President's Monthly Report to Campus September 2018

Don Birx
Plymouth State University

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September 2018

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome back to a fresh start with the new academic year. For those of you who took time this summer to relax, I hope you’re ready to take part in the implementation of Clusters. We have much of the reorganization behind us and we are off to a good start having completed University Days—a truly inspirational opening with TedTalks by faculty, staff, and students and closing with our very own PEMI Talks. If you did not get a chance to attend, the script is online as well as the video of the opening remarks. We realized that there was a need for more programming for staff and that this time of year is difficult for some to attend, so we plan to have more options available for upcoming sessions in January.

Move in went better than ever despite the Highland Street road closure; and Summer Ascent and Panther Days were likewise very successful, as was Fall Fling. Many thanks to those across campus who were involved. These are challenging days for higher education, and most particularly in the Northeast. That leads to more uncertainty than any time in our recent history, but thanks to all of you, we are weathering it better than most. Our enrollments have held steady with some of the largest classes ever, our residence halls are largely fully occupied, the Smith renovation turned out great (with increased opportunities for students to live on campus), and the P.E. Center is coming along well.

Robin Dorff has started as our new provost and with his arrival we have made an organizational change to move Student Engagement and Student Welfare into Academic Affairs. It is hoped that this will build stronger ties between in-class activities and engagement outside of the classroom, with the goal of creating a seamless environment from student enrollment through onboarding, and student engagement and welfare to residential life, and on through academic programs. This will work hand-in-hand with our new one-stop student center in Speare. I want to thank Janette Wiggett so much for her work to move engagement forward during her interim role until Robin arrived and we could begin the final alignment of student affairs activities. A new job position will be posted this fall. Robin will be working closely with faculty in the year ahead to move our transition forward and address faculty challenges and concerns.

I know there has been discussion about the role of departments as we move forward in our Cluster-based structure. As you are thinking through this, it might help to reframe the thinking about departments in terms of a Discipline-Based Community, or DBC. Those will always exist, and be a core identity, but whether at one extreme they might look somewhat similar to departments including some program budget segments, or at the other extreme, be a group of faculty with similar core expertise and interest within an Integrated Cluster structure, it is really a matter of what works best. My original thoughts were that cluster leadership teams could be made up of representatives from the DBC’s, but I know there are a variety of approaches being put in place, and that is great. The question is what is most efficient and supportive on moving forward and making our academic programs affordable and integrative, and yet of the best quality possible given the resources we have available.
This we need to do while recognizing both the changing interest of students and needs of the twenty-first century, and the required skills to integrate ideas across disciplines to solve challenges and synthesize, validate, visualize, and use that knowledge to further explore, teach, create, and build ideas and concepts within teams and with a habits of mind perspective. Some of the University Reinvention Initiative (URI) proposals were very exciting in this light and could serve as models or pilots for different approaches. Using the analogy from the University Days kickoff, now that we have reached land we want to take apart the boat to build new structures, but that doesn’t mean we have to take it down to the timbers. We can use parts of the structure, we just don’t want to build another boat. Again, thank you all for all you are doing. In many ways, it is amazing what we have accomplished together.

I know that last month I mentioned during University Days that I asked the Transition Leadership Team (TLT), which has representation across campus, to work with each of our communities over the coming year to help them develop task forces around key concepts that we need to evolve and implement—among them curricular change, process mapping, and training and sharing of ideas—and to not only ask task forces to make recommendations but to stay involved through implementation. As it did last year, the TLT will also continue to work across campus to bridge and collect questions and share answers to help facilitate the change process.

With regard to issues that are impacting our campus and higher education in general, we will be starting speaker and forum sessions this year with topics to be determined. Please send any suggestions to Corey Hoyt, who will compile responses. The provost and I will also be setting up a group that represents those across the University who are moving the change process forward and have stories to tell. Its goal will be different than the TLT, less on being a communications bridge and more on interchange of ideas and sharing of experiences. It is hoped though that the TLT will form the core of this endeavor.

For those of you who haven’t had a chance to see The Chronicle of Higher Education webinar re: “Higher-Ed Business Models: How to Foster a Conversation About Campus Sustainability,” I recommend the first half hour, in which Peter Stokes and Scott Carlson talk about the changes ongoing in higher education. It does a lot to put things in perspective and their first slide shows clearly the challenges we all face. The link to the archived webinar will become available later. You might also want to look over the first part of our NEASC report as it outlines our midterm accreditation review and goals, particularly focused around assessment and our implementation of the Four Tools of Clusters.

The following updates align with our focal areas, each of which relate to equipping our students to lead and thrive in the twenty-first century global economy.

**Movement to a flatter, integrated Cluster-based organizational structure and implementation of the Four Tools**

Last year, with the URI process, many of you told us and each other about what you are doing or would like to do in programs across the University. The deans did an initial review at the end of last year, but over the summer, we spent time going through each of the proposals and organized them into 14 categories. As mentioned in my University Days talk, I’m particularly excited about the ideas that fell into categories like graduate 3+2, 4+1 programs; cluster or integrated majors and modules of courses that support various ‘Cluster majors’ (with elimination of redundancy); and themed pathways and integrated capstone courses. We’ll talk more about these ideas over the coming year, but the provost’s office is sending out letters to those with activities that are ongoing or require minimal
investments so that we can begin moving ahead with some of the most promising of these recommendations. And we will be working through the other proposals to follow up with approaches to move forward.

A few quick updates from Academic Affairs:

- NEASC fifth-year Interim Report has been completed and submitted.
- University Days was well attended and sessions were reported to be very interesting.
- Kick-off of the first 3+2 in athletic training began with more than 50 incoming students.
- Integrated Capstone (INCO) fellows are beginning their work with Cathie LeBlanc.
- First-Year Seminars are launching.
- The Center for Research and Innovation is up and running.
- The Provost Council met four times over the summer and will be meeting regularly during the academic year.

We are appealing the CAEP Accreditation decision to revoke our accreditation based on not passing two standards. This decision is with respect to our initial teacher preparation programs and does not affect our advanced programs. PSU remains fully accredited during the appeal process and this process is not public. Our state of New Hampshire accreditation by the Department of Education has been extended through May 31, 2019, and we are seeking accreditation through AAQEP.

Major education conferences were held on our campus this past summer, including the 2018 PSU Holmes Center Problems of Practice Summer Summit (Aug 6-9) with opening remarks by NH Department of Education Commissioner Frank Edelblut. This summit focused on multiage competency-based education and foundations in co-teaching, equity, and problem-based learning. Fifteen districts participated in a four-day residential program aligned to individual problems of practice. Innovation plans were developed that will be supported through an online professional learning network (PLN), curated open educational resources (OERs), and three mini conferences. Attendees included current professional development schools as well as districts moving toward large scale systems change and personalized learning systems benefiting children, youth, and faculty. Keynote speakers included Teresa Heck, PhD, Co-teaching and Collaboration, director of the Academy for Co-Teaching and Collaboration and professor at St. Cloud State University; Tambra O. Jackson, PhD, Culturally Sustaining Educators, chair, Department of Education, University College of Indiana University (UIUPI); and Leslie Etienne, PhD, Culturally Sustaining Communities, Department of Education, UIUPI.

The NH Career and Technical Education Summer Conference, held Aug 14-16 with opening remarks by Commissioner Edelblut, brought experts in schools to career from the federal, state, and local levels. Dr. Kathleen C. McCabe facilitated a statewide working session on developing professional communities of practice to support college and career-ready high school graduates.

Building Trauma-Informed Communities of Hope, Resilience, & Care: MTSS-B Summer Institute, held August 15-16, was presented by the Bureau of Student Wellness at the NH Department of Education, the UNH Institute on Disability/UCED, Antioch University New England, the NH Center for Effective Behavioral Supports, and Strafford Learning Center, in collaboration with the Holmes Center for School Partnerships and Educator Preparation. The 2018 Summer Institute focused on implementing trauma-informed principles and practices within a multi-tiered system. Its goal to establish a safe school environment using a multi-tiered system of support is related to improved outcomes for all students. Keynote remarks Building Trauma-Informed Communities of Hope, Resilience, and Care, were delivered by Cassie Yackley, PsyD, PLLC, Center for Behavioral Health Innovation, Department of Clinical Psychology, Antioch University New England.
The Fourth Annual Rural Educational Leaders Network (RELN) Summit, held July 18 and 19, took place at Plymouth State through an endowment by the late Ann Haggart. The focus of this year’s summit was developing the school-community partnership to support rigorous student learning opportunities in rural New Hampshire schools. National, state, and local level speakers contributed to a conversation with 60 members of the network. The discourse over the two days established for those in attendance an understanding of the state of rural education from a national and state perspective, and how local level leaders can mitigate issues through the development of rich, place-based learning programming. Keynotes included *To stay or to go: A look at why young people are leaving New Hampshire, why they’re staying, and why it matters*, by William Stewart, executive director, Stay Work Play NH; *Public Schools and Rural Community Development: A Necessary Parlay*, Dr. Gary Funk, executive director, The Rural Schools Collaborative; and *Working with the Center and the Educational Lab for the Northeast and Islands to support our place based work*, Dr. Pam Buffington, Educational Development Center.

**Recruitment and Enrollment**

Admissions transitioned to a new recruitment cycle on August 15, when college-bound first-year students and interested transfer students began submitting applications for fall 2019. The fall 2018 recruitment cycle in mid-August had 1,185 new first-year students confirmed while Admissions was still working with a handful of admitted students in efforts to enroll them before the start of the school year. The fall 2018 recruitment cycle saw continued increased competition for attracting college-bound students in the Northeast, worsening demographic challenges specific to New Hampshire (*projected 6.6 percent change 2016–2025 according to the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education*) and the surrounding states, and applicants’ families facing declining financial resources. Compared to last year’s class, the mid-August count included 40 more students that reside in New Hampshire, the Student Engagement team saw over 90 percent of the new student class participate in June Orientation compared to 75 percent last year, and the Office of Admission saw over 200 more applicants eligible for admission demonstrating a high school GPA of 3.25-4.0, despite the above mentioned recruitment barriers. The new transfer student class count is above 200 and graduate registrations for fall are trending above last year’s count. Final numbers for the fall 2018 class will be confirmed at R+30.

Much of the summer in Enrollment Management focused on addressing factors linked to the “summer melt” phenomenon (*students who deposit and then withdraw before the start of the semester*). Efforts by the Office of Admissions and Student Success teams included continuous communication outreach to students who faced financial barriers, needed course registration advising, and developing the latest summer bridge iteration, called *Summer Ascent*. Furthermore, the *summer melt reduction* communications outreach vision was applied to returning students in an effort to aid in retention efforts. The summer also saw staff transition, where former Student Success Coach Kayla Gaudette accepted a new role as operations manager for Health and Human Performance and former Student Success Coach Ryan Donathan sought opportunities back in his home state of Indiana. The Student Success Coach Team veterans, Marissa Lischinsky and Kelsey Donnelly, recently welcomed two new coach/advisors: Meghan Merritt Shaffer, who joined from Admissions, and Briana Bradley, who previously provided administrative support for the Center for Student Success. Also, Admissions has been engaged in a search for an associate director of graduate enrollment management in an effort to address some reported challenges and concerns shared by representatives from Grad Council back in April.
Finally, the summer also included Enrollment Management piloting a summer Open House event for rising high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors along with further exploring initiatives reported on last spring. For example, it explored a block transfer initiative with the Community College System of New Hampshire (CCSNH) institutions; developed students’ visit experience for STEAM AHEAD NH to mirror the spirit of PSU’s First-Year Seminar (where prospective students will solve a problem throughout the recruitment visit experience); and developed an Academic Support Recovery nine-week programmatic effort for returning students on academic warning and probation. Now that the academic year has started, on campus discussions linked to these initiatives will continue and updates will be provided throughout the semester.

For the fall semester, upcoming Open House events are scheduled for Monday, October 8; Saturday, October 27; and Monday, November 12; and an Athletics Open House is scheduled for Saturday, December 8. More information will come from Admissions as the semester unfolds.

**Retention and Persistence**

Many University Days events were aimed at retention and persistence efforts, from Deborah Brownstein’s Growth Mindset, and Cheryl Baker and Aparna Waghe’s meaningful learning outcomes sessions, to Marissa Lichinsky’s EAB Student Success Collaborative metrics and reports, and the group presentation on project-based learning sessions—and much more. Two sessions were specific to retention and persistence and explored what we as individuals can do to help students succeed. The first session was aimed at faculty. Thanks to the work of George Pettinico’s students (who interviewed last year’s incoming students), PSU knows that the majority of students want to see more faculty engagement in both academic and social events. They are particularly eager to have more academic events. They want to experience a clear difference between high school and college through challenging academics and deep conversations. During University Days, faculty started a list of ways faculty can help with retention and persistence that focus on developing authentic relationships with students. Please feel free to send more ideas to Marcia Schmidt Blaine. Kayla Gaudette ran a second session that focused on staff efforts, which aimed to present the ways PSU staff might impact retention in work every day. The group explored traditional-age student brain development and admissions and withdrawal data in order to understand the impact of real-world concerns on students, and additional context for students entering higher education.

**Sustainability/Thriving financially, academically, and reputationally**

We have been far more successful financially over the last three years than was predicted because of the changes we have put in place, the move to clusters, the associated marketing and enrollment, etc., but as we predicted, as the discounted classes compound, the challenge gets greater every year. Fortunately, this year is the last year that process will continue as the senior class is now the first class that led the discounting (implemented prior to my arrival). So, if we can make it through these next two years, we will have built a sustainable university. This will require that we move forward with completing our move to clusters and the four tools, implementing URI and other academic proposals (3+2, 4+1, cluster majors with shared modules, etc.), and increasing retention and graduation rates. Adding to that, we appear to have the governor’s support for a proposal for strategic funding for the next biennium. Only time will tell how that goes.

PSU has received a $400,000 grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to continue combatting substance and opioid use disorders. Students will gain valuable experience through partnerships with regional health centers, and the grant also promotes greater awareness of
integrated care options. Congratulations to faculty members and principal investigators Gary Goodnough, Robin Hausheer, and Cindy Waltman.

Plymouth State University hosted 19 residential summer conferences over a 10-week period, compared to eight last fiscal year. Size and complexity of events is increasing as we develop our program and best practices. Events and Conference Planning worked with Marketing, Communications and Creative Services (MCCS) and our faculty in Tourism Management and Policy to offer two student internships. In addition, five students were employed as summer conference staff. If you are interested in hosting a conference for summer 2019, please contact Events and Conference Planning.

In University Advancement, there has been a lot happening in Development, MCCS, Alumni Relations, and Career Development.

Many thanks to you, our campus colleagues who have joined in financially supporting our students, and for helping the University Advancement team set a PSU fundraising record of $5,615,335 in fiscal year 2018! As a reminder, the institution has three fundraising priorities: Student Scholarships, Stadium and Turf Field, and Strength and Conditioning Open Lab.

Recent Gifts:
- Paul Montour has named PSU as the beneficiary of a life insurance policy worth $310,000. Paul has earmarked his gift to the Stadium and Turf Field Project.
- Paul Hackenberry has committed a $50,000 blended gift to the Stadium and Turf Field Project—his gift consists of a $25,000 cash pledge and a $25,000 bequest.
- Paula and Eric Huttner ’06P have committed $250,000 to the Stadium and Turf Field Project. This gift brings their lifetime giving to $526,500.
- We have secured gifts totaling $1,395,396 for the Stadium and Turf Field. The amount left to raise for the project is $604,604. The development team has proposals out to a host of donors who are very excited about seeing the project come to fruition.
- In FY18 Annual Giving secured $710,000 to support PSU students. The Annual Giving team reports that its FY19 Goal is $1,000,000!

Over the summer, MCCS worked closely with Enrollment Management colleagues on strategies to decrease our summer melt as we looked forward to the arrival of our first-year students. In addition, it revised and updated all marketing materials for our admissions representatives and began the work of marketing to both students who will make up the incoming 2019 class of first-years and their parents.

After a national RFP/bid process, Brodeur Partners was selected in June as the new integrated marketing agency for PSU. In July and August, we on-boarded the new agency. In addition, we have chosen to work with the Education Advisory Board (EAB) as our recruitment search partner and will utilize its state-of-the-art communications and search modules for reaching prospective students and their parents during the recruitment cycle.

In May, we contracted with Merit Pages to distribute to news outlets across the country, including hometown newspapers, our student academic honors (i.e., President’s List and Dean’s List). The hometown listings have proved very popular with both students and parents and resulted in a marked increase in local media coverage of our students and their success.

The MCCS team continues to work closely with the student retention and success team in ongoing communications with returning and first-year students and their parents. As part of this effort it
hosted the first annual “Empty Nest Reception” for parents of incoming first-years to provide a place for them to meet and network with each other and PSU administration and staff.

MCCS continues to focus time and resources to update the plymouth.edu website, working closely with ITS to bring the new internal-facing campus site to full functionality to meet the needs of all key internal and external audiences.

A new addition to the MCCS team is Mackenzie Fullerton ’17, who was chosen after a national search to fill the new position of graphic designer/video editor.

Efforts by Alumni Relations allowed PSU to welcome over 200 alumni back for Greek Alumni Weekend on June 22-24, which included a meeting of the Greek Life Advisory Board to discuss the re-introduction of Greek letter social organizations to campus. The alumni are enthusiastic about partnering with their alma mater to bring back a successful, sustainable Greek life program to aid in our retention, persistence, and career readiness goals.

Summer Reunion on August 2-3 welcomed 115 alumni from the classes of 1973 and prior, with our most senior alumnus coming from the class of 1952. Several classes held meetings to discuss their legacy at PSU. We have received many compliments on our beautiful campus and on the quality of our students, and seeing Dan Perkins conduct a portion of the NH Music Festival brought to life the quality of our faculty. They were all proud to be Plymouth State alumni.

The search for the director of career development concluded with the hiring of Leslie Blakney ’07, who is finishing up as associate director for advising at the Dartmouth Center for Professional Development. We look forward to welcoming her back to campus in September to help us with our challenge of career readiness. Our ongoing work includes the development of an alumni mentoring program for first-year students; to help facilitate this goal, we’ve invested in a software solution called PeopleGrove, which will be branded as PSUnite. A pilot rollout is planned for September, adding more students and mentors as we implement best solutions and processes. We are launching a series of video and audio podcasts aimed at recent alumni, featuring other alumni sharing their advice. The first three will focus on strategies for paying off student loans, résumés, and cover letters, and job searching and interviewing techniques. We have a series of career development programs scheduled for this year with multiple collaborators, including the Professional Dinner, targeted at juniors and seniors but open to all students, on September 13 in Heritage Commons.

Equipping our students to lead and thrive in the twenty-first century global economy

Please save the date for our first Town Hall meeting of the academic year on Monday, October 15, at 3:30 p.m. in Merrill Place. This Town Hall will continue the focus on ‘Finding Your Why’ along with campus-wide updates.

Sincerely,

Don Birx
President