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President's Monthly Report September 2017

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Plymouth State University

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Dear Colleagues,

The September monthly report to campus is attached. In addition, I’d like you to know that we recently signed along with more than 600 College & University Presidents - a call for U.S. to Uphold and Continue DACA. Many thanks to Robin DeRosa for bringing this opportunity to us.

For those of you who were unable to attend the University Day ‘kickoff’ remarks, you may find them on the president’s page here.

As always, please be in touch with Cabinet members, the Transition Leadership Team or me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Don

Don Birx
President
September, 2017

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to a new school year. I hope you all had a great summer. Many thanks to all of you who worked through the summer and who were involved in University and Cluster Days whether it was participation, leading sessions, planning activities, supporting Panther Days, or getting the campus ready for the year ahead. It feels like we have great energy and we are ready to push ahead implementing the ideas we have talked about over the last two years. I was particularly encouraged by the discussions in the many sessions over University Days about how we move from concept to reality as our first cluster class enters. This is a critical year in our history and no matter where each of us stands with respect to implementing clusters administratively, and in our curriculum, it is a promise made to our students and to those who accredit us, so let us do all we can to make it happen.

I also appreciate the feedback on graduation. After compiling all the suggestions there was overwhelming consensus that we should move ahead with the plan to have two graduation ceremonies (graduate and undergraduate) and put in place the series of recommendations that were detailed in the letter to campus sent out earlier this summer. So, we are pushing ahead on all fronts.

Progress

Moving into a new year of progress, there are exciting and important opportunities to continue to shape how Integrated Clusters are implemented. Over the summer, a number of your colleagues have been engaged in moving us forward to support and operationalize the Four Tools of Integrated Clusters. The Four Tools are the First Year Seminar (FYS), themed Gen Ed, Integrative Capstone and Open Labs. The incoming class that we welcomed over the week is the first to experience the newest version of First Year Seminar. Last Spring, a team of 20 “FYS Fellows” came together to redesign FYS to focus on a challenge question, “a wicked problem” and to introduce students to the concept of clusters while engaging them in project-based learning, integrative thinking, and collaboration. The fellows will continue their reflective practice through the fall as they develop recommendations for FYS Fellows 2.0 which will begin during the spring semester. An invitation to participate will go out later this fall.

For the General Education program, a feedback session was held during University Days regarding the development of common learning outcomes by the General Education Outcomes Task Force, a faculty group that worked over the summer. Feedback is being reviewed by the committee and considered as the common learning outcomes for Gen Ed are finalized and brought to the faculty. Urgency is the word of the day because in many ways, the Gen Ed program is a core element in implementing clusters.

As a means to assess student achievement of Gen Ed outcomes, a bookend assessment needs to be developed for FYS and the Integrative Capstone course. Plans for developing the Integrative Capstone
will begin this fall as a result of initial work by a Gen Ed taskforce. Updates on this program will be
provided as this group begins to meet.

A General Education Coordinator will be appointed to support the overall Gen Ed program,
assessment, integration of the 4 tools for clusters, and future revisions. This is an internal only search.
We encourage interested faculty to contact the Office of Human Resources for more information. The
position will have a soft start this year and be fully implemented in Fall ‘18.

As cluster leadership teams emerge, support has been requested for areas such as communications,
projects and partnerships, operations, and administrative support functions. To meet this need,
academic affairs is developing a prototype for a Cluster Support Team. It’s anticipated that the piloting
clusters Justice & Security; and Tourism, Environment & Sustainable Development; will utilize this
centralized support. As this is an experiment, we know there will be adjustments to be made as we
learn. Additional teams may be created as more clusters prepare to “launch” in late fall and spring, but
all clusters should put in place their leadership team as soon as possible.

**Enrollment**

In recruitment, admissions transitioned to a new recruitment cycle on August 14th where college
bound first-year students and interested transfer students can now submit an application for the next
academic year. The Fall 2017 recruitment cycle has wrapped up with the incoming class even with last
year, grossing 1,340 deposits for first-year new students. In-state deposits declined, which can be
attributed to factors such as continued demographic challenges and increased cost-based competition
internally and externally. Out-of-state deposits increased this year, overall demonstrating a positive
response to Integrated Clusters and marketing efforts to students and families.

Last year, at the end of the enrollment cycle, net deposits landed at 1,150 for new first-year students
as a result of factors called Summer Melt, students that deposit and then withdraw before the start of
the semester, and Early Departure, and students that enroll at PSU and then leave prior to the end of
September. In an effort to better identify and address the considerations linked to Summer Melt and
Early Departure, admissions collaborated with various offices, staff, faculty, current students, and
alumni. Tactics identified were to launch multi-channel communications, events, student send-off
programs, and piloting a Summer Bridge/Pathways program that aimed to communicate with
deposited students committed to PSU. All of the Summer Melt efforts created and launched along with
the experimental Pathway Program are being assessed to identify lessons learned and knowledge
gained that will help inform future new student enrollment efforts. This year, final enrollment numbers
will be reported in the October 2017 President’s Monthly Report.

The new transfer student class entered into the start of academic year above 200 which was consistent
with last year, to-date. Finally, graduate registration is trending above last year’s count.

**Retention & Persistence**

This year, Student Affairs experienced major structural changes to align with our new mission in
support of Integrated Clusters. Several positions saw turnover or reclassification reflecting the
changing needs of our students.

Student programming is being re-envisioned, to provide a cohesive developmental journey which
aligns with our students' academic experience. Matt Curtis, who started June 30th, is leading the
initiative as the Director of Coordinated Programming and Student Engagement. Dr. Curtis brings extensive experience and research in curriculum design that he put into practice in Chicago Public schools. We look forward to seeing the results of a coordinated effort to educate our students with life skills, professional skills, and instilling a deeper sense of purpose.

The Student Programming and Engagement team is actively searching for the vacant position of the First-Year Programming Coordinator, a role that will oversee June Orientation, Panther Days, a peer mentor program, and join the programming team to plan events throughout the school year. Generating communications and programming for parents will also fall under the responsibility of the First-Year Programming Coordinator because parents play a critical role in supporting our students.

Amanda Grazioso, who joined PSU in June, has taken on the reimagined role of the Director of Residential Life and Dining Services. Amanda’s energy and strength in leadership will help integrate our cluster model into the residential experience, to build living-learning communities. Part of this initiative is the Residential Scholar Program, a mechanism for faculty to play a role in shaping programming and build a bridge to academics. Amanda rebranded the Residential Director position to Community Director. With the new name also comes a shift in responsibility, giving a greater focus to programming and relationship building and much less on responding to conduct issues. This is due in large part to Jeff Furlone, our Dean of Students hiring two new Conduct Advisors, Jill Martineau and Beth Clay, and reclassifying Kara Barker to a Conduct Advisor position as well. Shaun Connors is now coordinating all of the CARE cases.

Student Success Coaches have been busy connecting with the incoming class this summer. As part of this outreach, first year students are expected to complete an online orientation to registration and skills for success at college. The Student Success Coaches have been busy creating a year-long communication plan for our incoming students which started in early August. The Coaches, along with Orientation Leaders (OLs), are bridging the transition from high school to college life. OLs are connecting with their Panther Pride Groups to prepare for our second Panther Days Orientation. Building on what we learned last year, Panther Days was extended to five days, with most of day one dedicated to move-in and settling in. With the First-Year Programming Coordinator position vacant, a team of leaders in programming and student success are working hard to make Panther Days a success so that we can help our first-year students build community, learn valuable information, and become familiar with our expected behavioral norms.

The Panther Mentor Program is underway. Mentors and mentees have signed up, mentors have been trained, and the pairs are being matched in a thoughtful way. Mentors will meet their mentees during Panther Days and continue to meet at least twice a month throughout the year. The goal is to help students connect with those outside of their academic realm and to provide an additional layer of support to students. This year, we have approximately 50 mentors and almost 100 mentees.

Diagnostic tools are being integrated with Student Affairs focused on metrics to help staff and faculty intervene and support students when they are not connecting or succeeding. A pilot will begin with the Criminal Justice program where faculty have agreed to work on this effort.

Finally, Jeff Furlone was awarded the Senior Award by the senior class, a testimony to Jeff’s commitment to going above and beyond in his service and dedication to students. Another recognition
was given to the staff at the Michael L. Fischler Counseling Center, to whom the senior class dedicated their yearbook. We are grateful for the role they play in supporting our students.

In late August, we created a campus-wide Retention/Persistence Working Group. Meeting regularly, this working group will build a broad understanding of PSU's efforts and help us see where we can collaborate, thus increasing retention and persistence rates. The group will collect and share information of efforts across campus so that we can improve our retention rate (now in the low 70s) up to the institutional goal of 85%. More importantly, by understanding the work for retention and persistence of students, we can improve student learning and the post-graduate lives of our students.

Development and Planned Giving
The Bank of New Hampshire made the largest corporate gift to date to PSU. The Field House in ALLWell North is now named in the Bank’s honor. Carleton R. Parish’71, earmarked his bequest intention of more than $650,000 to the stadium and turf field project. Duane Baxter earmarked his second bequest intention of more than $500,000 as an unrestricted gift to support the “bright future of the University and Integrated Clusters”. Mr. Baxter and his wife, Reta Presby, made a generous gift last year to establish the Raymond S. Burton Open Lab in Lamson Library. The bequest intention of Dr. Henry Vittum ’48 and Professor Emeritus of English, was realized over the summer and provided a $50,000 endowed student scholarship: the Henry E. Vittum and Ethel Tessmond Vittum Scholarship for Excellence in English. Dr. Vittum taught at PSU from 1965 – 1998. After four years of outstanding work in the annual giving program, Assistant Annual Fund Director Brenda Shivley ’13, ’17G has moved to Charleston, SC. Please join us in welcoming Jordan Rosenberg ’17, who has accepted the position of Interim Assistant Director of the Annual Fund.

Alumni Relations
Alumni Chapters engage alumni based on geographic regions (location) and affinity (interest). The chapter goals are three-fold: provide value to alumni; recruit and connect alumni into volunteer roles to support PSU’s Integrated Clusters, Admission, and Career Services; and support the fundraising strategic priorities. There are four continuing and two newly launched alumni chapters in NH, MA, NY, and FL. Emerging chapters are in Washington, DC, San Francisco, the front range of Colorado, LGBTQA and Panther Gridiron. We welcome Brian Gagnon ’05,’09G as the assistant director for volunteer and alumni engagement. Brian will be the primary staff contact for engaging alumni and volunteers in the integrated clusters.

Marketing Communications and Creative Services
Marketing the integrated clusters brand directly supports continued student enrollment and philanthropic support in this competitive marketplace. Brand enhancement work continues both on-campus and in our communities—you may have seen the new banners and painted stairways. Working closely with Enrollment Management, MCCS is creating print and online prospect materials to differentiate PSU from competitors for high school students, transfer students and their parents. In addition, work is underway on a comprehensive review of all graduate program marketing materials and messaging. MCCS and ITS are transitioning the internally-focused university web content from the former Plymouth website to a new more easily navigable https://campus.plymouth.edu site. Marlin Collingwood assumed the position of Interim Director, Morgan Navarro began work in the new position of Digital Media Manager, and Mackenzie Fullerton ’17 is a new addition to our graphics team.
The Year Ahead

I want to update you on the legislative budget process and its impact on PSU. It was a challenging year, but Plymouth State’s vision of an integrated, theoretical, and practical education has gained many positive responses in Concord and across the state. While you probably know that the appropriations for USNH did not increase, Plymouth State also received $3 million in the capital budget appropriations that, along with other funding sources, will help renovate the PE Center/Field House to work within the cluster model. A renovated PE Center will serve as the Open Lab for the Health and Human Enrichment Cluster, creating a community resource that will allow the University to address needs and challenges—from aging to personal performance issues—while giving our students hands-on experience.

As I mentioned in my University Day kick-off remarks, we are all part of the PSU family and when we talk about community, we must mention and acknowledge the events in Charlottesville, VA and across the country this year. For decades, University campuses have been havens of free speech and discussion and that cannot change. In fact, we should be proud that we’ve been rated “Green” by FIRE (the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education) for free speech on our campus, the only campus in the system to be so designated. Even so we must say publicly that we do not support or condone, and in fact we condemn any form of discrimination and the violent actions in Charlottesville (we as a country are great because of who we are not because of what we look like) and other places over the summer and last year. If we err, let it be on the side of continuing to be a safe place for all. That includes those with all backgrounds and nationalities.

Now is the time to be hopeful for the future and revel in the fact that we will be successful, that the State and the Trustees have invested in our strategy, and that we are at the leading edge of a large and growing movement that will change opportunities for our students and generations of future students.

Our new and returning students came to campus over this past week and it’s now about coming together as a community to create the learning experience we promised – implementing the General Education and curriculum changes, and pulling together the cluster leadership teams (each cluster should set up one) to move us forward. Together, we can do this.

Sincerely,

Don

Don Birx
President