

## Convocation 2022

### Remarks by Provost Salma Ghanem September 1, 2022

Good morning, and welcome!

It's so wonderful to see all of you as DePaul begins a milestone year: our 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The anniversary presents an opportunity to appreciate the years of dedication to our students, to scholarship and to our mission that brought us to this moment. It recognizes that all of you—in your individual roles—form the collective that will propel DePaul's future.

The strength of our university and Vincentian mission rests with you. After all, the people make the place.

And so, I would like to begin by extending a special welcome to new members of our community beginning their journeys as Blue Demons.

This includes our new president, Rob Manuel. Welcome, Rob! I am thrilled to work closely with you in service to DePaul, and I know our community is, too.

I also welcome the 57 full-time faculty, who are joining 29 different departments and programs across eight of our colleges. Most of these new colleagues are new to DePaul. But others are familiar people who are stepping into new full-time tenure-line and non-tenure-line faculty roles.

Many new staff are joining us, too. And we have two new deans, Sulin Ba at the Driehaus College of Business and Martine Kei Green-Rogers at The Theatre School.

Many thanks to Tom Donley and Coya Paz Brownrigg for serving as interim deans of Business and Theatre, respectively, and providing capable, steady leadership.

For the first time in 40 years, we are starting an academic year without David Miller. David stepped down as dean of the Jarvis College of Computing and Digital

Media in June. His longtime, innovative service made DePaul a better place, and we are grateful for everything he did.

I extend my gratitude to Lucia Dettori as she begins a two-year appointment as interim dean of CDM.

Time really does fly. In my first Convocation address—in 2019—I mentioned my grandson posing the rather humbling question: “What the heck is a provost?”

Of course, my grandchildren are older and wiser now—or at least think they are wiser. But they still keep me grounded. Recently, I overheard them debating a question. Finally, the younger one settled it. He said: “We should ask grandma. She’s the provolone.”

All cheese aside, I’m honored to serve as your provost. It is always an exciting time to be at DePaul.

Here’s why I see bright days ahead.

For one, the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic are different now.

In response to local, state and federal public health entities’ latest guidance, DePaul is adjusting its mitigation measures.

We are remaining vigilant to changes in the pandemic and the emerging threat of monkeypox. At the same time, we have more opportunities to engage in community with one another and in educational and service opportunities throughout the city.

The highlight of last year was our ability to hold commencement in person. We joined in the celebration of the students, their families and the university community with close to 6,000 students graduating.

As the new year starts, it’s great to see our campuses buzzing with students and life.

We remain closely focused on attracting new students to DePaul. There is some good news on that front.

Compared to last year, freshmen net deposits are up by about 7.4 percent.

Given the ongoing enrollment decline at community colleges, transfer enrollment remains an area of concern. Currently, the number of transferring students is trailing last year. However, applications to transfer to DePaul from other four-year institutions, which is a smaller number than those to come to us from community colleges, are up 17 percent.

Graduate applications are up 24 percent, and graduate enrollment is ahead of last year. And, promisingly, international graduate enrollment has more than doubled.

However, overall, the number of new and returning students is 4.5% behind last year.

It is one thing to attract students and another to retain them.

We understand that the richness of a diverse student body requires strategies that go beyond one size fits all. Our mission demands a duty of care for all admitted students.

That's why we are implementing new tools and initiatives to better support students who have the highest risk of attrition.

- Peer mentorship to incoming first-generation low-income students of color has been a long-standing approach. Now, we're starting to leverage software to provide a more personalized experience. The software allows students to select peer mentors according to demographic information, program of study and interest.
- We're also expanding support services beyond students' first year of study by initiating success coaching for Black and Latinx sophomore students.

- And we're starting to leverage predictive analytics to inform student outreach and support. This lets us target resources where they are needed most.
- We are also focusing on making sure our seniors make it to the finish line. We need to find a way for every senior who is not on academic probation to graduate and become a DePaul alum.

Of course, you are all doing so much to make DePaul a place our students want to call home.

For one, you are introducing innovative curriculums and in-demand programs:

- This fall, the School of Nursing is welcoming its first cohort into the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program. More than 1,000 applications were submitted for just over 30 slots.
- The master's of Occupational Therapy program is also welcoming its first cohort. Like the BSN program, its curriculum will orient students toward service to our community.
- A number of existing graduate and undergraduate programs are adding an option to complete the programs fully online. In other areas, such as the redesigned undergraduate curriculum in the Driehaus College of Business, students have greater flexibility in how and when they learn. This is one way we are working toward the goal of expanding access to higher education.

I'm also proud of the way faculty and students are shining through research.

- In the last fiscal year, DePaul received 152 new and continuation awards from external funding agencies; revenue from sponsored projects totaled more than \$10.7 million dollars.
- DePaul also continued to support more than 140 undergraduate students to perform research under the supervision of faculty mentors. Last year, five DePaul students presented their projects at the inaugural BIG EAST Undergraduate Research Poster Symposium.

Your hard work, innovation and creativity are gaining attention. Here are just a few examples:

- The Princeton Review recently recognized DePaul in its “Best Colleges Guide” and has ranked DePaul’s graduate and undergraduate programs in entrepreneurship and game design.
- The Jarvis College of Computing and Digital Media is rising in the rankings and earning accolades from The Hollywood Reporter, Variety and Fortune magazines, Animation Career Review and Graphic Design USA.
- And the Chicago magazine Newcity Lit recently recognized seven DePaul professors in its annual ranking of Chicago’s publishers, services and other media. The professors are based in The Theatre School and two departments within Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. (*Note to Salma: Those two are the Department of English, and Department of Latin American and Latino Studies*)
- And our Public Relations program was named #1 Outstanding PR Education Program of the Year.

I know we face many challenges: enrollment pressure from increased competition and demographic changes; financial stress; and continuous adjustments to these COVID times. You rise to these challenges. And I am confident you will continue to do so.

I’m so sure of it because I have seen how you answer the question ‘What must be done?’

And what we need to do is make DePaul a top choice institution. We provide a quality education, and will work to continue improving on that quality through retention efforts, graduation rates and program offerings.

All of us together play a role in helping our students access a quality education. We’re responsible for seeing that each student who comes to DePaul not only graduates, but graduates armed with a strong sense of the Vincentian mission and the ability to have a transformative impact on society.

Your actions show time and time again just what the mission means to you.

Last winter, DePaul enrolled 100 Ukrainian students in online courses so they might continue their studies amid the conflict with Russia. This was no small effort.

Staff and faculty from many different areas collaborated quickly to provide the support and logistics that allowed the effort to succeed.

This showed DePaul's Catholic and Vincentian mission in action at its very best: people working together to help students in need pursue their educations.

This effort and your many, many accomplishments inspire me—and I hope you're inspired, too.

I am pledging to take that spirit of collaboration forward. To work with you to address problems and opportunities. To listen and learn from and with you.

Thank you for everything you do for DePaul, for each other and for our students. Now, let's have a great academic year!