



**uchicago news**

*President Paul Alivisatos  
begins tenure with focus on  
engaging the UChicago  
community*

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Inspired by University's rigor and imagination, leader announces listening sessions for this fall

**E**ditor's note: *This message was sent Sept. 1 from President Paul Alivisatos to members of the University community.*

I am thrilled today to be back on the University of Chicago campus on my first day as president. Over these past few months, I've deeply appreciated the opportunity to renew my relationship with the University community through visits and a series of wide-ranging conversations.

Today, I'm writing to share some initial impressions and set the stage for what I hope will be a series of engaging and informative listening sessions over Autumn Quarter, leading in turn to a set of actions and initiatives.

But first, I want to thank Bob Zimmer, whose 15-year tenure as president, and impact on the University, has been extraordinary. I'm very much looking forward to working with Bob in his role as chancellor.

I want to acknowledge the resilience and creativity that the UChicago community has exhibited during the pandemic. Despite the many challenges, UChicago is every bit as vibrant as I recall from my student years. The University has grown and gained in capacity and impact in remarkable ways, and there are many opportunities to explore and develop for the future.

I plan to devote the fall to listening and planning with you. To frame this work, I'd like to share some reflections on what I have heard thus far. I've asked faculty and researchers to share a bit about the research questions they are most interested in, students to tell me about what excites them most about their studies and experiences, staff to share with me what binds them to the community, and alumni to share what matters to them most about their UChicago experiences.

While I've had the chance to hear from just a fraction of the University community so far, the sheer scope and originality of the research and education, and the rigor and imagination of the thinking brought to each topic are truly inspiring to me.

Even as the distinctive approaches to foundational discovery and education

at the University of Chicago remain vibrant, it is clear that a meaningful transformation is underway. Across campus, I have heard from many people about their desire to see the University become more engaged with the problems of the city, the nation, and the world, while seeking to actively translate their work and learning into human, societal, cultural, economic, and environmental impact.

This fall, I would like to explore two particular aspects: the UChicago of deep inquiry and scholarship, and the “engaged” UChicago in the world of practice. What can be done to support and enhance foundational discovery and education at the University, and how can the journey toward a more fully engaged UChicago best be advanced, so that the two reinforce and support each other?

In these early stages, I will host a series of listening sessions in the College, the Divisions and Schools, the UCMC, as well as in many other venues. I am seeking input on a series of questions related to foundational discovery and education, and to what I will call vectors and culture of engagement. More details on these sessions are forthcoming.

#### 1. Foundational Discovery and Research, and Education

- What steps can the University take to ensure that the broad base of foundational discovery, inquiry, research, and education continues to thrive across all disciplines, divisions, and professional schools?

#### 2. Free Expression

- How can the University build on its leadership role as an advocate for and home of free expression?

#### 3. Sense of Belonging

- What else can we do to ensure that our community is diverse, that all students, researchers, staff, and faculty feel that they can speak and will be heard, and that our climate is inclusive and creates a sense of belonging?

#### 4. Mental Health, Well-being, Thriving

- Post-pandemic, mental health, and well-being are at the forefront of concerns for so many. How can we better create an environment in which all members of our community have the support they need to thrive?

## 5. Financial Investment and Management

- Like all universities, we must pay close attention to fiscal sustainability and to renewing and stewarding our resources. How can the University better serve its mission by investing in new areas, and for those investments to, in turn, continue and sustain a virtuous cycle?

## 6. Community Engagement

- Much has been achieved in the last several years to establish deeper partnerships with South Side communities, and yet there is much more to do. How can the University be a stronger partner with our South Side and Chicago-area neighbors to improve schools and community health, reduce violence, bring new jobs and economic opportunities, and foster civic institutions?

## 7. Entrepreneurship and Innovation

- What are the best ways for the University to support and improve our efforts in translating our discoveries into practice through entrepreneurship and innovation?

## 8. Transformative Partnerships

- How can the University better work with our deepest and most transformational partners, like Argonne National Lab, Fermilab, Marine Biological Laboratory, other great regional universities, Chicago-area cultural institutions, the Obama Foundation, and others?

## 9. Global Engagement

- With new forms of communication and education, changes in the geopolitical and trade environment, and the challenges of climate change, are there new ways in which we should think about our global locations and partnerships?

## 10. Vectors of Engagement

- How can UChicago forge a distinctive leadership path in a handful of areas I will call “vectors of engagement?” What are the areas of greatest intellectual promise and potential societal impact in which the University can be a distinctive leader by bringing together people and resources at scale?

I’m excited to be back, and I’m looking forward to a fall that is full of energy and debate, as we come together to build on a great legacy while planning for a vibrant and engaged University of Chicago of the future.