

**SUNY Maritime College
Convocation 2021
President's Address**

First, I would like to acknowledge and thank our terrific Facilities and Student Residential Life staff for their rapid response to the many incidents on campus caused by last night's storm. We had electrical and flooding problems on campus throughout the night, and our staff did a terrific job managing multiple storm-related events on campus. I hope everyone weathered last night's storm with minimal property damage.

Acknowledgement Summer Sea Term 2021

Second, words cannot express my deep appreciation to all the efforts by numerous faculty and staff that resulted in a very successful Summer 2021 Sea Term. The end result was that we were able to make up for the loss of last summer's Sea Term, and the vast majority of our cadets were able to make up their lost sea time and are now back on track towards graduation. There are far too many people to thank, but I would like to thank in particular Captain McManus, Chief Mate Mahanna, Chief Engineer Bem, and the rest of the crew of Empire State. I would also like to thank all the deck and engine faculty who put in countless hours planning and participating in this summer's Sea Term, in particular Pete Vecchio who sailed as Chief Mate, Tamara Gilmartin and Jeff Spillane who sailed as Senior Deck Training Officers, Sean Carswell who sailed as Senior Engine Training Officer. Finally, I would like to thank all of the staff who worked so hard "behind the scenes" from our HR Department who managed the hiring and crewing for Summer Sea Term, to the Chartwells staff, many of whom sailed the entire 134 days, to JoAnn Sprague who provided all the necessary staff support before, during, and after Summer Sea Term. I am sure I am missing someone, but for all those who had a role to play in ensuring the success of this summer's Sea Term, please accept my thanks and gratitude for your efforts.

Announcement: New VP of Finance and Campus Operations

Next, I am very pleased to announce our newest Cabinet member and Vice President of Finance and Campus Operations, Roxanne Thompson. Roxanne was selected from a pool of more than 50 applicants for the position, and she clearly demonstrated she was the best candidate. In fact, I have to say that my interview with Roxanne was one of the best interviews I have ever had with any candidate for any position. I ask everyone to please extend their congratulations and best wishes to Roxanne as she assumes an important new role at Maritime College. Roxanne and Scott will be spending the next few weeks transitioning their roles and responsibilities. Again, please join me in extending our best wishes to Scott as he prepares to leave Maritime sometime in the coming weeks.

Construction Update

As many of you may have noticed, there is a lot of construction activity on campus, and much of it will be as Scott described, "intrusive." So, I would like to briefly update everyone on the construction activity on campus, and how long some of these activities will "intrude" on other campus activities.

Reflections

I hope everyone had a great summer. I must admit my summer was a bit disappointing. The combination of a cold spring and wet summer resulted in the complete failure of my vegetable garden with most of my zucchini, squash, and cucumbers rotting. Kim will tell you that my summer gardening brings me great pride and joy, so it was a tough summer.

I also spent a bit of the summer reflecting on my professional journey thus far, and thinking about my journey moving forward. I would like to spend just a few minutes sharing two personal stories and what they mean to Maritime College.

The first story is of a new faculty member. Some of you may know that my career in higher education began in 1989 when I was selected to join the Coast Guard Academy's permanent military teaching faculty. I was eager and enthusiastic about the new opportunity. I felt professionally prepared. I was well versed in the material I was presenting. Yet, every time I thought I had it all figured out, the students would remind me that I had much more to learn. It took several years of trial and error, successes and missteps before I became what I thought was an effective classroom instructor, but I found I never stopped trying to improve my teaching.

The second story is of a new president, who seven years ago was selected to become Maritime College's 11th President. I was similarly eager and enthusiastic about the new opportunity. I also felt professionally prepared. The positions of increasing responsibility in higher education had groomed me for this new role. Yet, like that new instructor, I have learned many lessons from my successes and missteps. And like that experienced instructor, I'm still learning and trying to improve.

Three Lessons Learned

Over these past seven years, I learned many lessons, but I would like to share three of the lessons I have learned. First, serving as President is all about relationships! I understand the importance of taking the time and effort to build relationships both internally and externally. I recognize the value of engaging more frequently and personally interacting with members of our campus community and I'm committed to finding more opportunities to engage with each of both formally and informally. Many faculty have asked about bringing back the receptions I used to sponsor after the Faculty Meetings, and I am committed to again sponsoring these receptions, as long as health and safety protocols allow, to provide important opportunities for informal conversations and engagement.

Second, while I am proud of our strategic plan and the process we underwent to develop the plan, I have become more aware that some of you may not see or feel a connection between our strategic goals and priorities and your roles and responsibilities on campus. My commitment to you is to focus on sharing clear and consistent priorities and providing opportunities for you to directly engage in these priorities.

Third, I realize the benefit of taking more time to offer explanation and clarification when rolling out a new idea or initiative. "Why?" and "How?" are important questions that need to be answered in advance. For example, the transition to a contemporary three-School academic structure is an initiative that I believe is important to Maritime College's future. However, the concept was presented to the faculty late in the process with limited opportunities to discuss the why and how of moving to School-based structure. In my effort to run with the concept, there was limited time for you to catch up, leading to ambiguity and confusion. The roll-out of the Centers of Excellence is, perhaps a similar example. The Schools and Centers of Excellence are both important initiatives that should continue moving forward, but must be carried out in a fashion that allows everyone to understand clearly the why and how.

Three Imperatives

As I look ahead, I strongly believe that Maritime College's future is at a crossroads, and I feel a sense of urgency as we consider which path to take. I would like to present Three Imperatives as our focus for the next Three Months – Increasing Enrollment, Improving Campus Climate, and Meeting Industry Needs. For each, I will answer the questions Why? and How?, and present suggestions for campus engagement.

Imperative: Increase Enrollment – WHY?

First, it is imperative we Increase Enrollment.

Why? Maritime College's enrollment continues to decrease and presents a significant risk to our future if not addressed. While COVID may have exasperated this decline, this graph shows, Maritime College's enrollment has decreased by 16%

over the past 6 years, and decreased by 6% since last year alone. These declines are due to reductions in number of incoming students since 2015 and increases in students not returning to Maritime due to graduation or attrition.

First Year Retention Trends

The percent of first-time full-time students returning to Maritime College to begin their second year has fallen to 78% for the past two consecutive years. These are the lowest levels we have seen in many years. We need to refocus our attention on improving the rate at which our students return to Maritime College for their second year.

High School Graduates in the U.S.

Unfortunately, future demographics and enrollment trends indicate an increasingly competitive market for recruitment of high school graduates. As highlighted in the Chronicle of Higher Education, the number of students graduating from high school is forecasted to decrease by more than 8% nationally by 2028-2029.

Regional Growth/Decline

This decrease is expected to vary considerably with region. While the number of high school graduates will actually increase in the western states and Texas, the number of high school students graduating from high school in the northeast is forecasted to decrease by more than 15%. Like many other colleges in the northeast, we must broaden our reach in order to tap into new and different recruiting markets, and must develop student support programs that will increase retention of students who choose to attend Maritime College.

Increase Enrollment - RESPONSE

How is Maritime College going to respond to our enrollment challenge?

We need to focus on increasing both our recruitment and retention efforts.

We need to develop a marketing, communication, and outreach strategy that will reach a broader group of students. We can no longer afford to be the “hidden gem” in the five boroughs. We need to be the “shining star!” I have requested additional resources from the Federal funds we have received to be put towards a marketing campaign.

We must improve our identification, tracking, communication across units, and follow-up of students who are struggling financially, academically, and/or emotionally. We need to do a better job following up with returning students who are not registered for classes or housing. I have requested additional resources from the Federal funds we have received to be put towards enhancing the support in our Learning Center, but we all have a role in retaining students.

Increase Enrollment - ENGAGEMENT

There are many opportunities for members of our Campus Community to be engaged in recruiting and retaining students. Take time to greet visitors you see on campus. Introduce yourself. Ask where they are from. Ask if they have any questions. Volunteer to be an “admissions ambassador” and help Admissions in their outreach efforts to prospective and accepted students.

Check on students who seem to be struggling academically or otherwise. Follow-up with any students who are missing class. Refer any students of concern to Dean Imbriale.

The very simple reality is that this year’s entering freshman are not ready for college. For many of them, their senior year was not only interrupted by COVID, but completely disrupted by COVID. I have spoken with many of the incoming freshman who are deeply concerned about their level of preparation for college. Similarly, many of our returning sophomores may not have received the preparation they needed last year to be successful this year. We all must accept the fact that COVID has dramatically affected our students on many levels – academically, socially, emotionally and financially. We must look at doing things differently this year to retain as many of these students as possible. Yes, we must continue to hold them to our high standards, but we will likely need to provide them with additional support and

resources if they are to meet these standards. Please think about what you can do differently in your classroom to help ensure these students succeed.

This is an “all hands on deck” effort. Everyone can contribute towards this effort and play a part.

Improve Campus Climate – WHY?

Second, it is imperative we Improve the Campus Climate

Why? First, a healthy campus climate is essential to attracting and retaining talented faculty, staff, and students. A healthy campus climate encourages free and open exchanges of diverse ideas, perspectives, and viewpoints. Our students are graduating into a workforce that is more diverse and inclusive, and they must learn the acceptable behaviors in this more diverse and inclusive workplace.

Unfortunately, students at Maritime College continue to be subjected to a lack of respect, bias, and harassment based on their gender, race and ethnicity. While I was on Empire State this summer, a 3/c scratched a racial slur against a 1/c female of color along with the swastika on the bow of the ship. When all 3/c deck cadets were interrogated to determine the responsible party, the response from some of the 3/c was that the incident was being “blown out of proportion.”

I call on everyone to redouble our efforts to ensure a campus climate wherein everyone feels safe and welcome, feels they have a voice, and are free from bias, harassment and retaliation. Those who cannot comply with our Core Value of Respect are simply not welcome at Maritime College.

Improve Campus Climate – RESPONSE

How is Maritime College going to respond?

First, we must be willing to acknowledge that we have work to do, and we need to be willing to continue to engage in conversations that may be difficult and uncomfortable. The Campus Climate Task Force has provided us a roadmap in the form of their 16 recommendations, and I am committed to using these recommendations to improve campus climate. We will keep the campus community updated on our progress in addressing these 16 recommendations.

Improve Campus Climate – ENGAGEMENT

There are many opportunities for our campus community to engage in activities that will improve our campus climate. We all need to take a stand against words and actions that are harmful to others in our community. When you see something, say something or report it to UPD, HR, Dean Imbriale, or the Provost. In addition, I call on all faculty to include a diversity and inclusion statement in their course syllabli, and to engage students on first day of class regarding expectations for respectful and civil behavior in class and lab.

Imperative: Meet Industry Needs

The third imperative is to focus on meeting the needs of the industry.

As I engaged with industry leaders throughout the summer, I asked them if my sense of urgency regarding the rapid changes in industry, and the need for Maritime College to respond to these changes was unwarranted. ALL assured me that there is absolute need for Maritime to respond as quickly as possible.

Imperative: Meet Industry Needs – WHY?

I have spoken over the past several years regarding the changes in industry that are being driven by disrupters such as Digitalization, Decarbonization, and Environmental, Social, Governance, or ESG. Decarbonization, driven by environmental regulations, is driving tremendous changes in propulsion systems and alternative fuels. Digital technologies are now common on the bridge, in the engine room, in building management systems, port and terminal operations, as well as marine insurance and chartering. For example, digital data is now being used more and more for

vessel optimization and condition-based maintenance. Our graduates will not only face an industry undergoing tremendous change, but the pace of change is rapidly increasing. There is no question in my mind that a digital, tech savvy, and adaptable workforce is urgently needed.

Meet Industry Needs – RESPONSE

How is Maritime College going to respond?

First, we need to become more aware of the scope of these changes and the anticipated future workforce needs. We will be scheduling a series of industry panels to provide a venue for industry leaders to directly engage faculty regarding future changes and workforce requirements.

Meet Industry Needs – ENGAGEMENT

While these industry panels will help us to better understand future changes and workforce needs, we need to do more than just listen to industry panels. We need to take the next step and ask, What does this mean for Maritime College? How should Maritime College respond? As such, I would like to organize follow-on colloquia and discussions within two weeks of each panel to provide opportunities for campus engagement and discussion. My hope is that these colloquia and discussions will allow us to move from listening to acting.

I know we are all busy, but I ask that you take the time to attend the industry panels and to engage in the follow-on discussions that will occur during the colloquia. The future is rapidly approaching, and we need to address future workforce needs now. Failure to do so will mean that Maritime College will no longer be “First and Foremost.” Instead, we will no longer be relevant.

To further Campus Engagement regarding this important challenge, I will be asking each School to identify speakers, host one industry panel, and one colloquia/discussion in the Spring Semester.

Not A New Plan

I want to be clear that we are not moving away from the Strategic Plan. This is not a new plan. Rather, I hope these three Imperatives bring clarity to our implementation of the Strategic Plan over the Fall Semester. My commitment to you is that I will keep my focus on these Three Imperatives for the next three months.

Conclusion

Like a new faculty member or a new parent, I, too, have learned and grown during these past seven years serving as your President. I stand here today fully committed to continuing to serve you and our students, applying the lessons I have learned, answering Why and How, and providing clarity and focus as we move forward together. I will strive each day to earn and maintain your trust.

I wish everyone the very best for a healthy, safe, and successful academic year.