



Lisa Juncaj
Distinguished Lasallian-Administrator
2008-2009

Lisa graduated from Manhattan after working as a student assistant in the Controller's Office. She stayed on in a variety of roles, moving quickly from bookkeeper to grants accountant. Then the academic side of the house called, and in September 1999, she became the Academic Advisor for the School of Arts and for the School of Science. Here she mastered scheduling and curriculum along with advising, and she revamped many of our policies and most of our paperwork. She returned to finances in late 2002, much to my chagrin, and served as Bursar and now serves as Associate Director of Student Financial Services.

If you have ever worked with Lisa Juncaj, you will know what I am talking about. If you have ever spent an hour in her presence, you will understand what I am saying. If you have not yet had that experience, let me try to prepare you.

Being with Lisa is like being in the eye of a hurricane. For 360 degrees around you, all is a swirling wild. But there in the still center, it is calm and controlled. Except for one major problem. Lisa is also the hurricane swirling around you. When Lisa is around, things move and shake. Do I suggest an earthquake? A tornado? Lisa is a natural wonder. And I know. I worked closely with her for three years. She has more energy and more direction than ten people put together. If Manhattan ever has to replace her (and I hope that Manhattan never will have to), Manhattan will have to find ten people to do her work. Look around some night to see what lights are still on in what offices on campus. Randomly dial her at 8 P.M. She's there, making sure that the work is done and done right.

Lisa has never yet met a job she did not like or she could not do—to perfection. Not only can she master the complexities of the School of Arts curriculum or the intricacies of student financial aid or the vagaries of the IA or Banner systems, but she has the uncanny ability to pass her skills and knowledge on to others. She is a quick learner and a master teacher. As she said of her mentor John Daly just this past Tuesday, he trained her to be a coach and a consultant. She is not just a distinguished administrator; she is a distinguished administrator who is clearly a distinguished educator.

What I have always especially appreciated is that Lisa is a problem spotter. She has the uncanny ability to see a problem on its way to forming and to head it off. If it is already a full-blown problem, her creativity comes into play, and she finds innovative ways to turn around a bad situation. She never breaks the rules, but she has done some very creative bending—always in the service of the students and of Manhattan College.

On top of that, she has a wicked sense of humor and is not above loading a colleague's purse with what seemed to be 5,000 paper clips, which the colleague never noticed until she got home. She keeps many a lunch table in paroxysms of laughter as she rips off one-liners or does a powerful riff on the pompous or the foolish.

I always loved watching Lisa work with students, and I know she remains the same way. She knew every one of the Arts students—about 600 plus of them at the time—by name. She knew their issues. She knows her students like that to this day.

Just yesterday, she worked long and hard with one of our students to help him consolidate his loans so he can finish the nine credits standing between him and his degree. She reached out to him.

She takes each student as he or she is—smart or unmotivated or lost or lazy or lonely or struggling or hard-working. To Lisa, each student is unique and special—even the ones who might drive anyone else crazy. Slowly she breaks down the barriers, whether fear, distrust, confusion. She helps the students sort out their problems. She never fostered what we often called “learned helplessness.” Her target was always to help the students stand on their own and then to move forward. “Baby steps,” she would say, “Let’s just start with the baby steps. Then we will get there.”

Her loyalty to friends and family is well known. Loving daughter, dedicated sister, demented cousin, mom extraordinaire. One only has to meet Matthew, our proud Fordham Prep freshman, to know what care and love and devotion Lisa expends in her personal life as well as her professional life.

In keeping with the spirit of the founder, it is fitting that Lisa Juncaj be named this year’s distinguished Lasallian administrator. She exemplifies the best of the Lasallian spirit in her dedication to serve, her respect for the dignity of each person she deals with, her spirit of fun and joy, her energy in the service of the entire community at Manhattan College.