



Convocation 2019
Remarks delivered by Salma Ghanem, interim provost
September 5, 2019

Good morning. One of the things that is unique to the academic world is that sense of renewal that comes with the beginning of an academic year. I am thrilled, to kick off DePaul's 122nd academic year with you.

Welcome.

Earlier this week, I had the pleasure of spending time with the newest members of our DePaul community. We have over 65 new faculty joining us this year. We also welcomed several staff members. Welcome to all of you who are new to DePaul.

I would also like to welcome our two inaugural endowed chairs: Dr. Gazmend Kapllani the Hidai Bregu Endowed Chair of Albanian Studies and Dr. Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnée, the Holtschneider Chair of Vincentian Studies.

Would all of our new faculty and new staff please stand?

Let's give them a warm welcome.

Thank you. We're so happy to have you here.

A few weeks ago, I was hanging out with my grandson. He's six.

We were talking about the university and my job. He asked me, “Grandma, what do you do at DePaul?”

I said, “I’m the provost.”

So he said, “What the heck is that?”

When you think about it, trying to explain to a six-year-old what a provost does is not all that different than explaining it to anybody else.

Anyway, this chat with my grandson got me thinking about DePaul, my role now and how we all can work together to set a course for the year ahead.

First, the foundation of my leadership style, which has not changed, rests on two fundamentals: respect and trust.

We need to respect one another, but also we need to have trust in one another. One way I believe we can accomplish both of these things is through conversation.

That’s what I want to do this year: have conversations and dialogue.

What do I mean by that?

Conversations are a means for problems to get solved, for teams to function well, for people to become energetic activists.

Now, look to your left and to your right. At DePaul, we are surrounded by clever, well-informed people. Let’s take advantage of who we are as an innovative, academic community.

Many of you know that I am not originally from the U.S. My parents were Dutch and Egyptian, and I grew up in Egypt.

Learning about different cultures is a passion of mine. That's why a university has always been the place where I feel most at home. A university is the one place where I don't think of myself as an immigrant.

My point is we're a unique community, and that's why I want to have these conversations with you.

Part of these discussions could focus on my new role and how I may help your programs or new ideas. But what I really want to do is to have regular campus conversations about higher education as a whole and the role DePaul can play in the higher education landscape.

Let's talk about the future of DePaul, the future of higher education, affordability, technology, course offerings. You name it.

Jeff Bethke, executive vice president and chief financial officer, and I will be hosting some town halls to address the academic and the financial trajectory and aspirations for the university. It will be an opportunity to share information with you and to engage in a conversation about the academic and financial well-being of DePaul. We plan on hosting one on September 20 in the Lincoln Park Campus and one on October 8 in the Loop. You will receive more information about these events soon – read Newslines. We hope to see you there.

But let's not stop there. We also need to talk about the difficult issues. Freedom of speech. Immigration. Racism. Inequality.

We all know national and global issues find their way to a university's doorstep. If it is affecting the country at large, it is affecting our students as well. As educators, it is our responsibility to help our students navigate those difficult conversations.

We have amazing expertise at DePaul. I want to tap into the knowledge and skills and ideas every single one of you brings to our university. I believe we not only can help our students develop the skills and mindset necessary to discuss the difficult topics, but we can also contribute to the national and international dialogue. We can make a difference.

I want you to know how humbled I am to serve as your interim provost. Thank you for all of those who supported me during this transition. I would like to take a moment to recognize Marten denBoer and his many contributions to DePaul.

Now, I know the last couple of years have not been easy. There have been a lot of transitions. There has been a lot of uncertainty and that takes its toll on people.

Higher education faces many challenges and DePaul is not immune. But if there is one university that can handle this challenge, it is DePaul. I've served at several institutions, and I was very impressed by the dedication of the folks in the College of Communication when I first came here. In this new role - this what the heck is a provost role - I continue to be impressed about all the work that is happening across academic and non-academic units.

Our university is still going through a lot. It was only a couple months ago that we said goodbye to our colleagues who opted to take the early retirement package. There are gaps in their absence, and we're adjusting.

Multiple leadership searches will also occur this year. We will launch national searches for the deans of the College of Science and Health and the School of Continuing and Professional Studies. There will also be the search for the associate provost for diversity, a vice president for Enrollment Management, as well as the library director. Details for all of these searches will be shared as they become available.

We have several faculty and staff who are currently filling interim or acting leadership roles: Lexa Murphy, acting College of Communication dean; Dorothy Kozlowski, interim CSH dean; Ruben Parra, interim associate provost for diversity and inclusion; Paula Luff, interim EMM vice president; Don Opitz, interim SCPS dean; Rob Karpinski, interim director of the library.

To our interim appointments and all the faculty and staff who are helping with our transitions, I say thank you. And I can relate.

I would like to recognize all the deans who represent you, our faculty and staff, in support of academic programs and student learning. I thank them for their ongoing work and dedication.

A new academic year brings a new beginning. If anyone can overcome the potential hurdles ahead of us, it is DePaul. We know how to deal with ambiguity. We don't shy away in the face of a challenge.

We are about to enter the second year of our current strategic plan, where we will continue on the path ahead to make DePaul unequalled among urban universities. We will embark on strategic growth focusing on new programs, interdisciplinary programs and attracting students from all walks of life through innovation in our offerings.

As you are likely aware, the strategic plan calls for a university-wide process of academic-program prioritization. Last fall, the provost's office appointed a task force to develop a methodology for this project and to oversee the implementation. Lucy Rinehart, associate provost for academic planning and faculty, and Scott Paeth, president of Faculty Council, are co-chairs of the task force.

This fall quarter, the work continues and we are now renaming it as the program portfolio review because that is what it is all

about. It is a systematic review of all our programs from multiple angles. No program has to be everything to everybody. The goal is to have a diverse, balanced and sustainable portfolio of programs, one that is well aligned with our mission and strategic goals.

The task force is on track to deliver a final report to me by the end of the academic year. They have been working very hard on developing and operationalizing the appropriate criteria which does involve finances but extends way beyond that to include curricular demand, the quality of the programs and centrality of the programs to the mission.

This project will help to identify opportunities for strategic investments in programs. It will provide all of us access to a common set of data that will help us make decisions and set priorities.

I imagine an update regarding the quarters to semesters task force also would be of interest.

Caryn Chaden, associate provost for student success and accreditation, and Mary Ann Papanek-Miller, professor and chair of the Department of Art, Media and Design, co-chaired the task force. In June, they delivered a final report and made all supporting documentation available to the university community. A special thanks to the task force that submitted a very thorough and comprehensive report.

After discussing the report submitted by the task force with the administrative and academic leadership of the university, we have determined not to move forward with a conversion from a quarter-based to a semester-based academic calendar at this time, because there is no indication of pedagogical benefits or desire among DePaul stakeholders, including most importantly, our students.

A conversion is a large-scale undertaking requiring major time and financial resources, which are better spent at this time to focus on strategic growth. The conversion would be revisited if new data becomes available and provides stronger rationale for such a conversion.

In the interim, however, we will continue to explore ways to deliver the curriculum with the flexibility our students, and the market, expect.

These two task forces: the program portfolio review and the quarter to semester task forces have been great examples of faculty governance in action. They were opportunities to hear from the various stakeholders and to learn from each other. The task forces made sure that transparency permeated the process. Reports have been shared, presentations have been made to keep you updated with the work and the outcomes. Will members of both task forces please stand up so we can acknowledge their work?

DePaul's strategic plan also calls for enhanced support for faculty and student research and scholarship. I am very excited to work with DePaul's new chief research officer, Daniela Raicu. After an extensive internal search, I announced Daniela's appointment as the associate provost for research in June. In addition to overseeing faculty research support, Daniela also will manage external grant funding, as well as patents and intellectual property transfer. Forming collaborations across the university and expanding student research opportunities will be a high priority.

In Academic Affairs we will also provide added focus and energy to the area of diversity and inclusion. Ruben Parra has already reached out to the diversity advocates and the deans to strengthen our work in this area of major importance.

In July, we officially launched the School of Continuing and Professional Studies. A new school website and branding

debuted this summer, and this fall, SCPS faculty and staff will engage in a strategic planning process. I already mentioned that a dean search will occur this year too.

SCPS carries forward and builds upon the work of its predecessors, the School for New Learning and the Office of Continuing and Professional Education. But it is a departure from the way we have served adult learners in the past with competency-based, individualized degree options. Instead, we will move toward the growing adult market for credit-hour based professional studies degrees and credentials. A new BA in healthcare administration, for example, is launching this fall. SCPS will also host a new Office of Prior Learning Assessment.

DePaul has a longstanding commitment to serve a diverse group of adult learners. SCPS strengthens that commitment. It will position DePaul as a recognized leader in continuing and professional studies.

We will also continue our work to make DePaul a recognized leader in health sciences. A bachelor's in nursing program is making its way through the curricular process and hopefully will launch in fall in 2020. We continue to develop a competitive portfolio of academic programs in health-related professions, including occupational and speech language pathology. We will also continue to elevate our non-clinical health related academic programs. DePaul is renowned in public health, health informatics, health communication, healthcare administration, community health, health law. I want to make sure that is known both in and out of DePaul.

All of these programs will not only meet student demands, they will also fulfill workforce and societal needs.

Together, we must envision a DePaul of the future. Academic excellence stands strong at our university's core. Our strategic

plan keeps us on course. The urban, Catholic, Vincentian mission to serve the public good is our heartbeat.

Because of you, I feel very optimistic and energized. I look forward to our conversation and collaboration in the year ahead.

Thank you so much for all that you do for DePaul University.