

Good afternoon faculty and staff colleagues and welcome to the Academic Affairs Fall Address. This is the second time the Deans and I have presented as a group, the first being last year at this time. At the start of the Spring Semester, it is the associate provost's who join. Collectively, it is important for you to not only have perspective on what's happening in specific units of the Division of Academic Affairs, but that you also gain a sense for how such work and activities are a collective and coordinated effort.

As I mentioned in my brief remarks to each college on Welcome Day last week, and in my campus message on Wednesday, I am starting my fifth year as Provost. It feels like just yesterday that I'd moved from Indiana to New Jersey, seeking to make sense of jug handles, impatient other drivers, and why people talk in terms of exits. Five years later, I feel like this is home, brought sharply into focus for me at the Springsteen concert at MetLife this past Sunday and cheering on every reference to Jersey in his songs, together with my 82,000 friends who went too.

Last year's theme for this presentation was *Building the Academic Affairs Future*. Informing that theme was collective planning work around the WP Strategic Plan, as well as the WP Branding and Identity Plan, both documents that are posted to the President's Office website. This year's theme is *Momentum for Success*. We are fully in execution mode now, and our ability to build for strength through distinction in the marketplace depends on momentum. This presentation will both contextualize why momentum is essential, while also evidencing how it is occurring.

First, however, I want to say something about the concept of momentum. As most know, this summer I hiked to the top of Mt. Whitney in California the highest mountain in the lower 48, to honor my grandfather who did it in 1910, and to raise money for student scholarships. In our group was his great-grandson, my cousin's son. My greatest fear as leader of our expedition was him being injured, or worse. But time and time again, he was a leader to us - figuring out how to get back on the trail in the dark when landmarks were not easily seen with just headlamps, finding the safest route through flooded streams, keeping a keen eye to avoid snow bridges that might collapse,

and most of all, how to get off the mountain as this picture on the right depicts. What you see there is a 35 degree slope about a mile in length. One could not just walk down, one had to slide down on one's backside, somehow arresting your speed lest you lose control and simply tumble uncontrollably, perhaps into the rocks you see at the left. That was a kind of momentum I knew was categorically wrong and for a time, was frozen in place at the top. But, once more, this young man showed the way – using his hiking poles as a brake while also stomping his heels in on the steepest parts, he enabled us to see that controlled momentum was possible, and at the lower part, to blissfully slide at a paced speed, achieving in a matter of a few minutes what it took us hours to accomplish coming up.

I share this story as a metaphor for the kind of momentum we need and don't need, going forward. Our Strategic Plan, and our Branding and Identity Plan, provide us the trail map ahead, the summit being the goal outcomes we desire in the next few years. Momentum requires we not fear execution, even in the face of ambiguity, and the action steps embedded help ensure that there is grounded intentionality. Said another way, the terrain around us is treacherous, and our competitors are not

staying still, but we have a good thing going coming out of the pandemic and we need to accelerate appropriately to exploit the opportunity.

Before I expand on the momentum theme with examples, something the Deans will do as well, I want to recognize that it is the people of WP that make achievement possible. First I wish to recognize the folks in Academic Affairs that retired this year. Their work, in some cases over decades, contributed to what makes this university a community. Their energy, commitment, and contributions will be missed and we wish them the very best in their next life phase. We stand on their shoulders as we continue to move the institution forward.

[slide 3] Second, I want to welcome our new faculty and staff colleagues to Academic Affairs. We have exciting and energized persons who were attracted to WP and its unique mission.

Many of you are listening now and on behalf of the Division, I want to formally welcome you and wish you the very best as you begin, or continue your career here. Finally, I wanted us to collectively celebrate what is unique to an academic career, the opportunity to be considered for tenure and promotion. These faculty achieved these particular milestones this past year.

Tenure represents a commitment by an institution to a long term relationship with an individual, one that provides stability, and fuel, for great things in the arena of teaching, scholarship, and service. Being promoted represents an important acknowledgement of one's body of contribution to a particularly high level, and with regard to full professor, something that places that individual among the highest esteem. Congratulations to all of these persons for their achievement.

With that as backdrop, I want to return to the theme of momentum, this time with one that I would argue is for the ages. As I mentioned earlier, one thing that momentum does is to exploit opportunity. This happened at Undergraduate Commencement in May. The Governor was in attendance as you may recall, and witnessed two extraordinary things as reflected in this paraphrase of a text message to President Helldobler the next day. Governor Murphy texted, "There were two moments I will always remember. The first is all of the first generation students who stood when you invited them to do so. The second was the extraordinary story told by your student speaker." Racha's story in brief was she and her mom came to

the US as Syrian refugees in 2014. But, her father had to remain in Syria to care for a parent. Racha worked at Quick Check around the corner from WP, and still does as a manager, and graduated this May, with her mother as a fellow graduate! And her father was finally able to come to this country and arrived just a few weeks before the ceremony. That story encapsulated so well what it is that makes WP unique. We change lives in ways that many others cannot claim. That graduation moment, among others, has placed WP more actively on the radars of folks in Trenton, and around the country through the NBC Nightly News story about it.

Now I would like to put another lens on the importance of momentum. Every fall, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* publishes its annual *Almanac*. Given that this is my 5th year at WP, I thought it would be interesting to examine how things have changed in NJ in just the past 5 years. I pulled out 6 data points that I thought were compelling, and ones we need to have front and center as we move forward. In brief, we are already seeing shrinkage in high school aged young people, the ones we traditionally enroll in college; a growth in 25-44 year olds, the age most commonly associated with adult learners;

we are about to be a state that is majority minority; and with a huge immigrant population. I would also point out that the cost of college is up more than \$1200/year, and everything else going up in cost even more, meaning that our most important competitor is not so much other schools, but jobs. Finally, unlike most other states, private HE is moving in. In summary, we need to continue to exploit opportunity with respect to (1) adult students, (2) non-White populations, particularly those who represent an immigrant experience, (3) the practical reality of work as our #1 competitor and to examine ways we can more effectively embrace a student working while in school, and (4) knowing that something good is happening in NJ given that private non-profit institutions are seeing opportunity to set up shop here when that is not true in many states.

At this point, I want to share a few examples of momentum sourced in the University's Strategic Plan and that have, or will shortly, deploy. First, with respect to efforts to **reduce student attrition**, our new tool Navigate is enabling the build of success teams in support of students, and providing powerful analytics for informing action. The Faculty as Mentor Initiative with sophomores has deployed, and faculty are

increasingly integrating free or reduced cost materials in their classes. In the area of **alternative credentials**, we have an array of new ones launched and a number that are in the approval pipeline. And, we have a new curriculum workflow to make the process of review more streamlined, and paperless. Finally, we are working on a dedicated website for certification opportunities at WP and a badging system to enable students to evidence their achievements in new ways, including through LinkedIn. With regard to our third Pillar, I know you've heard a lot about our **adult learner initiatives**, particularly through WP Online, but what you may not know, is that nearly 1/3 of our students (UG and Grad, are adult learners)! That's big growth in just a few years. One thing that is aiding that, and our growth in transfer students generally, has been Faculty Senate supported efforts to enable transfer credit more readily and our embrace of credit for prior learning. The units within our School of Continuing & Professional Education have been leading this charge. With respect to **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice activities**, important discussion will be occurring this year around a social justice certificate through the UCC. In addition, we just brought on board our second class of pre-doctoral

fellows, and one post-doctoral fellow, a specific initiative that supports the success of an historically underrepresented new faculty member at an institution with a mission like ours.

Finally, we have received some important grants this past year that support efforts in this arena, and more planned for submission this year. Folks want to fund what we are doing here and seeing what can scale elsewhere.

With regard to momentum in the Branding and Identity Plan, we have launched the Student Success Teams as you know – a group consisting of a professional advisor, a faculty mentor, a financial aid counselor, and a career coach. A subset of the certificates I mentioned earlier are intended to be ones that students earn in their first two years, thereby providing early and evident value before achievement of the degree. The UCC is also seeking faculty input on how social mobility can be a way of reframing value for general education, and the colleges and departments will be engaged this year on how we can make even stronger connections between academics and career outcomes. Finally, as you will hear about more from the Dean of Science & Health, we've formed a School of Nursing from the former department with the intent of using it as an

anchor to not only serve nursing needs in the state, but build capacity in the equally important allied health fields. Towering over all of this is WP's growing reputation in the state for re-engaging stop outs to return, something I am seeking for us to accelerate by examining ways our campus can better serve the needs of working students, regardless of their age or enrollment circumstance, on-campus or online. Just received national data on WP vs. its peers shows that our students work way more, and way more hours than at other schools.

In closing, I want to remind that Academic Affairs has 5 core goals linked to particular cardinal goals for the University – grow enrollment, help student succeed, be good stewards of resources, generate alternative revenues, and invest in people. As I've said, we need to exploit this moment for momentum. And two metaphors come to mind that capture features of WP as building blocks. First, I took this picture of the Fearless Girl in NYC early in the pandemic. To me it captures our grit and determination when confronted by powerful external forces, ones to be respected, but not feared. The second one comes from a bike ride I did this past weekend around the entire circumference of Manhattan, a goal I have had for some time.

This little lighthouse is featured in a famous children's story called, the *Little Red Lighthouse and the Great Gray Bridge* that prevented its removal after the building of the George Washington Bridge when thousands of children protested. To me, it reminds that we are second to no-one and our mission's beacon is crucial to so many, and in ways that others are not meeting. So, in summary, we are scrappy, determined, and a beacon, second to no one.

With that, I invite Dean Bowrin to speak about momentum in the CCOB, followed by Dean's Sharma, Davis, and Ginsberg. Dean Bowrin, I turn things to you.

Thank you colleagues. We have much to build upon here at WP, but we need to be bold going forward, and I invite you to reflect as departments and colleges, as well as individuals, on how you will be a partner for momentum this year. Share your thoughts with colleagues, with your Dean, with an Associate Provost, or with me. All the best and have a good rest of your Friday.