

There is a saying that replaceable people often use to make themselves feel better about the fluid realities of the world. In short, “no one is irreplaceable.” This is true, for the most part, and while most would love to be the exceptions to that rule, very, very few actually are. We are all privileged to be honoring one of these truly exceptional people today.

In the 2021-2022 academic year, the School of Liberal Arts enrolled nearly 12,000 students in our 395 classes. We have 11 departments, 5 interdisciplinary programs, 4 cross-disciplinary minors, coordinate the majors, double majors, and minors of 700, deal with the concerns of all 3,000... and apparently have a pear tree with a bird in it somewhere. Simple is not a word ever used to describe SoLA’s beautiful chaos. Complexity and chaos are expected realities when you play the game we play, but beauty is much more elusive. To draw beauty from chaos has led most to attribute divine or natural causality, in our case the cause is a single person. Dianna Cruz has spent the past twenty years as Academic Advisor, Assistant Dean, and Senior Assistant Dean creating beauty from our intentional chaos.

It takes a special person to tolerate a state of fluidity, of constant change. It takes an extraordinary person to enjoy that state of professional being. Of course, her intelligence and skill are the foundation for that exceptionalism, but even more influential is her sense of purpose. Dianna Cruz is here because she believes in our shared work of education for the purpose of creating opportunities in a better world. That might mean maintaining the data infrastructure that makes faculty and student advising possible. That might mean assuming the responsibility of reforming a College-wide living and learning program and working with campus partners to realize incredible growth. That might mean having to deal with four deans – particularly the current one, who is definitely a pain – and twenty years of faculty turnover. What it absolutely means for her is the opportunity to work with each and every student that comes through the School of Liberal Arts.

Of the many nominations for this honor, the same phrase was repeated: “Dianna is devoted to our students.” Literally, the word “devoted” shows up in more than half of the nominations. She knows the people she is supporting. She knows their hopes and their challenges. She takes the time to understand how to help a student through a difficult day or talk a faculty member through a challenge. We all come to Dianna Cruz for help and answers because she

reliably provides both. She shapes the beauty of our chaotic existence because she has earned all of our confidence and we trust her to do so. Without beauty there is loss, and our purpose would be lost without her. Please join me in congratulating the irreplaceable heart of the School of Liberal Arts at Manhattan College, our 2022 Distinguished Lasallian Administration Award winner, Dianna Cruz.