Trying financial, social times to test Canisius' new enrollment VP

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Mid-pandemic is a heck of a time to step into an enrollment management role. To also head a school’s diversity efforts in spring/summer 2020 presents a greater challenge.

But Danielle Ianni said she’s ready to help Canisius College rebound from
Covid-19 and bolster its ranks.

Danielle Ianni, the new vice president for enrollment management at Canisius College, joined the college just as all institutions of higher education are trying to ensure stability during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ianni was named vice president for enrollment management effective May 15. Coming over from the University at Buffalo, where she was director of enrollment operations, Ianni has been tasked with leading undergraduate and graduate enrollment initiatives, including ensuring diverse classes of students campuswide.

She steps into the job at a time when the impact of coronavirus — including exactly what in-person instruction will look like come fall — has yet to be determined.

But Ianni is confident she can reassure students during trying financial and social times, thanks in part to her research background studying the gap between traditional and non-traditional students.

**What made you want to step into this role at Canisius?** I have always had great respect for Canisius. Its mission and values really resonated with me. I feel that this is a place that provides an excellent education and has a strong commitment to Buffalo and the higher-education landscape.

**Where does Canisius’ year-over-year undergrad and graduate enrollment stand so far for the fall semester?** We are still working with students who are interested in starting for the fall semester. We realize the current environment has resulted in delays in students making decisions about higher education, and we are trying to be supportive as they work through the many factors that
go into making this decision. The current pandemic has resulted in the timeline being extended, so we are not able to predict fall enrollment at this time, but feel confident in our efforts and in our plans to open campus this fall.

What challenges will there be in recruiting students and obtaining financial aid for them while the Covid-19 pandemic is ongoing? Recruiting looks and feels differently than it has in the past, but it is still student-centered. We are working with students individually on their college searches. We are meeting with students virtually, holding virtual information sessions, tours and chats. Our goal is to still provide the same excellent service we have in the past, but in a different format. We are also offering financial support to students impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic through our Covid-19 Canisius Relief Fund.

What challenges are there to retaining students for this coming year? The uncertainty of what higher education will look like in the fall is at the forefront of many of our incoming students’ minds. Leadership has been working all summer on plans to open up campus and provide a safe and educationally enriching experience for our students. We have increased outreach and communication efforts to help address concerns and answer questions. The uncertainties, which are out of our control, may have an impact on students enrolling in the fall. However, we feel confident that we can deliver the Canisius experience we are known for and our students have come to expect.

Do you see graduate enrollment increasing due to fewer job opportunities, or dropping due to loss of income or other circumstances during the pandemic? We have experienced an
increase in inquiries for our graduate programs within the last few months. Historically, education levels have increased during a recession. We will have to wait and see if this holds true during a pandemic. Now is an excellent time to go back to school and further your education. We have a lot of programs that prepare individuals for career advancement or a career change that are offered in many different formats, including in-person, on-campus or hybrid options. Students may find the current environment the optimal time to invest in their future and position themselves for the next step in their career.

**What lessons that are applicable to your work can be learned from the pandemic?** The pandemic has presented a lot of challenges but also has provided some opportunities to continue to grow. We have become much more efficient at providing our services virtually and will continue to do that in the future. The virtual appointments and tours are beneficial for some students’ schedules, and we see value in continuing to offer these opportunities. Our comfort level with online (teaching) has grown considerably, and I foresee this being a continued part of everyday business moving forward.

**What lessons pertaining to diversity can be taken from the ongoing civil unrest?** Canisius has a strong mission that values diversity and social justice. The current civil unrest shows how important it is to continue to live by the values and mission of the institution and to continue to learn as individuals, as an admissions staff and as a campus community. Our staff has engaged in discussions at the department and institutional level, and we will continue to address these topics and find opportunities to incorporate dialogue into our work. This will be a
continued priority for professional growth in the coming year and into the future. In addition, Canisius created an office of Equity and Inclusion and hired Fatima Rodriguez-Johnson to lead these efforts. A bias response team to address racially motivated incidents and measures was also created.

**How can Canisius and other institutions work to bridge the gap between traditional and non-traditional students?** At Canisius, we offer a number of different programs, including undergraduate, master’s and certificate programs. We also offer a number of different delivery options to try to meet students’ needs. We have to continue to work on being relevant, meeting students’ needs and timelines, and make a commitment to help provide access.

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