Opening faculty meeting

August 10, 2010

I am delighted to have the chance to greet you this morning, and welcome you to the start of the 2010-2011 Academic year. It is an honor to serve here at Clayton State University, and a continued obligation to work to reinforce for us learning for faculty, students, staff, and community. And while the University System of Georgia is operating with about 220 million fewer dollars than was the case the year before, our own efforts, with your advice and support, have helped us find ways to foster learning. We will be discussing budget elements at an open meeting next week Last year at this time. And information on how we have handled both new tuition and fee budgets and reductions in proposed activities, are found at the swan— http://swan.clayton.edu , When we speak next week we will have further information about budget strategies for the coming year. Needless to say, whatever we are able to accomplish, we would accomplish more had there been dollars allocated for salary support for faculty and staff, and more than a million dollars we would have had to commit in the coming year with just next year’s possible reductions.

However for now, we continue to move to support our core missions, and our emerging focus on strategic planning and thinking—and will do so making efforts each day to reinforce a climate of collaboration, communication, strategic partnerships, and evidence driven discussions and decisions.

In a confessional mode last year, I publically admitted that one of the books that I had had a chance to read over the summer was the King James Conspiracy, by our own Phillip Depoy. And while I glanced at works on Nursing theories by Dean Eichleberger and Drug Regulatory Submissions by Professor Weinberg among other works, I can’t admit to finishing either of those exceptional texts this summer. But interspersed with the reading of more memos than an adult should have to read, I completed (among other works) Malcolm Gladwell’s Outliers. Among a variety of interesting observations, Mr. Gladwell compares the career tracks of two 20th century figures with IQs in excess of 190. Robert Oppenheimer, Professor of Physics at Berkeley and called the father of the atomic bomb, and Christopher Langan, who was forced to leave two universities because he was unable to persuade school officials to allow him to stay after his mother had failed to complete financial aid forms, or he was unable to use negotiating techniques that can assist students of limited educated backgrounds find help. One of these individuals was proven to have attempted to poison his Oxford tutor—and he went on to be tenured at Berkeley.

And so while genius may be important, the ability for genius, or even students of better than average ability to produce exceptional or even important results, requires the attention of institutions like Clayton State--to actively identify students needing assistance—because even very smart people can benefit from help in accessing resources that will support their learning.

Less than two weeks ago, we received a letter from the Chancellor’s office, indicating that Dr. Sheryne Southard in our Department of Social Sciences, had received one of two USG Faculty in the entire system for outstanding work in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning—a unanimous selection by the committee—and was, as her nomination letter here noted, her ability to use evidence to support her efforts in student learning, ideally captures this award’s intention and spirit.” Yay!!! But yay to all of those colleagues whose works reinforce a daily commitment to helping students learn. And yay to all those offices who work daily to improve the way that our institution extends “tough love,” holding our students and each other to standards, but doing so in a way that celebrates those successes that do come, and finding ways to surely increase the number of students and colleagues who experience those successes. And yay to all who will be working in the coming months to examine our current methods of help, advanced those that have had some success, and modify or change those that have been less than successful.

Willis Potts, the new Chair of the Board of Regents, has guided the Board toward a greater commitment to student success, measured by graduation and retention performance of students. And as the year progresses, and thorough the shared initiatives led by Drs. Crafton and Haynes, and our new Associate VP for Enrollment management, Dr. Mark Dadonna, will lead the institutional effort to bring such successes for our students. But I am convinced that we will see such success occur in demonstrable ways, because, as one consultant observed, this faculty has considerable pride in its ability to make differences for our students.

Dr. Crafton, among others, will share a greater number of specific successes by faculty and staff in support of Clayton State’s continued to progress, in Jim Collins’ terms, from Good to Great. Our SACS review (with special thanks to Jill Lane and Donna McCarthy) (even if we have some work to do, especially in the area of assessment of learning outcomes beyond course grading), our approvals for new degree programs such as Supply Chain Management or on-line delivery of graduate work in nursing or our approval of graduate work in Psychology, our real time video link to Peachtree City, our near completion of the BHS annex and thus the addition of new labs, the continued contributions campus makes to the community through day one for Clayton County Schools (our students and faculty and staff provided among the greatest number of volunteers encouraging student success), our largest number of dual enrollment students, which we believe will only be the beginning of program growth, or re-invigorated on-line and blended course delivery with continued evidence of learning success, our success in diversity, our evolution as an institutional with a solid residential component (Laker Hall is filled for a second consecutive semester), our continued progress in the number of faculty and staff participating in international exchanges and connections, including sponsorship of the official visit of the Hungarian Minister of Trade; our distinction as the producer of the largest number of minority nurses in the state of Georgia, and the second largest percentage growth in baccalaureate degrees in the USG since 2004, and, candidly, a campus whose focus is and will be on learning for students, for faculty, for staff, and for community—well ,we have a lot of people doing some incredibly good work—but that the reward for good work is proof that we can and should do so. And for all of this, I say thanks!!!

During the next several weeks and months, we will begin to bring to closure work on a number of efforts begun last year. Facilities Master planning documents should soon be circulated and town meetings are scheduled during the next 6-8 weeks. This effort led by VP Cummings is challenging, but essential to our institutional future. For Strategic Planning, in an initiative led by Dr. Crafton, additional interviews of faculty and staff and students lie ahead, but within the next 2 months, we hope to have a document recommended to us that will help us more clearly tell ourselves who we are, where we are going, and some possible ways to help us get there.

As to our work on Market research, and in an initiative led by VP Stephens, we received last month a report from Paskill, Stapleton and Lord, which addressed “how the University is perceived by the public, how it is connecting to its market, and how it is servicing the community as a partner in the economic development of the region—a competitor assessment was also completed as a part of the project. “ We have begun to widely circulate the report, and will use it as a starting point for one of three large initiative areas (modified, of course by findings of strategic planning)—Marketing and image for Clayton State, Enrollment management as series of integrated tasks from recruitment to retention to graduation, and resources given changes in the nature of state support—remembering that who we are and who we will be will be defined by our academic and support programs, and the exceptional people we must support to make those programs successful.

For me, there were a few surprises in the findings. For external audiences, the name Clayton State University was neither a negative issue, nor a connector with problems in Clayton County. Or to paraphrase an AJC recent vent, with all of the challenges in Clayton County, how come Clayton State is doing well? Given the perception on campus, this external review was a pleasant surprise. I was surprised that many people both on and off campus were unfamiliar with our honors program. I was surprised that campus colleagues were not familiar with our internship and cooperative education opportunities, even as I was not surprised that awareness of such activities was limited externally. Many things here were not surprises—that many people don’t know very much about us. That future student don’t always recognize us and our programs, but that once student arrive here, they believe we are very demanding and very good. These same students believe that faculty and staff is very helpful, and committed to their success. That there are some work to do here on campus (and externally) about which programs can best serve community and state needs. That while many people see us as good community partners, that we can build on this and seek selective new program areas to advanced the Southern Crescent of Atlanta. And that generally speaking, that faculty and staff are committed to this institution, but perceive that they have not been much involved in recruiting new students, but are eager and willing to do so. And that as an institution, we have some soul searching to do about ways in which we can better structure our communication efforts to highlight the things we do very well to have both internal and external audiences have a consistent image of who we are.

In discussions at a retreat of senior leadership including the current president of the faculty senate, we concluded that work needed to be done to make certain that we as an institution focus on implementing good ideas we have, and assessing progress that builds on successes and moves away from actions with little or no evidence of success. And pending some modifications coming from strategic planning, we would work to develop teams directed at successes in three areas—in strategic enrollment management, of branding and imaging and communicating, and of seeking multiple strategies for developing resources.

I am grateful that many people are already working on a presidential inauguration here. Since VP Stephens managed the second Clinton inauguration, this, as Stephen Segal observed in the important film Under Seige 2, this I am trained for. I have tried to stay away from details, other than the early conversations. And those included the following--Because of who we are, the inauguration celebrations should have three parts for which the campus can claim ownership—a celebration of faculty and student work—the heart of our university now and in the future; an investiture that reminds us the ceremony is of importance in the academy, but that it could be punctuated by an ice cream social to remind us of our commitment to both learning and community; and a day of service, reinforcing our role as stewards of place and our connection with the community. Neither Spivey Hall nor Swan Lake can be put on wheels—nor would we want that to be the case.

Barbara Ehrenreich in the work Brightsided identifies an agenda for addressing future American challenges—I believe this resonates for our commitment here at Clayton State.

“…the point is to acquire skills not in positive thinking but of critical thinking…. The best students and in good colleges, also the most successful—are the ones who raise sharp questions, even at the risk of making a professor momentarily uncomfortable. Whether the subject is literature or engineering, graduates should be capable of challenging authority figures, going against the views of their classmates, and defending novel points of view. This is not because academics value contrarianism for its own sake, but because society needs people…to ask hard questions.” (p. 199).

I am grateful each day to have the support of my colleagues, as well as the confidence that by working each day to preserve our values, we will move forward, and through hard questions, be recognized increasingly for the good work each of you does each day.