

Provost's Convocation 2017

- *September 27, 2017*
- *Stephen V. Sundborg, S.J.*

The Provost's Convocation is an important gathering at the start of an academic year: to gather with all the faculty, especially the new faculty, and the academic staff from all of the colleges and schools, and from all areas which serve the academic purposes of the university.

Bob, thank you for inviting me to speak by way of introduction to this Provost's Convocation. I look forward especially to your remarks as the leader of the academic enterprise of Seattle U.

I want to start as president by thanking you, Bob, on behalf of the whole university for how generously, how ably, how openly you are serving as Interim Provost in these years. From all sides I hear gratitude and admiration for how you are carrying out this responsibility. We applaud you.

Welcome all faculty, especially new faculty, to this academic year, and welcome to all academic staff who are so vital to the quality of our academic programs and service of our students and of our faculty. You are critical to our educational mission.

Congratulations to all holders of chairs and professorships. You represent our academic quality; you anchor our college and schools; you further our research; and by holding those positions you support your colleagues.

I am joined this afternoon in this part of the Provost's Convocation, before the remarks of Bob Dullea, by two other members of the Administrative Cabinet:

- Dr. Natasha Martin, VP for Diversity and Inclusion
- Dr. Alvin Sturdivant, VP for Student Development

They are here because they are new to the Cabinet, but also because what they are about and what they lead is vital to and is integrated into what we do academically, how we educate the whole person, and what culture we create among us. I will invite each of them to say a few words about how what they do is one with and complements what you do as faculty and as academic staff.

Let me say something about how I, together with the Cabinet, see the next chapter of Seattle University. I am helped in this by monthly meetings of the Deans and Cabinet together in open discussion of all issues facing us, by quarterly meetings of the 65-person University Leadership Council—inclusive of many faculty members—and by deliberations with the Board of Trustees.

We have a consensus that we are moving ahead confidently because of a clear mission, an excellent core curriculum, significant enhancement of our educational quality, by technology and new modes of delivery, a greater role of research in the university, new institutes of importance to carry out our mission such as the Institute for Catholic Thought and Culture and the

Indigenous Peoples Institute, a stronger reputation and visibility both regionally and more widely, ever-increasing application of academics to critical issues and to service of local communities, a successful fundraising campaign which is on track, a commitment to create the new Center for Science and Innovation as the largest project ever of Seattle U, and the development of more sophisticated and professional ways of operating as a university.

We are strong, we are stable, we are doing so much all at once. Bob will talk about some of the specific issues with which we are engaged.

The biggest questions our current development raise for me are:

1. First, can we be clearer about where we are going; what we will look like in 5 to 7 years; what we want to be and what we can be? Perhaps there is so much going on from all sides that we have a greater need than ever for a better sense of direction, not so much an inspiring vision, but a clear marker or milestone for the future. Finding and clarifying this direction will be a priority of this year.
2. Secondly, we need to have a new, more up-to-date understanding of our students. Who are they? How do they learn? What do they need from us? How can we meet them where they are and take them where we want them to go? How do we today put the good of our students first, which is our first goal? How can we grow in our confidence in educating, guiding, and forming them? Who our students are today and how we understand and relate with them underlies the challenges of the next chapter of our education.
3. Third, our own culture as faculty, staff, and administrators has changed in these years for many reasons of size, complexity, finances, segmentation, the time we have and the spaces in which we work. We can't go back to a previous culture. We need to create a new culture among ourselves with all of the opportunities and challenges of knowledge of one another and respect, governance and voice, common purpose and shared mission.
4. Fourth, all three of these—direction, service of students, and culture—would be so much more easily attainable if we had greater financial resources to dedicate to them. As an independent university—which means we are completely dependent on the tuition and fees of students and on the generosity of donors—our financial resources over the next 5 to 7 years will be limited, constrained. The development of realistic financial plans with prioritization of investments and increased revenue from academic programs will be ever more pressing.

To face these issues of our direction, our knowledgeable service of our students, our culture, and our finances. I am advocating and attempting to develop the capacity among us to utilize discernment which is the greatest gift and resource of Jesuit education. We don't need only to discuss and debate and deliberate about these issues of the next chapter; we need to discern them. This means listening, this means the voices of all need to be heard, this means being patient and taking time. This means going deep, this means simplifying and becoming clear. Discernment is about finding the truth of what we will do and who we will be. If what we want most for our students is for them to be able to discern their life choices we need to discern our own direction

as a university. You will hear more about this from me as I invite us to be a more discerning university.

Two vital aspects—each of them touching all we do—are the dimensions of our education represented by VP for Diversity and Inclusion, Natasha Martin, and VP for Student Development, Alvin Sturdivant. Neither diversity and inclusion, nor student growth and development are separate from our academic endeavors but require an active collaboration and an integration if we are to be truly dedicated to educating the whole person, to professional formation, and to empowering leaders for a just and humane world.

No university could find better leaders for these university-wide efforts vital to us all than we have in Natasha and Alvin. As I invite them to address you, please thank them for their generous service.