



FACULTY/STAFF CONVOCATION

TUESDAY, AUGUST 25, 2015

PRESIDENT HEIDI MACPHERSON

THE COLLEGE AT BROCKPORT, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



The start of this new academic year brings change and exciting opportunities for staff, faculty and our students, as well as for me. Today I want to talk about four things, as I start my first year at Brockport: what I'm learning about our College, about celebrating our successes, about the commitments that the Cabinet and I will make to each other and to you, and about what we can expect to be our priorities over the next year. I see all of these things as contributing to the process of developing our next strategic plan.

One of the things that first attracted me to Brockport was our promise: "to reveal to each student each day his or her capacity for intellectual, physical and creative accomplishment."

I can't think of a better promise to live and work by, and I value the statements that we make about our College, that we

- provide a multidimensional education
- champion the scholar in every student
- are a vital community of engaged citizens
- and that we open the world to our students

Those of you who have already met me will know that I am particularly pleased to see that we consider our students global citizens. My own experiences as a study abroad student, an international student, and an international faculty member in the UK have instilled in me the importance of taking a global perspective whenever and wherever possible, whilst remaining true to local needs and regional issues.

I value undergraduate research and other 'high impact practices' that engage students in their own learning, including leadership development programs that help our students become alumni and leaders themselves. I feel so fortunate to find these values shared by Brockport, a college committed 'to fostering a learning community in which each member takes responsibility for contributing to and celebrating the success of others.'

Despite the economic challenges we face as an institution, we continue to rely on the strengths of our campus community to uphold and deliver our mission and our promise.

In the last six weeks alone, I have seen this promise played out in front of me every day. I saw it when I attended the closing event of the Summer LEAP project for the Rochester school district. I watched our students and faculty work closely with children who may one day become Golden Eagles, if we keep them engaged in the joy of learning and if we open our campus to them early enough and often enough for them to see it as *their* campus. I saw it on an impromptu tour of Rakov when I visited with the graduate mentors and interns at the Educational Opportunities Program and learned a little bit about how they assist students in transitioning to higher education. The EOP students themselves also shared Thompson Hall with Allan and me this summer, so I've met quite a few of our students that way, too, though I suspect the real draw has been Tilly, our Springer Spaniel...

I see the Brockport Promise in the way that faculty and staff volunteer to attend summer orientation for students and parents, talking with them over dinner about the ways that they can be successful, and in seeing how many faculty and staff have volunteered to help with student move in later this week. And I've read about it in the Rochester papers—how our international education efforts are changing the world for our students and how Ralph Trecartin's team is assisting with this. I read about The Rochester Reform Trail, a project led by Joe Torre, which is funded by the National Endowment for the

Humanities. This project helped us to educate 70 teachers from across the country about Rochester's 19th century landmarks. I read about Lauren Lieberman's connections to Beep Ball as well as the 20th anniversary of Camp Abilities. I learned that we have educated more than a thousand future teachers in the area of sports and recreation for children with sensory impairments.

I was thrilled to see that our College was included on *The Princeton Review's* 2016 "Best in the Northeast" college rankings. This designation includes the top 25 percent of the nation's four-year higher education institutions. We were also named a "Green College" by the publication. According to the Princeton Review's methodology, schools are selected primarily for their excellent academics, as well as what students reported about their campus experiences through a student survey. I wanted to be sure to share this news with you because I believe that it is important for us to know how others view us.

When I have asked my colleagues about what makes us Brockport, what makes us excellent, people have been generous with their responses.

Thus I know about Dr. Douglas Wilcox, an Empire Innovation Professor in the Department of Environmental Science and Biology, who is in the midst of a large wetland restoration project funded by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. If all works according to plan, the methodology employed by Dr. Wilcox and his team will serve as a model for restoring Lake Ontario wetlands impacted greatly by lake-level regulation. This is research that has a real impact and it's happening here, on our campus.

I've learned more about a Biology project spearheaded by Dr. Laurie Cook, who with her team has been awarded a three-year, \$404,345 grant from the National Science Foundation to study the effects of melanin-concentrating hormones on fat cell maturation.

You probably know that Dr. Amanda Coyle traveled to Sierra Leone in Dec. 2014 – Jan. 2015 to work in an Ebola Treatment Unit with a US-based humanitarian organization, Partners in Health. What you might not know is that her narrative about this experience will be published in the journal *Nursing* in 2015.

I've heard about the significant number of opportunities for our students to work with faculty in international venues, including work led by Dr. Jennifer Ramsey in Israel, helping students to excavate a Roman Legion site, or work done on choreography and performances in Brazil, as well as historical and cultural investigations in England, Ireland, Japan, Chile, and Montreal.

There are numerous other stories of excellence in research and teaching, and I am relying on you to tell me about them, so that I can, in turn, tell others.

I found out that Ed Jaskulski was named both the SUNYAC Outdoor Track and field Coach of the Year and the US Track and Field and Cross Country Coaches Association Atlantic Regional Men's Coach of the Year. He is only the latest in a long line of successful coaches who have won a wide variety of awards from national and regional bodies for the important

work they do with our student-athletes.

We hosted the New York State Summer Special Olympics this June, and our events team worked hard and well to accommodate the needs and opportunities for 1,500 athletes, coaches and staff, not to mention their families. We will host the games again next summer as well. In addition to the Special Olympics, we hosted 1,300 other visitors this summer, through sports camps, leadership development conferences and bridge programs. So while this is a 'welcome back' for many of you, the reality is, our campus is definitely a year round operation. I want to extend my thanks to the staff in BASC and facilities who not only turned things over quickly, but have also ensured that after a busy summer, our residence halls, grounds and other facilities are now ready for the new academic year.

I've heard more about the growing number of faculty and staff who serve as mentors, workshop presenters and advisory board members for our award-winning Student Leadership Development Program.

I've heard about our Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, or VITA, Program, where students work under the supervision of Assistant Professor Kari Smoker to provide assistance to students, employees and members of the community in preparing their income tax returns.

At the SUNY Voices conference, College Senate President Alison Parker led a roundtable discussion with two of our BSG leaders, past president Will Mitchell, and incoming president Sean Flynn. This work in partnership is a hallmark of The College at Brockport.

Through attending a Friends of Drake Memorial Library event, I got a thorough history lesson about our college, and its early commitment to diversity, a commitment that we maintain to this day.

I've been impressed by the way that you have contributed both to our successfully completed campaign, Pursue Something Greater, which concluded a year early at \$26.6 million, and to our annual giving campaign. 500 of you made a gift to the College last year, an all-time high. Our endowment has more than doubled to \$9.5 million. There are 164 new scholarships and awards for our students created as a direct result of the Pursue Something Greater campaign.

Why am I telling you all this? I believe we should celebrate those successes, and tell the world a little more about what we do. I also want to reiterate—it is my job to ensure that the good work you do, the passions that you have, are recognized and celebrated, because you are who Brockport is, and your passions are the basis for our excellent results in the *Princeton Review* and elsewhere.

Lest you think that I have only heard good things about our college since I arrived, or that I am somehow not paying attention to critiques, please know that I have also had correspondence from alums or former students who did not graduate who wish we'd done things differently and who are either polite or not in their engagements with me and with the College. We need to listen to their voices, too, and see if we had opportunities to communicate differently or better.

And through other processes, for example, the administrative surveys undertaken by College Senate, I've heard that we need as a College to do a better job of ensuring that we communicate effectively across the organization and beyond it, and I will do my best to help with this.

As I have begun working with College Cabinet, we have all agreed that we are proud to serve our institution, and want to do so as effectively as we can. This means listening to what you say about how we can better assist the institution in achieving its goals, and how we respond positively and proactively to our changing needs.

We have created some rules of engagement in our meetings, and while I won't list them all here, there are several that I think you may wish to know. One of the things we have promised to each other is that we will have the courage to tell the truth—to each other and the campus about what our challenges are and how we need to try to meet them. That means we'll continue to talk about the budget, and consider how best we put ourselves back on a healthy track to ensure that we are safeguarding our future as well as reacting to our present needs. With you, and through our College standing committees as well as with College Council, we will make some difficult choices, and we will try to do this with transparency and clarity.

Perhaps one of the hardest things we've promised ourselves is that we will do our best to maintain a constructive balance between chaos and stability—I say that because as we move forward in our strategic planning phase this year, we know that we won't know everything we need to know about the future, and there may be things that threaten to move us off track. We need to recognize that higher education is always in flux, and to learn to cope better with the inevitable messiness that results from having partial information, and needing to act anyway.

Finally, we've promised to focus on the real issues. For me, this means paying attention to enrollment and understanding as much as we can about how enrollment ups and downs affect our college. It also means ensuring that our budget supports our needs and our goals, and finally it means ensuring that we are aware of and responsive to our accrediting body, Middle States Commission on Higher Education, as they hold us to the highest standards and as we work towards meeting them.

So what can we expect from 2015-16?

This year, I'd like to see us work towards further integrating our planning and budget activities. This may mean developing a joint planning and budget committee, with broad representation and the remit to act as an advisory board to the Cabinet. It certainly means that we need to think about how our governance structures can best support the work we are doing.

Given the significant budgetary challenges we have facing us, we need to plan thoughtfully and thoroughly for campus-wide priorities. I'd love to be in a position next year to launch a strategic initiative fund—but we can only do that if we are able to integrate the areas of our work that combine finance and future vision.

I have long held that space is the physical manifestation of an institution's priorities, and we've seen a great commitment

to mind and body in our recent large capital projects, with the Liberal Arts Building, SERC and Lathrop Hall being the most visible projects we've undertaken over the last few years. Our next major capital project is around infrastructure, and while most of this will eventually be invisible—replacing, for example, underground piping and wires, I'm glad we'll be focusing on ensuring that our campus is accessible and indeed beautiful as an end result. We are also looking forward to commencing the construction of our Academic Success Center.

We will be working on our submission to the SUNY Expanded Investment Fund and Performance Fund RFP which is closely linked to our Performance Improvement Plan and the SUNY Excels metrics.

We will launch our strategic planning process this year, so that, as we move through the last year of the current strategic plan, we will be able to say what we want to keep moving forward, what continues to resonate for us, and in what new directions we want to go. I want to honor our past, and plan for our future, and I will be asking for your help in a myriad of ways as we do so. In doing so, I want to build on the visioning work undertaken a few years ago for the College 2025 project, where, amongst other things, you identified Community, Engaged Education and Identity as some core themes. What did those themes mean to you in 2013 and what do they mean to us today, in 2015? What are they likely to mean to us over the next decade?

Community

We need to work together to achieve the kind of community that we desire for the College. It is our responsibility collectively to define our terms, to extend our connections beyond our campus buildings (while not forgetting the need to build a community within). Our goal is to pursue something greater—and we can best do that in partnership with Rochester, with the region, with the state, and beyond. I believe in a greater Brockport for a greater Rochester, a greater Brockport for a greater world. I commit to working on your behalf with local businesses and interest groups so that they will think about us when they are looking for someone to create a solution. I want them to reach out to us when they need internships filled or other partnerships, and for that to happen, we have to reach out to them. I see my role as telling our story, whenever and wherever I can. I've begun to do this already, having recently spoken to Rochester Rotary, and with the chief executive of the Rochester Business Alliance, as well as local legislators and with local media outlets. I've been heartened and impressed by their knowledge of us, and their enthusiasm for working with us further. My Cabinet colleagues and I are the facilitators of your creative thoughts, and we will work together to help you achieve your ambitions for a greater Brockport community.

Engagement

I was pleased to see that the 2025 conversations also centered around engagement activities, and from what I've seen, I believe we have done a good job of making student

success central to our mission. Many of the activities that I mentioned earlier—the leadership development program, our international education experiences, and indeed undergraduate research, which I strongly support—help with this engagement goal. It is also a goal that remains central to the National Survey of Student Engagement and other outside metrics, so we will do well to continue to focus on this area. Of course, engagement does not end with students: we must all be engaged in the process of determining our pathway forward.

Identity

Identity was another core theme discussed in the 2025 conversations, but without, it seems, an overarching common definition of who we are. This also came out loud and clear through our campus climate survey. This, I would argue, needs to be at the heart of our new strategic planning—absolutely clearly articulating who we are and where we are going. Without this common understanding, we risk no one else knowing who we are either.

Another way of saying this would be to ask, how we do we know we are achieving our mission and our vision?

There are some obvious first steps. We must align our mission with our vision and strategic planning. We need to review our progress against goals, and ensure that there is monitoring not only of the goals themselves, but also reflection on whether those goals remain fit for purpose in a changing environment. What we say about ourselves in 2015 we may want to revise with new information in 2016, or thereafter. So it is crucial that we are able to measure ourselves against what we say about ourselves.

That is a fundamental project management answer, but I think that the answer is even wider than that, and encompasses four areas.

What do our alumni say about the experience they had with us? The vice chancellor of Essex University said to me, “We’re not producing graduates, we’re producing alumni.” If we’re recruiting to our mission, and teaching to our mission and values, then we should hopefully be producing alumni who value us, and tell us so—who can reflect back positively on their time here. They are our amongst our best ambassadors, and they will tell us whether we are achieving our mission.

Our other best ambassadors are you, our faculty and staff, and we’ll know that we are achieving our mission if you talk about the university as “us” and not “them”—if you see yourselves as the co-creators of our academic learning community, rather than as the people to whom the university *does* things. If the *we* is more than the *they*, and the *us* is more than the *them*, we’ll be achieving our mission and vision for attracting and retaining high quality faculty and staff.

Our other stakeholders—and potential ambassadors—are in our local and regional community, and even further beyond this. Our College Council has a direct role to play in this activity as well, and I am grateful to College Council Chair Scott Turner for his interest in us and his commitment to our welfare and good health, both financially and academically.

I believe that we must ask for and receive with wisdom the feedback our wider community offers to us, so that we can continue to engage with them culturally, academically, and professionally.

The final element that shows that we are achieving our mission is one that encompasses all of the above: and that is a culture of respect and responsibility, not blame. We need all of our stakeholders to feel able to help steer us back on course if we are not achieving our mission. We need to be able to embrace the learning that comes from mistakes—because we all make them. We need to reinforce an environment of trust and confidence in the institution and between each other.

In order to be successful in this planning phase, we must continue to celebrate those things that make us distinctive, and embrace new opportunities we might otherwise fail to recognize.

So here’s my commitment to you: As we reinforce our academic community, focus on student success, and work on being connected both to each other and to the community at large, I want to hear what you think. I promised you a listening tour the day that I was appointed, and I will be having both town hall meetings and open office hours this year. We are in the process of setting up dates and locations, which will be announced through the *Daily Eagle*, for you to meet with me and with cabinet members to discuss issues of importance and to help to define our common goals. We cannot achieve what we need to achieve if we don’t have these important conversations. Your participation is crucial in this process, which will only have validity if there is more than one viewpoint represented.

People often ask me, as the new president, what is your vision for Brockport? (Sometimes it’s phrased as, what do you want to change?) My answer is simple: my developing vision is a combination of multiple viewpoints that will help us to see a better picture together. In a darkroom, an image starts to appear slowly. It is not a procedure that should be rushed. I am in the process of learning who we are—what better place to learn than on a campus? Learning is, after all, our ultimate goal and our ultimate product, as it were.

As we conclude today’s convocation, I wanted to remind you that the Open SUNY team is presenting a poster session in the lobby outside. They will be available to you if you want to know more about the opportunities that Open SUNY has to offer.

Thank you for welcoming me into your midst. You have been generous with your time and your expertise, and I am grateful to you for your ongoing education of me about the College at Brockport.

Finally, I want us to acknowledge and celebrate the new members of our community. We have 93 new faculty and staff with us today. I would ask those of you who are new to us in 2015 to stand and be recognized by your colleagues.

Thank you for joining us and for helping us to build a better Brockport.