

President's Fall Convocation Address

**OneLeMoyne:
Forward Thinking**

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The beginning of this academic year, the sixth since we launched the OneLeMoyné initiative, is a fitting time to review and reflect. This afternoon I will examine the College's actions within the broader context of American higher education and consider how our challenges lead to new opportunities. I will also identify our most important priorities and initiatives for the year ahead.

ONE OF THE BEST!

As we look back on the past year, we have many successes to celebrate, beginning with a dedicated faculty and staff, students who are well equipped for life and career and a more vibrant campus. Of our many achievements, I am particularly pleased about The Princeton Review's most recent recognition. In line with our strategic priority to raise Le Moyné's visibility, we set a goal to be included, first, in the regional guide and then in the national one. In 2010 we made it into "The Best Northeastern Colleges." This year The Princeton Review listed Le Moyné as one of the nation's best institutions for undergraduate education. Congratulations!

This affirmation exemplifies the many achievements we are realizing throughout the campus. Among them, Academic Affairs had another terrific year. Le Moyné's faculty continue to deliver a rigorous, mission-centered curriculum, while fostering an environment where students come first. As a result, our students are receiving prestigious awards and research funding from a host of organizations and studying at sites throughout the nation and in 17 foreign countries.

Your investment in our students leads directly to their subsequent success. Members of the Class of 2013 were accepted to graduate and professional schools in the most prestigious programs from nearby Cornell and Syracuse University to Harvard and Georgetown on the East Coast, UCLA on the West Coast and many top programs in between. The most recent "One-Year-Later" survey data for the Class of 2012 demonstrate that ninety-one percent of respondents are either employed or accepted into graduate school.

In addition to countless hours spent engaging students in and out of the classroom, our faculty published numerous books and articles to advance knowledge in their respective fields of study and were sought for their expertise nationally and internationally. Their scholarship was supported by competitive awards from distinguished agencies including the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Science Foundation.

Our Athletic staff and coaches complement these academic achievements with other accomplishments on and off the field. The Athletic division truly embodies the Division II philosophy of "Life in the Balance." At Le Moyné student-athletes excel in the classroom, contribute to social justice and win. This versatility is reflected in the fact that the cumulative GPA for student-athletes has been above 3.0 for twenty straight semesters. Further, our student-athletes volunteered nearly 1,800 hours last year and the division's community engagement initiative raised more than \$50,000 for organizations such as the Salvation Army, Syracuse First Tee and the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

The year's most exciting intercollegiate moment for many of us came on May 26th as several thousand Le Moyné fans gathered to witness athletic excellence. That afternoon at Lincoln Financial Field the Le Moyné Men's Lacrosse Team demonstrated, once again, that our Dolphins have everything it takes to succeed at the highest level of competition. Here stands the NCAA Championship Trophy they won.

We also had a stellar year in Institutional Advancement. The division initiated an illustrious dinner in New York City that proved not only to be profitable but also an elegant setting in which to connect with hundreds of our faithful alumni. The Le Moyné in New York gala made a bold statement about the College's increasing sophistication and contributed to splendid fundraising outcomes in Institutional Advancement.

The Advancement division raised \$1.75 million in cash for the unrestricted Annual Fund—\$400,000.00 over the prior year's result. The total Annual Fund brought in nearly \$2.2 million. We raised \$4.1 million for capital funds, including the \$2 million REDC grant from New York State and \$1.35 million for the endowment. Our grand total of cash and pledges was \$7.7 million for the last fiscal year. Much of the restricted money was committed to the \$15 million Madden School Campaign, which now stands at \$16.8 million in cash and pledges—nearly \$2 million over the goal.

The tangible results of our fundraising are evident as I look from the Plaza to the west to Mitchell Hall to the east. I am astounded by the physical transformation of our campus over the past five years. Each project was based on the priorities established through our OneLeMoyne conversations with students, faculty and staff. We extended this transformation over an incredibly busy summer for our Facilities and Information Technology teams.

In the first series of OneLeMoyne conversations, our science faculty made a strong case that they were grossly short on space and existing facilities neither allowed them to deliver the curriculum our students required, nor permitted them to appropriately advance their research. In response, we built a 48,000 square-foot Science Building that opened in January 2012 and that summer we renovated the wings of the existing Coyne Science Center. This past summer we continued our progress by renovating the ground floor of Coyne. Through this most recent project we have two renewed Physics labs, a renewed Ecology lab and a new Geology lab. Science faculty report that these four labs will allow for implementation of advanced pedagogies and research experiments that were not previously possible in that space.

Responding to my invitation in this room on November 4, 2009, the business faculty created a compelling vision for the future of business education at Le Moyne. They were united in their top two priorities—establishing a school of business and constructing facilities that would allow for the delivery of an innovative, contemporary curriculum. Based on the naming gift that the new vision inspired, we initiated the Madden School Campaign. As a result of the campaign's success, we were able to undertake a more ambitious first phase of transforming Mitchell Hall than originally planned.

Students across the College now have a cutting-edge Trading Room with Bloomberg terminals; a Business Analytics/Marketing lab with the ability to manage “big data”; a Management Information Systems lab; a state-of-the-art Accounting lab; dedicated workspace for Blue Highway, our medical technologies partner; and full video conferencing capability—all in a classic building with a beautiful new exterior.

Due largely to the work on Mitchell, office moves involving over 100 people took place this year, new office spaces had to be secured and old ones repurposed and renovated. We also continued HVAC improvements, refurbished lavatories in the Athletic Center, undertook additional abatement work and advanced the beautification of our grounds. Despite the substantial construction, everyone who visited this summer commented on how terrific the campus looks, with most noting that it has never looked so splendid.

Our colleagues in Student Development, Campus Ministry and Mission and Identity, in collaboration with others, are making our campus more engaging and mission-focused each year. We see the positive results of this in our consistent increases in first-to-second year retention. For the third straight year our retention rate is up. This fall it stands at 87.7%, which is significantly above our five-year average of 83.8%. This accomplishment, along with the increased attractiveness of living on a campus that is more vibrant, has led to record housing demand. Once again we are at capacity and it comes at a time when room and board revenue is increasingly important to our bottom line.

A few weeks into a new semester, we are already on course for yet another busy year. Each of us will be adapting to many changes that are underway, among them transitioning to the new Core, launching Canvas as the new course management system, adopting more powerful research systems in some of the support divisions and completing additional construction, notably further renovation to the Campus Center which will be done over the winter months.

These impressive achievements are just a sampling of Le Moyne's recent successes. They are a direct result of the high level of performance taking place across our faculty, staff and administration. We would not be witnessing this level of momentum without your commitment and persistence. Thank you for rising to meet the demands of our vision in these strenuous times.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Despite our advances, last year was one in which we faced serious trials. Following three years of record enrollment growth while holding our discount rate in check, we learned in May 2012 that deposits were down precipitously. That decline produced a multi-year loss of revenue and required that we make some hard decisions in trimming our staff and administration. These actions allowed us to balance the budget while adding positions or filling lines that the President's Council deemed essential for our future. Although we are fortunate that the number of separations was relatively small, each involuntary departure at Le Moyne is a painful one.

Your response to the College's financial pressures was inspiring. The campus community participated in various dialogues, created plans and quickly acted upon them. As a result, we increased revenue in select areas while trimming where we could without impacting quality. Thanks to your resilience, we continued progress on our vision "to be a premier Jesuit college where diverse talents meet to foster academic excellence, integrity and a commitment to justice."

I know that each of you shares a responsibility to uphold the Jesuit tradition of educating the whole person through a curriculum that is grounded in the liberal arts and a campus-wide emphasis on service and social justice. Together—faculty, staff and administrators—we focus our energy on providing our students with the experiences, material, assignments and opportunities necessary for growth and maturation that ultimately leads to success in their chosen careers. We certainly want our students to excel in their work and, as our loyal alumni demonstrate, they do. But we expect considerably more, beginning with imparting critical knowledge and skills that leads to the pursuit of rich, meaningful and self-reflective lives, rooted in confidence and prepared for all of the challenges and opportunities each will face.

Unfortunately, conversations about higher education across the nation are becoming increasingly narrow. We hear more frequent talk about education's ROI: return on investment. Schools, majors and degrees are being measured in dollar terms based on the cost of the education versus starting salary or projected lifetime earnings. While I believe that a narrow calculus is misguided, I understand the reasons behind this turn. Arguably, the primary challenge facing private higher education today is that of affordability. The media, politicians and the public are vigorously raising questions about price, debt, value and return.

President Obama himself put the academy on notice while speaking at Knox College in July when he vowed to "shake up" higher education. He stated:

Today more students are earning their degree, but soaring costs saddle them with unsustainable debt....Families and taxpayers can't just keep paying more and more into an undisciplined system where costs just keep on going up and up and up....We've got to get more out of what we pay for.

On August 22, dozens of Le Moyne students and I attended President Obama's address at Henninger High School. I was standing roughly twenty feet in front of the President as he announced his plan titled, "A Better Bargain for the Middle Class: Making College More Affordable." He argued for the use of new technology and adopting the most leading-edge educational practices for providing high value at low cost. His plan contains three main points:

- First, *Paying for Performance*, which aims to create a rating system that ties financial aid to measures of a college's published performance on a range of quantitative measures. Students and funding would be directed to colleges deemed to provide the "best value."
- Second, *Promoting Innovation and Competition*, which includes offering students a greater range of "affordable, high-quality options."
- Third, *Ensuring that Student Debt Remains Affordable*.

The President's proposal comes at a time when demographics, family finances, student debt and governmental sources of support have all turned in a decidedly negative direction. The effects are being felt across higher education. This is most evident in the pressures we face in admissions and financial aid.

It is a testament to your efforts across the College that for four out of the last five years we set enrollment records for new first-year students. This year's entering class is our second largest in number, though not in revenue. We discounted at a record 55% for this cohort. In absolute terms, the average new student this fall actually paid less in tuition and fees than any year since 2009. While this increase in aid helps families and would appear to be one the President would appreciate, it means we have less tuition revenue, our primary source of funding. Furthermore, at the same time that the College's net price is declining, our students are taking out more in loans. Since 2009 the average student loan for Le Moyne graduates has increased over 80%.

You do not have to be an accountant to realize that this path is not a sustainable one for Le Moyne or for our students. Several recent articles provide data indicating that we may have reached the tipping point many predicted. One recent piece from *Inside Higher Education* ("Holding the Line," Kevin Kiley, July 23, 2013) reported:

Colleges' effort to increase tuition revenue, now the dominant form of funds for most colleges and universities, is running headlong into a public that is reluctant to pay much more for higher education. That is truest of all for wealthy families.

The findings, like those of the past few years, could continue to be troubling for colleges that are struggling to bolster net tuition revenue—the amount of money colleges take in once institutional aid is subtracted—since they indicate a reluctance to pay more than an average of about \$24,000 a year for college, even among high-income families....Families that make more than \$250,000 a year said they should only be expected to contribute between \$21,000 and \$25,000 a year, even when some officials argue they have the ability to pay as much as four times that.

The author noted that those figures are all-inclusive: tuition, room and board.

As a result of these forces and in language that has become familiar, Moody's issued a report in January ("U.S. Higher Education Outlook Negative in 2013," January 2013) that stated:

The U.S. higher education sector has hit a critical juncture in the evolution of its business model....Even market-leading universities with diversified revenue streams are facing diminished prospects for revenue growth.

. . . Most universities will have to lower their cost structures to achieve long-term financial sustainability and fund future initiatives. Universities have been restraining costs in response to the weak economic conditions since the 2008-2009 financial crisis, but they have only recently begun examining the cost structure of their traditional business model.

The sector will need to adjust to the prospect of prolonged muted revenue growth....Strong governance and management will be needed by most universities as they navigate through this period of intensified change and challenge.

Nearly everyone in higher education acknowledges that the financial model is not sustainable. Some have been saying as much for a long time. Various trials and experiments are underway. I believe we can, and must, be a leader in this pursuit. As we continue to ponder the question at the heart of OneLeMoyne—"What must we become?"—addressing this pressing matter is paramount.

PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

Looking ahead to the coming year, we will continue to advance the College's mission and the OneLeMoyne Vision while grappling with the changing realities of American higher education. Our skillful new Vice President for Enrollment Management, John Dolan, is already deeply immersed in this effort. John has been sharing emerging plans for promising Enrollment Management strategies with the President's Council.

Council members have collaborated over the last several months to discuss the changing realities, identify primary threats and consider the College's response. The group has delineated a set of priorities upon which various leaders will focus. Members for your respective divisions will be sharing this list with you.

Of the priorities we have identified, there are three that are most critical and require broad participation. These are the ones upon which I, as president, will particularly concentrate and in which I need your full engagement in order to guarantee success.

First, we must focus even more intensely on the issue of affordability. Beyond discussion at the President's Council level, I intend to form a small, diverse faculty committee that will meet frequently and work directly with me to consider how we might more aggressively address the challenges posed by President Obama and faced by our students and their families.

We will call this group the OneLeMoyne Innovation Committee. Its members will be encouraged to consult, as appropriate, with faculty, staff, administrators and students across the College. Once established, the Committee will invite suggestions and proposals to inform its work. At appropriate times I will share the proposals that emerge from the group with the President's Council and, through the Council, vet the proposals in appropriate divisions. I will also forward proposals from the Council to the Committee for its review and comment.

To create the OneLeMoyne Innovation Committee I will ask the deans and provost for recommendations. I also encourage each of you to consider nominating faculty members. I seek a broad range of scholars, from those new to Le Moyne to our more senior colleagues. Please send your nominations directly to me by the end of next week. I intend to appoint faculty who are constructive, creative and expansive thinkers. Because of the time commitment required and the extreme importance of this project, I will provide a stipend to those who serve.

Second, with the science and business areas well along in developing their programs and attracting increasing numbers of students, it is time to focus our attention on the arts, humanities and social sciences. The Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences recently published "The Heart of the Matter," which emphasizes the importance of these areas for a stronger, more flexible workforce. The report stresses that:

As we strive to create a more civil public discourse, a more adaptable and creative workforce, and a more secure nation, the humanities and social sciences are the heart of the matter, the keeper of the republic—a source of national memory and civic vigor, cultural understanding and communication, individual fulfillment and the ideals we hold in common.

This viewpoint is entirely aligned with the OneLeMoyne Vision which states:

The College upholds centuries-old ideals of liberal arts education by maintaining the highest standards of excellence, cultivating reason, critical acumen and eloquence. The Le Moyne community's values of respect and self-direction prepare students for informed, active citizenship, while building capacities for skillful collaboration.

I intend to call a meeting with the arts, humanities and social sciences faculty, along with Provost LeMura and our talented new Dean of Arts and Sciences, Chris Jones. At that time I plan to invite a vision and strategic planning process similar to the one I began with business four years ago.

Third and finally, we will undertake a campus-wide marketing initiative. The sixth priority of the OneLeMoyne Strategic Plan commits us to "achieve a national reputation for excellence in Jesuit education." We agreed last year that it was time for a more refined and robust marketing strategy. We created a new position, Associate Vice President of Marketing and Communications, and hired Peter Killian. Over the course of the year he will rely upon his considerable expertise as he leads us through a comprehensive marketing and branding process. Pete will be seeking your assistance.

While our journey towards excellence is not without risks and pitfalls, both internally and externally, I am confident that we can secure Le Moyne's future through our determination, keen and compassionate intelligence and commitment to mission. During his remarks at Henninger High, President Obama celebrated the "Say Yes to Education Program." "Say Yes" is just one of the many educational initiatives in which we participate that is aimed to assist the less fortunate. If the President were aware of the student-centered, high-touch, relatively low net cost, justice-oriented education we provide to a student body that is over 30% Pell eligible, I am confident he would applaud our efforts here on the Heights.

CONCLUSION

Through our Le Moyne pride and spirit, we turned a year that began with a shortfall into one of our most successful yet. Your limitless energy, passion and enthusiasm have bolstered us through difficult times and will continue to be a driving force as we embrace the future.

We face the inescapable threats I have discussed. Our prosperity depends upon treating them as opportunities. In the spirit of resilience and determination that has characterized Le Moyne since its founding, we will seize this moment and, thus, guarantee our College's continued success in serving its noble mission.

As we face the tasks of the coming year, let us continue to be inspired by our first Jesuit Pope, Francis, who recently declared:

Before all else, we need to keep alive in our world the thirst for the absolute, and to counter the dominance of a one-dimensional vision of the human person, a vision that reduces human beings to what they produce and to what they consume. This is one of the most insidious temptations of our time. (Address to religious leaders, March 20, 2013)

May God bless you.