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### Dawood Farahi 2019 Opening Day Address

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## Dawood Farahi 2019 Opening Day Address

### **Abstract**

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### **Keywords**

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Good morning.

Thank you, Madam Chair, for that kind introduction. The University continues to grow in prestige because of your leadership and the support of the Board of Trustees.

Before I begin, I would like to recognize some special guests who are here with us today.

I welcome each of you here today as we start the new academic year.

This is the time of year we all look forward to. We're filled with excitement as we prepare for another year of student achievement, and distinction for our University.

Today, we welcome new faces, new attitudes and new perspectives to our diverse campus. We prepare for lively discussions in and out of the classroom.

We reflect on the task of preparing students for careers that may not yet exist in our fast-changing economy. And, we consider what it means to be agents of change:

- changing the status quo for what higher education can and SHOULD be,
- changing expectations of how far ANY student can go regardless of where they start,
- changing lives.

Some time ago, we established a blueprint for all we wanted to accomplish for Kean and its students. It was called Vision 2020, and it was ambitious in every way. It required all of us to think outside the box, to work outside the lines and to push ourselves harder than we've ever pushed before. We challenged ourselves to:

- FOCUS on our strengths
- ATTRACT great students
- INSTRUCT at the highest levels
- GLOBALIZE our curriculum
- EXPAND partnerships
- GROW our footprint and our reputation
- SUPPORT development and instruction

- PROTECT our community
- INNOVATE in academics and technology and,
- FOSTER a community that embraces equity and inclusivity.

Today, I'm tremendously proud to stand up here and tell you that together, not only have we accomplished most of our goals, we have achieved them beyond expectations.

Let's start with focusing on our undergraduate and graduate programs.

Kean cougars climb higher.

Take the Cappuccia sisters.

Like so many of our students, they are children of immigrants and are first-generation college graduates.

Also, like so many of our alumni, they are undeniable success stories.

We are so very proud of Tizzy and Beatrice. And we are very grateful for the support of friends and donors like Anne Evans Estabrook who help them and so many others to realize their dream of a world-class education.

We could tell hundreds of stories like this.

There's also "Meteor Mike," a two-time Kean alumnus and adjunct professor here, who some of you may know from

TV news. Mike Rizzo is a weather anchor for News 12 in the Bronx and in Brooklyn. He is also a New York Emmy winner.

And let me tell you about four recent graduates from our mathematics program — a diverse group of young women who are succeeding beyond all expectations.

Women and minorities often are not encouraged to study STEM subjects, and so, they do not take on the challenge. But Kean students do.

These four women were encouraged and mentored. Each was accepted into prestigious graduate schools to

continue their mathematics education, with full scholarships!

One of them, Alexandra Vasconez, received nine full scholarship offers to pursue a Ph.D. She is just about to start her graduate program at the University of Delaware.

Congratulations, Alexandra. And congratulations to Dr. Louis Beaugris and the math program faculty. Keep up the good work.

Any sports fans in this crowd? Well, we have a few at Kean, and one of them — a recent graduate — has already launched his career.

Francisco Reyes graduated with a communication degree in May. At Kean, he learned how to be a leader as president of the Student Organization. Now he is one of 21 recent graduates of prestigious colleges nationwide accepted into ESPN Next. Francisco is already working as a Production Assistant on ESPN's top-rated morning show.

And if we are talking about sports - I have to acknowledge all of these smiling faces in front of me wearing their Cougars Climb Higher t-shirts. They have been here for weeks, working hard to get ready for the upcoming season. Our student athletes are some of the best

ambassadors we have – they embody what Kean is all about.

How many of you watched the Little League World Series?

It was great, right? Well a Kean graduate, Jairo (HI-ROW)

Labrador, coached that Elmora Troopers team from

Elizabeth all the way to this international event.

Even though the Elmora Troopers didn't win the final

trophy, they put up a good fight and captured the hearts of

everyone in New Jersey along the way.

Coach Labrador's speech to his players after their final game went viral. If you haven't seen it, you should Google it. Try not to get choked up. He told those kids:

*"I love the way we didn't give up .... We fought. We fought."*

I think he learned that attitude here at Kean because our kids never give up either.

Our students' success is OUR success, so we continue to advance to meet their needs.

This year alone we celebrated the first graduates of our Doctor of Physical Therapy program AND the first graduates for our undergraduate architecture program.

Many Kean architecture graduates were accepted into prestigious graduate programs across the country – testimony to the quality of the education here at Kean.

Even more telling is that many of them chose to stay right here at Kean to continue their studies because they know a great education when they experience it. They will be part of the first cohort of graduate architecture students at Kean this fall.

Now, when it comes to attracting students, Kean continues to excel.

Last year from this stage, I told you about the launch of the Centennial Scholarship program—an initiative designed to provide high-achieving students of limited financial means with access to a world-class education.

Today, I am proud to share the news that 54 freshmen this fall will start their college journey as Kean's first Centennial Scholars -- paying no tuition thanks to the generosity of our supporters. We said we would help these students achieve their dream of higher education, AND WE DID IT.

Some of those students and their families are here today.

Let's give them a warm welcome.

We are set to welcome one of our biggest freshman classes again this year, thanks to the work of Enrollment Services, Student Affairs, our faculty and many others who play a shared role in recruitment.

These students come from all 21 counties in New Jersey, 13 other states and 13 countries. But perhaps more importantly, admissions tells me that this is one of the best academically prepared classes we've ever had. I'm excited about that, and I know you are too.

We also welcome a stellar new group of faculty to Kean University this fall—FORTY SIX new faculty at Kean USA and FORTY-NINE new faculty at Wenzhou Kean. Please stand up and say hello!

We're glad to have you here and look forward to your contributions. You are now part of a massive new generation of faculty at Kean; in the past five years alone we have brought on a total of 511 new faculty members both here and abroad.

And, our faculty continue to distinguish themselves.

Dr. Patricia Morreale made us extremely proud when she was named a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. She was elected for “exceptional leadership and service to advance diversity in computing.”

I can think of no better reason to be recognized by such a distinguished organization, which also noted Dr. Morreale’s contributions to scholarly research. Well done, Pat.

Professor Lane Rick from Michael Graves College received the Gabriel Prize, a \$20,000 grant from the Western European Architecture Foundation. This is a truly

international achievement that brings distinction both to Lane and the Michael Graves College. Great work!

This year, we also welcome Dr. Jin Wang as the new dean of the College of Business and Public Management. Dr. Wang is a Fulbright Scholar and comes to Kean from Drury University in Springfield, Missouri. Welcome aboard Jin!

In the Provost's Office, Dr. Jeffrey Toney takes on a new leadership role in University research, following a summer spent at MIT as a visiting professor. He is now our Provost and Vice President for Faculty and Research.

We know that students who participate in our research have a five-year graduation rate of 92 percent. More than 1,500 of our students took part in Research Days last year and Dr. Toney will see to it that even more students participate going forward.

Dr. Suzanne Bousquet is now stepping up to the Cabinet of Vice President for Academic Affairs. Sue will oversee all of our deans, academic programs and accreditation.

Congratulations to you, Sue.

One of the key goals of Vision 2020 was to create a new model for a global university. And BOY have we done THAT at WKU and dozens of study abroad and internship locations around the globe.

You may not realize just how fast the Wenzhou-Kean campus is growing. We welcome 800 new freshmen to WKU this fall, bringing total enrollment to more than 2,400 students. This growth will continue, with another 1,000 freshmen expected in Fall 2020.

And more and more Kean USA students are studying in China each semester, getting the opportunity of a lifetime to expand their horizons and build their resumes.

One of our students created his own video about his experience.

Tomorrow, 186 Wenzhou-Kean students will arrive on this campus for a semester at Kean USA. Their participation in the classroom and at campus events benefits all of our students. This is truly a cross-cultural alliance and so many of you have contributed to its success. You should all be extremely proud of what we have achieved in Wenzhou.

The campus at WKU also continues to grow. Next up is a new building for architecture, design and computer science, which will be ready in June 2020.

Dean David Mohnney from Michael Graves College has played a key role in the development of the

Wenzhou-Kean campus. As of this summer,

Wenzhou-Kean is a candidate for accreditation with the National Architectural Accrediting Board.

Thank you, David, for your hard work and creative talents.

And our success in China is getting noticed here at home.

This year we expanded our partnerships on a local and global scale by establishing an international sister school program between K-12 schools in New Jersey and China with a focus on STEM. Dean Keith Bostian worked with educational partners here and in China, and then brought a group of New Jersey educators to a STEM conference at Wenzhou-Kean this past June.

When we envisioned our path to 2020, we definitely envisioned growth -- both as a multi-campus institution and back here at the main campus.

The new Skylands location opens its doors to students on Tuesday.

Originally envisioned as a living laboratory for Kean's students, the plan for The Skylands grew to accommodate the needs of students in the northwest part of New Jersey.

And, it will continue to grow, offering bachelor's degree-completion programs in high-demand fields.

Have you seen it? It is a beautiful campus in the middle of 1,200 acres of pristine woodlands connected by our very own skywalk.

But, don't take my word for it. Let one of our brilliant interns tell you more.

And we're not just talking about new campuses.

We're also expanding the Miron Student Center, the Learning Commons and the Science Building, to support new research initiatives.

We envisioned a bustling University Boulevard in Vision 2020, and if you look across Morris Avenue you can see a

University Town well on its way. Compete with a restaurant row, retail parks, townhouses, faculty housing and Hynes Hall, this development is the fulfillment of our University Boulevard concept.

To make that kind of growth possible, we're constantly looking for new sources of revenue and support. You'll see the fruits of that work soon when the brand new Hynes Hall opens across Morris Avenue.

Construction is moving forward thanks to the generous support of alumnus Jim Hynes and his wife Carole. We couldn't be more grateful.

At the Kean University Foundation, we have a young CEO who is already getting noticed. When he was hired last July, I didn't realize just how young he was. But now I know.

Bill Miller is one of the NJ Biz "40 Under 40" for 2019. He is recognized as a "mover and shaker" in New Jersey, and we are so very happy he is putting his passion to work for Kean, raising money for student scholarships.

Congratulations, Bill.

As we build our campus, we are very much aware of the need to ensure it is the safest environment it can possibly be for our students, faculty and staff. Under Police Director

Mark Farsi's leadership, we maintain a high standard for our officers and our community. Our vigilance has paid off, as Kean has been named one of the safest campuses in America by Safewise AND the National Council for Home Safety and Security. Many thanks to everyone who contributes to making Kean a safe place to study, live and work.

We're doing more than making this campus a safe place to live and study, we also are making it more convenient as we add new technology to the way we serve our students.

This weekend, more than 1,800 students will move into our residence halls. And we are ready to welcome them with some new tools.

Our new housing software system lets our students apply for housing online and select roommates.

And our new “Get Mobile” App is putting meal plan management in students’ hands. From their phones, they can see their account balances, and even email their parents to add money to their accounts. All of this gives students more control over their campus life experience.

This fall we also will debut several new technologies designed to advance student services, enhance faculty and support staff connectivity, and streamline HR recruitment.

Student recruitment also has a new technology assistant:  
Meet Roary.

He's our new chatbot. He's on Kean.edu, and Enrollment Services tells me he can answer any prospective student questions. Let's see about that....

Roary, what is the best thing about Kean University?

Ok, what's the next best thing about Kean University?

I don't need to tell you that we have one of the most diverse college campuses in America. You already know that. Be certain that we don't stop there. At Kean we continue to foster an environment where everyone feels welcome, and community service is supported across the globe.

This past year, the Human Rights Institute sent groups to Costa Rica and Puerto Rico for service learning trips. We also continue to bring diverse viewpoints to campus.

From Chelsea Clinton to Bob Woodward, the Distinguished Lecture Series brings us some of the most

influential voices and perspectives from the US and beyond. This year we have a POWERHOUSE lineup prepared for you and your students, which premieres opens October 28 with Samantha POWER. The former United States ambassador to the United Nations in the Obama administration, Power is recognized internationally as a tireless crusader for U.S. foreign policy as well as human rights and democracy. Her lecture will certainly be worth attending.

Future speakers in the series include political strategist David Axelrod, civil rights advocate Martin Luther King the Third, and futurist Jamie Metzl.

The annual Human Rights conference is going on its 13th year. Last year, we hosted food activist and TV's Top Chef, Tom Colicchio along with moderator Mayor Bollwage.

This year the conference will focus on voting rights. It's an important topic across the globe, and I hope you'll join us for that conversation.

All of these events challenge our students to re-evaluate their worldview and develop their own guiding principles on important issues. This is what a college education is all about.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have all accomplished a  
GREAT DEAL.

Let's stop for a moment and give ourselves a round of  
applause.

But you know what I'm going to say next, don't you? We  
can celebrate the success of Vision 2020, but it is equally  
important to look forward.

Dr. Bousquet soon will be calling on everyone in the Kean  
community to contribute to our next strategic plan, which  
must ensure our progress continues and our students  
continue to gain the skills needed for career success.

We must never stop improving. Good enough is never good enough for our students. We have already started some critical work to move the University forward beyond Vision 2020 that I would like to share with you.

Professional experience is key to landing a job, and we're determined to provide each of our students with a high-quality experience before they graduate. Kean is partnering with more employers to bring internship opportunities to our students.

Beginning this Fall, every undergraduate academic program will offer at least one three-credit internship as part of the curriculum.

To make it happen, our Career Services team, under the direction of Vice President Felice Vazquez, is expanding our network of participating businesses and public agencies every single day, and we are grateful for all of their hard work. We also appreciate those of you who are connecting our students with your own networks.

Our Supplemental Instruction program is also expanding in a big way.

This program provides extra instruction in courses identified as challenging for our students. It's taught by our

own high-performing students. Many of them are here today. Let's thank them for their work.

More than 200 of our students have participated in this program and it has shown amazing results. In our first year, students who attended saw a 38 percent average higher final course grade compared to those who didn't attend -- and course withdrawals decreased.

In the Fall semester, students in 55 sections will have Supplemental Instruction support for their courses. The National Science Foundation is helping us make it happen as part of a \$1.7 million grant to our Computer Science department.

Our new First Gen Scholars program also is fostering success. It pairs first-generation students with alumni mentors to help guide the students through their transition to college and their professional paths. So far we have at least 50 signed up on both sides of the equation for what promises to be a productive partnership.

We take care of our students here at Kean in any creative way we can imagine.

This past year, the Kean Hunger Task Force, a partnership among various campus groups, spearheaded the opening of the Cougar Pantry to provide food for those

students who need it. It's located in the HRI, and we always appreciate your donations.

Our students also are going to see some changes to the campus itself when they arrive this weekend.

You may have noticed that Willis Hall, which called it quits on us last year, is gone -- replaced by a Learning Plaza for students, faculty and staff. And guess who designed that plaza? One of our students - Hugo Burgos.

Great job, Hugo. One of the things I really like is the Learning Plaza offers a window into our campus for anyone driving by on Morris Avenue.

The Liberty Hall Museum and Academic Center also is now open.

This is quite a list of shared accomplishments. But there's something else worth noting..... We did it all while ALWAYS keeping an eye on affordability and strong fiscal management.

In fact, Moody's says "Kean's strong financial management has translated into continued positive operating margins and growth in flexible reserves." That's business speak for "Kean is doing VERY well."

Friends, Colleagues, Board members, students and community partners.... I know I have asked a lot of you over the years.

- I asked you to do things others said were impossible.
- I asked you to have courage when we tried things others wouldn't try.
- I asked you to be humble when we KNEW we had to be more student centered.
- I asked you to be efficient when it was obvious state funding was going one way and costs the other.
- I asked you to be creative when it became obvious that the world was changing faster than ever.
- I asked you to abandon the ways of the past and embrace the needs of the future.

- I asked you to stand tall, gaze out far, dream big, and be bold!

I ASKED you all to enVISION 2020! And I am SO PROUD of where we've arrived.

Ladies and gentlemen...

No reasonable person could disagree with:

- the world-class learning environment we have created
- the world-class opportunities we have developed for our students
- the world class academic and residential facilities we have built
- the high-quality new programs we have put in place

- the significant investment we've made in learning support programs instituted.
- the hundreds of capable faculty with great teaching skills and scholarship productivity we have hired

Our combined efforts have produced amazing results for students, and brought distinction to Kean University.

As a multi-campus, regional university with a global reach, our reputation is moving from good to great.

It has been my honor to serve this University on its path toward Vision 2020. I recently advised the Board of

Trustees that I will complete the last year of my presidency in 2020, and I do so confident that Kean University is transformed, it is flourishing, and it is well-prepared to serve the next generation of global leaders.

Thank you all very much.