

## Fall Convocation August 28, 2018

This past Thursday, I was happy to have a chance to drop in on some sessions scheduled as part of Faculty Development Day.

What a rich array of programs! And what an impressive display of the extraordinary work going on throughout the College.

It really was energizing to get an overview and some updates on the innovative work our faculty are doing to *engage* our students ever more deeply and effectively, whether through curricular innovations (such as the Digital Humanities project in the School of Liberal Arts or entrepreneurial opportunities in the O'Malley School of Business), new interactive approaches to pedagogy, or initiatives (such as the new Lasallian Women and Gender Resource Center), that seek to bring our core values as a Lasallian Catholic College ever more intentionally and effectively into creative dialogue with contemporary scholarship and theory.

It was energizing because it was such a powerful confirmation of what I know to be true and what I (and others) tell our students over and over—from the time that they visit (as prospective students), throughout their recruitment, and continuing right through their orientation—that is, that they are fortunate to be coming to a college that takes so seriously its mission to *engage* them fully, to *challenge* them in an environment of support and encouragement, to *guide* them as they discern who they are, what their true gifts are, and what they are called to do with those gifts, and to *inspire* them to develop and use those gifts in order to lift up others.

The keynote speaker, José Bowen, has gained a national reputation as an effective advocate of what he provocatively calls “Teaching Naked.” Briefly, for those unfamiliar with his work, he advocates putting technology in its proper place as he reasserts the value of teaching as a deeply personal endeavor.

Technology is a great tool, but it is only a tool, best used to facilitate, never to replace, the kinds of personal interactions that are the foundation of true teaching and learning. The goal is, as much as possible, to make the classroom a place of intense engagement, moving much of the work of acquiring content out of the classroom, and freeing up class time for work that can only be done face-to-face, work that actually challenges students to develop their capacity for high-level thinking, reflection, or aesthetic engagement.

A favorite metaphor for him is the classroom as gym and the professor as “academic coach.” And it is this kind of activity—and active learning—that is the true value of what higher education offers (or should offer). And, I think he would argue (and I would agree) that to the extent that we (that is, colleges and universities like ours) are places where this happens, we will continue to be relevant, even amidst powerful trends to reduce education to something solely utilitarian and transactional, as effectively pursued in on-line environments as in a traditional college setting.

As Bowen himself readily admits, his focus on personal engagement is nothing new. Whether we talk about it as “learning how to learn,” “developing critical thinking,” “educating the whole person”—or “touching the minds and hearts of those entrusted to our care”—the idea that real education is at its core all about interpersonal relationship is something we all know.

We know that the single most important factor in student persistence and success is establishing a mentoring relationship with at least one teacher. We know that students retain knowledge much better when they acquire it actively rather than as passive receptors. What Bowen brings to the table is the data (including studies of brain activity of learners), a good grasp of technology and how it affects our students' approach to learning, and a lot of practical advice on how to achieve the goal of effective engagement.

But I hope it is not inhospitable for me to note that, as good as the session was, I was not surprised that his concluding call for questions was greeted with a longish silence. Finally, the tension was broken by a colleague who graciously suggested that he had wowed the room into that silence. (And there was indeed a certain "wow" factor to the presentation.) But I think the silence meant something more like: "we couldn't agree more; thanks for the affirmation and encouragement; now, excuse us while we get back to work on all the ways we're already doing this!"

And so I was *especially enthusiastic* in my welcome of the class of 2022 at New Student Convocation last Friday. My main theme at that event is always to encourage students to make sure, in the midst of all of the opportunities for them to be active and to get involved, that they make time for contemplation and reflection—that they work to develop the habits of *thoughtfulness* that they need in order to be truly educated by making sense of knowledge they'll gain in their studies, and to learn how to use their gifts in leading lives of meaning and purpose. And I congratulate them on having chosen to come to a place which offers them great resources to do that work, under your guidance.

I really do think that our students—whatever their external demeanor may suggest, and even as they revel in the constant stimulation and distraction that their electronic devices provide—are hungry for direction in the ways of thoughtfulness and interiority. And so it was good this past Thursday to have occasion to get a glimpse of the rich banquet you are welcoming them to as they begin their journey here in this community.

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It's been a busy summer here on campus. Summer programs continue to grow, and included this summer our hosting of the Buttimer Institute, a major formation program for our colleagues in Lasallian education from around the country. Construction began on the Higgins Science and Engineering building. Major renovations of Leo have commenced. And the old physical plant building has been transformed into the new home of our soccer, lacrosse, and softball programs.

Our colleagues in the Orientation office have been busy, as well, conducting four summer sessions to accommodate (at last count) 980 new students, including 172 transfers and 808 new freshmen. While the new freshmen number is an increase over last year of about 30 students, it is 12 below our target of 820.

Broken down by schools, we have increases in the School of Liberal Arts (189 freshmen, up from 180 last fall) Business (up about 30%, from 154 last year to 203 currently) and Engineering (258 vs. 233 a year ago). Offsetting these gains were lower than expected numbers in the School of Science (85 vs. 114 a year ago) and Education & Health (73 vs. 99).

Some quick facts about the class of 2022: Academic quality numbers continue at about the same level as last year, with HS GPA at just about 89% and SATs at 1171. The class is about 55% men and 45% women, compared with 53% vs. 47% last year. And we continue to recruit increasingly diverse classes. Just about 26% of incoming freshmen students identify as Hispanic, and the percentage of African American students in the class of 2022 (still relatively modest at 6.8%), is up slightly from last year and is twice as large, as a percentage, as the class of 2020. 36% of the class of 2022 identifies as “first generation” students (up slightly over the past several years).

As we work toward finalizing the budget provisionally approved by the Board in June, we are monitoring closely several areas of uncertainty or concern that, taken together, make it prudent for us to delay, as we have done in the past, full implementation of the budget, including our plans for salary increases, until after the October census. Among these concerns are the following:

- While our new student numbers are probably very close to where we will end up, we always need to anticipate the possibility of further “melt.”
- We need to complete a full assessment of the final actual expenditures from the financial aid budget. We know that we did in fact have increased pressure, once again, on our financial aid resources, but will not know exactly where we stand until that full analysis is complete.
- Our most recent look at our retention numbers for continuing students indicates that retention may not be as strong as we had anticipated, based on very good fall-to-spring numbers for the class of 2021; preliminary reports indicate that we could be down in the neighborhood of 20 (or slightly more) returning students.

Yet another area that requires attention as we work to finalize budgets is an increase these past two years in the percentage of new students who choose to commute, which has an impact on room and board revenues. Almost 35% of this year’s incoming class plans to commute, compared with 29% last year and 26% in the class that entered in fall 2016. Occupancy in the residence halls is currently estimated to be 1,866, which, while still strong (at about 93% of capacity), it has trended downward from just about 100% two years ago. We are studying this trend carefully, not only from a budgetary standpoint but also in relation to our long-range housing and campus development strategy. Based on what we’re seeing now, we are realizing that we must invest in upgrades to our existing housing in addition to any new housing we might contemplate building in the future. (And the fact that the residence halls are not at 100% actually gives us an opportunity to do some renovations during the school year.)

And so, while our enrollment continues to be strong, we do continue to have areas of concern that will require good thinking and planning as we move forward. The fact is that net tuition revenue from undergraduate programs, by far our largest source, has plateaued the past three years.

We need to continue to work hard to get back on course and produce reasonable growth in this core area. We need to continue to get word out about the strength of our programs, to be attentive to ways that we can strengthen our position in recruiting, to invest wisely in student support to assure that our students can persist through graduation, and (yes) to make sure our facilities (and residence halls) are up to par.

At the same time, we must continue to be smart and creative in diversifying our sources of revenue, reducing as much as possible our reliance on undergraduate tuition.

I mentioned summer programs and conferences, for example, which are only one (important) way we are working to strengthen our financial standing by diversifying revenue sources. We also need to continue to be diligent and creative in developing graduate programs and programs for non-traditional learners that both serve our mission and strengthen us financially. And we need to be constantly on the lookout for ways to increase efficiencies and use every dollar wisely: this past year, for example, we instituted a new policy on student insurance from which we anticipate significant savings, and analyzed all of our existing contract services to identify potential savings across the institution.

Lest all of this talk about challenge and caution suggests otherwise, let me assure you that we continue to be in a very strong position overall, even at a time of tremendous stress on institutions like ours. One very important indicator of this is the recent reaffirmation, by the credit rating agency Standard & Poors, of our rating of A- with a stable outlook—even at a time when the overall outlook for our sector among the rating agencies is “negative,” not “stable.”

Fundraising, of course, is an important part of the picture—for both the short- and the long-term, and there is continued good news there as well. We continue to be blessed by the generosity and support of our alumni and friends. It seems that the more they learn about the work you are doing and about the success of our students, the more eager they are to be part of what we’re doing. This is why publications like *Focus on Faculty* and the *Annual Student Outcomes* report—as well as the many stories featured on our website and in our print publications—are so important to our efforts. (So keep the stories of your accomplishments and those of your students coming!)

We had another very good year this past year, exceeding our annual unrestricted budget goal by almost 10% and bringing in just over \$14.5M for the year, the fifth consecutive year that we’ve been above \$14M. In addition, commitments to major gifts (including multi-year pledges) have been extraordinary, even taking into account the impact of the O’Malley gift. Such commitments currently stand at just over \$90M, compared with about \$40M a year ago. And this \$90M in commitments includes 15 gifts or pledges of \$1M or more.

Speaking of the O’Malley gift—and to end on a decidedly cheerful note—we’re looking forward to Tuesday, September 25<sup>th</sup>, when we will formally mark the naming of the O’Malley School of Business with a brief ceremony and celebration. The event will give us an opportunity to thank the O’Malley’s for their extraordinary generosity (the \$25M gift is the largest in the College’s history, and brings the O’Malley’s cumulative giving to the College at over \$50M to date).

It will also be an opportunity for the community to meet and hear from the O’Malley School’s new Dean, Don Gibson, to whom you were introduced earlier. Welcome yet again, Don, it’s good to have you on board.

Finally, as I’m mentioning new colleagues, let me take a moment briefly to introduce two people who are just starting in very important roles—both of whom will be doing work that will bring them into contact with a broad range of people throughout the institution, and who consequently are very eager to get to know all of you!

First, we're pleased to welcome Sheetal Kale, our new Director of Equity and Diversity and Chief Title IX Coordinator. Reporting directly to my office, Ms. Kale will work closely with the offices of the General Counsel, Human Resources, Student Life, and the Provost, while serving as a primary resource to the broad campus community. She will provide leadership in the strategic planning of programs that support and promulgate an equitable, diverse and inclusive campus culture.

In her role as Title IX Coordinator, she will also chair the Manhattan College Title IX Working Group, newly expanded to include additional faculty and staff representation. In this role, she will reinforce the College's dedication to the creation of a safe climate for all community members, lead the College's ongoing primary prevention efforts, and coordinate resolution of all reports of sexual and related misconduct under Title IX.

Sheetal received her bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at Austin and her juris doctor from Georgetown University Law Center, and is a member of the New York and California Bars. Previous to coming to Manhattan College, she served as Director of Litigation at the Inner City Law Center in Los Angeles, California, and, before that, in Assistant and Associate General Counsel roles at Barnard College and TCS Education Systems, respectively. She also served for five years as a staff attorney at the New York City Commission on Human Rights.

We are delighted to have her aboard in this very important role.

We are also delighted to welcome Robert (Rob) Walsh, who came on board this summer as Senior Advisor for Strategic Partnerships. Bringing extensive experience in building productive relations between and among governmental agencies, cultural institutions, foundations, nonprofits, and businesses large and small, Rob will coordinate the College's growing and increasingly important efforts to develop such affiliations in the interest of enriching student opportunities and success, facilitating faculty research and entrepreneurial activity, and elevating the College's competitive position through relationships with key New York organizations and institutions.

From 2002 through 2014, Rob served as Mayor Michael Bloomberg's commissioner of the NYC Department of Small Business Services. During those twelve years, he helped re-energize the city's business improvement districts, created an award-winning neighborhood leadership program, and established seven NYC Business Solutions Centers that from 2008 to 2014 secured more than \$200M in funding for small businesses.

From 1989 to April 1997, he played an instrumental role in the revitalization of one of New York's great neighborhoods, as executive director of the Union Square Partnership.

Rob holds a bachelor's degree in political science and master's degree in public affairs from Fordham University. He began his career in public service as a New York City Urban Fellow, a program he later directed.

Please join me in welcoming Rob and Sheetal to the Manhattan College community. And please introduce yourselves to them at the reception, which commences immediately upon our formal dismissal by the Provost!

Happy new academic year. Have a great semester!