

President's Dinner September 17, 2015

Good evening. It's always a pleasure to be in the company of Manhattan College's biggest fans and strongest supporters. Thank you for being here; and thank you especially for the privilege of working with you in building the future of this great institution.

Educators are inherently hopeful people—and who can blame us?

Every year, just as the slant of light and the chill in the air tells us that the days are getting shorter and the year is coming to an end, we get to start afresh as we welcome or welcome back 3,400 eager and energetic young people. Nature's Fall is Academia's Spring.

As the fall semester begins, the students in our classes seem just a little brighter than their counterparts from last year—who we last saw slogging through final exams and papers.

Their sense of humor seems especially keen this year—judging from their excellent response to our jokes on that first day of class. Everyone, every year, is off to their *best* year, *ever*. We log on to GoJaspers.com and find—amazingly!—that thirteen of our nineteen Jasper athletic squads are undefeated! (And the six that have actually been in competition thus far aren't doing badly either!)

But, even taking into account the Fall “discount” of expectations that I've learned to apply over my more than 30 years in the classroom and as an administrator, this Fall really does seem special: there's something happening up there in Riverdale! Something that has been noticed by many people I've spoken with—faculty, administrators, staff, and especially the students themselves.

It's hard to pin down exactly what it is—maybe a slightly more tangible sense of school spirit right out of the gate; or a bit more eagerness to get engaged in classes and research and in student activities.

There seems somehow to be a more palpable feeling of community—and, maybe most important, a stronger sense of being part of an institution with a strong identity and heritage that's also moving in some exciting new directions.

But don't take my word for it. You've heard it directly tonight from Mahamoud Diop in his eloquent remarks on behalf of his fellow students. And you can hear it, I think, in this excerpt from the first editorial of the year in *The Quadrangle*. Now remember, as you listen to this, that student journalists are not, as a general rule, noted for their eagerness to praise their schools. (I say this as a former student journalist myself; one who sometimes cringes to remember the many things he wrote about that hopelessly clueless creature—the College administrator. Karma certainly is, as the kids would say, “a thing.”)

Here's how Sean Sonnemann, Editor in Chief of *The Quadrangle*, kicked off the year: “Returning students will immediately notice,” he writes, many “physical changes around campus.” He goes on to note with approval some major improvements we've made to the Quad, to the interior of

Draddy Gymnasium (including our brand new—and very green—basketball court), and to Walsh Plaza (which has been completely resurfaced).

So far; so good. These spaces really do look great—and the work on the Quad and on Walsh Plaza was much needed especially after this past winter. (As VP for Facilities Andy Ryan says, it looked like the Loch Ness Monster had gotten seriously lost and had been trying to surface on our campus.)

Sean might have mentioned as well one of my favorite projects—the installation in the Chapel of De La Salle and His Brothers of the beautiful stained-glass windows that we have acquired, thanks to many in this room and in partnership with the District of Eastern North America, from the former Brother's novitiate in Barrytown. The windows, which depict in exquisite color and detail the life and legacy of De La Salle, are currently being painstakingly restored and will be dedicated on April 7, the feast day of De La Salle.

Back to the editorial; after noting campus upgrades, Sean expands his scope to other kinds of improvements: “In many ways,” he continues, “these campus facelifts are representative of the increasing number of changes and upgrades happening throughout the college—both physical and otherwise”:

It seems that every few weeks a new program or policy is being instituted at the college; be it common interest communities, community service opportunities, expanded dining options, innovative research programs or noteworthy student events.

The paint has seemingly just finished drying on the new Kelly Commons and the college is already looking to further expand, probing the possibility of building a new STEM building, residence hall and renovating existing campus spaces.

Simply put, *it's an exciting time to be part of the Manhattan College community*. The college is clearly expanding and with residence halls essentially at capacity and enrollment growing, there is more work to be done.

Really: I couldn't have said it better myself! *It is an exciting time. We have achieved a great deal over the past several years.*

The most visible achievement is, of course, the magnificent 70,000 square foot LEED Gold Certified Raymond W. Kelly '63 Student Commons. As anyone who has been on campus since its opening can attest—the Commons has added enormously not only to our ability to offer quality academic and co-curricular programming, but also to our sense of community and our identity. It really has become the campus center that we very much hoped for and needed. It is our new front door and our living room, and a place that both resident and commuter students think of as home.

It is a place where we can welcome the community—and very importantly a place where we proudly welcome prospective students, who see immediately what an asset it will be to their daily lives as Jaspers. We owe a great debt of gratitude to all who contributed so generously to this

ambitious project—led by our honorary chair Tom O’Malley, our campaign co-chairs Gene McGrath, Ken Rathgeber, Fred Salerno, and Development Chair, Mike Regan, and including so many people in this room tonight.

Thanks to you and your tremendous generosity, we have been able to put a bold exclamation point on decades of strategic planning focused on creating a first-rate residential college experience.

As wonderful as the building is, it is (as you’ve heard me say many times) only the most visible of the many ways in which we’ve been pursuing—relentlessly—a course of continuous improvement, spurred by a spirit of innovation in response to the changing needs of our students as they prepare for success in their careers—and, more importantly, in their lives.

As Sean notes in his editorial, scarcely a month goes by that does not see some major improvement of or addition to our programs—from the re-birth of our MBA program, to new majors and minors in areas like Environmental Science or Data Analytics, to the launch of our first fully on-line programs, to increased support for student research and collaborative learning.

The Quadrangle Editorial also reflects well the forward-looking spirit of the College—our recognition that, as the Editor writes, “there is more work to be done.”

Last year, we spent a good deal of time and effort on two parallel and interlinked planning processes: a second phase of our Strategic Plan—Renewing the Promise—and a comprehensive facilities Master Plan—through which we envisioned the Manhattan College of the future.

The plans set a clear and bold course for making a strong institution even stronger: capitalizing on our core assets as a Lasallian Catholic college in New York City; developing our capacity to respond to emerging needs in the higher education landscape; using technology judiciously to diversify our curricula and serve a broad range of students; and assuring that we will have the facilities we need to deliver the best possible educational experience for our students.

At the core of the facilities plan are strategic upgrades of space throughout the campus, with particular focus on our STEM facilities, and with the most substantial investment an addition to and renovation of Leo Engineering, and the development of a true “south campus” with the “new Leo” as its hub. I think that you will find the plan extremely exciting. It is ambitious—as is appropriate for a forward-looking institution like Manhattan. But it is also realistic and achievable. I look forward to sharing details with you in the coming months and years.

Now, as important as this recognition by *The Quadrangle* is—the student paper is not the only news outlet that has noticed that Manhattan College is on the move. Last May, my in-box was suddenly flooded with messages excitedly encouraging me to check out the *New York Post* (as if I don’t read it religiously . . .). There I found an article that has since gone viral in Jasperland. “Forget Harvard,” begins the *Post* article (actually . . . being the *Post*, it says something a little stronger than “Forget”). We are to “forget” Harvard, says the article, because according to a new ranking of colleges and universities by the Brookings Institution, Manhattan ranks 9th in the country, just ahead of Stanford and ahead of all of the Ivy’s, in what Brookings defines as “added value.” Essentially, what Brookings looked at was the difference between the expected

mid-career earning power of a college's students and the actual earnings of graduates. The larger the difference between expectation and reality, the more value an institution adds. For Manhattan, that difference is 42% (about \$111K per year compared with the "expected" \$72K), placing it in the top 1% of all colleges and universities.

Factoring in what is still a relatively modest cost of attendance and a high completion rate, the study finds Manhattan to be an extraordinarily good value and investment. As the *Post* put it in its inimitable way, Manhattan "catapults" its students to financial success; so, "if you want to be a top earner in your chosen field," the article says, "go to school in the Bronx."

As I've noted in this gathering in the past, the more the public looks hard at the question of value for price, the better Manhattan looks and the more favorable attention we receive in a climate of increasing skepticism about the value of a college degree. We continued this year to rank very highly in any and all ratings that look at the question of return on investment. One of my favorite instances of our new fame was a clever story that ran on the Dow-Jones's Marketwatch website just before the NCAA Men's basketball tournament—where of course the Jaspers were appearing for the second consecutive year, having once again beaten a college somewhere in New Rochelle in the MAAC tournament.

The reporter asked the question, what if the tournament were decided on the basis of "what really matters"—that is, the Return on Investment of the competitor schools? Applying the most recent Payscale.com rankings to the entire tournament field, the reporter's brackets had a final four of Duke vs. Lafayette and Harvard vs. (you guessed it) Manhattan. True to the *Post's* wisdom, Manhattan eliminates Harvard in the semi-finals ("forget Harvard") while Duke falls to Lafayette (which was a double joy to this UNC Chapel Hill alumnus). We won't talk about who won in the final between Manhattan and Lafayette; let's just say it wasn't the best officiating we've ever seen . . . (the article says it comes down to a "one possession game," since Lafayette last year ranked 32nd in Payscale, with Manhattan at 33). Time to raise another banner in Draddy!

We also look very good according to the much anticipated (and, by a lot of private college presidents, feared) U.S. Department of Education "Scorecard" of college cost and value, which was launched just last week.

I say that the government's Scorecard has been "feared" in some circles because of the hard look it takes at the question of earnings and return on investment, analyzing the tax records and loan repayment history of every student who has received federal financial aid ten years after graduation. According to these metrics, Manhattan's relatively modest cost (net of financial aid) and high graduation rate, combined with the high salaries and strong loan repayment rate of its graduates, places it among the top performers in the country.

At the same time, we continue to perform very well in more traditional rankings, which put much less emphasis on the economic success of graduates and more on academic quality, preparedness of the incoming students, and overall financial health (including alumni giving). In *US News and World Report*, we continue to be ranked in the top 20 in our region, this year moving up one place, from 18 to 17, among regional colleges and universities in the North.

So word continues to get out that something good is going on up there in the Northwest Bronx. And the very best evidence—and most important consequence—of that is our continuing success—and really remarkable success this year—in recruiting new students. Applications continue to break records each year; fulltime undergraduate enrollment now stands at 3,385 students, an increase of more than 15% since 2010. At 903 students, the incoming freshman class is 20% larger than last year and the largest in decades at the College. Our residence halls are full. Academic quality of incoming students continues to be strong and getting stronger, with an increase in average SAT of about 25 points since 2012. And we continue to be true in our recruitment efforts to our Lasallian mission in providing access, as well, with about a third of our students being first-generation; nearly 30% Pell eligible; and more than a third minority students, with Latino/Latina students comprising about 22%.

Beyond the size of the class and its academic quality and diversity, though, what really impresses me and gives me great hope is what I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks: that strong and growing sense among our students that they are part of something genuinely special; that in becoming Jaspers they are becoming part of a multi-generational community of really good and really smart people who have done, are doing, and will do amazing things in their lives and careers.

Thank you for all you have done and continue to do to support the mission of this great institution, to sustain our commitment to excellence and to build our reputation: it is only through your generosity and continued commitment that we can ensure that future generations will continue to have access to the great good of a Manhattan College education.

Thank you for your attention. Thank you for all you do for the College; God bless you and God Bless Manhattan College. Go Jaspers and Good Night!