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Creating a Culture of Shared Responsibility for Student Success

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Creating a Culture of Shared Responsibility for Student Success.

John P. Pelissero

Provost, Loyola University Chicago

Faculty Convocation Speech

September 11, 2011

Good afternoon, colleagues,

Let me begin by thanking Julia and Jay for their thoughtful and meaningful reflections on the anniversary of 9-11. It is certainly appropriate to have a faculty perspective as part of the commemoration of the events that so shaped our lives in the past 10 years.

And I should thank you for being here. I know you have choices when it comes to how you will spend your weekends. So thank you for choosing Loyola—over the Bears today! (Do we have a score update? I think they are winning.)

Well, how are we starting out this year? In my opinion, good and positive. We have over 16,000 students here—a recent record. We are making progress on improving our students' retention, persistence, and graduation rates. Retention is now at 87%—a jump of 2 points in one year; persistence is solid with new programs that are helping students continue toward graduation — such as our TRIO program, Achieving College Excellence, which retained 100% of students—about 160 at-risk or first generation students are back for a second year; and our graduation rates have improved—our official rate has climbed from 65 to 70% in two years.

Last year at this time, I spoke to you about my vision and the goals for our academic enterprise. Allow me to provide a brief update on progress.

First, Delivering a Transformative Undergraduate Education.

The UCCC and BUS have reviewed recommended changes in nearly all areas of the University Core Curriculum. Whereas, some work is still to be done to create a more coherent and developmental approach to learning, we will have a modified Core curriculum to be implemented in Fall 2012. We will also have a new requirement for engaged learning—which will replace the values curriculum—and this will require a larger array of engaged learning courses for students—from experiential learning to capstone seminars and performances.

Progress continues in our goal to have full-time faculty teaching 75% of Core and undergraduate courses. Most of the professional schools have achieved this target, while Arts and Science departments continue to make modifications in teaching assignments to achieve the same.

Second, Refocus Faculty Hiring and Development.

In faculty recruitment, we renewed an emphasis on hiring for mission, diversifying the faculty, and pursuing interdisciplinary cluster hiring. Search committees participated in workshops to help our colleagues manage successful searches for the right fit for the department or school and develop a more intentional approach to hiring for mission and diversity.

The results are encouraging. We hired 40 new faculty into permanent lines and the pools of candidates helped to achieve some of our goals. Women made up 38% of the applicant pool and of those hired, 48% are female; and whereas about 1/3 of the applicants were from diverse backgrounds, 28 percent of those hired are faculty of color or international. Deans are telling me that the faculty hired have a better understanding of our mission and how to contribute to it through their teaching and research

We currently have search processes underway for about 30 vacant faculty positions. In addition, I expect to be able to authorize additional hires for new faculty lines that will be needed to improve our student faculty ratio (currently at 15:1 – our target is 13:1), reduce average class

sizes, and have adequate faculty for the instructional demands of our programs, particularly the new foundational Core courses in Fall 2012.

Third, Promoting New Academic Initiatives

We launched our first on-line summer sessions with 15 faculty who completed a cohort development program to be better prepared to teach on-line. 300 students enrolled in these summer courses and the evaluations from both students and faculty have been positive. This academic year we will launch the January Term—a two week intersession between fall and spring semesters in which 12 courses will be offered—from accelerated traditional courses to on-line and study abroad. (And if students want to experience January up-close, we will have a winter ecology course on the grounds of LUREC.)

I should mention that schools and departments were active in developing new degree programs that will launch in the next year—from Masters programs in International Higher Education and Business Administration to on-line and blended education programs in Bioethics, Nursing, and Pastoral Studies. Our first Chicago MBA for Executives Program began last month. We also welcomed the first group of International freshmen to the Rome Start program. The Law School started two new on-line masters programs and launched an LLM in Rome to prepare lawyers from countries transitioning to a rule of law.

The development of an array of academic programs in the area of environmental sustainability has made rapid progress: we have a new dept of ENVIS, we offered our first summer courses and internships at LUREC, established a farm and food systems lab, and completed significant planning for the academic and residential facilities in our future Institute on Environmental Sustainability and Center for Sustainable Urban Living (which will be connected to BVM Hall).

Fourth, Advance Research Capacity.

At the Lakeside campuses, we received nearly \$18M in external grants in AY2010-11, close to the record of a year earlier. I congratulate the faculty who pursued new grants and helped

achieve this outcome. Today, many competitive external grants and foundation awards seek cross-disciplinary knowledge. This past summer we began a research support program for interdisciplinary teams of faculty who receive multi-year summer support for projects that can lead to successful external grant proposals. And I'm happy to say that one of the first teams declined to accept salary support and asked that their summer awards support undergraduate students who would work in their labs and on this project. This faculty team embraced the idea of faculty-directed research that can also provide a transformative education for our students.

So, what is ahead? This year I'm expanding a key goal related to the learning environment. I want to talk to you about building a culture on campus of shared responsibility for student learning, student development, and student success. It begins with our teaching and our continuous interaction with students.

Last month we held a two-day retreat for university leaders and a small group of faculty at LUREC. We discussed a book that we read during the summer—by George Kuh and colleagues, *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*. As you may know, Kuh was one of the founders of the NSSE research. Their book is based on research results focused on 20 colleges and universities that have Documented Effective Educational Practices-- or so-called DEEP learning-- that achieve higher levels of student engagement and better graduation rates. The schools are varied—from small liberal arts colleges to Carnegie Research Extensive universities, and includes one of our sister Jesuit institutions.

Each of these schools promotes a set of institutional values that foster student success. Faculty and students understand these values and the collaboration that is needed to achieve the outcomes related to the mission and values of the institution.

Whereas there is no single formula for success, the authors note that each of these schools has an excellent track record on student retention, persistence, graduation, and careers. They

attribute much of this success to key aspects of the academic and campus environment—strong relationships between faculty and students, active and collaborate classrooms, and engaged learning programs. But most important seems to be a common understanding of the role that faculty play in student success, and a culture in which there is a shared responsibility for student success among the faculty and support staff.

So, we might ask: what contributes to an effective learning environment for students at Loyola and how do we use what we know to support student success? Understanding how college students learn and how they use that learning to achieve their educational goals is a seemingly never-ending task with few simple answers. Yet, this I know—at Loyola, your teaching is at the core of our students' intellectual growth and development as whole persons; your teaching and the learning that results is what our students carry with them into the world and hold onto long after they graduate; and your teaching is what forms *and* transforms Loyola students.

So this year I want to us to solidify a broader understanding of the key role that we, as faculty members, play in the success of our students—in their engagement in learning, their persistence to develop and succeed, and their achievement of the degree—and more often than not in 4 years. Having a common understanding that faculty have a privileged role in the overall development of students is the foundation for establishing a culture of shared responsibility for student learning, development, and success.

It is with this in mind, that I have refocused our faculty development efforts on promoting excellence in teaching and learning through the new ***Faculty Center for Ignatian Pedagogy***. As many of you know well, an Ignatian pedagogy seeks to challenge student learners to appropriate his or her own process of knowing through collaborative learning, engaging experiences, reflective analysis, and understanding oneself. By assisting faculty to become teacher-scholars through an Ignatian Pedagogy, we will contribute to the development of students as knowledgeable, well-skilled, and ethically responsible leaders for careers, one's community, and the world.

In my judgment, most of Loyola's faculty are already practitioners of an Ignatian pedagogy, even if what you do is not ordinarily described in these terms. Through the new Faculty Center, however, faculty will have more professional opportunities created intentionally to support the teaching craft, along with more opportunities to engage one another in conversations about the science and art of effective teaching and student learning.

Throughout the year, you will have opportunities to share best practices in active and collaborative learning environments, develop plans for supporting engaged learning experiences for your students, and participate in workshops and retreats that will focus on creating conditions that make a difference in our all of learning environments --classrooms, residence halls, and off-campus-- in regard to student success.

Our own NSSE results show that we have made progress in key areas of the learning environment, but we have still have room to improve. For example, our seniors report that there is more active and collaborative learning taking place in the classrooms than did seniors 5 years ago. Nonetheless, students at our Jesuit peer institutions are significantly more satisfied with the learning environments in their courses. Student-faculty interaction is viewed positively by our seniors, but only about 1/3 of freshmen are satisfied with the level of interaction and that, again, is significantly below that of freshmen at our Jesuit peers. We have made good progress on enriching educational experiences, such as service learning, internships, and capstones and this speaks well for the level of engaged learning on our campus.

We can take pride in what we are doing well and we should recognize those who have helped bring this about. So this year we will start new university-wide recognition programs for faculty who excel at teaching, mentoring, and engaging students. We will have student-initiated nomination programs for annual awards to outstanding faculty. As one example, we are creating a program to allow freshmen to nominate faculty who represent their best professors; essentially, an award program for faculty who teach freshmen in Core and Introductory courses.

In a sense, these initiatives will help to create institutional value for teaching. We should make this a part of the culture of each department, program, and school. And we should demonstrate in our expectations, evaluation and reward systems for faculty, that teaching carries equal value as research at this university.

So, I hope you will embrace this goal and accept opportunities to be part of a community of learners that seeks to expand ownership of student success, share best practices in collaborative and engaged learning, and promote a culture at Loyola of shared responsibility for the success and development of students. Thank you.

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