**HFNT #8: Meet the President**

**Episode Transcript**

[INTRO MUSIC]

Scott: Happy Friday, North Texas. We are back from our summer break. I'm Scott.

Alicia: And I'm Alicia.

Scott: Today is Friday, September 13th, and it feels so good to be back in the studio, Alicia.

Scott: It truly feels like home, Scotty. Like a warm, weighted blanket on a cold, rainy day. This episode, we’ll have information about resources for students to succeed at UNT. We have a fun interview with a few members of our Green Brigade marching band and an interview with UNT’s new president, Dr. Harrison Keller.

Scott: That's right. But first, it's been nearly three months since our last episode. So you know what we need to do now?

Alicia: Got to catch up, Scotty.

Scott: Alicia?

Alicia: Yes, Scotty.

Scott: Did you have a brat summer?

Alicia: Do you even know what that means?

Scott: Absolutely not. But I know it's a thing.

Alicia: Well, since you're asking, I did not have a brat summer, but I definitely had a good summer. Took some much-needed time off, watched some Olympics and managed to not melt in this heat. So, that's a win. How about you?

Scott: It was good. We had a great vacation. Finally starting to feel back to normal after the health scare that kicked off the summer, and so excited to be back working on the podcast again.

Alicia: That's right. And we're not the only ones who are back. The students are back on campus to start the fall 2024 semester. And, with the start of a new academic year, we want to let all of our students know about all the resources at their disposal to help them succeed at UNT.

Scott: That's why I spoke to our very own Alicia Washington-White, who is a communications strategist for student retention, about the Succeed at UNT campaign and the work she's doing to help students start the semester off strong.

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

Scott: All right, Alicia, so thank you for joining us for the podcast.

Alicia WW: Absolutely.

Scott: What can you tell us about the Succeed at UNT campaign?

Alicia WW: So, succeed at UNT has been around for 10 years, and before my onboarding, it was ingrained in the university culture as support outside of the classroom. Students have evolved in 10 years, of course, so when I came aboard in 2022, I really wanted to bring success to our students, meeting them where they are. So, it's all about support outside the classroom, how to access it, how to ask for questions and really empowering students and take control of their success.

Scott: Nice. And, you know, I'm a, I'm an alum and now work here and I worked on Succeed at UNT campaign a little bit a couple of years ago. And, when I started working on it, I was like, `Man, there's a lot of resources that I had no idea about.’

Alicia WW: Yes.

Scott: Is there anything that kind of stands out to you as like, that's a really cool, unique resource that we provide for our students?

Alicia WW: I would definitely say the First-Year Passport program is something unique considering we are a campus of a larger size and, in the fact that Student Affairs is able to welcome new students and really present to them opportunities to become involved on campus or stop by an office, pick up a t-shirt, come to this event. I appreciate that. And, really, everything that we try to do. I'm not an alum, so I came in with an eagle-eye view, if you will, and really looking for those programs that really make UNT stand out, and I would definitely say the First-Year Passport program, the Learning Center, Sage Hall, having all academic services in one building is also something that I think is just unique to our culture and really helps enhance the messaging of Succeed at UNT.

Scott: Yeah, and for anybody who's not familiar with the Passport program, can you give, like, a brief explainer.

Alicia WW: Absolutely. So, it is required for all new students to participate in the passport program. But, how they participate is optional. So, during orientation, all students receive a passport booklet, if you will, and there are different ways that they can earn stamps. So, it's attending Mean Green Fling. It is stopping by an office. It is stopping by some tabling in the Library Mall. So, it is over the course of the first 6-to-8 weeks of class, they can submit their passport to any one of the offices on campus that is designated a passport office and then they receive prizes. So, the deadline is October 16th. So, that's a shameless, shameless plug out there for that program.

Scott: It's cool. It's a fun, like, kind of scavenger hunt gamification.

Alicia WW: Absolutely. Definitely. Absolutely. And the First-Generation Center, lots, lots of student services are a part of this collaborative effort for the scavenger hunting, the first for First-Year Passport program. So, all of that is wrapped up into that experience to really put the onus on the students to get to know our, well get to know their campus and become involved in the way that really fits their needs because it's different.

Scott: And so, for students that are wanting to learn about more about Succeed and all the resources, what do they need to look for on campus or go online?

Alicia WW: Absolutely. We've expanded visibility. So you students, I'm talking directly to you: Make sure that you check out the Succeed at UNT banners. They are at the entrance of all academic buildings. So, whether you take classes at Frisco, Discovery Park or Denton, you can find them at Willis Library, the University Union, the Pohl Rec Center. So, any academic or high-traffic student places where we placed those banners you can also visit succeed.unt.edu for the link to all campus services, food, maps. If you need career help, interview help, resume help -- literally all UNT things are funneled into the Succeed at UNT website.

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

Alicia: Don't you just love how passionate Alicia is about helping students succeed?

Scott: Yeah, she's really doing a great job with the awareness campaign. Be sure to check out succeed.unt.edu to get more information.

Alicia: Yes. We'll also have a link to the site in the show notes, so students, be sure to check that and take advantage of all the resources UNT has to offer so you can start your semester off on the right foot.

Scott: Alicia, you know what else the start of the fall semester means?

Alicia: That it's pumpkin spice season.

Scott: No, it's college football season. The Mean Green football team is two and 0 and coming off a big win against Stephen F. Austin University. A Mean Green home win means the fans got to see the Mean Green Brigade marching band at that huge stadium.

Alicia: Did you know that the Green Brigade was founded in 1911 and was named the best band in the land and the best drumline in college football by Bleacher Report? We were lucky enough to get to listen to their summer practices out here on Traditions Field right by our offices as they prepared for the fall. Our very own Christiana Flores interviewed Green Brigade director Amy Woody and a few of the band members to talk about their favorite band traditions and memories ahead of the new season.

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

Nate: My name is Nate Holland, I am a music education major specializing in French horn, but I do conducting and drum major, for the marching band and I'm a senior this year.

Melinda: My name is Melinda Coleman. I'm a graduate student in wind conducting. So, my major is wind conducting, but I'm assigned to work with the Green Brigade. And I did play clarinet in undergrad, but for this degree, my instrument is the baton.

Zachary: I am Zachary Phillips. I am a sophomore this year. I play euphonium or baritone in marching, and I'm an education major with a concentration in euphonium. I'm starting a music composition degree also, and I minor in Spanish.

Ashley: My name is Ashley Thompson. I played tenor trombone. I, my major is music education with a concentration in trombone, and I'm a sophomore.

Sophie. I'm Sophie. I play the flute. I'm a freshman. And my major is philosophy.

Laura: My name is Laura Frazier. I’m an ecology major with a modern philosophy. I'm in the color guard and I’m a senior.

Amy: My name is Amy Woody. I'm the director of the Green Brigade and also a lecturer in wind studies here.

Christiana: All right. So, first of all, what does it mean for you personally to be part of UNT’s Green Brigade?

Ashley: For me, it's a community because I was super scared to come to UNT because I didn't know how it was going to be being a music education major. So, it really helped me make so many new friends here.

Nate: Yeah, I mean, for me, it's being part of something bigger than myself because this is not only a massive band, but it’s part of a massive school of music within a really great university. And so, you get to get involved with more than just, like, my own personal things. I'm supporting, helping out all these other people around me to perform with all these other people. So, it’s just a really exciting experience.

Zachary: I think for me it's definitely a turning point. I started off not as a music major and I always had an interest because I played in high school, but I think being in GB really enforced the solitude that I wanted to be in music and I was engulfed in it, and then I changed my major the next semester and now I'm in music.

Amy: I think for me, too, I didn't, I'm not actually a UNT grad, but I grew up knowing of UNT Green Brigade and so there's been a legacy in my head for years and years and years, and it's pretty surreal that I've been able to step into a role and work with these students and they're incredible and they come from some amazing programs across the state of Texas. And the fact that they can all come together here and recombine in kind of a new version that not only upholds the traditions we've had, but also kind of showcases what they've done in their own careers is pretty amazing. And every time we, I always say when I step in front of the Green Brigade,it’s like driving a Ferrari because they can do everything and anything you ask them, and they do it really well.

Christiana: Very cool. It's good to hear it. OK, so another question I ask to you, I know that, being a former marching band member member, it’s a big time commitment, obviously. So, how do you balance all of that? How do you make sure that you're devoting time to this, time to your studies, time to social life, all that stuff? Can you kind of talk to me about that a little bit?

Laura: Part of what I have, I have, like, a full-on bullet journal of, like, things I need to do of, like, I have certain things that, `OK, I have this thing to do at this time, this thing to do at this time, this thing to do at this time.’ If you section out what you need to do at what time, you will get it done. That is the biggest thing, is time management.

Christiana: Organization.

Laura: And just, like, having that organized. `OK, you have to do this at this time, this at this time and this at this time,’ and you’ll be able to get it done.

Christiana: Right. OK. Good point. And then, as a freshman, like, your incoming freshmen, do you help, like, the upperclassmen knowing how to balance, help them balance their schedules too, because I'm sure it's all new to them.

Laura: Yeah, right. Yeah.

Zachary: I'm also an RA, so I'm interacting with freshmen all the time and I have this Google calendar set up and it’s color-coded. So, I have all my classes, all the work stuff, all the band stuff, and it's, like, it's overwhelming when you look at it, but you’ve just gotta look at each day. And that's what I'm trying to teach my little freshmen to not get freaked out because it's going be, it's going to feel like a lot. You’ve just got to get through one day at a time, and it's way more manageable looking at it like that.

Christiana: Yeah, and y'all have so many tools, too. I just remember we had a paper and pen and I was like,`I’m gonna figure it out.’

Amy: Or you’d need to like, pick up a phone and call to register for class.

Christiana: So. I talked about, like, with others the fun traditions. I know that when I was in band, we had kind of some secret handshakes and secret cadence marches and things like that that we had. Can you share any of the fun things that are maybe not, like, private to y'all, that y’all do together that are fun, that are just free reign?

Sophie: I think one of the most important ones is you'll never walk alone. We're trying to create a community, and making sure that everyone knows, like, you're not by yourself. You actually have people who are here to help you.

Christiana: I love that.

Laura: I haven't been here too long because, freshman, but something I have noticed is there’s a lot of, like, cheering on others. And, it’s like, if we say, `I love something,’ like, `I love the Green Brigade,’ or `I love being here,’ it's like a, `Me, too.’ Like, everyone screams, `Me, too.’ So. it's really inviting and I think it’s really fun.

Christiana: Somebody said that, too, earlier. That's really cool that y’all do that.

Amy: What's really cool for me to see, because I did my undergrad here, so I was here 2016 to 2020, and now coming back and doing my master’s, the traditions that are the same. Like, we did the, `I love this. Me, too.’ And I'd forgotten about that until they did it on the first Leadership Day. my gosh. It was like, `Oh, my gosh, they still do it.’ And then, like, our drumline cadence, the first time I heard it, everyone was shouting the lyrics and I was like, `Oh, they still chant it the same way that we did in 2016,’ and that was really cool.

Christiana: Yeah, definitely. I mean, is there anything that you implement as traditions or something that you like, a routine that you implement in your playing style?

Amy: Well, I you know, obviously I can't speak to all the things that came before me, but one of my goals when I came here was to try and uphold what I knew the organization held valuable. This is my second year. So, last year was, was a lot of, you know, how do we want to do this? How do we do this? And a lot of it was evaluating, OK, what are the traditions? We need to make sure that we uphold those? And I wouldn't necessarily say that I've inserted anything that's unique, but just maybe put my own spin on how to do them in a way that I think is positive and effective, I suppose. So, if there's something that students tell me is really valuable to them, that we, we try to make sure we have a way to implement it that's meaningful. So, I don't know, I don't know is there anything -- those that have been here two or three years -- I don't know, anything that you've seen?

Zachary: There's not a lot of scheduled traditions. Like, a lot of the sections will have their own personal stuff and those will continue. Like, no one really says that happens, but it does happen. I think that's a really cool part is that everyone is so involved with all this stuff and making those memories together that things just kind of kick up from there. The only major one would be You'll Never Walk Alone.

Amy: Yeah, and that one's been here since the 1980s. Like, we played out at the end of every game, and it's a really, really special thing for all of our members and our alumni. And, I think I think that's because we are a 100-year-old organization. it's really kind of making sure we continue to stay relevant to the modern era, but also continue to pull the things that make this organization so special for that long. So, it really is the students kind of making sure that happens and I'm just steward for them in that way.

Christiana: OK, so I know that there's a lot of really good matchups happening football-wise. Are you looking forward to any particular game? Any event that y'all are going to … But I want to hear more about anything you're looking forward to.

Amy: Well, I mean, OK, so I want to preface this: Unfortunately, it costs a lot of money to get us down the road and that's just, we have a lot, we have 400 people and you know, that's, so yes, people, we wish we could go to everything, but it’s a, it's a huge financial task. So, we're not able to do everything. We were not able to go to that Texas Tech game, but we were really excited. And when I was in college as an undergrad at another university down the road, we would go to Lubbock and they would throw frozen tortillas at us. So, it was a little bit not the greatest experience, but I know out there in West Texas, they have a pretty strong pride in what they do. So, we may not get to meet up with them this year, but, yeah, I think it's, it is. We don't always, travel is so expensive nowadays that it's not very often that we get to see a visiting band and vice-versa, you know, because it just costs so much to get large groups down the road. I would say maybe we had one visiting band last year, I think it was UTSA. They brought a small band. But occasionally, yeah, we do get a traveling band, but for the most part, you know, we're kind of we're here for our home games and we're usually the ones, the only ones there in terms of music. And, if we can get down the road, we try. But, I know UTSA, that's a big one.

Nate: Battle of the Birds. Every year, it's a faceoff, and their band’s in on it, too. And it's, it's a lot of fun. That’s the game everyone always look forward to. We're ready to play you.

Amy: That one’s in the AlamoDome and so it's down in San Antonio. That’ll be a fun one. I mean, who is coming to us this year?

Melinda: SFA.

Nate: SFA will be starting us off.

Amy: I think that's right. That's right. Basically, everyone we didn't see at home last year, I think, is coming to us this year, I think. So, you know, I will say that there's one thing about the band. It doesn't matter who we're playing, they are in it to win it. They will scream until the end. You know, they're the number one fans of that football team. They're diehard fans, if there ever were any. And they, you know, it's fun to be in that section because you feel like, it doesn't matter what's happening on that field – winning, losing, tied -- the band is it.

Christiana: Awesome. So, another question I thought of. I know, speaking, or being Dr. Keller’s writer and stuff and knowing what kind of upcoming events he has, he's going to be with y'all on the first home game, on the seventh. Are you excited? What are you looking forward to? I know he's rehearsing with you and things. He's really excited about doing , you know, practices with the band. What are you most looking forward to about, you know, working with Dr. Keller?

Zachary: I mean, just his presence is going to be awesome. He’s going to conduct and that's really weird but awesome because, like, the president of the entire university conducting our band. It like, feels fake.

Christiana: Yeah, I saw him at Spirit Night, he had the drumsticks. He was he was ready to march with you all.

Amy: I think, too, it's you know for an organization that works really hard, like the Green Brigade, you know, we're out here for a lot of hours in really hot weather.

Christiana: Yeah.

Amy: You know, and I think it's, I'm so glad that people are able to kind of acknowledge that and to have somebody that's so busy and taking care of so many large, important issues at the university is willing to at least step in and, you know, just be with the students here just for a moment is a really special and unique treat for all of us. So, I'm excited that they get to work with Dr. Keller and just kind of interact with him on a real level, not just watching a speech or something. You know, I think that's a really the person-to-person interest there is is really special.

Christiana: All right. Next question: How has being in the Green Brigade changed or influenced your college experience? I know you said you're a freshman, but, and you mentioned that it kind of got you into what you're doing. But anything either inside academics or outside of academics, how has it changed how you look at college and the college experience?

Ashley: It has definitely made me more confident in what, like, my abilities are and what I'm capable of because, obviously, I am a senior. It's my fourth year on GB and in color guard and we just got now a new director, as well. So, I'm constantly questioning myself of, `OK, I need to push myself to do this. I can push myself to this. I can do it, I can do it,’ You know what I mean?

Christiana: Yeah. It spills over into other things.

Ashley: It spills into my academia as well.

Melinda: I think it's been a great way to make friends, especially I remember my first year as a freshman. I was in a new section, because I did band while I was in high school … and I was really scared. But everybody there was really welcoming and through the Green Brigade, I made lifelong friends.

Ashley: For me, it's just taught me how to actually teach people and how to help people out when they are going through stuff because as a music education major, we're taking so many teaching classes, but you don't really know how you're supposed to teach because they don't give you like a rulebook. It's kind of, `You do you?’ Because you can't teach like how someone else teaches. So, it really just allows me to really work through how I need to do my teaching and how I can help others find their way and then just help anyone else I can.

Christiana: All right. All right. So favorite thing about being the Green Brigade, and least favorite. You can’t only say one.

Amy: I don't know if I should start that.

Christiana: You can wrap it up.

Nate: My favorite thing easily about the Green Brigade is the energy that it brings. There's some moments like right before we tunnel up and run the football game where everyone is just kind of ecstatic, and we're not running yet but we’re all like bouncing up or down, ready to go. Some of those moments where you're surrounded by people that, like it’s a 400- person organization, you don’t get to talk to everyone. They may be completely strangers, but you're all in the exact same thing. Those moments are easily, by far, my favorite. My least favorite? Probably the weather. It gets hot and, you know, the shade at the stadium is great and it kind of creeps back right as we’re at a rehearsal, so the further back you are the better. But at Traditions Field, there’s not much you can do to avoid it, You’ve just got to go through it, but it is what it is.

Amy: My favorite thing is the traditions and the legacy. Like, we do the same thing for pre-game. And every year you, come back and it's like, we're doing `National Emblem’ again. And the first time you hear `Never Walk’ again, it’s like, `This is my band.’ Like, no other band marches on to pre-game to `National Emblem’ or whatever. My least favorite thing is also the weather. Like, not even these summer band hours because summer band is at advantageous hours. But it’s when we show up to the stadium at 4:30 and it’s 100 degrees and not yet in the shade.

Laura: My favorite thing is probably the people, how we’re all just trying to get better and be better teachers and everything. My least favorite is probably, like, a game last year where it was raining and we all just stood outside. My sticks got all wet and I couldn’t use them ever again.

Amy: It rained all the way up until the game. Then it was fine for the game, but for all of our all of our before-game prep, we were soaking wet.

Zachary: I think my favorite part is football games. It's, like, such a different energy and it's such a different, like, for lack of a better term, such a different high. Like, baritone’s super, super heavy, but, for some reason, during the games, it's like the easiest thing ever and I wish they could be like that for practice. But, for least favorite, I don't know. That's really hard. I would say either the weight of that the instruments or, I guess, just the sun.

Sophie: For me, my favorite part is the freshman. I really enjoy all the freshmen, even if they're not in my section. I like when they come up to me and just ask me like a random question, even if it's not relating to Green Brigade, because I know they are trying to get to know me, and I just find it fun because I like helping them out and I also want to know them on a personal level. And then, least favorite? That, my least favorite thing is marching. I hate marching. I'm just not a big fan of marching, but I will put 120% in. I will put my whole, likem life into it, but I don't really enjoy it. It's not my favorite thing. Especially six to five.

Laura: My favorite is probably the community. There's a lot of people, but everyone's bringing a lot of positivity and it's nice to get to know other people who feel the same way and the same passion that I do for marching band and Green Brigade. It's, I enjoy it, yeah.

Christiana: How about least favorite?

Laura: The heat, especially in morning block. Like, I do, I can do the afternoon just fine. But, like, when it's morning and the sun is like, right there.

Ashley: I think for me, my favorite part is performing at football games. I personally love just going all out and, like, making myself look huge even though I’m 5-1. I find that amazing. But just, like, performing with, like, all my friends and I'm just, like, `Yeah, let’s do it.’ My least favorite? Either rain games because your silk gets really heavy. It’s just, like, you can't even spin it and it gets wrapped around you and it frickin’ sucks. Or the heat. Either or.

Amy: All right, I’ll finish it up. My favorite thing is a tie between, it is it is pretty amazing to stand in front of the group and just watch them perform. I mean, they're amazing. I, I don't know how else to say it. It's just kind of, like, you get to sit there and watch what they do. And, I think in line with that is, the interacting with all of these students and knowing that they're going to go on and become, you know, professionals and educators and citizens. And it is, it's always, I'm always in awe of what each of them can offer and how selfless they are and how much they give to each other. And to be kind of just helping facilitate that for them, for me, is a very rewarding thing. And I, I don't take it lightly that that's a really important job in their lives and they give back to me in the same way. So, I think that is something I will always be glad for in my life, here in particular. And, my least favorite thing is kind of a little more perhaps sentimental in that I, I know that all of these students come with a lot of, they're all three different walks of life and different issues and different backgrounds and different circumstances and a lot of times there are issues that stand in the way of your ability to be fully successful at whatever it is they're doing, you know, today. And I can't, as much as I wish I could solve, you know, apartment issues or relationship problems or class problems, you know, I cannot do it. And so, you know, along with that joy that we have together, there's also the hurt and I can't solve that for them. And, you know, that's life. And so, that's kind of the worst part, is that you get, as much as we get to grow together as a community, we also get to kind of feel the pain together when those things happen and that's, you know, that's the hard part.

Christiana: And it’s also good to have somebody there who can at least listen to you.

Amy: And, I think they do a really good job of lifting each other up in those moments and they know what's important. They start to figure out, `OK, this this is important and maybe that's not.’ And that's good.

Christiana: Yeah, exactly. I thought of a fun question as she was talking. Do you have any favorite things that Amy does? And anything that annoys you maybe a little? It's like supervisor feedback. . Maybe like a saying or something where you’re like, `She says that a lot. I wish she would stop saying that.’ It’s, `Roast Amy.’ I’m just kidding.

Nate: One of the fun parts that I found funny, because my band director in high school would never have done that, is that she’ll agree with us. Like yesterday, or I guess also the day before, when we were playing `National Emblem,’ we took it insanely fast. And she gave us a little leeway and we bumped up the tempo a little bit more than what it normally is. My band director would have never done that. He would, like, have made us sit there for, like, 5 hours working on the one piece with the one tempo.

Amy: I knew I could not win that battle. I have other battles I need to face.

Laura: I think my favorite thing that you said, `Was where's my hug at?’ I was like, `How does she know about that?’

Amy: We have an exercise and it’s `Where my hug at?’ But you never get a hug.

Sophie: I don't have any like annoying thing. I haven't been here for long. But something I do like is, like, the positive positivity and the energy. Like, yesterday was like it was like cowboy- theme day and there was a lot of instead of like, `Yeah,’ there was a lot of `Yee-haw.’

Amy: So se answered `Yee-haw’ to everything. It's the only way you get good, long days.

Zachary: I'm a big fan of the little snippets. Every once in a while, it’s like, `Hey, good job on that.’ And you promote a lot of the other leaders to do that as well. But just those little, bitty comments just real fast. A lot of times, that, like, makes people day -- even if it's just like one small thing -- I do love that.

Amy: You know, as somebody that grew up in band 20 years ago, 20 or 30 years ago, it was a very different culture. It was, it was cut-and-dried business and go home. You know, and that is, you know, learning environment has evolved to be something that's more collaborative. And I think band is a perfect place for that because it is so student-owned. Yeah. So, the learning environment really depends on the students wanting to create that, you know. So, you kind of have to evolve with the times because that's what they, that's what they need and that's what they, that's the environment, I think, they operate best in versus just kind of military.

Christiana: Yeah, for sure. And then, just the last question before we get to the little quiz part and then we’ll wrap up. How do you feel that you impact the students and the culture here at UNT? I know we talked about your tradition of you never walk alone, that's very important. But, overall, how do you feel that you impact our culture here at UNT?

Sophie: If feel like, since I am a leader now, I'm starting to make the program more of, like, a positive environment. Just from personal experience in, like, a three-ish years that I've been in it, it's been a little bit negative and I think I'm starting to bring it back up in that direction. And, I think that's, like, the big impact that I'm, like, happy I’m actually able to impact here.

Laura: I think for me, it's just trying to make sure that the trombones are doing exactly what they're supposed to be doing because my freshman year, it was really just, like, you do whatever. You can talk on the field, you can talk when other people are talking on the podium. It was just like, “La, la, la,.’ And, I was just, like, `Yeah, we can't do that anymore. Like, that was cool because no one was actually, like, paying attention to us, but now we actually have to do better and everyone's been doing it so far. And I'm just trying to make sure that they all know, like, I'm doing it so you have to do it too.

Christiana: Yeah. Yeah, no problem, sure.

Nate: In terms of more than just my section, since I'm not a section leader, and I'm like and RA, all the people in my specific wing, they all know I'm in band And so, they're like, I guess I'm forcing them to interact more with band than they probably may want, but I've been liking a lot. I had to leave practice a little bit for some meetings with the people not in GB and one of the times I had my instrument, and they peer pressured me into playing them something. That was really fun. I actually liked it a lot because, like, I feel like it made them happy, put me on a spot a little bit. But it was just nice bringing that energy back to people who may not even know about it, or maybe even care..

Christiana: You bring up a good point because you all, I mean, we have our Eagle Ambassadors, right? But you all are ambassadors for university, like, when the students see you -- alumni, parents, everybody sees you – you are representing UNT and you're trying to get them engaged and hyped up and things like that. And that's a big responsibility.

Amy: I think the band, if you've been to any event here, the band brings a different life. And I don't think anybody can deny that the spirit, the music, the peppiness. When the band is at the event, it is a wholly different event in a positive way. And, I think, you know, I wish we could go to everything all the time but, you know, I think, I think it is important to remember, that everybody needs to know that these are all students who are also trying to do their student thing. So, we can't be at everything, you know, like, we can’t be at every sporting event and every gala or whatever. But we try to be, because I know how much it means to, to the university when they are there representing, I think, kind of the heart and soul of UNT and they embody it so well.

Christiana: All right. And just to wrap it up, I wanted to, anything you want to say, maybe that, to get the students hyped up to come to our games and things like that?

Amy: Sit next to the Green Brigade.

Ashley: When else will you see the best band in the land and the best drumline?

Christiana: That's right. That's right. yeah, exactly.

Christiana: OK. All right. Well, as we wrap up, I just wondered if y'all could do maybe a Go Mean Green together?

Amy: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We, we do end every rehearsal with this, It's simple: It's one, two, three …

All Band Members: Go Mean Green!

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

Scott: It's so cool to hear how much being in the Green Brigade means to the students and the impact it has on their overall college experience.

Alicia: Absolutely. I love that camaraderie and the friendships that grow out of it. And that's so cool that President Keller showed them some love at the game last weekend.

Scott: Yeah, apparently, he was in marching band in high school and college, so he was excited to do something with the Green Brigade. That's just one fun fact Christiana learned about him when she interviewed President Keller for the podcast.

Christiana: OK, Christiana, I see you pulling out all the stops for this episode.

Scott: That’s right. Yeah, we definitely appreciate Christiana bringing us both of these interviews. President Keller joined UNT August 1st as our 17th president after serving as Commissioner of Higher Education and Chief Executive Officer for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. Dr. Keller has more than 25 years of experience and was wrapping up his first month at UNT when he sat down to talk to Christiana about his vision for the university, his leadership style and his musical background.

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

Christiana: What is your vision? We've heard a lot about your vision in the first few weeks that you've been, here for first month. What is your vision for the future of UNT and what does that look like in about 5 to 10 years?

Dr. Keller: So, I was so excited and am so excited to be at UNT because I've gotten to know a lot of colleges and universities across the state, across the nation, and there are just not many institutions that are so well-positioned as the University of North Texas. Now, some of that is obvious because of the incredible growth we have in this region, because of the economy in this region. So, we have the fastest growth in our economy and in our population here in the DFW region, and for the most dynamic state in the nation. But there's something even more than that for UNT, and that's the people. And so, whether we're talking about the chancellor, we're talking about the board leadership, the deans, the faculty leaders I've met, students I've met, there's an openness to innovation and deep in our DNA is a commitment to creativity and creative problem solving and openness to doing things differently that you just don't find that many other places. So, we are in an incredibly dynamic time with changing expectations from higher education. We need to educate many more people to higher standards than we've achieved before, and we need public universities to step up and take responsibility for talent problems. UNT is willing to change and we're willing to lead. And that, again, is something that distinguishes UNT from a lot of other colleges and universities across the state and across nation.

Christiana: Absolutely. All right, so, as we're getting to know you, can you describe your leadership style when you're working with your faculty, your staff, your cabinet?

Dr. Keller: So, my, it's hard for me to describe my own leadership style. You might have to talk to some of my colleagues about what my leadership style and working with me is like. In all cases, I can promise it's not boring. So, when I'm putting a leadership team together, one of the most important things to me is to have folks on the team who are good at things I'm not good at, to have a complementary set of skills and different perspectives that we can bring together and we work really hard and we move fast. We have a lot of fun doing it. This is incredible to have the opportunity to do this work. And, you know, I really believe that we have a responsibility to take our talents and work on the world and try to do as well as we can. When folks ask me about, `Well, so what do you look for in a leadership team or how do you evaluate your team?’ There's basically three things. So, first, you need to be really competent. You need to have the skills to do the job. And then the second thing is, you've got to be able to fit into the kind of team I just described. You've got to be able to be a good colleague. You've got to be able to be hard on the ideas and really supportive of your colleagues in this kind of high-performing, fast-moving work. And then there's a third thing that I think is really important, and that's the ambition for the work, right? So, you need to get up every morning thinking about how do we do this work better. And that's, to me, a really essential element to having a successful team is people who are really committed to continually pushing, continually improving, continually asking the question of how we can do the work better.

Christiana: Right. Absolutely. Can you talk a little bit as to why you expanded and what your thought was behind expanding the membership of the President's cabinet?

Dr. Keller: So, just like with my leadership team where I feel like it's important to have people who have different perspectives bring different skills to the table, on my cabinet, I wanted to have diversity of views. I wanted to have people who have different kinds of experiences, different roles in the university, not just administrators and vice presidents. So, it was important to me to add deans, to add faculty, add staff and add students into the mix. So, now, we have already had our first couple of meetings with the expanded cabinet, and I have to say, I think it's a much more productive, it's a much more fun conversation when you have these other views at the table as we're talking about the future of the university, as we're talking about our strategic priorities and where we need to go.

Chistiana: Right. Those fresh perspectives really help with the input. OK, speaking of the cabinet, I remember you talking about a book, the “10 to 25” book. Can you talk a little bit about that? I think it's very interesting.

Dr. Keller: So, my friend David Yeager, who's a psychologist from UT Austin, has a new book called “10 to 25” that is really a great distillation of the current science around memory, motivation, around learning and mentorship for students from the ages of 10 to 25. So, as a cabinet and also with the deans, with other key leaders at the university, we're all reading this book together and we're going to have the author do some workshops for us later this semester. So, one of the things that stands out to me in this book that I think is an important theme we need to embrace is the idea that we need to have both high standards and high support, really embrace what Yeager calls a mentor mindset. That's something that I'm going to be emphasizing a lot, especially as we're talking about our work on student success.

Christiana: All right, that makes sense. OK, so, we're talking about the challenges and opportunities that you've seen here. What do you see the biggest challenge facing UNT?

Dr. Keller: Well, we're a large and complex university. So, we were founded in 1890 as the Normal School to train educators. We have a rich history. We're about $1 billion-a-year university with nearly $100 million-a-year in sponsored research. So, there is a lot going on. And, of course, I've only been here a few weeks, so I'm still drinking out of multiple fire hoses. Tor any university right now, our biggest challenge is that disconnection between the way that we usually approach changes in the university and the pace of change in our economy, especially changing workforce needs because of the rapid rise of artificial intelligence. So, just last night, I was talking with some of our employers in the region and they were telling me about how there are things that they thought they'd be able to automate maybe someday down the road that they're already into implementation of new technologies, and that's changing the way that they need to think about their companies. That's changing about how they think about the workforce that they need. So, we have to be able to be credible partners to be working closely with employers, and we're going to have to accelerate the pace of change within the institution. That means we're going to have to operate a little differently. It also means that we have to be willing to accept that it's not going to be perfect. The first changes we make, we’ll have to be nimble and be ready to adapt. But we have a talent problem here in DFW, in the state of Texas, in the United States, and we need to take responsibility for that as an institution.

Christiana: Absolutely. And, you did talk a little bit about our willingness to innovate. So, speaking about, you know, on the opposite end, the strengths UNT. Can you talk a little bit, you mentioned our position and DFW and the economy. How are we going to engage with local businesses and organizations to create those partnerships and opportunities for our students? How do you go about that?

Dr. Keller: I think two things are especially important. First is, across the campus, we have some amazing examples of students being involved in internships with major companies. Many of these actually translate directly into job offers for our interns because our UNT students are resilient. They're highly capable, they work really hard and, frankly, they're not entitled. So, our students bring tremendous energy and value even through their internships. And that's something that I know employers appreciate because that's the theme that I keep hearing from them. We need to make sure that many, many more of our students have these opportunities. So, it's not so much because of the particular program you had or because of the particular advisor you have, but that needs to be more the way we do it at UNT that all of our students have opportunities for meaningful work-based learning experiences. That can be internships, that can be working on projects that have particular client, but that gives students an opportunity to learn how to apply what they've learned here at UNT into a professional environment and help build that momentum for them as they launch into their careers. The other thing is, as I mentioned earlier, I was, when I was talking to employers last night, when I've been talking to employers across the state, one of the things that they tell me is their workforce needs are changing faster than they understand. So, it's not as simple as just asking employers what they need and feeding that into our programs. We're in a highly dynamic, rapidly changing environment. We need to be at the table working closely with employers, and we need the employers at the table with us as we're thinking about the implications for our programs, for our curriculum, to make sure that every student we enroll not only completes a degree, but they've got a clear line of sight to a great job, to a meaningful, productive career, and to a life that is going to be full of meaning and purpose.

Christiana: OK, so we did speak a little bit about, in some of the meetings that you've attended, about the three big rocks. Can you talk a little bit about those three key areas that you want to focus your attention?

Dr. Keller: So, again, I'm drinking out of multiple fire hoses, right? I've only been here a few weeks at the at the institution and there's still a lot more I have to learn. And, I really appreciate all the conversations I've had with I've met with all the deans one on one, all the vice presidents, faculty leaders, student leaders, donors, employers. and there's still so much more I have to learn. There's already those key themes that have emerged where it's clear we need to take a little bit different approach. And so, we've already launched three strategic, I call them strategic reviews, where we need to quickly assess where we are, course correct and figure out what our strategy is for moving forward. So, one of these is around how we budget. So, the university has generally used more incremental and historical budgeting. That's what a lot of universities do. We need to shift rapidly to a much more strategic budgeting model where it's clearer about how our priorities as an institution are reflected in our budget and where the process is a lot more transparent across the campus. So. that's one that we've already launched. We already have the steering committee underway. We already have the technical committee underway scanning across the country for what are the models that are already been implemented, what are the pitfalls we want to avoid. And we've committed to implementing a new strategic budgeting process starting in January. So, this is this is ambitious, but it's necessary for us to be able to move forward. The second one is around research. So, in my former role as commissioner of higher education for the state, one of the things I'm most proud of, proud of is that I, I got to work with the policy makers and with institutions on the design of a new endowment for university research. Texas actually now leads the nation in state support for higher education and for higher education research. So, the new dollars that we get from this new endowment called the Texas University Fund need to be focused strategically on areas that are aligned with our strengths, but also are going to have impact for our region and for our state. So, we're working closely with the deans, with the faculty to assess where are those, where are those areas where we can target new funding so we can accelerate our work and increase the impact of that work. So that's another strategic priority. The third priority is around student success. So. our graduation rates aren't where they should be. To be candid, our persistence rates are not where they should be, and they've been stubbornly around 60%, six-year graduation rates. Our persistence rates are now in the neighborhood of about 78% of students persisting from the first to second year. We've got to do better than that as an institution. But the marker that I put down on my first day is we also need to push ourselves to think much more broadly about student success. The goal shouldn't just be earning a degree. The goal needs to be to make sure all of our students are equipped with the skills that they need so that they can they can launch directly into a good job, so that they're equipped for their careers. So, our end goal when we talk about student success, yes, includes improving graduation rates, includes improving our persistence. But we've got to do more than that. We've got to make sure our students are equipped to launch and take that talent as far as they want to take it.

Christiana: Absolutely. And just a final question. So, say of a student, we're sitting here. I know that you talked a little bit about this, about at convocation. If a student is sitting here, what would you talk to them about what their goal should be for their student success? I know you mentioned the 4, 3, 2, 1 graduate plan and convocation was really interesting.

Dr. Keller: So, actually, I was just sitting here with the student yesterday and we were having this conversation. So, that's the best part of my job actually is talking with the students. I love that very much. And, in fact, we're launching a new student advisory council for the president that is going to convene for the first time next week. And that's going to be really important for me just to have a sounding board for conversations and hear their insights, to hear about their experiences directly, to be able to bounce ideas off of each other and learn together with the students. I'm very excited about that. So, there's two big things that I have told students, and I have three teenagers of my own, so we have a lot of these conversations also in my house. First is, I think it's really important that students have the opportunity to explore and figure out what is important to them. So, I really believe in vocation. I believe we have a responsibility to take our talents and work on the world. So, what are the kinds of problems that students want to work on? What's really compelling to them? I see a lot of students that end up sort of drifting in to particular majors. Or. maybe there's a class they got an A in and they think, `Well, I'm good at that, so maybe I should declare that as a major.’ They need to think a little more deeply about what are the kinds of problems they want to work on and what are the kinds of things that they envision for themselves. So. that's one thing. Now, the second thing is a little bit more mechanical, and that's OK, when we've figured out, `Well, here's what I'm committed to doing.’ One of the strategies is very effective, that was pioneered by some of my friends at Purdue University who had amazing success with this, is the 4, 3, 2 1 graduate strategy. So, here's what that is, is first you need to aim to graduate in four years. Don't hang out because you need to take the that degree and be able to apply it in a professional context and start realizing the benefits of that degree, so graduate in four years. The second is make sure that your GPA doesn't slip below a 3.0. At least a 3.0 GPA is really important for a lot of internships. That also helps open some new doors for you. And. frankly, it's a signal that you're getting what you should be getting out of your coursework. Now. the next is something that a lot of students don't learn in high school. You need to spend at least two hours or budget at least two hours of your time for every hour that you're spending in class. So, students first get their schedules. They say, `Well, it looks like I have so much time. Right. I'm only in this class three hours a week as opposed to five days a week for 45 minutes or an hour.’ You need to budget at least two hours to study, to do your homework for every hour that you're in class. And then, the last one is, find at least one activity that you're going to get deeply engaged with here at the university. We have more than 450 different activities, organizations, a ton of opportunities for students to get engaged. Students need to pick one that they're going to get deeply engaged with. That's really important for having a community, for having kind of an outlet to be able to blow off steam, to be able to connect with other folks. So, that 4, 3, 2, 1 is a great strategy so that students can really realize the value of their UNT degrees.

Christiana: Yeah, absolutely. It’s easy to remember, too. So, yeah. All right, I'll start with the rapid fire. What is your favorite music, Dr. Keller?

Dr. Keller: Now, that's a hard one because I like so many different kinds of music, and I had the opportunity to play so many different kinds of music. So, really, it just depends on my mood. You know, it can be classical, it can be jazz, it can be funk. It just kind of depends on what's going on.

Christiana: Yeah, that's awesome. OK., and as a native Texan, what is your favorite thing about living in Texas?

Dr. Keller: I, well, sixth-generation Texan. I have a deep love for Texas. And, I have to say, one of the things I especially appreciate and love about Texas is it's a culture that embraces the idea that you can do what you're big enough to do. So, the opportunities, ,let's stipulate for especially our students across our K-12 schools are uneven, right? And not everyone always has the opportunity to get the kind of education that they need to be able to unlock their potential. But, overall, like, there's something about the pioneer spirit in Texas that really values that individual entrepreneur, the individual who takes the risk and is willing to step out there and take their talent as far as it can. And so, my commitment as president is we want UNT to be the kind of platform where every individual student, every faculty member, every staff member can take their talent as far as they want to take it.

Christiana: It's amazing. And then, also we’ve got to talk about the food a little bit, too. We can’t forget that in Texas.

Dr. Keller: And, well, yeah, I will. Obviously, we have to talk about the food ,and let's just let's just call it out. We have to talk about the barbecue, right? Because, clearly, Texas barbecue is superior. I have friends from St Louis, I have friends from North Carolina who I think are deeply confused about this. And so, whenever folks come to Texas, I think we have a responsibility to expose them to what barbecue is really like.

Christiana: Maybe it could be a new class at UNT, why Texas barbecue is …. .

Dr. Keller: You know, actually there are other Texas universities that had had very successful barbecue classes.

Christiana: Really?

Dr. Keller: There are. And my, my son is a freshman in the Corps of Cadets at Texas A&M. And, one of the highest demand courses they have is for a barbecue class for freshmen. So, I would not be opposed to that kind of a culture, the kind of students to have that opportunity.

Christiana: Yeah, that would be a popular class, I think. All right, this is a fun question: What's your favorite color? And, I have to preface this by saying that UNT green can be the only correct answer.

Dr. Keller: Yeah. So, I have to say for a long time my favorite color has been blue. I have a lot of blue ties, blue suits. I've always been drawn to green for some reason. And then, especially over these last couple of months, all the blue ties have ended up at the back of the closet and I'm in the market for even more green ties. So, I love the green.

Christiana: Good, good. Glad to hear that. OK. And then, a last fun question here. Do you have a favorite movie?

Dr. Keller: Favorite movie is “Casablanca.” Yeah. Now, there are a lot of great movies. Again, you know, it just kind of depends on depends on the mood. “Bul Durham” is another one of my favorites. But, but if it's that rainy Sunday and you want to kind of have a comfort movie for me, it's a classic movie like “Casablanca.”

Christiana: Yeah, that's good. I love that movie. All right. Well, that's all the questions that I have. Thank you so much for doing this. Can I get a Go Mean Green at the end?

Dr. Keller: Yeah, absolutely. Go Mean Green.

[TRANSITION MUSIC]

Alicia: Wow. What a great interview with President Keller. I really enjoyed hearing how he seeks out advice from other leaders to be a better one for his community. It really shows he cares.

Scott: Yeah, and it's great to hear more about his plans for UNT and get to know him a little bit better.

Alicia: Scott, it's time for my favorite part of the show. Let's dig in to some Q&A.

Scott: All right. Today's question is, what is or was your favorite part of back-to\-school season?

Alicia: My favorite part of back-to-school season when I was a student, was buying myself new school supplies and organizing my daily planner with all my classes. It is so therapeutic for me. I also enjoyed learning about all the resources UNT had to offer because we have so many. How about you?

Scott: Yeah, well, I mean, I love it when the weather finally starts cooling down and getting into football season is really fun. But for now, that both my kids are in school, getting back into an organized routine is huge. When the teacher-wife and school-age children are on summer break and home, it can make things a little bit more chaotic when we don't have that routine.

Alicia: All right. Well, now that you've heard our answers, we want to hear yours. So, email us at podcast@UNT.edu or call us at 940-565-4341. The more you interact with us, the more fun we can have on the pod.

Scott: Yes, and don't forget to tell a friend about the show shared on social media or leave us a rating and review wherever you listen.

Alicia: Five stars only, please.

Scott: All right. Well, that does it for us today. So, until next episode, we hope you have a Happy Friday, North Texas.

Alicia: And, Go Mean Green.

[OUTRO MUSIC]

Scott: Happy Friday, North Texas is a production of the University of North Texas. Today's show was produced and edited by Scott Brown with original reporting by Christina Flores and Scott Brown. For more information, visit UNT.edu/podcast.

[BLOOPER REEL]

Alicia: We get it! Scott Brown! I’m kidding, I’m kidding. My goodness.

Alicia: Yes. We'll also have a link to the site in the show notes. So, students, be sure to check that and … OK, I'll go again.

Scott: Oops, my stomach’s growling. Mic’s gonna pick that up.

Alicia: He’s hungry. You know we’re doing this too early when the stomachs are growling.