President’s Remarks

Spring Faculty Meeting

May 5, 2010

Like the tradition in the Congressional Record, I ask unanimous consent to edit and expand my comments before publication. There were multiple challenges that we faced this year, ranging from early discussions to the removal of all controls for carrying guns on campus to budget reductions that gave rise to furloughs and other limits on our abilities to compensate faculty and staff in ways consistent with what we would desire. Our request for new capital appropriations to allow for construction this year of the new science building was delayed at least for this year. We had to find nearly 2 million dollars from our budget that could have gone to support our efforts to advance faculty, student, staff and community learning. And the campus had to get used to some new guys arriving with, to paraphrase Arthur Miller’s phrase, “a shoe shine and a smile.”

But there is at least much, for me, to be thankful. There was during all this time nearly a 10% improvement in the first to second year retention rate. Since 2004, Clayton State University has had the second largest percentage increase in the total number of graduates in the University system, and this spring will see the largest number of Clayton State Graduates ever. And this could not have been done without this group. Our hope is that many share the perceptions that our institution are heading in directions that will support our future well. Those directions are to be pursued with an eye toward collaboration across campus, transparency as best it can be developed for proposed actions that might affect our futures, civility in our discussions in those instances in which disagreements so resolved improve the chances for wise actions, and good humor that takes our responsibilities to foster learning quite seriously, but ourselves, not so much.

We are thankful for the campus’ willingness to engage in significant ways our shared efforts for mapping our future. Many in this room have been regularly engaged in discussions of how to best use our budget to advance our strategic future, founded on a move to four year and graduate programs, but matching 21st century ways of knowing with the economy in which we and our students will live.

And yes, we are all likely to have offices in that future. The work of facilities master planning reflects a long view, of 5, 10, 20 and 30 years from now, and the facilities, infrastructure, and other support needed to accommodate the growth this university will likely experience because of demographic trends. And the Sasaki group will continue to ask us to help shape our conversations. Scores have responded in ways that will help Sasaki craft a next draft for our review, and that work aims to complete early fall. So too with the work of Strategic planning consultants, the Pappas group, who will conduct extensive focus group work among other efforts to help us review our mission, our strengths and weaknesses, and possible goals and objectives to help us guide specific activities over the next 3-5 year—with a commitment to implement such goals with rigor, and to find ways to define excellence on our terms while we serve the state and local educational priorities best connected to a comprehensive publically supported university. Finally we have engaged the Paskill group to survey our campus, our community, civic leaders and prospective students and school partners to help us get a better idea of how others perceive us, how those conclusions are drawn, and how perspectives might be changed if we find perspectives in tension with our own understanding of great things happening on our campus. Again, all of these finds will take your participation, your good work, and your continued commitment to making things better each day here at Clayton State. There is much movement, but out of such movement will come an engaged future.

I am thankful what I have observed to be an exceptional commitment by my colleagues to student learning. The classical scholar and Oxford faculty member Gilbert Highet years ago framed an argument for the rigors of the teaching profession:” But it is difficult to learn how to think: we must be patient with them while they learn it…This is why teaching is such a demanding profession. Doctors make sick people well again. Lawyers reconcile people’s differences. Clergymen make people better in spirit. Teachers make youngsters…into civilized human beings…Every youth at heart wants to grow to the fullest powers of which he or she is capable. The best teachers in the world cannot force that growth. All they can do is to help it and encourage it. Their best reward is to see, not a product, but a free and independent human being who can think.” Highet’s belief in students who thirst to succeed, and a faculty committed to finding new and changing ways to foster that growth are found here at Clayton State University.

Faculty learning is also of premium here, and we must find ways to support this faculty learning in coming years. Here I am reminded of Henry Rosovsky’s description of the academic life as a world in motion: “Some changes revolutionize fields of study; occasionally new subjects are born; some innovations are ephemeral and quickly forgotten. New ideas can make life miserable for many who have a stake in the old ways, generating conflict between adherents of the old and the new. Every scholar has to face these challenges…It is at once a burden, a challenge, and one of the attractions of academic life.”

Finally, I am appreciative of the culture which acknowledges the vital role that change plays in our efforts to define excellence on our own terms, especially at a time in which all of us are trying to discover exactly what the new normal will look like. And focused adaption to these changes is well within the grasp of this institution. I am impressed by the fit to Clayton State of advice given by Daniel Hurley in a recent review of the role of State Universities in our time: “In addition to using the student experience as a portal through which institutional values are affirmed and priorities established, the public purpose that is a legacy of the state (university) mission can also serve as a guiding compass during this period of recessionary upheaval. Decreased state support need not diminish state (university’s) roles as ‘stewards of place.” On the contrary, a deeply integrated network of partnerships with private, non-profit, philanthropic and local government entities for a public purpose can sustain state (university’s) ability to deliver on their historic commitments to public engagement…Perhaps more than any other entity, state (universities) serve as the conduit for leading positive change that transcends educational opportunity, healthcare, job creation, environmental sustainability, arts and culture, and the attraction of diverse people: all elements which give rise to the creative class and lead to strong healthy communities.”

Thanks again for your welcoming spirit, and your candor which helps us improve daily in the ways that we can support the learning of students, faculty, staff, and community here at Clayton State.