

Faculty Convocation
President's Remarks
January 26, 2016

Happy New Year to all. And welcome to our traditional semi-annual gathering of the community to catch up, share some news and updates, and talk a bit about what's on the horizon for the second half of the academic—and beginning of the calendar—year.

Special thanks to everyone who helped to minimize the effects of Jonas on the opening of the semester—especially of course all of our colleagues in facilities who moved tons of snow in a matter of hours, allowing us to start safely and on time. And thanks as well to the staffs of residence life and student activities, who accomplished a smooth move-in despite the challenging conditions.

As you may remember, last year we decided to refocus this convocation, making space in the event for a keynote by a member of our faculty about some aspect of our common educational mission. One of the very best aspects of Manhattan College is, of course, the shared commitment of our faculty to our students. We hold our students to high standards, as is appropriate for an institution devoted, first and foremost, to academic excellence. But our approach as a Lasallian College has never been dictated by an ethos of sink or swim. Indeed, at the core of our work is the striking of a careful balance of challenge and support in a relationship of personal attention. Scarcely a day goes by that I do not hear about one or another effort by our faculty to encourage and support one another in this hard work, or of initiatives supported by deans and chairs and directors to assist in that core work. And so it makes sense for us periodically to take time in forums such as this to share insights, challenges, innovations, and best practices.

Today, we'll hear from Professor Heidi Laudien of our department of English, who has been doing great work as part of Manhattan's participation in a national organization of like-minded institutions—the New American Colleges and Universities (or NAC&U). NAC&U is a national consortium—currently composed of 25 schools—of selective, small to mid-size independent colleges and universities “dedicated to the purposeful integration of liberal education, professional studies, and civic engagement.” It's a great affinity group for us, as its members share very similar missions and other institutional characteristics, and yet are not in direct competition with each other, allowing a remarkable degree of collaboration—from shared on-line course offerings and study away opportunities for students, to sharing of institutional challenges, as well as strengths and best practices. Because we are not in competition, the consortium is an especially rich opportunity for inter-institutional sharing of hard data that is sometimes hard to come by—in enrollment, financial aid, finance, and advancement areas, for example.

In recent years, NAC&U has made a concerted effort to involve faculty more directly in the cross-institutional collaboration, and Professor Laudien is currently serving as an inaugural co-chair of the consortium's Ambassador program, through which faculty are encouraged to share best practices in the integration of teaching and learning, scholarship, and service. She has also been a major contributor to a book just published by NAC&U that highlights innovative work being done on the member campuses. And this summer, Manhattan will be hosting the annual national conference of the organization. So it seemed a good time for Heidi to talk with the community about some of the initiatives and resources that our membership offers.

I, like you, am looking forward eagerly to hear from Professor Laudien, and so I will just briefly note a handful of developments, major events, and news as we begin 2016.

This spring, we continue to move forward with the second phase of our strategic plan and with the Campus Facilities Master Plan, formally approved last June by the board. With regard to the Strategic Plan, we continue to work to align all of our planning processes—including assessment and resource allocation processes—to support a culture of continuous improvement grounded firmly in our mission and guided by the plan's three major goals. Thanks to all who have been participating in efforts out of the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment to coordinate and streamline the process and to convert from paper to electronic reporting.

There's great work to recognize in many areas—as you'll see documented in detail in the recently published *President's Report*, which you should have received in the past week or so. Among the wealth of examples I might cite, I'm particularly pleased to note the many ways in which our students, following the lead and benefiting from the mentorship of our faculty, are distinguishing themselves for excellence in the world outside the College: not only in landing first-rate internships, gaining job offers, and earning admission to graduate and professional schools, but also in competing with distinction in the Model U.N. program, nationally and internationally; advancing in rigorous competitions such as the Federal Reserve Challenge; earning placement on our athletic conference's All-academic Teams; and competing successfully for competitive national and international fellowships. (I was delighted to learn over the break that we have a Fulbright finalist this year—the first in several years, and the first, I hope, of many who are benefiting from the support of the Center for Graduate School and Fellowship Advisement.)

Our students are also presenting their writing and research on- and off-campus, which more and more frequently is leading to peer-reviewed publication. In September, 13 of our students and their faculty mentors travelled to St. Mary's University in Minnesota for the annual Lasallian Research Symposium. And just last week, Dylan Gray, a physics major with a minor in philosophy, was chosen to participate in a panel marking the publication of the NAC&U book I mentioned earlier at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. In addition, three other students, John Trieste, Christopher Hoey, and Emily Cutler, summer research scholars from the Schools of Business, Engineering, and Education and Health presented posters at the event.

In the current year, I'm especially encouraged to see us moving forward with aspects of the Strategic Plan that focus on diversifying student experience, both at home and away. We have a number of initiatives underway, for example, in the areas of study abroad and multicultural student and leadership development. In November, we celebrated the 35th anniversary of our Study Abroad Office and the work of Professor Nonie Wanger and many colleagues who have made it possible for hundreds of Jaspers to study in 59 countries throughout the world. And it is exciting as well to see new developments on the horizon.

In our Strategic Plan, we recognize the opportunity we have by virtue of our international network of Lasallian institutions to foster an especially mission-grounded kind of experience. One of the most promising projects underway is a concerted effort on the part of several Lasallian universities to develop an international study abroad center in Rome, on the campus of the Generalate of the Brothers of the Christian Schools—or the Mother House as it is affectionately known by Lasallians throughout the world. For several years, discussion has ebbed and flowed among the leadership of the Institute on the question of how best to use this property, now that it is no longer needed to

house the hundreds of Brothers who would have been accommodated there in the early years of its use. Last year at a meeting of the International Association of Lasallian Universities (IALU) in Bogota, Colombia, a group of presidents, provosts, and mission officers was able to garner support for a pilot study abroad program, initially shepherded by the US schools, to be housed on the site. Months of work, involving faculty and administrators from the six Lasallian institutions in the US, issued in the launch of the pilot this semester. Twenty-one students representing four of the six Lasallian schools are currently registered for a hybrid course in “Christian Faith and the Arts.” After completing an on-line component of the course, they will travel to Rome and live and study at the Generalate, using Rome as their classroom, from May 21 to June 1.

As those of you who have visited the Mother House know, the facility lends itself remarkably well to this kind of initiative, as it is really a mini-campus, complete with housing and attractive grounds, secured by a perimeter wall. Its location—about 2 miles from Vatican City and a little over three miles from the center of Rome, but close to the Cornelian Metro Station—actually makes the campus experience very similar to our situation here in Riverdale. And what we say of our campus can be said equally of the Generalate: it gives access to all the city has to offer while providing a safe haven a little distance from the places normally visited by tourists. We hope and trust that the returning students from the initial pilot will be ambassadors for the program, as we seek to expand it with a second pilot in the Fall semester of 2016 (with residence in Rome in early January 2017). The ultimate goal is to develop a full semester program that would be a magnet for students at Lasallian institutions throughout the world, where they could interact with each other, with professors from throughout the network, as well as with visiting scholars doing research in Rome or attending conferences at the Generalate. The vision is of a true international crossroads of Lasallian education.

Closer to home, we continue to work on ways to take educational advantage of the rich diversity of our community, creating opportunities, curricular and co-curricular, for students and faculty to foster multicultural awareness and understanding. Programming offered or facilitated through the Multicultural Center continues to develop and expand, as our faculty, student life staff, and student leaders look for ways to promote genuinely inclusive community and to engage in civil and constructive dialogue about some of the most difficult and controversial issues facing us as a society. To this end, the division of Student Life was able to recruit a highly qualified Director of Multicultural Affairs, Mr. Hayden Greene, who joined us in December. Hayden will expand the important work of providing training around diversity and inclusion efforts with student leadership groups and will provide important new programming for all students, including educational sessions during Orientation.

In recent months, I have been proud to see the many ways in which our community has responded to our growing and painful awareness as a nation of continuing deep divisions among us, whether they are divisions of race or religion or economic status or political ideology. The racial justice teach-ins, I think, were excellent examples of what universities can and should be able to do in response to events that remind us of how much work remains to be done to realize our promise as a society truly dedicated to freedom, inclusion, and equality. Such events bear powerful witness to our core values—as faculty, students, and staff work together to channel pain and anger into constructive action and deeper understanding.

And I was especially proud of and moved by the groundswell of support for our Muslim and Arab brothers and sisters in the wake of the San Bernardino attack and the backlash it spurred—a backlash encouraged by divisive and deeply irresponsible statements made by one of the candidates in the presidential primary. That support was eloquently formalized in a “Statement on Inclusive Community” posted on December 17 and supported to date by the signatures of nearly 300 faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends of the College. In that statement, our community reaffirmed core principles of our Lasallian identity in condemning “the actions and words of public figures and any and all organizations who have attempted to exploit recent acts of violence to incite anti-Muslim and anti-Arab feeling in our country.” Quoting the powerful language of Circular 461 of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the statement reminds us that “the anthropological view of human nature that motivates Lasallians recognizes and dignifies every human being as being unique, unrepeatable, and educable. Discrimination based on gender, culture, religion, sexual orientation or political affiliation has no place in the Lasallian educational Mission.”

Our diversity is indeed one of our greatest strengths, and it is heartening to see so many examples of our community values in action.

Shifting gears from events and programming to facilities—we’re moving forward as well in the course set by our Campus Master Plan, which calls for modernizing and enhancement of north campus, strengthening the connection between north and south campus, and developing the south campus to be in its own way as attractive a place to live and learn as is north campus.

Two major studies are well underway in advancing this vision. One assesses our future needs for student housing, given our enrollment goals, our plans to develop south campus, our desire to encourage our juniors and seniors to continue living on campus, and the necessity of continuing to make our housing as functional and attractive as possible.

The second study is a comprehensive survey of our current facilities in the STEM disciplines, preliminary to our developing specific plans for the improvement of those facilities, including a full-scale renovation of Leo Engineering and an addition of some 30,000 square feet of state-of-the-art STEM teaching and research space. It’s an exciting plan—ambitious but achievable, and necessary to our continuing efforts to provide the best possible environment for our faculty and students to learn and teach, study and discover.

In the short term, we’re moving forward on a major improvement on north campus. As you know, the relocation of many offices and dining facilities to Kelly Commons opened up opportunities to repurpose a good deal of space on north campus. This semester, what was Dante’s Den and the area that used to house student government offices on the quad level of Thomas Hall will be transformed into a our new Center for Student Success.

The new facility will allow us to bring together in a central location several student-facing operations that until now have been parceled out in various wings and corners of the quad buildings, often in cramped or hard-to-access space. By the time that the next freshman class enters, our students will be able to find, in one convenient place, many of the most frequently used services they need to meet the challenges of a rigorous academic environment and to excel in that environment, including: the Center for Academic Success, the Writing Center, Academic Support for Student Athletics, the Specialized Resource Center, the Center for Career Development, the Center for Graduate School

and Fellowship Advisement, and the office of Study Abroad. In addition, the office of Student Financial Aid will relocate to the new Center, as will the office of Graduate Admissions, reflecting our renewed emphasis, in the Strategic Plan, on growth of our graduate programs throughout the College.

While I'm on the topic of facilities upgrades, let me mention briefly a project that I'm especially fond of. On April 7, the feast of Saint John Baptist de La Salle, we unveil and dedicate a set of magnificent stained glass windows that will shortly be installed in this space. The windows, crafted by French artisans in the first years of the 20th century and until last year installed in the former novitiate of the Brothers in Barrytown, New York, depict the life and ministry of De La Salle and the history of the Brothers in New York and North America. The novitiate was sold by the Brothers in the 1970s. This past year, in a joint effort of the College and the Brothers of the District of Eastern North America, the windows were reacquired and are currently undergoing restoration. They will be a magnificent addition to this Chapel and a continuing reminder of our heritage as a Lasallian institution.

Another major project in which so many members of the community have been engaged is our complete redesign of the College's website. We made great progress several years ago in developing what is now I think a very respectable site, but we knew even as we developed it that the current site would be a temporary bridge to what was really needed. We need not only to upgrade it aesthetically and technologically to keep pace with expectations among our various audiences; we also need to sharpen its purpose and function as the face or the front door of the College to prospective students (primarily), to alumni, and to the general public. This requires redirecting content that is solely or primarily of interest to the internal community to a new and improved internal portal, which is also in development. This will free up the web to showcase our faculty, students, and alumni more effectively than ever, and help enormously in our efforts to spread the good word about how wonderful an educational community this is. Thanks to all who are working so hard on this important project—and very importantly to those who are responding to requests to update and upgrade content. As you've heard me say many times, the more we can give people access to what actually goes on here, the more excited prospective students will be to join us, and alumni will be to support us.

I could go on and on about the good things going on at Manhattan—including yet another very strong year for applications for the incoming class. (Thanks, by the way, for all you will be doing in the coming weeks and months to recruit next year's freshman class, as we build upon the remarkable success we've seen in recent years, and especially last year.) I look forward, with you, to another great semester and to a great 2016.

And now it is my pleasure to introduce Professor Heidi Laudien of the department of English. Professor Laudien, as I mentioned, has been heavily involved in the College's collaboration with peer institutions through the New American Colleges and Universities. We're grateful to Heidi for speaking to us today about her participation in these conversations and her experience engaging with peers at NAC&U schools.