May 12, 2014

Dear colleagues:

As we wrap up finals week and another academic year, I wanted to share some updates related to academic life at Marquette. We are poised to begin a new chapter with President-elect Lovell, who attended the University Academic Senate meeting earlier this week. President-elect Lovell brings a new sense of energy and enthusiasm to our collective pursuit of academic excellence, and is looking forward to working closely with UAS and the academy. Many of us in the room were moved by his remarks at the meeting and his collaborative philosophy, which he said is based on the African proverb: “We can go fast alone or we can go far together.”

Shedding more light on this year’s major milestone for the university – our successful reaffirmation of accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission – the HLC report brief is now available and it documents the review team’s high regard for education at Marquette. Thanks to the leadership of Dr. Gary Meyer, vice provost for undergraduate programs and teaching; the more than 200 members of our campus community who served on committees and volunteered their time and talents during the past two years; and the more than 500 faculty, staff and students who met with the HLC site team while they were on campus; Marquette is reaccredited through 2023-24.

The one area that the HLC visit team recommended for improvement is “operationalizing our commitment to diversity.” To help us make strides toward that goal, Dr. William Welburn, associate provost for diversity and inclusion, has accepted my invitation to lead the development of a campus-wide diversity plan. Components of this plan will include a campus wide climate study conducted during the 2014-15 academic year; a new, anonymous bias incident reporting and response system for students; and enhanced student education on diversity beginning in fall 2014 and administered by the Division of Student Affairs. This will be a campus-wide effort, and I’ll be calling on many of you to help lead this important initiative, which is also a key objective under the strategic theme “Formation of the Mind and the Heart” in our Beyond Boundaries strategic plan.

Another inclusivity effort initiated this year, the Action Group on Campus Conversations on Gender and Sexuality, has met throughout the spring semester to discuss how to improve dialogue on campus related to issues of gender and sexuality and our Catholic, Jesuit mission. That group is organizing campus forums this fall for faculty, staff and students to share their thoughts, and I urge all of you to participate in these meaningful discussions.

I’m excited to report that the comprehensive enrollment management plan into which many individuals put so much energy into this year will be presented to the Board of Trustees this fall.
Nine committees focusing on specific enrollment areas have assessed the current environment, determined best practices and drafted recommendations, which will be shared with President-elect Lovell when he gets to campus. This summer, the Office of the Provost will move forward with hiring for a new position, vice provost for enrollment management, which will lead implementation of the comprehensive enrollment management plan. As you’ve heard me say in the past, our approach to enrollment needs to expand to emphasize growth in high-potential areas such as transfer students, international students and summer studies – in addition to continuing to recruit competitive classes of undergraduates and address graduate and professional enrollment.

To ensure that our academic programs maintain the highest standards of excellence and that academic units are aligned with the university-wide strategic plan, this fall the Office of the Provost began administering a program review process that is data-driven, forward-looking and outcomes-based. The outcome of the academic and academic support unit program review process is an action plan for each unit agreed upon by the provost and the dean or department head. During 2013-14, academic reviews were conducted for the Libraries, Department of Theology, Office of International Education and School of Dentistry. This fall, the College of Professional Studies, the Educational Opportunity Program, the Department of Social and Cultural Sciences, and the University Core of Common Studies will undergo program review. The full schedule is available on the Office of the Provost website.

In the spirit of continuous improvement and in collaboration with the deans, a greater understanding of budgeting principles and practices has been emphasized this year. I have asked the deans to be wise stewards of their resources and evaluate operational efficiencies and effectiveness, including being judicious with hiring decisions. Senior leadership also piloted the use of new metrics in the development of our capital budget, a new approach that helped us reach sound decisions while promoting greater transparency and better understanding across our colleges and operating units regarding how funds are allocated and which investments get funded. While some of the decisions stemming from the comprehensive financial review process have been difficult to make, we must be vigilant about sustaining our financial resources in order to keep a Marquette education affordable for our students and their families, and so that we can invest in a future Marquette that makes us proud.

Finally, I want to thank you for your support this year. Serving in dual roles has been eye-opening, demanding and rewarding – sometimes all at once. I appreciate your kind words, prayers and constructive feedback, and look forward to continuing our work this summer and fall until the search for a permanent provost is completed.

Marquette blessings,

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