

Welcome Address
9/13/19

Last Thursday, I received an e-mail with the subject line “What’s keeping Provosts up at night? Top 10 Issues in Academic Affairs.” As I clicked the message open, I was half-hoping for a Letterman-style inventory ranging from – #10: Decades of working on college campuses have ingrained time-management strategies that include pulling all-nighters to finish the accreditation report, budget spreadsheet, or welcoming address that is due the next day – to the #1 reason Provosts are up at night? They’re binge watching of *The Good Place* on Netflix, rationalizing that the show’s satire on what it means to be human and what we owe to each other justify this behavior as research for our liberal arts core curriculum.

Alas, not from the producers of *Late Night*, the email was sent by EAB, a higher education consortium and research group of which Fairfield is a member; and the list was not meant to provoke laughter but call to attention the primary academic affairs concerns across our industry. As I scanned the list – presented in the ever-popular infographic format - I indeed recognized topics that have been central to discussions this summer as the President Nemec, EVP Kevin Lawlor, and I began thinking about strategic planning for the University beyond *Fairfield 2020*.

The infographic reminded me of the looming “demographic cliff” – the term census watchers use to describe the abrupt decline in the college-age student population that will occur 18 years after the 2008 economic recession – which resulted in a significant decrease in births, especially

here in the Northeast. It also warned of the impending disruption to both the workplace and the traditional system of higher education caused by the advent of new technologies in a world of augmented intelligence. Finally, it highlighted the need to change institutional budget models, re-examine traditional assumptions about faculty career tracks, and scale-up pedagogical innovations to respond to these shifting market forces.

None of these issues were really new to me, nor do I suspect is their inclusion news to you. Since 2014, when we began the *Fairfield 2020* process, we have been hearing about these academic affairs concerns and working to address them. So, I found the content of the infographic less than illuminating.

As I thought about it further, the whole premise of being “kept up at night” was also off-putting. It suggested that more than concerns, there are threats to our existence worthy of sleepless nights. The very phrasing and framing seemed designed to provoke fear.

Organizational behaviorists have long recognized that fear is commonly used as a motivator in the workplace, especially when institutional change is required. These same behaviorists, however, point out that fear leads to dysfunction in organizations. In their 1998 book, *Driving Fear Out of the Workplace*, Ryan and Oestreich explain:

“fear does not motivate toward constructive action. On the contrary, it nourishes competition within an organization, fosters short-term thinking, destroys trust, erodes joy and pride in work, stifles innovation, and distorts communication.”

In the educational context, fear as a motivator is particularly destructive. Educational theorists recognize that fear compromises learning, as it undermines self-confidence and prevents openness to new ways of thinking. Fear obstructs intellectual curiosity, disrupts human development, and interferes with the search for truth. As such, fear and fear mongering have no place in *our* scholarly community.

Indeed, when I think about the setbacks we've faced in the past year, it was in large part fear that undermined open communication about the Academic Commons project; it was fear that prevented certain departments from fully embracing colleagues in non-traditional roles; it was fear that delayed budget decisions - and fear fueled anxiety about moving into new physical or virtual spaces.

Most problematic is that fear signals what should be avoided. It prompts us to create distance, slow down, not act. Fear directs us away *from* but not *toward* anything.

In contrast, love – the psychological opposite of fear - is a driving force that can guide our work in positive directions. Behaviorists point out that love, rooted in trust, can foster creative thinking, authentic dialogue, respect between colleagues, and justice within organizations.

While fear is motivating, only love can be inspiring.

Indeed, it was love--in the form of our passion for learning, dedication to our students, concern for each other, and commitment to our institution - that inspired some of our greatest accomplishments over the past year.

- Love brought about the implementation of the new core curriculum for the first time in 40 years, and the development of the signature elements that make our new core worthy of the title *Magis* – meaning more or greater.
- Love inspired the launch of 10 new and/or revised graduate programs – including those in Applied Data Science, Educational Technology, Social Work, Dyslexia Intervention, Pre-Health, Interior Design, Management, and Business Administration.
- Love helped us reimagine our center for career development, with certain aspects of this student support service re-deployed to Deans offices where they can more strategically serve specific student need.
- Love contributed to the success of our revised Innovative Research Symposium, which was so large it spilled out of the Oak and Dogwood rooms and into the hallway around the Tully staircase.
- Love supported the collaboration with colleagues in Admissions that brought us nearly 1200 first year students (we stand at 1184 today)– not just the largest but the most qualified first year class in Fairfield’s history.
- Love fueled the presentation of a record number of exhibits amid a year of leadership transition in our University Art Museum; and the digitization of the Museum’s collection which allows students, scholars and art lovers to access all of the collection via our website.

- Love enhanced the development of new and forward-thinking strategic plans in the College and the Dolan school.
- Love created the design and opening of new labs for cybersecurity, the natural sciences, and innovation in the humanities and social sciences; and the design and opening of a new Dolan School.
- Love inspired our Human Library project that connects people from similar and dissimilar backgrounds across campus in ways that promote human connection and deeper understanding.
- Love shepherded us successfully through the temporary and then permanent move of over 200 faculty and academic staff into newly designed spaces for teaching, learning and service to our students.
- Love encouraged the development Preferred Plus international programs that link academic tracks to specific study abroad locations in Provence, Florence, London, and Galway.

Across our division, love fuels scholarship, creativity, teaching, and engagement with the community. Love forms the basis of radical hospitality as it opens our hearts and minds to challenge notions of home and other.

It is this love orientation that likewise provides the foundation for the apostolic preferences outlined by the Superior General of the Society Jesus, Father Arturo Sosa last February. With these preferences, Father Sosa calls us to four essential urgencies. We are called:

1. to show the way to truth through Ignatian spirituality,
2. to walk with the marginalized and dispossessed,
3. to accompany young people in the creation of a hope-filled future, and
4. to care for our common home, the earth in all its lived variety.

Discerned through a process of communal reflection by members of the Society, these urgencies will animate *all* Jesuit works over the next decade. In many ways, they place our University's founding mission in the current context as they are the work Jesuits identify as vital to the world today. Our task at Fairfield will be to define the specific ways in which we will enact these four preferences as the work of a University set to bridge our strategic plan past 2020.

In the upcoming academic year, we will explore a range of opportunities to meet the horizons of the 21st century in generative ways; **to marry the work the world needs from Jesuit-institutions with issues facing academic affairs across the higher education sector in means that build on Fairfield University's unique position and calling.**

In order to do so, members of the University community will be invited into a number of collaborative conversations through which we will identify and build on the successes of *Fairfield 2020*; we will respond to President Nemeč's call for us to be more national in scope, global in outlook, and unbounded in approach; and (as we heard from the President last week)

we will specifically attend to the reconceptualization of *Fairfield 2020's* goal to grow and diversify as an ambition to extend and innovate.

In many ways, the you have begun this work already – with novel programs and projects occurring across all parts of the Academic Division.

- New graduate programs, including Data Analytics in Dolan and Applied Data Science in the School of Engineering, as well as new collaborative projects like the Fredriksson Innovation Lab for the College of Arts and Sciences demonstrate Fairfield University's early response to the advent of Big Data across all fields of inquiry. This year we will consider ways to position the School of Engineering as the nexus for big data questions as we also search for the School's next Dean.
- The development of an honors-track within Dolan's undergraduate Finance program, as well as GSEAP's development of a certificate program for Dyslexia Intervention, are just two examples of how academic departments are engaging industry and community partners to shape student learning experiences. This year, we will explore how to extend this type of engagement in ways that can bring national stature to our programs in communication, arts and media.
- The establishment of strategic partnerships show how forward thinking we have become; we have developed partnerships between the Egan School and Creighton University to bring to bring mid-wifery training to the Midwest; between the College and Florence University of the Arts that will bring our Bachelors of Liberal Arts degree to students in Italy; and between the Dolan School and Golden Education that will bring

our Finance Masters to China. These partnerships represent our early forays into geographic expansion. In the coming year, we will consider additional opportunities to extend Fairfield's nationally ranked nursing education to locations facing nursing shortages across the United States.

- The success of our unique approach to on-line education, evident in the high retention and completion rates of students in GSEAP's Educational Technology programs, show that the Fairfield teaching and learning experience *can* be brought forward through new modalities. This year, we will ideate on ways to scale our unique approach to reach new populations of students.

Aware of the issues facing academic affairs, we have responded with energy and passion; and began the strategic work we will continue to pursue throughout the academic year – preparing for the advent of big data; engaging industry and community partners to shape student learning experiences; expanding our geographic footprint; and pursuing new modalities for teaching and learning.

This important strategic work will be buttressed by the on-going conceptual and logistical work of the Division of Academic Affairs, as we simultaneously engage in projects that articulate our purpose and build the organizational capacity to carry it out. For example:

- The work of the Provost's Task Force on Free Expression will continue as we collaboratively engage partners across campus – in Student Life and areas of Operations – to review and revise University policies related to free speech.
- The President's Working Group on Inclusive Excellence, as one stream of its work, will undertake a series of critical conversations to further explore the construct of radical hospitality and its meaning for our scholarly community.
- The Academic Commons Working Group that was established by the Academic Council in late spring will carry on its efforts to define the Academic Commons at Fairfield University and identify ways in which that definition can be realized. This group has already made great strides in their efforts, and invite all to save the date for an Academic Commons opening on Friday October 4th.
- The Non-Tenure Track Committee and the Ad Hoc Subcommittee of the Academic Council on the distribution of non-tenure track faculty will continue their collaborations with the Academic Deans to further define roles and responsibilities for our increasingly varied faculty labor force.
- A transition team for the Office of Sponsored Programs has been established to make recommendations for the restructuring of the Office in order to advance support for our faculty research and other projects that enhance our teaching and learning community.

- A new multi-disciplinary Working Group on Arts and Culture is being established to reaffirm Fairfield University's commitment to the arts and develop a comprehensive vision that builds upon the strengths of our performing arts center, our University museum, and our excellent arts curricula in the College.
- A subcommittee of the Academic Council, collaborating with a Working Group in the Division of Student Affairs, will explore the impact of impending Title IX revisions on our student code of conduct and employee behavior policies and due process procedures.

And in each of your areas, you will continue to make improvements and introduce efficiencies to our academic operations - course scheduling, registration, the management of student information, and the appointment of new faculty.

When the Senior Leadership Team met for retreat at the end of August, Vice President for Mission and Identity, the Rev. Gerry Blaskczyk, SJ, gave the opening prayer in which he acknowledged that while many in the world labor in jobs they don't enjoy, we at Fairfield have the opportunity to do work we love, among colleagues we care about, at an institution to which we are committed. The following day, President Nemec reminded us that above all, our singular purpose is to help students find their calling and be successful at it; to engage our and their passions in ways that contribute to our collective flourishing.

The hopefulness and urgency outlined in both Father Sosa's call and President Nemeč's strategic focus reflect back to us the love we know to animate our ongoing mission here at Fairfield University. There is no place for fear where love is our motivation. As Martin Luther King Jr said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate. Only love can do that."

So, if we are kept up at night, let's make sure we're awake with the urgency of our calling; excited with the anticipation of all the opportunities a new academic year affords, and mindful that we are fortunate to take up that call toward a new year in loving community together.

Thank you.