WELCOME BACK

AUGUST 22, 2012

How was your summer vacation? I hope that you are rested and ready for an eventful new academic year. Summers, for me and probably for you, are always times of reflection, professional development, reading, planning, and yes, even a bit of relaxation. I am always eager to begin a new year with hopes of great possibilities; this year is no different.

As I reflected over the past academic year, I determined that all in all we had a very good year. Clearly, a major value for us is teaching, and I attribute many of our successes to exemplary teaching. For example our retention rate is 83% and our 6 year graduation rate is 67%. These rates are among the highest in the system and are the result of faculty providing excellent classroom instruction, assistance outside of class, and advising. We have made significant efforts to support students in their coursework through supplemental instruction, the Writing Center, and the Center for Student Achievement. With support from the staff in Instructional Design and Delivery faculty have created a variety of course formats. Our redesigned courses are providing instruction that is both efficient and structured to students’ ways of learning. This fall two additional redesigned
courses supported by University System of Maryland grants will organize instruction in formats that will meet the needs of both the departments and the students. Last year faculty proposed a new department of environmental studies that reaches across three schools. This interdisciplinary approach to teaching demonstrates that faculty is responsive to student needs and to innovative ways of organizing curriculum. Greater emphasis will be given to experiences that enable students to see the way things are interconnected in the real world. In another innovative approach the math, computer science, and information sciences departments are developing a 3+2 degree program in cybersecurity management with the Tallin Technical University and the University of Tartu in Estonia. When this program is initiated, students from SU who complete this program will graduate with a bachelor’s degree and a masters degree in cybersecurity management. I congratulate Dr. Olmstead, Dr. Wood and the faculty involved for their innovation and attention to the interests and needs of our students. Our growth in international study also demonstrates the value that faculty place on meaningful, relevant coursework that prepares students for a global society. I had the opportunity this summer to visit a rose plantation in Ecuador that will be an intern site for an SU student this fall. Providing real work experiences such as this combined with the experience of living in another
country truly prepares students for a living in a global economy. Additionally, welcoming international students to SU’s campus and incorporating them in academic endeavors and recruiting international scholars to teach here immerse students in a culturally rich curriculum on our own campus.

There is no better example of faculty mentoring than the mentoring that occurs with our undergraduate research efforts. Our focus on undergraduate research draws students to SU and helps keep them here. Last year 31 students presented their faculty mentored research at the National Undergraduate Research Conference, and over 150 students presented research at the Salisbury University Research Conference. Additionally, 160 in the Seidel school presented posters depicting the research they conducted during internships at the annual Gallery Walk. Just a couple of weeks ago approximately 30 students presented poster sessions on research conducted this summer under the guidance of 20 faculty members and supported by an NSF REU (Research Experiences for Undergraduates) grant awarded to Annie Lu, a second NSF grant, and additional support from the Guerrieri Foundation. In addition three students under the tutelage of Mike Lewis won the coveted EPA fellowships. Last year we established the Nationally Competitive Scholarship Office under the direction of Kristen
Walton, and with her help and that of Ray Thompson, Brian Stiegler, Rich Bowler, and others student Charles Overholt won the first Fulbright awarded to a Salisbury University student. This very intentional, direct mentoring faculty provide to students is critical to their academic success.

Faculty also contributed to student learning through their own professional development and research activities. Mike Lewis and Jill Caviglia-Harris will share an Elkins Professorship from the University System of Maryland. Two of our faculty, Gene Williams and Dick Hoffman, secured Fulbright awards and are beginning their research as we speak. Nine faculty earned sabbaticals and will be spending the fall conducting research in their disciplines. Dean Kotlowski appeared on C-Span this past weekend teaching a class about his research on Nixon and civil rights. Faculty scholarship is also demonstrated in the one hundred thirty-four faculty published journal articles, book chapters, reviews, and creative works. Nine faculty published books; 79 participated in juried shows. Literally, everyday there is some new effort or achievement to celebrate. You should take pride in your work and the recognition it brings to you and the university. Your research not only brings you professional recognition but also enriches your teaching which translates to increased learning by students.
Inevitably, my summer reflections of the past year raise questions for the new year. Every fall we are faced with what do we do next? How do we build on the past year? Where do we target our energies and meager resources? This academic year marks the end of our current strategic plan. We have met most of our academic goals, although some of them are ongoing and will never really be complete. You have developed or expanded programs in graduate biology, exercise science, procurement, and cybersecurity to mention a few. We have added a graduate and research dean to highlight and grow our graduate and research initiatives. We continue our search for a new Honors Director, but we are already beginning to move forward on some of the suggestions of the task force. This fall we welcome the first students into the Doctor of Nursing Practice program, the first doctoral level program at SU, and, this fall, we will submit a proposal for a Doctor of Education in Contemporary Curriculum Theory and Instruction with a specialization in Literacy. When the state’s budget was finalized in the spring, SU, finally, received funding for an Academic Commons that will expand our library capacity, provide a permanent home for the Nabb Center, include the Writing Center, the Center for Student Achievement, Instructional Design and Delivery, plus provide a place for faculty to interact and work in a collegial environment. Acquiring the funding for the library was a long
battle, and many worked hard to make it a reality, particularly Dr. Janet. Thanks to all of you who have contributed to the Part II Planning document which describes what will be in the new space and has been submitted to the Maryland Department of Budget and Management. I am looking forward to watching the building take shape over the next four years. In fact, I suggest that we go ahead and schedule my welcome back remarks for the Fall of 2016 in the large auditorium space in the new Academic Commons.

Now we are ready to plan for the future. Next academic year (2013-14) we will engage in a formal planning process to produce our next strategic plan. But a lot of conversation needs to occur among faculty and between faculty and staff and administration before the formal process begins. We need to consider the challenges and opportunities that may present themselves. We need to talk about what we hope to accomplish and consider how we can generate the resources to support new initiatives. I have no answers, only questions.....and maybe a few suggestions. So, this year we will be talking, discussing, and maybe arguing a bit about what lies ahead for academics at Salisbury University.

As I mentioned earlier, the summer, for me, is a time for professional development and reading. In my discussions with my peers at conferences and in
my professional readings I have identified several challenges facing us in the coming years. These challenges will shape our planning and progress going forward. You may know of others, and I hope you will share them with each other and with me this year, but here are the challenges I have identified.

1. **Rising costs of higher education coupled with higher debt for students.**

   The media is full of stories about the rising cost of an education. The rising costs stem from higher cost of instruction; costs of operation such as utilities, deferred maintenance; cost of more and more technology; and the costs associated with security and safety requirements. We have been fortunate to have kept our costs lower than our sister institutions, although our tuition and fees are beginning to rise, too. This year tuition across the system was raised 3%, and SU received an additional 3% as a structural adjustment. Before you get excited and start celebrating in the aisles, let me inform you that it’s already spent based on priorities set in our current strategic plan. About $500,000 was designated for financial aid. Another $170,000 provides student support in the areas of disability assistance for students and security on campus.
Approximately $1M will fund new positions including 6 new tenure track faculty lines, 3 FTNTT lines, supplemental instructors for the CSA, a director of fair practices and a new staff member in Instructional Design and Delivery. The remainder will go to increases in mandatory costs, to support our assessment needs, and the disability services office. As tuition and fees rise, student debt increases. Across the country the student loan debt is now greater than credit card debt and will be more than a trillion dollars this year. Although the debt load for SU students is less than that of students at other institutions, it too is rising. Government threats to student grant programs will force some students to delay college or choose alternative routes or to go deeper into debt. Parents and students alike are questioning the high costs and, quite frankly, often lay the blame at our feet because of their perception of high salaries and work they view as irrelevant to them (i.e. research).

2. Coupled with rising costs is challenge # 2, **stagnant or decreasing state support**. While costs have been rising, our share of state funding has stayed level or decreased. Our state appropriation accounts for only 25% of our
budget, and tuition and fees, 37%. The remainder of our budget is supported by grants and contracts and by auxiliary funds. The continued national budget crisis does not bode well for universities that are hoping for additional state funding. The balance is clearly shifting from primarily state support and smaller tuition support to lower state support and higher tuition. A recent issue of Public Purpose, a publication of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, had several articles focused on the crisis in state funding of higher education. In his article, Stephen Pelletier stated, “Every public college and university needs to think anew – and broadly, creatively and entrepreneurially – about how to generate income.” AT SU we have been able to protect positions and begin to fill vacant ones and so have been relatively unscathed thus far compared to institutions across the country, but things are not getting better. We will need to consider additional sources of revenue to meet our financial needs in the future.

3. **College completion goals.** President Obama, Governor O’Malley, and the University System of Maryland have all set aggressive college completion goals for us. Obama’s goal is for the US to have the highest proportion of
college graduates in the world by 2020, and our Governor wants a 55% degree attainment by 2020. Graduation rates will become increasingly part of how we are evaluated and, perhaps, funded. We will be urged to graduate more and more students with fewer and fewer dollars and within a reduced time frame. Course redesign, less time to degree, and collaborative articulation agreements with community colleges and even international colleges are on our horizon.

4. **The Impact of Technology.** Technology natives now outnumber technology dinosaurs. With ever-changing technology, it is difficult for us dinosaurs to ever catch-up, try as we might. I have been told that just a few years ago, the average student at SU brought either a laptop or a desktop computer to school. Now, on average, each student brings at least 3 electronic devices: a laptop, a tablet and a smartphone. Students are constantly connected. Ten years ago when my children were in college we talked once a week on a landline. I read recently that students now call their parents multiple times every day because their phones are always with them. Students are moving away from e-mail and toward texting and social media. Imagine how exciting they must find a 200 page reading assignment! We can take
advantage of this need for constant connectedness through redesigning coursework, rethinking assignments and how we engage students, and by exploring alternative modes of delivery.

5. **Public opinion.** Listen to these headlines: “Are Universities Likely to Follow Borders Bookstores into Oblivion?” “Degrees, Designed by the Numbers”; “Big Returns on Small Investments”. These all sound like articles referring to businesses, but indeed the articles are talking about universities. A speaker I heard this summer shared a report that six out of ten Americans believe that universities are run like businesses that are more concerned with the bottom line than with students’ educational experiences. People believe we are overpaid and underworked, and they do not value the research we do that, in their opinion, takes away from classroom instruction. The depressed economy has many people questioning the value of a college education or looking for alternatives to traditional 4 year institutions. Public interest in smaller government has prompted legislators to look for ways to cut budgets. Higher education is an easy target.

6. **Competition from for-profit and free vendors.** Raise your hand if you have heard of Peer to Peer University; Udacity; Coursera? These are all on-line
distributors of free courses called MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses).

Peer to Peer University states on its website that “Peer 2 Peer University is a grassroots open education project that organizes learning outside of institutional walls and gives learners recognition for their achievements.”

Coursera, sponsored by Stanford, Michigan, Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania and, now, joined by the University of Virginia has over a million subscribers (students). Students can enroll in real university courses online that are taught by university faculty free of charge to the student. If you follow higher education news, you know that the open courseware providers are popular as an alternative to us, and they are evolving and expanding. It’s almost like they are recreating the wheel. In the meantime they are attracting a lot of attention and a lot of students. On the for-profit side, the University of Phoenix has over 450,000 students. I can remember when my previous institution was debating whether to accept credits from the University of Phoenix; now, they are widely accepted as a more student-oriented learning environment. The popularity of the University of Phoenix and other such entities and their online offerings has pushed traditional institutions to venture into the world of online courses.
These are daunting challenges. How do we move forward in spite of the challenges to advance our model of a highly selective, residential, faculty engaged, student-focused institution of higher learning? I propose that we make this academic year a year of exploration, examination, innovation and conversation. We must ask ourselves these questions: What direction should SU take for the future? What direction do we want SU to take? How do we start moving in that direction? Where do we find the resources to move?

Today, I am specifically proposing a year-long series of conversations/discussions that will at times be structured, at other times informal and unstructured. To launch this effort I have scheduled three academic summits: one on international education on September 13; one on graduate education on September 20; and one on academic advising in the spring. The summits are targeted to specific audiences; however, all are open to all who are interested. The goals, objectives, information, questions/challenges that come from these meetings will be distributed widely through the Faculty Senate, our committee structure including the Strategic Planning and Budgeting Committee, and electronically to the campus community.
Secondly, I will continue having lunch conversations with faculty and staff in the satellite locations in academic buildings. The few I had last spring provided me with very helpful information about such things as the results and plans from an academic program review, proposed international studies and visiting faculty, concerns about doctoral programs, and student issues, among other items. This fall I will hold these very informal “brown bags” twice a month, each time in alternating locations. Faculty from the host academic building is certainly invited, but the lunches are open to anyone. I will bring my trusty I-Pad (I am desperately trying not to continue as a dinosaur) and take notes which I will share through all avenues mentioned above. September’s lunches will be September 10 in the TETC and September 27 in Fulton hall, both beginning around noon. Additionally, there will be small groups convening to consider course redesigns and how we might take advantage of the USM’s funding of new initiatives. Today, faculty from Fulton began a dialogue about sustainability with those of you attending the faculty development day workshop. I hope that conversation will continue throughout the year and provide us some direction in that area. Dr. Hardy, our new library dean, has appointed a task force, Library 2.016, to help prepare the library faculty and staff and the larger university community for a 21st century library. I encourage
others, departments, schools, the faculty senate, to hold their own conversations and share what they learn or determine with the campus. In this way we can explore a multitude of topics, generate goals for the future, and prepare ourselves for the very real task of strategic planning next fall.

Keep in mind that we are not beginning from scratch. We are already noted for our high quality teaching and learning. Faculty and students are top-notch. We have state of the art facilities. We have innovative, creative, entrepreneurial minds among us. For example, Dr. Kotlowski’s c-span class is a type of open courseware. He taught a class on campus, which was later broadcast on television. Now, thousands of viewers have access to this class for free in the comfort of home and learn the same information as his students here at SU. We have hybrid classes offered throughout the state and more are in the development phase. The IDD staff is offering many opportunities for faculty to learn new methods of online instruction. Our cybersecurity degree with Estonian institutions is a perfect blend of our institutional strengths that will result in marketable degrees for our students. This year we have added several Professors of the Practice, offering our students an opportunity to learn from the experiences of professionals in their areas of study.
The challenges are all around us, but we are clearly ahead of the game through creative, innovative approaches to teaching and student success. This year of conversation will prepare us for the next steps. I look forward to the conversations and the journey. Let’s have a great year!