

**Our University's Promise**  
**Welcome Breakfast Address to Employees**  
**August 23, 2022**

Good morning, everyone! It is my great pleasure and honor to welcome you to the start of Alfred University's 187<sup>th</sup> academic year and to thank you for your shared commitment to our University's mission/vision of transforming student lives and bettering our world.

Please join me in first greeting the new faculty and staff who have joined our University since the last academic year by asking them to stand and giving them a round of applause. For our returning staff and faculty if you haven't yet introduced yourself to the newcomers at your table please take the opportunity to do so and provide them with a warm Alfred Hello.

We have with us a number of retired staff and faculty who have done so much over the years to make Alfred University the extraordinary place that it is. Retirees, please stand so that we can acknowledge your service with a round of applause.

Finally, the work of our University is meaningfully advanced through a shared governance model and the input we receive from advisory groups such as our Support Staff Council, Administrative Technical Specialist Council, and Faculty Senate. If you are a member of these advisory groups please stand so that we can recognize you for your service to our University.

**Today's Relevance.** While occasions like this breakfast provide the opportunity to reflect on our past and take stock of the present, they, most importantly, allow us to envision the future we can jointly create for our University. To an economist like me, the future is always the relevant margin. And, as one of our trustees is fond of saying "there is a reason God made the front windshield so much larger than the rearview mirror."

**Creating Our Future.** If there is an antidote to the various challenges vexing humanity—and the last several years have certainly presented us with a number of them, it lies with the creation of knowledge and values within individuals intent on contributing to positive change. Given our role as an educational institution, how can we best seize on the opportunity to provide

the solutions that will better our world? And how can we best build on our distinction as makers so as to create a future for our beloved University that is consistent with our mission, vision, and values; impactful for our students; rewarding for our employees; and cherished by our alumni?

This Friday, we will formally welcome our newest students through a Convocation ceremony. The promise our University has made to these students is to help them realize their purpose.

How can we best fulfill the promise that we make to our students and thereby also fashion a promising future for Alfred University? Through two essential components: the educational intersections that we create for our students; and the guidance that we provide our students while they explore those intersections. The first of these components drives our ability to attract students while the second is critical to students earning their Alfred University degrees and realizing their purpose. In addition, the two components determine, in large measure, our ability to create a rewarding environment for our employees while ensuring our University's ongoing financial sustainability.

## **Intersections**

We are blessed with a broad array of curricular and co-curricular offerings. How can we ensure that the promise associated with this bounty is best realized by our students and University? By being mindful of the powerful intersections provided by our offerings that allow our students to seek, identify, and nurture their purpose. These intersections include those with future professional opportunities; higher-order learning outcomes that organizations are looking for in college graduates and are the objectives of a liberal education; and experiential learning. They are also inherent in the rich breadth of our academic and co-curricular offerings.

**Intersections with Professional Opportunities.** Due to the growth of the technology sector and Big Data, we have launched majors and minors in data analytics, business analytics, and computer science.

The share of the U.S. economy accounted for by health care is already 18 percent and expected to further increase as the Baby Boom generation ages and with advances in genomics and microbiology. Capitalizing on this trend is why we have added bachelor of science (BS) degrees in chemistry and biology to our existing bachelor of arts (BA) offerings; introduced a BS

and a BA in biochemistry; offer a biomaterials engineering degree; initiated a health planning and management minor; and struck partnerships with, LECOM, the leading osteopathic school of medicine, and Cornell's graduate program in health administration (Sloan).

Our renewable energy engineering and environmental studies majors are premised on the opportunities associated with the global Green Movement while the establishment of E-Sports is predicated on increasing student interest and professional opportunities in gaming.

Are there other, similarly-growing professional opportunities for our students where the wind would be at our University's back? Globalization, sustainability, artificial intelligence, virtual reality, mental health and wellness, and geriatrics are but some of the possibilities.

**Intersections with Higher-Order Learning Outcomes.** A liberal education develops such power skills as: critical thinking; creativity; communication; integrative reasoning; cross-cultural awareness; empathy; quantitative analysis; leadership; and team-playing. Like other higher education institutions we are organized by traditional departments and academic units. While specialization and in-depth knowledge are important, are there ways that we could better connect the dots for prospective students and their families when it comes to the development of power skills? The more clearly that we can illustrate how higher-order learning outcomes are at the core of liberal education and how such learning outcomes translate into personal growth and professional accomplishment, the more successful we will be at attracting students.

**Intersections with Experiential Learning.** While theory-based, deductive learning has its virtues so does applied, inductive education. Think about what it takes to become proficient in playing a sport such as tennis and to what extent it could be accomplished by solely focusing on understanding the theory of the game versus practice. Likewise for becoming an effective speaker, writer, educator, musical performer, artist, critical thinker, builder, entrepreneur, aircraft pilot, vehicle driver, leader, team-player, and parent.

So many of the innovations that we presently benefit from owe their origin to tinkerers, individuals who were willing to experiment with and establish new pathways. Examples include Thomas Edison and the lightbulb; Rosa Parks and ending racial segregation in the United States; Jennifer Doudna

and CRISPR gene editing; Susan B. Anthony and our own alumna Abigail Allen securing voting rights for women; the Pixar team and the development of computer animated feature films; and Albert Sabin and Jonas Salk and the discovery of a vaccine for polio.

Given Alfred's maker culture, are there ways that we could build on our commitment to learning by doing? In 2018, through the generosity of trustee Michele Cohen, we launched APEX to promote applied experiential opportunities for our students. Students apply for APEX funding to engage in study abroad, service learning, undergraduate research, and internships/co-ops. Are there refinements/revisions to our present APEX approach that would enhance such possibilities while building our reputation as a maker place? As with other distinctive aspects of our University, philanthropic support will play a pivotal role in deepening the learning by doing that we provide to our students.

**Intersections Across our Academic and Co-curricular Offerings.** David Epstein's best-selling book *Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World* provides compelling evidence that, when it comes to solving complex problems, individuals with a broader array of experiences and intellectual tools are more likely to succeed. In light of this, how can we best benefit from being what trustee and former Board chair Gene Bernstein calls "the biggest small university"? After all, we offer so much more than the numerous liberal arts colleges with which we compete.

The appeal of distinctive intersections is evident in some of the outside of ordinary educational journeys chosen by our students:

- engineers who dance (photo of trustee Cheryl Blanchard '86)
- communication studies majors who write for our sports information department and *Fiat Lux* newspaper while playing for our soccer team (photo of new Board chair Carolyn Clark '90...and mentioning philanthropic leadership role that she is playing with our Saxon Hill initiative)
- basketball players who discover an affinity for political science and public administration (photo of trustee Bryan Hill '90)

The ability of intersections across academic units and co-curricular activities to provide a competitive advantage to our students and University is attested to by the foregoing alumni examples. It is also demonstrated by enrollments in our leadership minor; data analytics major and minor; 4+1 option that allows students to earn two Alfred degrees, including the one-year MBA, in five years; and transfer agreements with various community colleges.

The power of cross-disciplinary intersections to inspire philanthropic support is demonstrated by Michele Cohen's generous \$6 million commitment toward the distributed boiler component of our Foundry/distributed boiler project. What inspired that commitment is not Michele's affinity for distributed boilers but her realization that such an investment would nurture a greater partnership between our School of Art and Design and Inamori School of Engineering. As articulated by deans Lauren Lake and Gabrielle Gaustad, the partnership will include a state-of-the-art, on-campus foundry; a digital fabrication lab; enhanced offerings in metallurgy; and other innovative curricular offerings spanning our schools of engineering and art and design.

While universities tend to focus on the vertical—the world of spires and steeples—Alfred's promise lies in becoming more adept at our horizontal dimension and creating more porous borders between our various academic units. While we can take just pride in the distinctiveness of our spires and steeples, we must also appreciate that our students tend to seek and live in the horizontal dimensions of our University. By making it easier for them to navigate the horizontal dimensions we enhance our ability to attract students and help them realize their purpose.

## Guidance

Guides are critical to ensuring that college students identify and successfully traverse the most promising educational pathways. As noted by Peter Felten and Leo Lambert in their book *Relationship-Rich Education: How Human Connections Drive Success in College* a 2018 national poll of 4,000 college graduates found that:

alumni who reported having had from seven to ten significant relationships with faculty and staff were three times as likely to report their college experience as 'very rewarding' as compared to graduates with no such relationships. Even a small number of important relationships matter;

alumni with just one or two significant relationships were twice as likely to rate college as ‘very rewarding’ as compared to graduates with no such relationships. The poll also found that students typically start building their mentoring constellations early in their undergraduate careers. Sixty percent reported meeting their most influential faculty or staff member in college during their first year, and 79 percent formed their most significant relationship during that year. Students usually meet these influential faculty and peers in their courses, meaning that their classroom experience, and particularly the first-year classroom experience is pivotal.

Alfred’s mission/vision of transforming student lives aligns with providing effective mentoring to our students. We are not mass producers of higher education. Rather, we focus on the value we add to each student and the social mobility thereby created, especially for our first-gen students.

When asked about their most treasured memory of Alfred, our alumni overwhelmingly note that a faculty, staff, or other community member took an interest in them as students—assisting them in identifying their purpose; nurturing their confidence to pursue that purpose. We can build on this track record.

- Photo of Marlin Miller ’54, HD ’89, HD ’19 and the mentoring impact that engineering dean John McMahon had on him
- Photo of Peter Cuneo ’67, HD ’13, HD ’22 play-acting with Emilia Smith ’24, as Spidey, while mentioning their mentors and programmatic mixes
- Photo of John Edmond ’83 and the mentoring impact that emeritus faculty member and dean David Rossington (in audience) had on him
- Photo of Gabby Gaustad ’04 and Scott Misture ’90, PhD ’95 [photo from the ceremony on 8/12 with Senator Schumer announcing Alfred University receiving its largest ever federal research grant]
- Photo of Marlin Miller Outstanding Senior Anastasia Campbell ’20, MBA ’22 and the impact Nadine Shardlow ’86, MS ’17 had on her
- Photo of Marlin Miller Outstanding Senior Merviella Bulonza ’22 and the impact various mentors had on her
- Photo of Ann Moskowitz and the impact various Alfred mentors had on her late husband, Joel ’63, that has inspired her ongoing giving, most recently to renovate The Brick this summer

Mentoring is consistent with our commitment to inclusivity. Inclusion has been an Alfred University value from the start. When coupled with our relatively small size and wide range of programs we have all the necessary catalytic ingredients to be a leading talent incubator and engine of socioeconomic opportunity.

What if on account of Alfred University's intimate size, commitment to inclusivity and transformational experiences, and range of programs, our promise to prospective students was to strive for at least one faculty, staff, or other community member (for example, a fellow student or an alum) taking an authentic and deep interest in them and changing the trajectory of their lives for the better? What if such an institutional objective was both deeply embedded in our culture and achieved through a thoughtful, planned system rather than left to chance?

The system would require sufficient redundancy in terms of relationships because one never knows how a mentor-mentee relationship that appears to be productive on paper will work in practice. The system would also require investment in educating all of our University community members about how to be an effective mentor and mentee.

- Photo of Nick Clark '11 and pivotal role facilities/landscaping crew played with his attraction to and development at Alfred
- Photo of Heather Cramer being honored in May with a Fiat Lux Award for her service to students as a custodian in our McLane Center
- Photo of Yvonne Squadrilli, a Fiat Lux Award winner in 2017 for how cheerfully she greets each student by name as they check into our Ade Dining Hall
- Video clip of Leo Pamphile '20, MBA 21 talking of the impact professor Gunn and Yvonne Squadrilli had on him

No other higher education institution currently promises that every student will acquire at least one mentor through their college pathway who will change their life for the better. Could Alfred University realize its promise by striving to make such an objective a reality?

In closing, as we prepare to welcome our new students to campus later this week through our Convocation ceremony plus our returning students over the ensuing weekend for the start of classes next Monday, let us remember the promise that we have made as a University to help them realize their

purpose. Every effort that each of us makes to help fulfill our promise to our students also serves to realize our University's promise.

Marlin Miller first set foot on our campus in 1950 when he was deciding where to go for his college studies. Imagine what our campus would look and be like today if Dean McMahon had not applied his personal touch during the campus tour and if McMahon and other faculty and staff had not provided the educational pathways and guidance that they did.

Conversely, please join me in imagining what our campus will look like 72 years from now if we consider every student to have the promise of a Marlin, a Gabby Gaustad, or a Mervielle Bulonza and treat them accordingly.

Six years ago, when I first gave such an opening address, I noted the various ways that we can conceive of light: its power to illuminate; the warmth it affords; and the diverse wavelengths/colors it unifies. Given these different conceptions and our responsibility to nurture powerful educational intersections and provide guidance to students who come to our campus our University's motto is especially apt. Let us ever keep the motto in mind and in our hearts as we tend to our important responsibilities here at Alfred University.

Fiat Lux!