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President's Monthly Report November 2017

Don Birx
Plymouth State University

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Dear Colleagues,

The November monthly report to campus is attached. I look forward to seeing you this afternoon at Town Hall meeting at 3:00 p.m. in Merrill Place Conference Center. As always, please continue to share your thoughts, suggestions and concerns with Cabinet members, the Transition Leadership Team, or me.

Sincerely,

Don

Don Birx
President
November, 2017

Dear Colleagues,

This fall has been the warmest since I have been here, and although as I write this in the midst of a deluge, we have had many amazingly clear autumn days. Looking across the mountains at the changing landscape and the students enjoying the summer-like weather puts things into perspective. Although the challenges we all face are incredible, it is well worth the effort to implement our vision and create a brighter future for our students, ourselves, and our region.

As we talked over the summer and fall about changes we should make in Commencement, the only unresolved issue has been scheduling. However, Commencement dates have now been determined based on careful review of feedback from faculty, staff, and students, including Student Senate and Senior Student Council members. It has been decided that PSU will hold Graduate Commencement on Thursday, May 17 in the evening; Convocation on Friday, May 18 and Undergraduate Commencement on Saturday, May 19 in the morning. I have informed the students that this is likely the last year for a Saturday morning ceremony and we would like to hold the Spring '19 Undergraduate Commencement on Friday evening or Saturday afternoon. More details will follow from PSU Events and Conference Planning. Thanks to all of you for your input. As for Commencement behavioral concerns, I have also asked the Student Senate to join us in addressing behavior issues at Commencement and I would ask that faculty sit amongst their students during the ceremony.

After discussions across campus, I have decided to start blogging again. These blogs are just thoughts gleaned from conversations across campus and are intended to provide some overarching perspectives. The three most recent blogs share ideas on cluster structure and evolution as well as the role we all play in moving PSU forward (shared leadership). These blogs can be found on the Office of the President page.

Finding the right Provost is an important part of our evolution as a University and I am pleased to say that the position has been posted. We are still holding on the Student Affairs search while the leadership team for Student Affairs lays out a strategy for the future. Retention (currently 68%) and graduation rates (~55% for the last decade) are of increasing importance as students who drop out often have large debt loads and many do not return to finish their education. Financing is an increasing problem as well for all students. In that light, we are being thoughtful in considering the goals and organization of Student Affairs. For the Vice President of Finance and Administration search, applications are currently in review. I must note that I am quite pleased with the performance of this team during these challenging times of change and financial uncertainty. My thanks to the search committees for all their work so far. Finally, my apologies for the added strain we put on administrative assistants. What was meant as a starting discussion on the evolution to a hub-like structure for the Clusters came across as an instantaneous reconstruction of administrative positions, and process before people. We are working on addressing these issues. We will talk at the Town Hall meeting later today about our top ten goals, an overview on finances, and recruiting and retention.
Progress

The General Education learning outcomes were unanimously accepted by faculty vote at the October faculty meeting. The outcomes are specified as four habits of mind to be developed by students through their General Education program: 1) purposeful communication, 2) problem solving, 3) integrated perspective, and 4) self-regulated learning. Each habit of mind has several signposts to determine a student’s current level of achievement regarding the habit of mind. The General Education Outcomes Task Force—comprised of Cathie LeBlanc, Ben Amsden, Pat Cantor, Holly Oliver, and Joey Rino—characterize a student’s journey through the General Education program as akin to ascending a mountain. They used the climbing metaphor in setting out progress levels for each signpost—starting at basecamp, climbing, and reaching the summit. Read the taskforce’s full report here.

The search process for the General Education Coordinator continues; applications are currently in review by the search committee.

Last week, 20 faculty and staff participated in a session on the Intellectual Property (IP) policy. Ben Amsden from the Center for Business and Community Partnerships (CBCP) led an open discussion regarding proposed changes to the policy in recognition of the increased potential for IP development with external partners. A faculty and staff team worked on the policy, utilizing recommendations from Tremonti (our IP consultants), President Birx, and USNH Special Counsel, Paul Remus. Ben Amsden (CBCP), Joe Boyer (Center for the Environment), Andrew Ines (sponsored programs & research support), Eric Spieth (Enterprise Center), and Christin Wixson (Librarian with expertise in copyright) all contributed to the policy. The team collected feedback and clarifying questions to be addressed in revisions and then shared with the campus community and further discussed during AAUP contract negotiations.

Progress continues in developing a pilot cluster support team to support Tourism, Environment & Sustainable Development (TESD) and Justice & Security (J&S) with plans to launch support for the remainder of the semester with an initial team from Academic Affairs. That team will work collaboratively with TESD and J&S cluster leaders and staff members, to develop streamlined systems and processes that may be generalizable in the support of other clusters. Academic Affairs will be reporting lessons learned and will hold frequent listening and progress sessions through the Center for Transformation. The first session will be held on November 29.

Enrollment – New Student Recruitment & Financial Aid

The Undergraduate and Graduate Admissions team continues to remain engaged with recruitment travel. Daily Campus Visits have been running for prospective students and an Open House event is scheduled for Friday, November 10. “Admissions thanks all who have participated, and plan to participate at new student recruitment events and who have provided feedback and suggestions on types of programming to offer for prospective students and their parents/advocates.” Efforts are underway to offer admitted students the opportunity to participate in the Panther Shadow visit experience which launched last year. To date, applications for Fall 2018 are running 20.3% ahead of last year (year-to-date) and Admissions has started to receive deposits from applicants who have already been extended an offer of admission. The increase in applications is attributed to strategy adjustments that were made in inquiry cultivation efforts performed by Admissions in collaboration with Marketing, Communication and Creative Services (MCCS) and with PSU’s student search partner, Ruffalo Noel Levitz and marketing consultant m5 New Hampshire. Utilizing a combination of communication vehicles—email, print, social media, telephoning, and text messaging—Admissions and MCCS are working with Ruffalo Noel Levitz and m5 New Hampshire on managing
separate in-state and out-of-state student search strategies. Furthermore, Ruffalo Noel Levitz is working with Admissions to assess levels of market demand and market share for recruitment that aims to help inform future recruitment marketing strategies as Admissions continues to navigate continued demographic challenges in New Hampshire and throughout the Northeast, while continuing recruitment efforts in new tertiary markets. In graduate recruitment, current course registrations are 1497 compared to 1268 (year-to-date) which represents the first increase observed since the summer of 2016.

At R+30, the Fall 2017 incoming class came in at 1343—which include; new first year, transfer, and re-admission students—compared to 1375 last year. Two factors that attributed to trailing (-32) behind last year are an increase in students deferring their admission, and as reported in September, an uptick in the phenomenon called “summer melt”—where a confirmed student, who has submitted an enrollment deposit, withdraws before the start of the semester. Undergraduate enrollment was actualized at 4145 compared to 4128 last year.

The Financial Aid Team began to receive and process submitted Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms for the 2018-2019 academic year. Starting last year, students can file using prior-prior year (PPY) tax information when reporting personal and family income on the FAFSA. This change will allow newly admitted students to receive financial-aid packages earlier in the recruitment cycle and currently enrolled students can benefit from filing their FAFSA earlier in the academic year as well.

Retention & Persistence

Retention and persistence are top of mind with many efforts underway on campus. The Retention-Persistence Working Group is working to increase collaboration between the various efforts on campus. But we need your help. All of us have a role to play in retention and persistence. While focusing now on what needs to be done to retain students this year (for next year), three themes are emerging for our current work:

1. **One-on-one retention/persistence efforts.** This involves reaching out to individual students, those who need extra support (and, depending on the issue, occasionally their parents as well, since parents are allies in retention/persistence). Student Success Coaches are following up on students with a variety of issues (from leaving school to a desire to study abroad) and coordinating students’ needs with the right help/office. Frost House staff work with individual students on a wide range of issues. EAB Student Success Collaborative provided updated campus information, expanding individual attention to those who need support. Faculty and staff across campus are key in this area. One issue we face is staffing concerns—especially in mental health counseling, coaches, and career services.

2. **Group led/supported retention/persistence efforts.** This involves creating cohorts. Plymouth Pathways (summer bridge program) has had good, even excellent, results. Sports, intramurals, and particular majors do this well too. How and where else can we create cohorts NOW? (Other groups are working on this and you will be hearing more on this. Your ideas and energy are welcome.

3. **Summer melt.** Efforts to prevent summer melt (the loss of students from Admission to deposit to showing up in the fall) include discussion of creating post-Admission cohorts using technology; use of variety of engagement mechanisms including majors and career exploration guidance; and summer connections to faculty and professional advisors, to name a few.
Finance and Administration

University Police are pleased to report a very successful Homecoming and Family weekend. New to this year’s fall celebration was “Fall Fling”—a music event on the front lawn of Mary Lyon Hall. Fall Fling included music and dancing for students, families, and alumni. Food and beverages were also provided by Sodexo.

Financial Services continues to make progress on the chart of accounts restructure where Information Technology Services is completed; Physical Plant design is complete, and implementation is nearing completion. Meetings with other areas are ongoing. Financial Service Center (FSC) managers are reaching out to individual departments to schedule an initial meeting to discuss financial reporting needs and how the chart of accounts can be structured to help meet those needs.

PSU Financial Literacy: Financial Services continues to host conversations about the general chart of account changes and will help facilitate the roundtable discussions at the Town Hall meeting on October 30. We look forward to future, ongoing information sharing sessions. FSCs continue to make adjustments and improvements to their service model based on feedback from campus users. Please continue to share your feedback with the FSC team members so they are aware of how this new model is working and can consider ways to help you in the future.

As a reminder, Financial Services team members are spread across campus. For the complete FSC staff listing and contact information, please see the Financial Services page.

Development and Planned Giving

Guy Wisinski ’85 pledged $25,000 to endow a scholarship in honor of John P. Clark ’71 and the five members of Guy’s family who have graduated from Plymouth State. JC Richardson ’13 added $100,000 to his scholarship for students in small business and entrepreneurship as a “Tribute to the significant role that his experience in intercollegiate athletics at PSU played in his college education.” Brett Lucas ’11 has led the creation of an annual scholarship from the Panther Business Club, our Boston-based affinity alumni chapter. The Panther Pride Ambassadors—student callers—now have a fully-automated call center in Holmes House, which increases the call volume per shift by 50%, subsequently increasing the number of conversations and pledge commitments. Planned Giving is finalizing gifts with eight donors: two PSU retirees, one friend, and five alumni. Six gifts are bequest intentions, one is adding PSU as an IRA beneficiary, and one is a gift of art.

Mark your calendars for Tuesday, November 28 as #GivingTuesday, a national day of philanthropy. Please join us and spread the word as we work to exceed last year’s total of $25,000 to support PSU students.

Alumni Relations

Plymouth State continues to engage an increasing number of alumni in opportunities to provide students with experiences that prepare them for success in their education and beyond. Examples of alumni volunteer opportunities:

- Attending networking events for students
- Mentoring students
- Engaging in interview preparation exercises
- Guest speaking in classrooms
- Sitting on a career-based panel for Q&A
- Serving on an advisory board for curricular, programmatic, and capital improvements
We know that alumni are providing volunteer services on campus and not all of it is being captured. Capturing these volunteer interactions is important for measuring which needs are being met, and where PSU needs to improve. The USNH Board of Trustees requires PSU to report on 1) alumni engagement—such as event attendance and volunteer roles—and 2) alumni philanthropic support. University Advancement is charged with reporting and, with your help, aims to capture all of our alumni engagement.

**What role do you play in Alumni Engagement?**

- If you have engaged PSU Alumni in any volunteer capacity, please send a brief email containing “who, what, and when” to alumni@plymouth.edu.
- If one of your former students has a particular expertise, unique experience, and/or useful connections, please contact alumni@plymouth.edu so University Advancement can record information, along with contact and career updates that you may have, in PSU's alumni database.
- If you're looking for alumni with a particular skillset or interest, contact University Advancement, who will help make a match. The more information that can be input into PSU’s database, the better matches will be. Please attend Alumni Chapter meetings, which are hosted by alumni volunteer leaders. Events are at go.plymouth.edu/AlumniEvents. Faculty and staff are welcome to attend, and your help in spreading the word to your former students is appreciated. Contact us at alumni@plymouth.edu to learn more or to get involved.

**Marketing Communications and Creative Services (MCCS)**

MCCS continues to work closely with the Enrollment Management team as fall recruitment travel, open houses, college fairs, and financial aid awards unfold. The MCCS team provided new materials and social media support, along with launching a redesigned, multi-part mailer to prospective students. Continuing our outreach to the community, MCCS worked closely with PSU Athletics to host our first “Scouts Day” during the October 7 home football game. Over 60 Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Girl Scouts attended the game along with their families. Several PSU students with scouting backgrounds also participated in the event. On October 13 and 14, two video crews were on campus to capture fall footage for Plymouth State’s marketing and advertising: on-ground video crews along with a drone crew captured students in various residence halls, outdoor, recreational, and classroom settings. Please share our thanks to the 25+ students who were involved in the two-day shoot, including football players, the women’s lacrosse team, community advisors, PSU marketing interns, Pathways students, as well as students from MAPS and the PSU Mountain Biking Club.

**The Year Ahead**

This year, Benefits Open Enrollment is October 23 – November 3 for coverage starting January 1, 2018. Benefits Open Enrollment is the one time each year you can make changes to your USNH benefit elections, unless you experience a qualifying change of status during the year—such as marriage, divorce or the birth of a child. Log on to MyUSNHBenefits.net to enroll. You may contact Human Resources at 535-2250 with any questions.

Thank you to the many who responded to the invitation to attend a short presentation on finances, enrollment, retention, and persistence and how this relates to URSA phase-two—a.k.a. University Review for Strategic and Innovative Growth (URSIG). At today’s Town Hall we will continue our discussions that began during University Days, surrounding student success and the Drive to 85 (retention) followed by a break-out session to discuss PSU Finance Overview and Update.
I appreciate all you do to send positive messaging to students regarding appropriate behavior on and off campus, especially during holidays and long weekends. It is also important that we support each other and treat each other with respect and kindness during this murky middle in our transition. More to come on this at the Town Hall meeting later today.

Sincerely,

Don

Don Birx
President