

President's Convocation

**Address of John J. Hurley
President of Canisius College**

**September 9, 2015
Montante Cultural Center**

I'd like to welcome you all back to campus for the start of the academic year and what is always an incredibly exciting time. Two weeks ago, when the freshmen and transfers arrived at Canisius, I could see the hope, anticipation, and optimism in their eyes. It's something that should inspire us all to renew our commitment to our roles in this great enterprise we call higher education, to rededicate ourselves to making a real difference in the lives of our students.

We open this academic year with a good measure of optimism, and I am here to report to you that the state of our college is stronger than it has been in the past five years. Working together, we have made many difficult decisions, we have worked harder and smarter, and we have made do with less. The good news is that we made our decisions quickly and we are now seeing the results.

Other schools are just coming to grips with the reality of their situation, having spent the past few years "hunkering down" and waiting for the storm to pass. They now find themselves in a new reality, a persistent storm of change and challenge that is not passing, and some are not prepared to respond.

Despite all of the media attention on the many challenges facing higher education, I continue to see opportunity rather than obstacle for Canisius College. Here, we have charted a different path. We developed new metrics to help us better understand staffing needs, teaching loads, class sizes, the sequencing of the curriculum, and policies governing course releases. As a

result, we have made better decisions on replacements and the use of adjuncts. We resisted the urge to rush ahead with a review process in the hopes of cutting a few low-enrolled academic programs and opted instead for a more carefully-considered model that is focused on strengthening programs.

We merged several administrative offices to create the GriffCenter in order to sharpen our focus on student retention, a persistent Achilles heel at Canisius. This summer, we merged the offices of Student Accounts, Financial Aid and the Registrar into a single Student Records and Financial Services Office in Bagen Hall. This was an outgrowth of our retention study two years ago as we realized that bouncing students between three offices in three different buildings was a frustrating experience for them. These offices now operate in a single location, and staff has been cross-trained so that every person can handle every question. We've introduced policies governing travel, printing, and procurement to drive down costs. We have looked at every corner of the college in order to drive out waste and inefficiency. Well-run organizations do this routinely and I'm pleased this is becoming a way of life for us because in the end, it will only make the college stronger. In the process, Canisius College has changed. We're now committed to constantly looking at everything we do and how we do it. Data has replaced our reliance on anecdotal arguments as a basis for our decisions.

I have been asked many times over the past year whether the worst was over for Canisius, whether we had seen the end of budget cutting and operational changes. Every time I am tempted to claim that yes, the worst is behind us, I am reminded of a prediction by one of our U.S. presidents that turned out to be horribly premature.

Seriously, though, I do think the worst of the demographic decline is behind us. But, we must push forward, understanding that there is no resting place and we cannot return to the old

way of doing things. We have made great progress but we will need to remain vigilant, nimble and committed to continuous change and improvement. As we open this academic year, though, it is clear that our plan and our different path are paying great dividends. Let me highlight the ways:

We finished the 2014-15 fiscal year with an operating surplus, as we had better than anticipated revenues from several sources and we continued to hold the line on expenses. This was a great accomplishment and the college's financial position continues to strengthen. The endowment stands at a record \$108 million, our cash position is strong, and we're taking advantage of the low interest rate environment to refinance \$54 million of the college's outstanding debt at a substantial savings.

As the fall semester begins, our undergraduate enrollment is slightly above budget at 2556 students, as we welcomed 608 freshmen and 117 transfer students to Canisius and, it appears, we had better than budgeted retention of upperclassmen. While the freshman class was under our budget goal of 630, transfers exceeded the target of 100. In recruiting this class, we kept a close eye on the financial aid budget. We have adopted a new approach on undergraduate recruitment in that we are budgeting more conservatively and placing the emphasis on making incremental progress on the discount rate, which we reduced this year by 1.4%. We may sometimes opt for a smaller class size that enables us to remain academically more selective, rather than be more aggressive in our admissions and financial aid awards just to recruit more students. Our expense reductions of the past several years have put us in a position to better manage the financial aid budget in this way.

Summer school finished ahead of budget and graduate enrollment for the fall is above projections. The net result is that we are on budget to hit all of our revenue goals. We are not

hitting any grand slams but being on budget is a significant accomplishment in this environment and I would like to recognize our Vice President for Enrollment Management, Kathleen Davis, and her team for their good work on the recruitment and financial aid for the graduate and undergraduate students.

In addition to our new students, we have about 155 students from Buffalo State who are residing in the Main Humboldt Apartments and Campion Hall. As we reported to the media, this is clearly a win-win scenario for both schools. I should point out that unbudgeted revenue from Buffalo State's rentals last year was a significant factor in our finishing the 2015 fiscal year with an operating surplus. And I should recognize our Associate Vice President Matt Mulville for his good work in making this arrangement with Buffalo State work so well.

We continue to move ahead with capital projects and new programs. We completed the renovation of the main floor of the Bouwhuis Library and the results are spectacular. The project ran under budget so we were able to complete some work on the lower level. The one remaining piece of work on the main floor, the expansion of the Tim Horton's space to accommodate onsite baking and storage, will be completed soon.

We also opened the Sports Journalism broadcast studio in Science Hall last week. This is the collaboration between our Communications Studies and Athletics departments that will have our students producing broadcast-quality coverage of our Division I athletic contests for airing on the ESPN3 internet platform. This is a great learning opportunity for our students and it will provide tremendous exposure for our athletics program.

Last Spring, Bill Collins and others in the Advancement section began working with me in earnest on a targeted plan to raise the \$35 million that will be necessary to complete Science Hall. We have had several excellent meetings with close friends of the college over the past six

months as a prelude to beginning to make actual solicitations. My hope is that we can make substantial progress on this targeted campaign within about 18 months so that construction can begin in the spring of 2017.

Our estimate of \$35 million for the remainder of the project comes in part from the design that Cannon Design developed in 2010 as we prepared for the first phase of the Science Hall project. I want to assure our science faculty, particularly those in the Biology and Chemistry departments, that I have heard your concerns about that original design. I understand the departments want an opportunity to revisit the plan before we finalize it and begin construction. I also understand that the world has continued to change and science education has evolved over the past five years, and our planning needs to accommodate that. Some have expressed concerns about the college's possible participation in the StartUp New York program and we need to consider if and how that might affect the allocation of space in the building.

Dr. McCarthy is initiating discussions with the science departments to better understand the specifics here, as a prelude to our planning. I want to say publicly in this forum that the science faculty will be consulted as we move forward. I cannot guarantee that we will always accommodate every single request or act on every opinion, but faculty will be involved. We remain open to the possibility of a StartUp New York relationship, but only if it is a strategic fit with our existing or planned science programs and only if it does not impose an undue burden on other planned uses of the building. We must also understand that the planning for this building must address where science education is heading, not just where it happens to be right now. And we must have an openness to listen to the expertise of our architects, Cannon, who have been involved in the development of so many of these buildings around the country as well as other sources.

I also reported to the campus over the summer that the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, our regional accrediting authority, reaffirmed the college's accreditation. That's good news, as reaccreditation is not a given in this environment. It was not an unqualified opinion, however, as Middle States is requiring us to submit a monitoring report by September 2016 - one year from now. The visiting team and the Commission generally endorsed all of the recommendations we developed as part of our self-study, but they want a report next year on our progress. Middle States is keeping our feet to the fire and we need to respond. So, while accreditation has been reaffirmed, it is not "mission accomplished." There is much to be done over the next 12 months.

The monitoring report must address the assessment of the college's core curriculum. Fr. Pat Lynch, Dr. Mark Meyer and the Core Curriculum Committee, have been doing yeoman's work on the assessment of the core over the past year, but there is much remaining to be done. I created some angst last year when I suggested in my convocation address that we needed to consider revisions to the core to focus on a smaller number of courses or at least a smaller number of critical learning goals that could be continuously assessed. Some misinterpreted that as a call for a smaller number of requirements within the core, which was not my point. I was referring to the number of courses approved for each of the various attributes and fields, many of which we have found are not aligned with the approved learning goals of the core and are not being properly assessed. I will avoid specific prescriptions this year and instead simply urge the Core Curriculum Committee to work with Dr. Peg McCarthy on what Middle States wants to see: the development and execution of a simple, sustainable and sufficient plan for assessment of the core. I offer only that memorable quote from the movie, *Apollo 13*: Failure is not an option.

And please do not come back next summer with the even more famous line from that movie, “Houston, we have a problem.”

As the campus will learn through a series of information sessions, the college is introducing a new branding campaign this month. This has been many months in the making, as we involved faculty, staff, undergraduate and graduate students and alumni in focus groups. We undertook a quantitative market research study to better understand what high school students and parents are seeking in a college education and how well they know Canisius. We also did research with high school guidance counselors and graduate students. It was extremely revealing and provided us excellent direction.

The bottom line: we discovered that we need to better communicate the Canisius value proposition, especially as it relates to program excellence, outcomes, opportunities and affordability. The conversation around value has clearly changed – students and families are comparing schools based on these attributes. This is great news for Canisius because these are all areas that distinguish us. We have created a new marketing campaign to significantly elevate perceptions of excellence and overall value of Canisius. The preliminary feedback has been very positive.

The information sessions will give all of you a chance to see the work, better understand the research insights that informed the overall direction, and provide feedback to help guide further development. We encourage you to attend the sessions as our goal is to make certain everyone is well-informed and is proud of how the college is being presented.

Along with the new branding campaign, we will be introducing a new mobile-friendly homepage for the college’s website in the third week in September that will also include the new

marketing message. The entire Canisius website will be rebuilt over the course of the next 10 months, a massive project involving people from every corner of the campus.

As I have said in the past, these convocation addresses are part state of the college and part vision of the future. As we begin our academic year, I'd like to reflect a bit on what we have learned over the past four years and point the way forward for Canisius.

While so many things at Canisius and in the world have changed, our fundamental commitment to academic excellence has not wavered and never will. We continue to get spectacular results: Our world-champion CFA Research Challenge Team, coached by Steve Guttuso and Rick Wall; our exceptional accounting program which continues to distinguish itself as the finest undergraduate accounting program in New York State; our near-perfect job placement rates in so many programs; our nearly ninety percent acceptance rates in medical, dental, osteopathic and law schools. In addition to student outcomes, faculty must be recognized for their impressive contributions to their respective fields in research, publication, and service to professional organizations. Grant awards from federal sources are frequently cited as a measure of success for universities and Canisius is no exception: Dr. Michael Wood's NSF grant for his research on the Big Bang theory, Dr. Mick Cochrane's National Endowment for the Arts award for the Contemporary Writer's Series and most recently a \$1.3 million grant from the Department of Defense for "Clinical Trial of a Comprehensive Treatment for High-Functioning Children with ASD" awarded to Drs. Chris Lopata, Marcus Thomeer, Jim Donnelly, and Jonathon Rodgers deserve special recognition.

We have also reaffirmed our commitment to the institution of tenure, as the glue that holds the academic enterprise together. We're still granting tenure and we're still providing resources to untenured faculty to enable them to achieve that goal. We've maintained our

sabbatical program. We've strengthened our commitment to the principle of shared governance and I want to single out Dr. Michael Noonan's leadership in the Faculty Senate; he has been a catalyst for making this happen. He has drawn me into this discussion and has helped us get to "yes." We're a better college for it, and I applaud the faculty for participating in the governance of the college in new and constructive ways.

What have we learned in the process? I think first and foremost, we have learned that in a college whose budget is ninety percent driven by student revenues, our pursuit of academic excellence is qualified by the reality of our budget and our students' ability to pay. The college's five year budget projection is based on small increases in tuition, incremental reductions in the discount rate, and continued controls on expenses. This is what we need to do to respond to the concerns about the high price of a college education.

The second thing we have learned is that expense control counts for a lot. Fifty years ago, one of the sages of the United States Senate, Everett Dirksen of Illinois, was reported to have observed about federal spending, "A billion here, a billion there, pretty soon you're talking about real money."

Sen. Dirksen, if he in fact ever uttered those words, was right. This table demonstrates how changes we made with travel, printing, supplies, memberships and dues, utilities, and maintenance have produced over \$2 million in annual savings in the operating budget. A million here, a million there, pretty soon you're talking about real money.

Category	FY 2011 Expense	FY 2015 Expense	Notes
Travel	\$1.8 M	\$1.3 M	Formalized travel authorization policy, engaged Travel Team
Printing	\$717 K	\$504 K	Eliminated most ink-jet printers; moved printing in-house
Supplies	\$883 K	\$591 K	Consolidated vendors,

			negotiated discounts, reduced purchases
Membership & Dues	\$520 K	\$417 K	Eliminated non- essential memberships
Utilities	\$2.8 M	\$2.3 M	LED lights, closed unused spaces, locked in lower rates
Maintenance	\$2.1 M	\$1.7 M	Consolidated vendors, negotiated discounts, space consolidation
TOTAL	\$8.820 M	\$6.812 M	

The third thing we have learned is that ongoing program review – both academic and administrative – is absolutely essential. We can see the results of the administrative program review. Dr. Rick Wall’s report this summer on the results of the Academic Program Board’s review process likewise demonstrates the value of requiring detailed reports on mission, curriculum, enrollment and retention, teaching loads, outcomes and assessment, and planning and budgeting. It has helped us link program review and planning to the college’s budget process. It has provided fair and constructive feedback to departments. It will lead, I hope, to curricular innovation and a strengthening of the academic program in every department. I applaud the elected faculty members and the administrators on the APB for the many hours they are spending on this important task.

What does the future hold for Canisius? In the immediate future, we need to maintain our focus and continue to execute on our plan to stabilize the operating budget of the college. The fact that we’ve made adjustments in the operating budget to accommodate lower enrollment does not mean we’re accepting lower enrollment as a given. Far from it. The college’s recruitment strategy is to continue to strengthen our efforts in our primary market of Western New York. Our market research this summer indicates we have some work to do here. We are stepping up our efforts in selected regional markets in the Northeast, specifically the rest of New

York State, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, and Chicago. This will take concerted effort over a longer period of time because we don't have the same established name recognition in these markets. But there is potential here. I am told that our sister Jesuit school in Cleveland, John Carroll University, has recruited 55 students from Western New York for its freshman class this year. I would like to believe that there are 55 students from Northeastern Ohio who would look at a Jesuit college in Buffalo as an option, especially given the resurgence and momentum we are feeling in our community. Buffalo can be an even more popular destination for college students and we must incorporate this into our marketing as well.

And then there is international student recruitment. We have been stymied in our attempt to introduce a doctoral program at Canisius, which could have been part of our effort to pursue a name change to Canisius University with the New York State Education Department. This was to be a critical part of an international recruiting effort. So, we need to decide what our international marketing strategy will be. This is a not a casual decision as the recruitment of international students will require a commitment to fund an English as a Second Language (ESL) program and an investment in personnel to recruit in foreign markets.

While I am speaking of opportunities for growth in our enrollment, I should stress that we will pursue growth that makes sense and is consistent with our academic and financial aspirations. Having made so many difficult decisions over the past four years, we will not pursue growth simply for growth's sake. It must be growth that sustains our academic profile and lowers the discount rate.

As we think about the future, I want to return to the themes of last year's convocation in which I charted a new vision for Canisius College that could be summarized in three words:

Redefinition, Revitalization and Innovation. These themes will continue to drive our strategic planning in this academic year.

Redefinition. I suggested that we need to redefine what it means to be a student-centered university at this challenging time in the history of higher education. In a recent Washington Post article, Hunter Rawlings, the former president of Cornell and the University of Iowa, points out that we in academia have tended to define being student-centered as meeting the needs of our students, whom we sometimes describe as “our customers.” The student-as-customer mentality has led to the commoditization of college, and Rawlings believes that we acquiesce to this at our peril.

The problem with this college-as-commodity analysis, according to Rawlings, is that a college education is not a product like a car because unlike a car, college requires the buyer to do most of the work to obtain its value. “The courses the student decides to take (and not take), the amount of work the student does, the intellectual curiosity the student exhibits, her participation in class, his focus and determination – all contribute far more to her educational outcome than the college’s overall curriculum, much less its amenities and social life.” Yet, he points out, most public discussion of higher ed pretends that “students simply receive their education from colleges the way a person walks out of Best Buy with a television.”

So redefining the student-centered university should mean creating, in Rawlings’ words, “a challenging engagement in which both parties – professors and students - have to take an active and risk-taking role if its potential value is to be realized.” Professors need to do what so many of you have done so well for so long: inspire, mentor, prod, irritate, and create engaging environments for learning beyond the books. But students need to make a similar commitment “to breathe it in and be enlivened by it.” One of our faculty members has suggested that instead

of describing ourselves as student-centered, we should describe ourselves as learning-centered. There's more than a little merit to that suggestion.

And if this is happening, none of us should feel threatened by talk of how a person's education can and should lead to a successful career in a satisfying job. Andrew Delbanco writes in *College: What it Was, Is and Should Be*, "The American college has always been about more than the transmission of information or the inculcation of skills; it has been, at its best, about helping young people prepare for lives of meaning and purpose." Meaning and purpose can involve the classic life well-lived and examined, but it can also mean significant career achievement.

Revitalization. We have learned how to live in a resource-constrained world and the need to trim expenses and cut things has been, at times, draining. In the meantime, the world has continued to change. We must constantly evaluate whether there is any gap between what we are teaching in a particular discipline and what graduates in that discipline will need to compete in an open marketplace. I should commend our recently-departed academic vice president, Rick Wall, who will use his sabbatical this year to revamp the curriculum in the college's Finance program. One would think that a program that is achieving a nearly 100 percent job placement rate for its graduates and producing a world champion CFA Research Challenge team would not need to be revamped, but Rick is demonstrating a commitment to continuous improvement and a belief that we can always be better, even in our best programs. I urge the departments in all three schools of the college to commit to revitalization to insure that our curriculum, our pedagogy, and our use of technology prepare our students for this changing world.

Innovation. We continue to pursue innovation in our business model with the consolidation of offices and services. This needs to become part of our culture and we need to

go further. We are attempting to develop best in class student services and operating practices that will make us more efficient and just plain better at what we do. With that may come new opportunities for strategic alliances, outsourcing, and new consortia.

So, how will we get there? We are initiating a new round of strategic planning to point the way. In June, I completed my fifth year as president of Canisius and I am happy to report that my contract was extended by the college's Board of Trustees for an additional five year term. The college's last plan, *A Transformational Education*, was developed during the 2010-11 academic year, my first as president. I want to engage all campus stakeholders in a thoughtful discussion of critical questions and challenges facing higher education and how Canisius can develop the best and most creative responses.

We begin with our vision of the future and we have kicked off an initiative called The Vision Project, an effort to engage the entire Canisius community in the process of envisioning the Canisius College of 20-30 years in the future. A group of faculty and administrators from the college's Strategic Planning Committee have developed what we consider to be some big questions in five areas: Justice, Jesuit Identity, our connection to the "new Buffalo," redefining the student-centered university, and academic revitalization. This is an opportunity, I hope, for all of us to move beyond the difficult discussions of the past few years and to imagine a brighter, more exciting, more prosperous future for Canisius.

But it is also an opportunity to come to grips with the challenges of our rapidly-changing world, to demonstrate how Canisius will draw on its great tradition of being a place that nurtures leadership as that word is understood in its broadest and best sense, and to insure that we remain responsive, relevant and successful amidst the change and disruption in the world. This is no small task. Imagine for a moment that it is 1990 again and I am asking you to imagine Canisius

College in the year 2015. Steve Jobs was in exile from Apple Computer and the iPad and the iPhone were not even glimmers in his eye. Cellphones were bulky, expensive and limited in what they could do; the term “smartphone” did not exist. The World Wide Web was born in 1990 when Tim Berners-Lee, a researcher in Geneva, developed Hyper Text Markup Language, or HTML. Is there anyone among us who could have imagined in 1990 the profound difference that Apple, cell phones, or the World Wide Web would make in education, research, pedagogy, the organization of libraries, communications, business functions and pretty much everything else that touches Canisius College?

As we look to the future, we need to look for opportunities and be prepared to make the bold, strategic decisions that will move Canisius to new levels of excellence. So, I invite all of you to log on and weigh in – either as individuals or as departments - with your best thoughts. We will use input on The Vision Project in developing a new vision statement for the college and ultimately in creating goals and objectives for the strategic plan that I will present to our Board of Trustees for approval in May. But I hope we go further and use these questions to create an ongoing dialogue about the future, the place where our best thinking needs to be directed, and about our commitment to creating a more just and equitable world; to preserving and enhancing our Jesuit identity; to developing ways of engaging with the “new” Buffalo, while also engaging with the gritty reality of the old Buffalo; and above all to providing our students with the transformational education that has always been at the heart of Canisius College.

Ultimately, this is all about Canisius and our collective hopes and aspirations for the college we love. Together, we can create that bright future for Canisius as we pursue the *magis*. May God bless all of you and may God bless Canisius College.