Good afternoon!

Thank you all for being here in this auditorium and for joining us through the web streaming presentation of this event. Your participation honors MICA, honors me, and honors the extraordinary legacy of my iconic predecessor, Fred Lazarus.

Above all, your presence and interest honor what MICA stands for in Baltimore, in the field of higher education, and in society at-large.

The illustrious speakers this afternoon, including our Honorable Mayor Rawlings-Blake, all spoke eloquently about why MICA matters. Thank you for sharing your insights and for inspiring me.

It is with a profound sense of privilege and responsibility that I accept this Presidential Chain of Office and Medallion, and assume the presidency of this remarkable college.

This is not a new beginning, but a continuation of all that is good, all that is right and all that is relevant in what MICA has achieved for its students, for the city and for the broader educational field.

I am proud to be installed as MICA’s president in the presence of such an august gathering.

Everyone partaking in this event is a MICA family member and a MICA partner in a special way. I count on your collaboration to build on the tremendous momentum of the College to meet our shared challenges and opportunities ahead.

Having spent just 120 days at MICA and in Baltimore, I cannot yet predict exactly how we will work together, but I want to share with you some of my most deeply held beliefs and aspirations that have always informed my work. They will continue to guide my efforts moving forward and I hope they will find resonance with you as a basis of our future collaborations.

First of all, consistent with MICA’s vision, I believe that the arts and the creative jobs and enterprises they help foster can be a game-changing force for economic and community development. And that is particularly true for our city.

Our Mayor has set an ambitious but important goal of growing Baltimore by 10,000 families in this decade, and along with that growth an increase in jobs and investment. Her call for action uses the very apt term “knowledge-based economy” because of the outstanding higher education institutions we are so fortunate to have in the region.
Equally powerful is the parallel concept of building a “creativity-based economy” rooted in the combined strengths of our cultural institutions and our thriving arts community. I know that concept also is part of our Mayor’s vision because of her long-standing support of the arts and arts education. Her inspiring comments in the recent New York Times article spotlighting Doreen Bolger and the Baltimore Museum of Art clearly indicated her belief in and commitment to the creative class.

As you all know, 20th century Baltimore depended on traditional industries and businesses. To continue to grow and flourish in the 21st century, Baltimore should unleash all forms and means of entrepreneurship and innovation.

Artists, designers and their enterprises, whether a solo practice or a collective, are the light and mid-sized industries of our times. Members of the MICA community, especially its alumni, students and faculty, are contributing in a very real way to Baltimore’s 21st century solution to urban revitalization. If further nurtured and supported, this community can be even more transformative in its impact.

Through our existing curricular programs that are both time-honed and forward-looking, our wide-reaching community engagement efforts, and our strong focus on career readiness, MICA prepares our students to be a new breed of wide-angle, wide-impact artists and designers who are culturally defining, economically driven and socially engaged.

We are proud of our pact with students and their families to take the creative energies that the students bring, and help develop them into skill sets, thinking and life strategies that embrace invention and resourcefulness at their core.

I look forward to help deepen this innovative approach to art and design education at MICA, so that the career possibilities for MICA graduates will be excizingly open and their lives will be an integration of personal success, purposeful accomplishment, and social good.

MICA today is nationally and internationally renowned. We draw students throughout the country and around the world. Our ambitions for our graduates are global. However, connection to place is a strong pedagogical value and a deep social commitment at the College. Therefore, we are especially proud to see the impact we have made and will continue to make to strengthen Baltimore’s many diverse communities.

Allow me to illustrate with two examples how MICA’s creative talents have added value and can further enhance the city far beyond its cultural roots.

The first relates to community development that is driven by artists. We have seen such initiatives work right here in this neighborhood, with the positive influence of MICA’s campus expansion from Mt. Royal to Station North. The thoughtful mixed-income development that is in progress in Station North will soon be further stimulated by the
exciting three-way partnership of MICA, Johns Hopkins, and the Maryland Film Festival. There is also a growing cohort of MICA graduates who have launched arts and social impact start-ups in under-served neighborhoods throughout the city.

What we’re doing here in Baltimore is part of a national movement of creative placemaking -- situating artists, arts and culture in the center of community and economic development, civic engagement, and public infrastructure. Working together, we can foster many more such efforts.

The second example of how we bring value relates to the fruitful convergence of art and design with science and technology. When these forces come together, the results are higher thinking and stronger outcomes.

What makes Apple products so much better and so desirable? The competitive edge is in both technology and design.

Why is the field of human services such as hospital practices increasingly seeking the input of design thinking and artistic intervention? Because non-linear artistic approaches and creative problem solving through design thinking have proven valuable to humanize health practices and bring about innovation.

By working together to combine this region’s renowned bio-medical educational institutions and industries with MICA’s singular creative resources, we can create in Baltimore a globally competitive health product design and service capital.

My point is this. Baltimore has a unique mix of challenges and strengths, both offering unusually rich opportunities for enterprising and socially-minded creatives to play a transformative role. MICA is well positioned to work with all of you to maximize the fulfillment of that potential.

Forward together, we can make it happen.

Currently, 45% of MICA alumni stay in the area after graduation. We are doing a little better than the national average of 40% of arts graduates who remain in the city where they studied. But for all the reasons I have shared with you today, we need more of our best to make Baltimore their permanent home. We don’t want them to look to New York City or Los Angeles for career moves. We want them here!

So, how do we do a better job of keeping our creative spirits?

I believe that we need to build a career support system for the arts in the city. For exhibiting artists, we already have a nurturing hub of museums, galleries and cultural non-profits. Yet, deeper and more strategic partnerships can still be forged to open up new channels of opportunities to a more diverse group of artists and enable a wider pipeline for artists earlier in their careers.

And to encourage innovative practices, in addition to investing in incubators and accelerators for technology start-ups and small businesses that are very popular these
days, I hope that we can work together as multi-sector partners to build an economic infrastructure in Baltimore expressly for artists and designers.

Inspired by research that I’ve been doing on such efforts around the country, I hope to work with other city and regional stakeholders to shape a network infrastructure that launches and supports creative practices and careers that strengthen our region, and generate creative jobs for a diverse talent pool, especially for those traditionally facing barriers to such opportunities.

Many esteemed presidents of our region’s colleges and universities are in the audience, and I am truly honored by the stage participation of President Hrabowski and President Daniels. I have never experienced such a strong and genuine camaraderie within a higher education network as I have here in Baltimore.

I look forward to working with my presidential peers and their institutions. Let us find new ways to connect and synergize our respective incubation initiatives, so that our efforts and our graduates’ projects can cross-pollinate for exponential results.

Forward together, we can meet our common commitment to retain our talented students after graduation, so that they can build successful lives here and help us build a more vibrant region.

There is great payoff in making Baltimore a place where our graduates want to stay. By turning Baltimore into a creative mecca, we will effectively transform the city into a “cool” town where young talents of all disciplines want to come and settle.

And we are well on our way. The College Magazine recently named MICA one of 2014’s ten most hipster campuses in the nation; we are the only art school on the list. Working together, we should put Baltimore on the New York Times’ top-ten list of cool and innovative cities in the U.S. That will certainly draw an influx of families and businesses to come resettle in our city.

Of course, to reach our shared educational and economic goals, we must be sure to nurture those who have already made Baltimore their home, and enable them to prosper. Arts and design education can be a game changer for young people and their families across the city.

In a society stratified with the very rich on top, the poor below and an emptying-out middle class, education is the key pathway to amplify human potential and expand economic mobility for all.

In particular, the education and training of a creative workforce is an effective social-economic equalizer. Through the development of their innate creativity and talent, young people of all backgrounds, but especially those from underserved communities, can advance themselves. We have seen how athletics and music can help level the playing field. We need to see more of that kind of success through the arts in Baltimore.
– giving youth from blighted neighborhoods the many options they deserve to transcend their limiting circumstances.

I am very excited by MICA’s partnership with the Baltimore Design School to build a promising pipeline of creative minds. Not every BDS student will go on to an art college like MICA, but all of them can be equipped with a developed inner voice, with bright creativity, and with design thinking to become stronger all-around learners – and eventually more competitive and entrepreneurial professionals. Their accomplishments will strengthen their communities because we have seen again and again that one family member’s educational and career success can begin to move the whole family forward.

Superintendent Gregory Thornton is injecting new vision and leadership into the Baltimore City Schools. I am particularly grateful for his openness to consider adding arts to the STEM equation to make it STEAM. MICA will be by your side, every step of the way.

Forward together.

Ultimately, I hope that MICA can help make art and design, and the kind of education it offers, an everyday value.

There are no formal academic regalia for this event’s processional party not because we are unworthy of distinction, but because we want to shrink the distance between art and our daily lives. We need to protect and honor the artist’s way but we also need to connect artists and their work in transparent, powerful and relatable manners to everyday lives and communities.

This is an audience that fully embraces the importance of higher education and a MICA education. Yet, across this country, the role of the arts, artists and art schools are not yet widely understood. We are perceived as “special” in ways both good and bad. Good in that the arts are widely consumed and appreciated. Bad in that what we do is often viewed as elitist, taken for granted and marginalized in terms of support and recognition. It is ironic that according to a national survey, 96% of Americans value art in their communities and lives but only 27% value artists.

In addition to providing our students with a world-class education, MICA has the right elements to help develop a value framework for our community of artists and designers, that can help create an ever-widening life and work platform for our graduates to occupy with their extraordinary imagination and transformative impact.

Here again, Baltimore and MICA can demonstrate leadership for this nation and the world.

When I was exploring the MICA presidency, people kept asking me: “Why would you leave Los Angeles to go to Baltimore?”
For me, it was a no-brainer. MICA is a phenomenal educational center to call home and it offers a great mission to serve. I have strived in my life’s work to demonstrate that artists and designers are of fundamental value in our society. Here’s where I want to continue that work and be a catalyst for change and innovation.

This is a city that has an exciting opportunity to show the world how investment in inclusive arts education, incubation of creative enterprises, and equitable access to creative jobs can activate the community’s natural strengths and build a diverse workforce.

This is the art school that has made and will continue to make a big difference.

This is the region with the right partners to get things done.

So for me, this is the place to be.

Thank you again for being here this afternoon.

I am privileged to join you in going forward together.