

Good afternoon, Welcome to the College of Arts and Sciences Fall 2020 address and awards ceremony. As the Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences I would like to welcome each of you back to an academic year like no other.

Typically, during the fall semester we gather for the Dean to provide an update on progress, accomplishments, and business of the College. We celebrate several student, faculty, and staff awards and introduce new faculty colleagues. In some ways there is nothing typical about this semester, yet in others, we keep doing what we typically do, and do well. In the midst of pandemic chaos, a parallel universe of normal, typical business continues for the College. We continue with our motto, “Gladly we learn and teach”.

Our faculty continue to embrace “gladly we learn” with ground-breaking research that involves students in areas of discovery that are transformative for living in a complex, global world. Our faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences take very seriously our responsibility of generating new knowledge and synthesizing existing knowledge in new ways. Last year brought another remarkable record of publications, presentations, creative exhibitions, and external funding awards. Our faculty publish articles in top tier journals and books in some of the world’s most prestigious scholarly presses. They exhibit creative work in the most respected peer-reviewed competitions. CAS investigators in 13 departments submitted 72 proposals asking for nearly \$32 million resulting in 40 successful awards for \$6.7 million. The amount of dollars requested in FY20 was in excess of \$14 million more than in FY19. In addition to external funding, we see that our faculty use internal resources such as University Research Grants and sabbaticals to make transformative progress on their research.

Our motto of “Gladly we teach” has never had such a poignant and pressing meaning to us as in the last six months. I know you each worked extraordinarily hard over the summer months when typically, that time is used for research pursuit and deserved family and personal rejuvenation. You essentially redesigned each of your courses from scratch. I know that many of you invested hours in workshops with CTLT to learn new pedagogical methods and technologies. You did all of this through a confusing landscape of how our university was going to open in the fall with those plans shifting and changing as new information came to light. And now with the fall semester well underway, you have continued to be nimble due to the trial and error of a new way of teaching and to respond to student absences due to illness. Despite the challenges of teaching during a pandemic, I remain in awe of

how faculty and staff in CAS continue to live out our commitment to individualized attention for our students. Despite the logistical challenges, you continue to deliver engaging, rigorous courses. And I realize you do all of this at great personal sacrifice as this way of teaching in these times is much more time and labor intensive.

I would like to share one response I had a few weeks ago from one of our faculty colleagues in CAS:

“Yes, I’ve spent months being exhausted to my core, I consider myself blessed. The kind of work that is sometimes so draining, that requires so much passion and energy, is exactly the work I want to be doing. The lows are definitely low. But the highs - those shape lives. Not just those of my students but mine as well.”

As I mentioned that in the midst of a pandemic, the business of the College, the University and your department continues. We are confident that this will end and the characteristic of “strong and stable” will bring us to the other side of this, but where we go from here, I anticipate to be more characterized by our campaign theme of Redbirds Rising. The University must be nimble and responsive to the needs of a dynamic world. We will not be waiting for the end of the pandemic, so I want to talk about some plans for our direction to begin even this year.

One issue I would like to address is the search for the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. The search should be happening this year but as you can imagine we would be ill-advised to entertain a search with travel restrictions. The Provost will make a determination in early spring as to an interim dean for the FY 22 year.

The University and College will make a vigorous investment in student success. As you all have heard, even during a pandemic, student recruitment numbers were strong this year. While the university overall saw less than a 1% decline in enrollment, the College of Arts and Sciences continues its strength with a 1% increase in enrollment. This is good news, but we need to focus more intentionally on student success once students make the decision to come to ISU. I do not want to paint a falsely rosy picture here. We could do better. Over the past five years, CAS saw a fall to fall student retention decline of 4.5% and a 6-year graduation rate decline of 6.5%. You might wonder if this is insignificant, but what is worrisome is that this is a trend with incremental drops each year. We are going in the wrong direction. I put this to you not as a “business problem” of enrollment and retention. I see this as an ethical issue. When we admit students and do not partner with their success, we do harm. They leave the university with no degree

and likely holding student loan debt. In a world that is economically bifurcated between those with an education and those without an education, our student success investments are a moral issue. We will be asking each department to examine their unique data and circumstances to see where practices or policies have become a barrier for student success.

Student success is both an academic and a personal issue. Just as I discussed our need to invest in academic student success, there is a related area of personal success that we have a responsibility for. All students should feel welcome and engaged in our classrooms and programs. This means students from diverse backgrounds should feel included. We can do that by examining our teaching, research mentoring, and advising for inclusive practices and culturally responsive practices. I want to mention a number of efforts and opportunities from the College.

Last year the Provost Office offered microaggressions training for every department. Several departments had to cancel their training due to the shift to work at home. They are offering that program anew and if your department did not schedule a training, you should. Culturally, we often do not know what we do not know, and, in that lapse, we are vulnerable to insensitive and hurtful behavior.

The College participated in the Provost's program of GROWTH Change teams and identified four areas for professional development this year including:

1. Consider the ways that increased empathy can impact classroom dynamics
2. Continued professional development on understanding diverse identities and experiences
3. Discovering ways to improve ASPT policies for equity
4. Engage reflective practices to understand student perspectives, practices, and needs.

I want to thank Scott Jordan, Linda Clemmons, Jeff Barrett, and Heidi Verticchio for their leadership on this initiative during the summer. The College will be partnering with the GROWTH Change process to facilitate meaningful activities to move us forward in these four areas.

The College office always provides monthly professional development each year. We distributed a flier on our series in both electronic form and paper fliers to your office mailbox. This year the theme of several of the sessions will be on inclusive teaching practices.

Perhaps one of the most important initiatives I want to announce is a new program that will start with student forums for our CAS students, particularly from underrepresented populations in our College. We heard loud and clear last fall with the Antiracist ISU activism that all students do not feel welcome here and that is shameful on us. We continue to see throughout this year that our society operates with insidious institutionalized bias and oppression. The College of Arts and Sciences is not immune from this. With the collaboration of Doris Houston's office and two student outreach leaders we will be holding 3 student forums this semester for our three divisions. This will be run by students for students and will be an opportunity to hear and learn what experiences they are having in our classrooms and programs. This will be valuable input as to how we grow inclusive environments. The listening to student forums will be followed by a student advisory group largely populated by students from underrepresented groups.

Just as we need to invest in student success, we also need to invest in faculty success through examination of our ASPT guidelines. This investment will be in both areas of proximal considerations due to the impact of COVID and in long term investments in ASPT policies that are sensitive to issues of equity and inclusion. We continue to make efforts to recruit more diverse faculty and staff, but just like with student retention, if we do not have inclusive environments that embrace diversity, this becomes an ethical issue.

An initiative that has been in the quieter planning stage in the University is the Engineering Program. Originally, representatives from CAS and CAST have been involved with early planning discussions with the consulting firm, Canon Design. Recently we added more faculty stakeholders to the planning groups and this fall, Canon Design will be holding faculty forums to receive broader input from across the university. If the University goes forward with an Engineering Program, broad input will be valuable for it to be truly integrated into the ISU culture.

An important initiative this fall, while not specific to the College, is the University efforts for Voter Education during this election year. As an American Democracy Project and a Carnegie Community Engaged campus there are many initiatives to promote responsible citizenship with this election year. Please check the website for the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning. As we all can palpate the tension of this election, we anticipate that the evening of the election and the subsequent days might be emotionally charged for our campus community.

CESL is planning a number of processing groups for our students to serve as safe places to talk about their emotions. More information on that will be coming out.

Lastly, I want to mention that as difficult as this time is, it is marching on and we know that there will be a post-COVID life ahead of us. The Provost Office will be leading discussions on post-COVID planning to begin in spring. We know that much has been learned from this process and in addition to the challenges, this has thrust us forward in some areas of growth and good processes we may not have realized prior to the pandemic.

Out of necessity, we have been focused on the acute moments of managing this semester and each day amidst the anxiety for our health, are loved ones, and our financial stability. We forget in the midst of pandemic crisis that in a parallel universe, many good things with the College of Arts and Sciences have still occurred. And I am not only hopeful, I am confident that there are many more good things ahead for the College of Arts and Sciences. We have certainly been humbled by these events, but humility can be one of life's great teachers. We have all the potential to rise from this stronger, more compassionate, and more hopeful for a bright future. We have good work to do, so let's keep doing it together.