
Message from Provost Urban

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OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

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Dear Colleagues,

As we begin a new semester, I wanted to share some of the successes of the past year and provide some thoughts about some priorities for the coming year. Lehigh is in a strong position in the broader context of higher education, but we need to remain focused and strategic in our efforts if we are to continue to succeed in an increasingly competitive environment. This need to focus on and invest in targeted areas is reflected in the strategic plan - [Inspiring the Future Makers](#). I am deeply thankful to the many people who participated in the strategic planning process and I am excited to begin to continue this work. Implementation of the plan will involve working through existing governance and advisory committees as well as creating some special-purpose working groups. You can learn more by joining the [upcoming information session](#) on strategic plan implementation. Whether hiring new faculty, investing in academic programs, or supporting research initiatives, we will be working to ensure that decisions made throughout the year reflect the priorities that we have worked collaboratively to articulate.

Recent Successes

Undergraduate admissions: The class of 2027 was drawn from the largest pool of undergraduate applications in Lehigh's history at 18,415. We are welcoming about 1,520 new first-year students and 45 transfer students to campus this fall. This class is the most gender-balanced class in Lehigh's history and when final numbers are in, women will likely make up more than 50% of the incoming class. These numbers are a direct result of the hard work of our admissions and financial aid colleagues in an era when [total undergraduate enrollment](#) in the US has declined more than 15% from its peak in 2010.

Student achievements: Lehigh students (undergraduate and graduate) won many competitive national scholarships and fellowships this year, including Fulbright Scholarships, National

Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowships, and Boren Scholarships. The [Office of Fellowship Advising](#) saw an almost 50% increase in the number of students expressing interest in these opportunities. For the first time in several years, a Lehigh Student won a Goldwater Scholarship - which is awarded to some of the most promising undergraduate students in STEM disciplines.

Faculty achievements and research: Lehigh faculty were recognized for their work through some highly competitive awards. For example, this year three faculty won Fulbright awards (Zepeda, Deo, and Ceron) and five faculty won NSF CAREER awards (Roy, Bhattacharya, Yang, Xie, and Palmeri). Just yesterday I learned that another Lehigh faculty member (Ralphs) was named an INFORMS fellow - one of only twelve so honored this year across the country. These are just a few examples of Lehigh faculty who have been honored by professional societies, foundations and funding agencies this year. Overall research expenditures increased this year to nearly \$50M - which includes a 46% increase in federally supported research expenditures in the last three years. These successes of Lehigh faculty are clear indications of the quality of researchers whom we are bringing to campus. This year, 51 new full-time faculty - 39 tenure track and 12 teaching track - will be joining Lehigh.

Equity and inclusion.: The creation of the [future faculty postdoctoral program](#) and the recruitment of the first cohort of six fellows through that program represents a new approach to enhancing the diversity of our faculty at Lehigh. We look to continue these efforts this year. We also have created a new Deputy EOCC/Title IX coordinator position and hired the first person (Edriana Symia) into that role. This represents a significant expansion of our resources devoted to ensuring equal access to education. I also created a [Provost's Title IX Advisory Committee](#) comprised of individuals from across the University including students, faculty, and staff in order to advise on efforts to reduce the incidence of sexual harassment and violence on campus and to improve our response to these incidents when they occur.

Priorities and Goals for the Year

Student outcomes: retention and graduation rate

When we admit students to Lehigh, we want to be sure that they have a path to succeed at and beyond Lehigh. Historically, [about 94%](#) of incoming students return for their second year and [about 80%](#) of our students graduate in four years. These numbers have fallen slightly in recent years, perhaps in part because of the effects of the COVID pandemic. Given our [strategic goal](#) to be a national leader in student outcomes over the next decade, we will work to improve overall student retention and graduation rates and especially to reduce gaps in these measures of success by race, gender, and socio-economic status - as described in [our diversity plan](#). Achieving these goals will require the attention of staff and faculty to ensure that students have and know about the support that they need to succeed. We also need to ensure that students feel like Lehigh is a place where they belong. Academically, taking a more [student-centric approach](#) by applying universal design principles to learning is a key to ensuring that students thrive in their academic programs.

Graduate enrollments:

More careers than ever are requiring education beyond a bachelor's degree. Not surprisingly then, demand for graduate education is increasing even as the number of undergraduate students enrolled at US colleges and universities is declining. However, at Lehigh, graduate student enrollment in the last academic year was **the lowest** it has been in about fifteen years and are about 20% lower than in 2011. Reflecting these facts, the **strategic plan articulates** a goal of doubling doctoral program enrollments and tripling enrollments in master's degree and graduate certificate programs over the next ten years. Achieving these goals will require that we create and promote quality programs that are innovative both in content and methods of delivery. The programs must reflect the interests of students and the needs of employers, and must leverage new technologies and learning platforms to ensure that high-quality remote learning is available to students in a flexible manner.

Engagement of faculty and staff:

A university is a community of learners and seekers of knowledge. Our sense of community and shared purpose around our mission is what makes universities special places to be and to work. While the last few years have shown us that a certain kind of community can be achieved through technology, I have talked to many faculty and staff who are seeking more opportunities to build and affirm community through in-person interaction. Therefore, the provost's office will be creating some new programs to bring people together in informal ways around arts performances at Lehigh and discussions of current issues in higher education (more info coming soon!) I would encourage all of us to consider ways in which we can develop stronger connections with colleagues and students in the coming year.

Enhancing entrepreneurship and Innovation:

Entrepreneurial thinking and actions facilitate the translation of ideas and innovations into societal, economic, and human impact. In the next year, we will work so that Lehigh students and faculty can access a more structured and robust path for developing an entrepreneurial mindset and also for accessing the support needed to turn research discoveries into intellectual property and sustainable ventures. This effort will help to create a distinctive educational experience for students and will provide new avenues for faculty-led research to have an impact at both the local and global scale.

Thanks for all that you do for Lehigh and our communities. I am looking forward to what I believe will be an exciting and important semester in making the future of Lehigh.

Sincerely,

Nathan