary School just across the street as a future home for CDU's expanding footprint. It's an opportunity to grow our institution while also strengthening our neighborhood, as we look to include affordable housing as part of this extended campus development. We, as always, continue to reach deep into our communities and build productive relationships with our partners and supporters to join us in, and benefit from, our progress and bright future.

We have bold plans to fund that future. We recently unveiled CDU's 75-million-dollar, five year long comprehensive fundraising campaign: CDU Rising. This initiative will help us further invest

in student success, grow our operating support, and fund a state-of-the-art health professions education building to house our proposed 4-year medical degree program. It's a bold step towards developing the next generations of health professionals instilled with a mission of social justice and equity in health care.

Let me close by sharing that I find myself often pondering the nature and source of the energy emanating from CDU. That hard to define quality that makes our institution so...special. At first, I attributed it to a unique culture that attracts talented faculty, dedicated staff, innovative researchers, supportive partners, and amazing students.

Then I realized I had it backwards. They are not attracted by our culture... they are creating it...right here.

This perfect mix that we enjoy and experience at CDU is truly lightning in a bottle fueled by inspiring people, inextinguishable compassion, unyielding ambition, and heroic dedication to changing the world. Each and every one of you, the entire extended CDU family, are the reason the state of this University is undeniably strong. It is so simple to overlook, but once you realize it you can't help but see it in every corner of our classrooms, campus, offices, events, and outreach. So, I will wrap up by thanking you from the bottom of my heart for your involvement in CDU. Thank you for that, truly.

May you all progress and persevere in your own endeavors. Stay safe, stay healthy.