



DAEMEN

COLLEGE

A World of Opportunity

Office of the President

September 16, 2017

Daemen College
Faculty and Staff

Dear Colleagues,

I hope your fall semester has started smoothly and that you had the opportunity to enjoy some or all of the Founders Celebration events. I am writing with another update on student enrollment and related issues.

As you know, this is the first year of the state's new Excelsior (free-tuition) program, and since this is uncharted territory, there has been a great deal of uncertainty at most private colleges throughout the state. In order to prepare for a possible precipitous drop in enrollment, the Cabinet instituted some months ago a number of precautionary measures, including a freeze on new hiring and spending. These measures have helped us enter the new academic year stronger than we would have otherwise.

Before this year, we could typically determine student enrollment for the upcoming year fairly accurately by tracking the number of new students who had paid tuition and housing deposits and returning students based on registration and historical trends. Coming into this academic year a few weeks before classes started, our deposited student numbers looked promising—meaning that it seemed that we were on track to reach or come close to our budget goals in the three usual key areas: new first-year students, transfer students, and graduate students. Our goal for first-year students had been 395, and 395 had paid deposits. Our goal for transfer students had been 192, and 190 had paid deposits. And our goal for new graduate students had been 102, and 120 had paid deposits.

What made this year unique is that we had no idea whether the new free-tuition program in the public institutions might cause many students to forego their deposits and simply not show up for classes, or similarly, whether large numbers of our existing students would simply not return for the new academic year. Obviously, the number of students who ultimately register is what really counts; the number of deposited students is only a forecast of who might register.

Student registration for classes on the Amherst campus has now ended, and we have a clearer sense of this year's enrollment on the Amherst campus, although we will not have a true sense of our entire enrollment until well into October, when registration on our Brooklyn campus ends.

The registration numbers—while not disastrous—are very disappointing: 65 of our existing students that were accounted for in this year's budget did not return. This is a significant loss of students, and this loss will have a significant impact on this year's budget because the budget was based in part on these 65 students. We can only assume at this point that the Excelsior free-tuition program is behind this drop, although we will have more certainty as the StEP task force analyzes exit-survey data and other information to determine why these students chose not to return. In the best-case scenario, the Brooklyn numbers will far exceed expectations and therefore add some relief, but we will not know for certain until the last week of October.

All summer, the Cabinet has been very proactive about a potential loss of students and therefore a budgetary shortfall, and we identified a number of avenues to respond to such scenarios, so we were well prepared.

We have made a number of adjustments to the budget and are instituting several cost-saving measures that should compensate for the loss of tuition. Also, it is necessary to continue the freeze on all new spending and hiring (unless specifically approved by a Cabinet member), until we know exactly what our Brooklyn enrollment is for the year.

Several administrative positions that have been vacated or that will be vacated during this academic term will not be replaced. The Associate Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness position has been restructured; and the search for an Instructional Designer has been postponed, along with several other mid- and high-level administrative positions.

We have also taken other actions to increase efficiency and/or attract students. First, we have contracted with Ruffalo Noel Levitz—a national company that specializes in college enrollment management—to acquire their financial aid leveraging system, which uses sophisticated analytics to build an effective awarding strategy to improve enrollment yield rates and use our funds more strategically and economically.

To further enhance our effectiveness, we are moving the Office of Financial Aid under the purview of Enrollment Management so that both areas can work together even closer than they have been, and we have developed a custom software program that generates financial aid disbursement data in real time; this will help our enrollment officials as they attempt to assemble a new incoming class effectively and efficiently.

Also, we simply must stay ahead of the Excelsior free-tuition program. Officials at the Commission on New York Independent Colleges and Universities believe that it will be the second year of the program—not this year—when we will have the most accurate understanding of the full extent of how the program will affect the public colleges. In other words, it is possible that next year may be more challenging than this year as more students are lured by the hope of being awarded a free college education.

With this in mind, we are reorganizing existing college units to create a more modern Communications and Marketing Department so that we can maximize our ability to market the college strategically and efficiently to appropriate student populations as well as other populations. This measure will be essential as we continue to set ourselves apart from other colleges.

In another initiative to improve efficiency, we have moved Veterans Services to Student Affairs, which will allow us to centralize support services around this population and to ensure a smooth recruitment and retention process. We believe that this move may help us recruit substantially more student veterans.

All of these measures should have an immediate impact going forward, and all will work in tandem to help us get ahead of the challenges we are likely to face going forward.

Finally, over the last 6 years, Bobby Mills, Special Advisor to the President for Governmental Affairs, has served the college with distinction. He created the very successful Distinguished Leaders Lecture Series and has helped the college in innumerable ways. Bobby informed us that he will be retiring at the end of February. In light of the very lean economic times we find ourselves in, we will eliminate this position and not hire a replacement. I hope you will join me in thanking Bobby for his years of dedicated service.

Let me end by reminding you that one of the college's highest priorities is to increase our student retention and graduation rates. Especially while we are being assaulted by the state's Excelsior program, we need to be ever-vigilant of students who might be struggling—either with coursework or other issues—and who should be advised to make use of the many student services available to assist them, such as the Student Success Center (academic advising, the learning center, tutoring, disability services, and the peer mentoring program), the CHIP Center (counseling, health, insurance, and wellness), the Financial Aid office, and the Nancy Haberman Gacioch Center for

Faculty and Staff
September 16, 2017
Page Three

Veterans. We want to provide our students with every possibility to be successful. Anything that any one of us can do to direct a struggling student to the resources that will enable him or her to do so will help not only the student but all of us.

All of this being said, the college begins its seventieth year strong and proud and resilient. We have many academic programs that are considered to be among the strongest in the region if not in the state, we have the finest and most dedicated faculty and staff in the nation, and we are increasingly considered a college of national distinction. Have no doubt about it: we will continue to thrive despite these temporary challenges. After all, we are Daemen!

I will continue to provide you with updates as appropriate.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gary A. Olson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G".

Gary A. Olson
President