

College of Arts and Sciences

Fall Address – 2017

Provost Murphy, faculty, staff, and students, welcome to the College of Arts and Sciences Fall Address and Awards event, and to a new academic year. Every year, I look forward to welcoming new students and faculty, eager to take part in all that ISU has to offer. To the new faculty and staff, I want to say that your success is the most important part of our job, as the success of our students depends on it.

Especially for the benefit of our new colleagues, I like to take a minute in this address to introduce the College office, and some of the new faces in the leadership. We have two new department chairs in the College this year. I would like to introduce Ross Kennedy as the new Chair of the History Department, and T.Y. Wang as chair of Politics and Government. Chris Horvath is serving this year as Interim Chair of Philosophy, and Juliet Lynd as the Acting Directory of Latin American-Latino/Latina Studies.

I have the privilege of working with an outstanding group of people in the College office, who possess tremendous knowledge of the College of Arts and Sciences, and are committed to its mission. Sally Parry is the Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Student Affairs; Marla Reese-Weber is the Associate Dean for Personnel, Budget, and Planning; and Joe Blaney is Associate Dean for Research, Facilities, and Technology. Debbie Fox is the Assistant Dean for External Relations, and is responsible for College events. She also publishes CASNews weekly, and assists with the organization of several advisory boards in the College. Carrie Wieburg is our Business Manager, managing the budget and serving as the Dean's assistant. I appreciate very much the hard work and selfless dedication of these colleagues to advancing the mission of the College. Tammy Hansen is the Administrative Aid, and Val Ilyukhina serves as our Office Manager. They present a welcoming face to visitors to the College, and keep the office running efficiently. Mike Regilio is the Director of CAS-IT, leading a team that assists faculty and staff with technology needs, in desktop support, web design, and advice on recent technology advances. Our Director of Development is Stephanie Sellers, now beginning her fifth year of fund raising for the College. I am pleased to work with this dedicated group of individuals whose commitment to the success of our students and faculty will continue to be critical to our growth as a College.

We anticipate another busy year in the College. We will sponsor two public presentations this semester. Maria Smith of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology is this fall's Distinguished College Lecturer, and at 7:00 P.M. on November 7, in this room, he will present "Tales Told by the Bones: The Archaeology of the Human Skeleton." The date and title of the Spring Distinguished Lecture will be announced in the future, but it will be given by Laura Vogel, of the School of Biological Sciences. We will also have another lecture in our Main Street College series, to be held at the Alumni Center. I expect to be able to send out information about the speakers and the date soon. I hope you are able to attend both of these talks.

Of course, these presentations represent only a tiny piece of the remarkable scholarship that occurs in our College, which is both broad and deep. In FY 17, College faculty submitted 111 proposals for external funding, with 64 being funded. Both of these numbers are down from previous years, but the total amount of funding was up, to \$4.95M. The decline in funded projects reflects partly the increasingly difficult funding landscape. However, the decline in submissions probably includes more. It may partly arise from pessimism, given that funds are known to be harder to come by. However, it could also be more local. Now, however, there are changes being made in Research and Sponsored Programs to better coordinate pre- and post-award activities, including relieving investigators of much of the stress associated with such things as purchasing and personnel contracts. Given the declining amount of money available, I think we can consider 2017 a reasonably successful year. Not included in the figures I cited are several large grants have been funded in the last few weeks, including a Major Research Instrumentation grant from NSF to Laura Vogel. I have hopes that 2018 will be more successful than ever.

As is the case every year, a number of our faculty have been honored for their professional achievement. Distinguished Professor Roberta Trites received the International Brothers Grimm Award, from the International Institute for Children's Literature, in Osaka. She will be traveling to Japan soon to receive the honor. It recognizes outstanding contributions to children's literature criticism. She is the third American to receive the award, and the first American woman to receive it. Distinguished Professors Rainer Grobe and Charles Su have been honored by the Research Corporation for Science Advancement with the SEED grant, which stands for Singular Exceptional Endeavor of Discovery. They received this honor after having been named Cottrell Science Scholars in 2015. From the 400 scholars so designated, five projects received the SEED grant, of which the Su and Grobe project was one. Amy Wood, of the Department of History, received an Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship to support her study of the nation's evolving attitudes toward criminals.

Our faculty are continually engaged with our students as well, from our successful competitive student teams to the collaboration of students and faculty in research and creative activity. You heard me say last spring that 40% of the refereed articles coming out of our college have student co-authors. We continue to attract new faculty that understand and welcome the close collaboration between students and faculty, and take very seriously the mentoring role for undergraduate students that is expected of our colleagues. I had the privilege to witness that engagement myself on two occasions this summer, at the archaeological field school led by Logan Miller in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, and the avian research station with the Wren Crew, led by Charles Thompson and Scott Sakaluk. They all went easy on me, and didn't make me work half as hard as the students did, but I left with fresh understanding of the commitment that our students have to a full understanding of the disciplines they study, and the commitment that our faculty have in fostering that understanding.

In these addresses in the past, I have expressed my interest in fostering more interdisciplinary interactions among our departments and schools, and even with other colleges. I'm happy to see that this interest has been embraced by many in the College. Several of our interdisciplinary

initiatives have gained momentum. A prime example is the work of scholars in the Departments of Geography, Geology, and the Environment; and Sociology-Anthropology; and the School of Biological Sciences, among others, to form the Transdisciplinary Water Center Steering Committee, dedicated to teaching, research, and outreach activities concerning effective and viable water solutions and stewardship within our region and far beyond.

A second new initiative has come from a series of very generous gifts from a donor, with a vision for an interactive art space for youth and families. This project, which we are calling The Art Station, includes faculty from Arts and Sciences, the College of Fine Arts, and the College of Applied Science and Technology. The impetus for the project is the recognition of how important the arts are in cognitive and social development of children and families, and the fact that the arts are getting less attention in the public schools than they have in the past. We are hoping to be able to announce the hiring of the Director of the Art Station in the next couple of days.

Interdisciplinary programs, as important as they are, can be fragile. If a single contributor leaves the University, it can deal a serious blow to the effort. This year, the Women's and Gender Studies program lost four key players just since last January – the last just a few days before classes were to begin. In particular, the new Queer Studies Concentration would have to close in only its second year if help could not be found. Director Alison Bailey has been able to shore up the program for this year, and we will recruit for a joint hire with WGS and Sociology-Anthropology this year. We will do all we can to make sure that WGS is returned to health for some time to come. I also want to stress that the College remains very amenable to the development and growth of other interdisciplinary areas that would serve the needs of our students.

Also in the interest of interdisciplinary growth, the College is again making available pool of \$60,000 in order to support further projects. Department chairs and school directors have been sent information about the process by which interdisciplinary faculty teams may propose a project that could be used to expand an existing program (such as one of our interdisciplinary minors) or to build a new interdisciplinary connection. We are glad that we were able to continue this program for another year, and will continue to fund it as long as we're able.

Also helping us remain healthy is charitable giving to the College. I was pleased to announce last spring that we had received another large gift to our World Wide Campus Fund, which is intended to help a student with the cost of studying abroad. With now over \$60,000 in that fund, we have been able to help our first student. Julia Martin, in French Education, is in France for the 2017-2018 academic year. The call for applications for next spring's award was sent to the chairs and directors yesterday.

With the public announcement of the University's comprehensive campaign just days away, Stephanie has been working very hard to see that we meet our campaign goals. The College has identified four broad priorities for the campaign: Expanding student support, Attracting and developing top faculty, Solving problems in a complex world, and Sustaining excellence. These

goals appear to resonate with many of our donors, if Stephanie's success is any indication. We are now 60% through the campaign period, which began in 2013 and will conclude in 2020, but we are 70% of the way to our campaign goal of raising \$20M. In addition, Stephanie is given annual goals, and in the last fiscal year, Stephanie exceeded that goal by 38%. We are now 18% through the fiscal year, and Stephanie has already raised 41% of this year's goal of \$2.4M. We will soon be traveling together to St. Louis and Washington DC, but Stephanie makes solo trips to the South, the Southwest, Florida, and of course frequent trips to Chicago. I'm very confident that we will meet our goal in the campaign.

So, despite the difficult budget that we have faced in the last two years, we are financially healthy. We will be able to recruit for 16 faculty positions this year. Two of these positions arise from failed searches last year, the first time in my six years that we have had more than a single such failure. It is my hope that the reputational blow that the state surely took among prospective faculty in the last two years will be eased, and our pools will increase in size to their previous levels.

I believe that one of the biggest challenges we face is the changing perception of higher education, and public higher education in particular. Some of you know that Jim Skibo and I have been writing some pieces for the Pantagraph about issues surrounding higher education, especially concerning the state of the liberal arts. All twelve of the pieces will soon be available from the CAS website, and there will be a story and links in an upcoming CASNews. It is disheartening to us that many people, while recognizing the value of a college degree, denigrate many of the very disciplines that are in fact at the heart of that degree. One of the dangers of the corporatization of the university, in my opinion, is that we think of the university not simply as an economic engine for a community and state, which it surely is, but that it is seen solely in economic terms at the level of the individual student. The defense of the liberal arts, then, becomes an argument about economic benefit: yes, you *can* get a job with a history degree; employers are looking for the skills that the liberal arts excel in teaching: critical thinking, communication, teamwork, and adaptability. These defenses are true, and Jim and I have made them repeatedly. But in my opinion, they are weak defenses. The defensiveness of the arguments, in my opinion, still plays into the neo-liberal idea that value and success are measured strictly in economic terms. I think we need to change the argument. One of our campaign goals is Solving problems in a complex world. Our complex problems are not going to yield to a single perspective. There is no single discipline that can successfully address the social, political, or indeed, economic problems that the world faces today.

I feel the same way about interdisciplinary work, by the way. Why is interdisciplinary work important? Because the funding agencies like it? No. It's because complex problems, such as global water quality, need to be addressed in ways that transcend the lines separating our traditional disciplines.

I don't have a specific call to action about all of this. But I want you to know that we take these issues seriously in our College, and talk about them often. We will continue to work for the values outlined in our strategic plan: A strong liberal arts and sciences tradition; promotion of

diversity in all of its forms; faculty-student collaboration in learning and research; and encouraging openness and civil discussion of diverse views. We will continue to do this in a spirit of cooperation and collegiality, and we will live up to the promise of our faculty and the students whom we serve.