

# **Report on President's and Related Campus Activities during AY Year 2018-19**

## **As of March 1, 2019**

### **Introduction**

Just under two years ago, on July 1, 2017, the legislature appropriated \$5.4M as the first of three installments to supply the recurring funding needed to increase the size of New College to 1200 students by 2023-24 and to increase our four-year graduation to 80% by 2027-28. One year later, on July 1, 2018, we received our second appropriation of recurring money (\$3.6M) and, as I write, we anxiously await word on what is promising to be a very tumultuous legislative session of our third and final recurring installment of \$1.6M. We also await word on funding for the new multipurpose building that we will need to house that growth.

In the twenty months since the first appropriation, we have accomplished an enormous amount. We engaged in a strategic planning process to determine how we could meet the enrollment and graduation rate goals we had laid out in the growth plan that we had presented to the State in early 2017, ultimately leading to the “New College Strategic Plan, 2018 – 2028; Cultivating Curiosity, Unleashing Potential” which was approved by the Florida Board of Governors on November 8, 2018. We have increased the size of our faculty over 30%, increased the size of our student affairs team more than 25% and built out other key infrastructure operations such as enrollment management. Those joining us have brought wonderful new expertise. Never had we had such human capital. Our finances, never flush, are no longer precarious, and we can afford to make some modest strategic bets. That is the good news.

### **The Challenge**

The bad news is that our student enrolments are not increasing – they have fallen slightly, and threaten to fall further. Retention is down (we are losing a larger proportion of enrolled students than anticipated) and we have not be able to attract as many admitted students as hoped. This is not an admissions problem, or a student affairs problem, or an academic problem. It concerns all of us, and addressing it will require all hands on deck.

At the town hall meeting on Wednesday, February 27 the VPs and Deans who report to me outlined what they were doing in their areas, and sketched a number of tactical and strategic initiatives. We begin with the tactical, because they are shorter term.

Fuller consideration of longer term strategic initiatives must await the conclusions of some research we've commissioned, and must acknowledge that some of our challenges reflect the larger national discourse and admission trends that favor larger urban institutions, well-known brands, and narrowly pre-professional and technical education. Except for a small number of

nationally known medallion institutions, smaller liberal arts and undergraduate institutions are struggling.

### **Tactical responses**

1. *(Outreach to prospective students)* I asked for faculty volunteers to call admitted applicants. Admissions will provide training. I will contact national merit finalists. Psychology Professor Michele Barton is currently working with Admissions half time. We also seek an additional faculty member to work half-time with admissions. High school students respond very well to faculty members.
2. *(New scholarship programs)* The Foundation has raised money for three new high profile, high prestige scholarship programs. These will be implemented to attract students applying for admission this fall. The provost and I will be approaching a few faculty members to serve as judges.
3. *(First year courses)* The Ad Hoc Committee for the QEP is working to craft a program to address retention. That committee will take some time to craft its recommendations and build buy-in. To help their work, I've asked the Provost's Office to offer an incentive program to have up to 10 faculty members offer a course aimed primarily at first-years. The courses could be team-taught, reworked existing courses, or new. In addition to academic goals, they should: a) have some learning outcomes linked to retention; b) afford opportunities for students to build resilience; c) help students learn to navigate the college; and d) connect students with professionals in other parts of the college. A full report to the Ad Hoc Committee would be due after the completion of the course.
4. *(Catalog)* We will produce a printed catalog of the courses that we currently offer and that we plan to offer next year that could be used by faculty, and as a leave-behind for guidance counselor offices.
5. *(Creating community)* The provost's office will offer a small grant program to faculty and AOCs that want to work with each other or student affairs to offer peer mentoring programs or other programs that build community among students in the same course. The Dean of Student Affairs will establish a similar program for clubs and residential advising.
6. *(Helping students plan for the next semester)* Academic and student affairs will assure that continuing students have plans for the next academic year before leaving campus in May. This includes some plans for courses. We will have clubs and athletic programs name persons involved and report on their expected fall enrollment before students leave for the summer.
7. *(Policy Committee)* I've directed the provost and my chief of staff Brad Thiessen to convene a small policy committee of faculty and staff that will 1) review changes in federal and state policy that affect us, and work to have them mesh with our unique academic program, and, as crucially, 2) identify and recommend changes to policies that work against retention.

8. (*Career counseling and internships*) Effective immediately, the Center for Engagement and Opportunity will report to the new Dean for Outreach and Engagement and will work with Student and Academic Affairs to implement more vocational and professional development and internships. We will create a team for each entering student.

9. (*Data Collection and Analysis*) We will become more data-driven and we need more lead indicators. I have asked Brad Thiessen to convene a small committee that will include Hui-Min Wen and others and that will work with our Data Science program to 1) mine the data we have and 2) capture data about our own students that other schools have found predictive about retention. Examples of mining: look at retention rates by first-year courses, first-year contracts, first-year advisor, first-year dorm, admission rating, high school, and first-year evaluations. Examples of data that other colleges have found relevant to predicting retention include: student plans at end of the first semester and the end of the first year, participation in high impact practices, and community engagement.

10. (*Electronic social life*) Dean Williamson will convene groups of students to discuss and come up for recommendations about student social issues and the use of electronic and social media to drive them.

In addition, to these initiatives, we have engaged a number of external consulting firms to provide tactical support to help both Admissions and Communications and Marketing to redirect many admissions and communications functions. Portara will provide parent communication; Paskill, Stapleton & Lord is doing competitor analysis and creating a distinct position to differentiate New College from the competition, redirecting directing the communications flow to prospective students and their families; and Way Better is assisting in the purchase of names of high-achieving students and handling the numerous aspects of the search process.

### **Strategic Initiatives**

In order to make New College a more welcoming community to individuals from all backgrounds, we created a new cabinet level position: Dean for Outreach and Engagement; and Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer. We were fortunate to be able to hire Dr. Bill Woodson to fill the position. He will spearhead community relations and serve as the college's chief diversity officer. Bill brings to this role a strong track record of leadership on diversity and inclusion initiatives in both the corporate world and higher education. Born in Sarasota, he will increase and formalize our students' civic and community engagement, working with both the faculty and outside organizations to meet their expressed needs. The CEO will report to him. Collaborative projects are Dr. Woodson's specialty, particularly those involving diverse populations. Before Bill began his career in higher education (he served previously as Assistant Dean at the Opus College of Business at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he oversaw admissions, career services, and student life programs for four MBA programs, and led the college's community engagement and corporate outreach efforts), he held leadership positions in product management and development at Johnson & Johnson,

Compaq, and Hewlett-Packard. He earned a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development at the University of Minnesota, an MBA from the University of Michigan, a master's degree in city and regional planning from Harvard University, and a bachelor's degree from Brown University.

At the end of last year academic year, we hired an outside research firm, Art & Science Group, to help us. In the course of laying out the strategic plan, we wanted to investigate how we could improve the New College experience to attract, recruit, and enroll a larger number of new students; retain a higher proportion of our current students, and ensure the vast majority of our students graduate in four years. We began asking why?

- Why are students attracted to NCF? Why are some students not attracted to NCF?
- Why do students choose to enroll (or not enroll) at NCF?
- Why do most students graduate in four years, while others take longer or just leave?

What we came to realize was that while we had lots of *hypotheses*, we had very little real evidence that would let us answer our “why” questions.

Confronted with this realization, and some early data indicating that last year's inquirer and admitted pools were behaving in ways that we did not understand, we sought an outside research group to help us study, analyze and understand at a high level what is happening with our student population, and to analyze a number of possible future scenarios to determine what impact any changes we made to New College would have in student recruitment, enrollment and retention. We wanted a firm that would work with faculty and staff to develop questionnaires that would give us insight into the experiences of prospective students, admitted students, enrolled students, and withdrawn students. We ultimately chose the Art & Science Group which had extensive experience with other liberal arts colleges. Moreover, their research methods matched what we were hoping to find to help us achieve our goals.

During the 2018-2019 academic year, the Art & Science Group has been conducting a combination of in-depth phone and on-line interviews with three sets of students: (1) admitted student applicants (including students who declined to enroll); (2) current and withdrawn students; and (3) potential students who inquired about New College. Sometime after April, we anticipate gaining an understanding of potential changes we could make to the New College experience and the impact those changes would have on student enrollment and retention.

So far, we have received preliminary reports on the first two sets of interviews. We learned that a lot that we already knew or suspected and got some new information. For example, students tend to love their professors, and value the academics that New College offers, even if they leave before graduating. Students who left and continued their education elsewhere did not cite narrative evaluations as a reason, but did note that they appreciated the structure of grades and the feeling of accountability it fostered. Even though they felt that they took advantage of the lack of grades while at New College, they reported enjoying that their peers who did not hand in work now were held accountable by grades. Although they rated social life as less important than the academics, difficulties encountered in the social realm

were what pushed them into leaving. Students who saw themselves fitting seamlessly into the New College culture on a campus visit, found after enrolling, a totally different culture of bullying and negativity (a lot of it online). A surprising number of students who left had decided to do so early in their first year, but did not depart until later. Early findings suggest that the academic side could play as important role in building community as the co-curricular side.

The most crucial part of the Art & Science study has yet to come. We have data about students who were willing to come to New College. But we need information from students who were interested enough to inquire, but chose not even to apply. Art & Science has begun interviewing a robust subset of inquirers to New College, including those who chose not to apply as well as those who did. The data from this group will be available in late April and the campus group will work with Art & Science to merge and understand conclusions emerging from the analysis of the different datasets and to make final recommendations, sometime in May or early June. We will present those conclusions and recommendations at another town hall meeting, and to trustees. The president and the provost will work with the Educational Policy Committee and others to allocate academic positions strategically to help attract and retain more students.

### **Other challenges**

Even as we work on increasing admission and retention, we are planning facilities to house more students and faculty in new buildings. Our BOT Ad Hoc Committee on Student Housing is exploring a number of options for student housing, including: partnering with USF-Sarasota/Manatee to rent space in their first residence hall on campus; housing students for the short term near the campus in rental units; and housing students in a residence hall to be built on 58<sup>th</sup> Street, where New College owns property, across from the new proposed multipurpose facility that will be built with state funds in place of most of the present Palmer Buildings, which are nearing the end of their useful lives.

We are working hard to secure state funding for the new multipurpose facility which will replace most of the Palmer Buildings (Palmer A, which houses Campus Computing; Palmer C, which houses Human Resources, faculty offices, and the Sarasota World Affairs Council; Palmer D, which houses the Registrar; Business Office, Communications and Marketing, Parking Services, and faculty offices; and Palmer E, which houses Data Science, faculty offices, and storage). This space will offer not only additional faculty offices and classrooms, student support and administrative services, but also space for student clubs and activities, recreational space, and a large gathering space for the campus community to get together, which we presently do not have. We understand that the needed funding for the multipurpose facility (\$47M) is unlikely to be allocated all at once, and will likely be appropriated in at least two or three phases.

## Successes

This year we have begun to see the pay-off from last year's hiring season. Recall that we searched in clusters (arts, global, sustainability/water, and human/artificial intelligence) instead of traditional disciplines. We hit the jackpot – the 15 new faculty members who arrived in August, 2018 are brilliant. They are doing cutting edge work in their fields. Perusing the courses that we are offering gives a dazzling glimpse of the intellectual richness of our community. Our students are benefitting greatly by having more faculty, adding to a wider variety of disciplines and cross-disciplines. We will finish this academic year with more and more students working in interdisciplinary fields, and completing their theses in areas such as Applied Mathematics & Computer Science, Biology/Music, Computer Science/Economics, Biochemistry, Biopsychology, International and Area Studies & Chinese Language and Culture, and Political Science & Environmental Studies. With the new faculty to spur them to new heights, we expect even greater things from them in the future.

Because of our slower than expected enrollment growth, and because of the delay in receiving facilities funding, we are currently searching for 7 (instead of 15) continuing faculty members in the fields of epidemiology and global public health, medical anthropology, constitutional law, and applied statistics for tenure-track faculty, and also for three-year visiting appointments in medical humanities, Russian language and literature, and creative writing, all starting in August 2020. As I mentioned above, we will not begin to decide on the remaining 18 positions until we have all the data from Art & Science.

Thanks to Brad Thiessen, our SACSCOC Liaison, the report for our decennial reaffirmation exercise in 2020 is well underway, and on schedule. Our new QEP will be focused on retention and hopefully will include a new first-year experience program, designed to strengthen our students' coping, foundational, and social skills, and to create positive ties among themselves and a sense of belonging to the College. In February, 2019 a QEP team attended the *Gardner First Year Experience Annual Conference* in Las Vegas.

Teams also attended the AAC&U conference in San Francisco on *Creating 21<sup>st</sup> Century General Education: Responding to Seismic Shift*, and *The Educating with Empathy Conference*, sponsored by the Learning and the Brain organization, also in February in San Francisco.

Our first graduate program in Data Science is going strong, and the third cohort will earn Master's degrees in May, 2019. The faculty are supplementing the undergraduate curriculum in STEM and STEAM courses, and working towards an undergraduate Data Science AOC and a combined or slash/AOC. Enrollments in Data Science and Computer Science have outpaced those in other fields. At the BOG Meeting at New College in September 2018, BOG Chair Ned Lautenbach presented Lexis-Nexis, a partner of the Data Science program, with a medal for excellence in program collaboration.

The recent National Science Foundation study of the Baccalaureate Origin of Science PhDs (awarded in 2013-2017) reported that 16.9% of New College of Florida graduates subsequently received PhDs in science and engineering disciplines, a staggering percentage placing us among the 10 top-producing undergraduate institutions in the country, and far higher than any SUS sister institution. The new wing of the Heiser Natural Sciences Complex received a LEEDS Gold Certification from the US Green Building Committee in 2018, a year after its dedication in October, 2017.

We are now in the third year of a grant from the Mellon Foundation. Under the able direction of professors Nova Myhill (English), April Flakne (Philosophy) and now Kim Anderson (Art), it has produced a truly outstanding outpouring of humanities and arts projects. Even though this year is a long way from ending, more than 55 Mellon-funded events have been scheduled and taken place so far, many open to the public. An emphasis on dance started the year with two former Martha Graham principal dancers offering a series of lectures, master classes, and conversations on how Martha Graham, the “Mother of American Modern Dance,” impacted classical ballet and their experiences with the company. They collaborated with the Sarasota Ballet to stage Graham’s ground-breaking *Appalachian Spring* while in town. The NOW Ensemble and Sarasota Contemporary Dance also provided workshops and programs, as did the very popular *Dance for Parkinson’s*, which was expanded from the previous year to include a spring course this year. The *Asian Film Series* continued, sponsored by Mellon, Ringling Museum, Ringling College of Art & Design, New College, and the Elling Eide Center, and included Japanese as well as Chinese films and discussions, open to the community, as most programs are. The grant also helped fund this month’s Black History Month efflorescence of truly inspiring academic, artistic, and activist programming. The scope and sustained excellence would have been remarkable at an institution ten times our size. Hats off to the committee of professors and students under the able direction of Sociology Professor Mecca Zabriskie who made it all happen. The new arts management certificate joint program with the Cross College Alliance holds terrific promise. Speaking of arts, this year marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of New College New Music, Steve Miles’s extraordinary program pairing community outreach with experimental music.

In a completely unexpected development, the Mellon Foundation has invited a second grant proposal to allow New College to partner with the external community to address issues identified by the community using the humanities and arts. The first Mellon Grant allowed us to deepen links among our neighboring Cross College Alliance institutions, to connect with arts organizations and to raise both our own profile and the profile of the arts and humanities. We envision that a second Mellon Grant will enable us and our CCA partners to better engage faculty, staff and students with the local community, local community organizations, and local employers. It could be transformative.

Our faculty members have won some significant, highly competitive external awards. To mention just three, in July, Chris Kottke was awarded a three-year grant by the National Science Foundation to pursue his work on geometric analysis of hyper-Kähler moduli spaces with collaborators from Leibniz Universität (Hanover, Germany), Stanford, MIT, University College London, and the University of Quebec at Montreal. This February, Erin Dean and a collaborator from Emory received a three-year senior research award from the NSF for ethnographic research on renewable forms of energy and their effect on the social, economic and political relationships in Tanzania. Also in February, Emily Saarinen received 2019's Outstanding Undergraduate Science Teacher by the Society for College Science Teachers. A more complete list is available at <https://www.ncf.edu/academics/research-at-new-college/orps/active-awards/>.

With four months to go in academic year 2018-19, the New College Foundation has exceeded our three-year fundraising target of \$11 million that we promised the State that we would raise as a match for growth plan funds. (In fact, we raised \$11.5 million six months ahead of target.) The Clambake event of November 1, raised a record \$350,000 for scholarships. Giving Tuesday on November 27, 2018 generated \$209,219 in a single 24-hour period. Several other major gifts were secured, including: the Isermann Foundation of \$1.2 million via bequest for scholarships; the Trustee Challenge put forth by Trustee Skestos (\$500,000) for scholarships; and a \$100,000 gift from Trustee Johnston (half for the Trustee scholarships and half as a challenge for the Giving Tuesday effort). We also secured a new scholarship for STEM students given by Andrew and Judith Economos (\$500,000). This will be launched in the fall for 2019 and is called the Archimedes Scholars Program. We also give our gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Kupper who have included New College with a seven-figure gift in their estate plans.

Dr. Beverley Tatum, noted psychologist, author of *Why Are All The Black Kids Sitting Alone in the Cafeteria*, and former president of Spelman College for Women, will be the New College Commencement speaker and receive an honorary degree on May 17, 2019.

## **Conclusion**

I am 100% committed to achieving the goals of our strategic plan. We have it within ourselves to graduate not just 80%, but more than 90%, of the students who enter our institution, and to claim as a result our place among the top 20 liberal arts colleges in the nation.

For now, we are falling short of the enrollment and retention targets that were built into our growth and strategic plans, and it is urgent that we address those shortfalls. The Board of Governors and the State have invested in us and expect to see progress. The tactics outlined at the outset will help. I also hope that they will stimulate discussion. I have no doubt that there are great ideas that are not on that list. Please do not be shy about sharing.



With your help, we will emerge from these challenges stronger. With the insights obtained from working together with the Art & Science Group, New College will be in a good position to achieve our goals, to align ourselves to the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and to demonstrate to all that the State's investment in New College of Florida was a wise one. I look forward to the honor of serving as President of New College of Florida for the coming year.

Sincerely,  
Don

### **Postscript**

One way I try to keep the college in front of the local community and the larger higher education and disciplinary communities is by writing. Here is a list of publications that have appeared since this time last year, together with links to where you can read them. Argument, comments, and criticism very welcome.

#### ***Inside Higher Ed***

"The role Jill Conway played in shaping women's and others' education"

*August 24, 2018*

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2018/08/24/role-jill-conway-played-shaping-womens-and-others-education-opinion>

#### ***SRQ Daily Saturday Perspectives Edition***

"The Charm and Utility of Medieval Studies" *March 10, 2018*

[https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-03-10/7960 The-Charm-and-Utility-of-Medieval-Studies](https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-03-10/7960-The-Charm-and-Utility-of-Medieval-Studies)

"April and Seniors" *April 14, 2018*

[https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-04-14/8194 April-and-Seniors](https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-04-14/8194-April-and-Seniors)

"What do you tell a Graduate?" *May 12, 2018*

[https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-05-12/8336 What-Do-You-Tell-a-Graduate](https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-05-12/8336-What-Do-You-Tell-a-Graduate)

"Vive la Différence" *June 9, 2018*

[https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-06-09/8517 Vive-la-Difference](https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-06-09/8517-Vive-la-Difference)

"In Loco Parentis" *September 8, 2018*

[https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-09-08/9102 In-LoCo-Parentis](https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-09-08/9102-In-LoCo-Parentis)

"Books, Coffee, and Conversation" *October 13, 2018*

[https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-10-13/9351 Books--Coffee-and-Conversation](https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-10-13/9351-Books--Coffee-and-Conversation)

"Liberal and Conservative" *November 10, 2018*

[https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-11-10/9547 Liberal-and-Conservative](https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-11-10/9547-Liberal-and-Conservative)

“Need blind admissions and Mr. Bloomberg” *December 8, 2018*

[https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-12-08/9705\\_Need-Blind-Admissions-and-Mr-Bloomberg](https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2018-12-08/9705_Need-Blind-Admissions-and-Mr-Bloomberg)

“Better than a resolution: January at New College” *January 12, 2018*

[https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2019-01-12/9898\\_Better-Than-a-Resolution-January-at-New-College](https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2019-01-12/9898_Better-Than-a-Resolution-January-at-New-College)

“ROI on a College Degree” *February 9, 2018*

[https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2019-02-09/10066\\_ROI-on-a-College-Degree](https://www.srqmagazine.com/srq-daily/2019-02-09/10066_ROI-on-a-College-Degree)

### **Sarasota Herald-Tribune**

“Activism, free speech and New College” *March 1, 2018*

<https://www.heraldtribune.com/news/20180301/activism-free-speech-and-new-college>

“Region has creativity to burn, so let’s help the world” *September 27, 2018*

<https://www.heraldtribune.com/news/20180927/higher-learning-region-has-creativity-to-burn-so-lets-help-world>

“In praise of the humanities” *October 25, 2018*

<https://www.heraldtribune.com/news/20181025/oshea-in-praise-of-humanities>

“The soul of a white nationalist” *November 23, 2018*

<https://www.heraldtribune.com/news/20181123/soul-of-white-nationalist>

“Beauty, truth and the university” *January 25, 2019*

<https://www.heraldtribune.com/news/20190124/higher-learning-beauty-truth-and-university>

“Through history, we face the future” *February 21, 2019*

<https://www.heraldtribune.com/news/20190221/oshea-through-history-we-face-future>

### **Mathematics**

“The Surprising Resolution of the Poincaré Conjecture,” Chapter 13, pp. 401-414 in Rowe, David E., Sauer, Tilman, Walter, Scott A., editors, *Beyond Einstein: Perspectives in Geometry, Gravitation, and Cosmology in the Twentieth Century*, Volume 14 of *Einstein Studies*, Birkhäuser, 2018, New York.

[https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4939-7708-6\\_13](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-4939-7708-6_13)

“Prime Numbers and the Riemann Hypothesis” Book Review, pp. 811-815, in *Notices of the American Mathematical Society*, Volume 65, Number 7, August 2018.

<https://www.ams.org/journals/notices/201807/rnoti-p811.pdf>

*Ideals, Varieties, Algorithms* (with David Cox and John Little), Fourth Edition, Corrected Publication, 646p, Springer: New York, Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London. 2018.