**Spring 2020 Comments to Faculty**

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Under ordinary experiences, we would all be focusing on Departmental, Program, College, and University public (and physical) celebrations of the achievements of the students, faculty, and staff of our institution—and there will be some of that here and across our electronic distribution systems over that same time frame. I confess that focus will be challenging in an academic world changed over the last 6 weeks—and those changes modifying our own perceptions of areas on which to concentrate.

The most important part of this report is brevity—and as always, the ability to revise and add materials before posting to our web site. Briefly, I will identify some University activities especially meriting recognition. We’ll move to some challenges I believe we face in the coming weeks and months, and the need to—more than ever— work to communicate***too*** much. Finally, I want to join with Dr. Demmitt in publicly recognizing this year’s recipients of University professorships, made possible by our Foundation Board, and our Office of University Advancement, led by Vice President Chase Moore.

First, great things for the year. From last May, the New York Times and the Urban Institute reported that Clayton State University was ranked 7th nationally as a school exceeding its expected six-year graduation rate— the highest of any institution in Georgia. This is evidence of our collective commitment to long-term student success. For the seventh time in eight years, the Atlanta Journal Constitution recognized CSU as one of the top workplaces in metro- Atlanta. Clayton State is the only Higher Education institution in the metro-Atlanta area receiving this recognition.

In our 50th anniversary year, the University completed its first comprehensive campaign, exceeding our goal by more than $2 million, and more importantly, setting the Foundation for greater support over time for the students, faculty, and staff of this institution. This Spring ***#Give4Dreams*** led to the largest level of support for our Annual Fund activity in University History.

We launched a broad- based Inclusion and Engagement initiative, led by Dr. Kevin Demmitt, Dr. Shakeer Abdullah, and Human Resources Executive Director Rodney Byrd. Some work was delayed by recent events, but the commitment to focus our attention on university searches, leadership training, and in other areas, is well under way. There has been an array of recognitions and awards by faculty, staff, and students across the institution—but for now, let me say that really wonderful things have been happening for the institution, immediately and for the long- term, for the students and communities we serve. And they will function as foundational in whatever forms higher education here take.

I want to especially thank the faculty of this institution for adapting so quickly to the changes over the last 6 or so weeks. There were technical support services in place such as the HUB and the Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) —and certainly resident experts in your department— ready to share insights and techniques based on their experience. But the essential element in change was the ability of individual faculty and staff to reach out and support students who, like so many of us, discovered a changed learning existence not of their own making.

We have found ourselves in interesting times requiring us to seek, find or invent new perspectives for ourselves and our institution. And that brings us to some challenges both in the coming days and during the next year--challenges which I am confident we will be able to address. To begin, we face the challenge of understanding the notion of community in a future of learning that for now, and likely in the future, will have more virtual components. Our strategic plan— and I believe an important part of our uniqueness in higher education—came from connection to community. How can learning outcomes for courses be achieved in a community- based environment? How can student learning in the classroom be considered as applicable to external circumstances, such as employment in the public, private, or non-profit sector, or involvement in our communities—communities that have long been associated with the ability for direct interactions with others. In the most recent issue of the **Chronicle of Higher Education**, Gabrielle Starr of Pomona College posed a similar question—seeking answers we will need to find in coming weeks and months, and perhaps years.

There will be resource and other financial implications in the coming months as the state begins to recover from the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our students face some of the same economic effects and will be making decisions about attendance here—and thus financial support of our activities. Several times during the week more than 50 members of the CSU faculty, staff, and student body have made calls updating the status of university activities during the COVID-19 response. In that spirit, we will be assembling broad-based groups helping us chart a course for institutional “next steps”—ranging from the continuation of social distancing (as we plan to renew on-campus activities in the fall) to how we plan for possible increases and declines in enrollments for the fall, based on uncertainties facing both us and our potential students.

As has been the case for some time, the Planning and Budget Advisory Committee will play an important role in our efforts to create conditions of transparency and collaboration in our adjustments to these changing conditions. But in all such instances, we will work to communicate as broadly and as clearly as we can. There remains an incredible number of unknowns in all of this, but I know that we will continue to collaborate to find ways to best support learning under these changing times. I remain confident in our continued shared success.

I close with recognitions of faculty of our institution. Several years ago, the Office of University Advancement met with faculty in departments about priorities for fundraising support, and requests consistently came for (1) scholarships to help address the financial needs of our students, and (2) professorships that would assist and recognize the work of our colleagues. Today we have the honor of publicly recognizing colleagues and the generous supporters of the University who have made these recognitions possible. Physical presentations will have to wait for another time. The 2020 Clayton State University Professorships are:

1. The Heritage Cadillac University Professorship—Dr. Audrey Dyer from the College of Arts and Sciences
2. The Jack and Sherry Hancock University Professorship—Dr. Jelani Favors from the College of Arts and Sciences
3. The Heritage Bank University Professorship—Dr. Anita Whiting from the College of Business
4. The Foundation University Professorship—Dr. Chen Miao-Lin from the College of Business
5. The MailChimp University Professorship—Dr. Junfeng Qu from the College of Information and Mathematical Sciences
6. The Jimmy Easley University Professorship—Dr. Elicia Collins from the College of Health