

- "November 18, 2011"

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Dear Ohio State Mansfield Colleagues,

Greetings from Orlando, Florida! Although I am pleased to be forwarding my Bi-Weekly Report from these warm environs, I am even more delighted to be participating in my first professional conference (National Council on Family Relations) since taking the position of Dean and Director of Ohio State Mansfield. I do believe in leading by example, and the fact that our campus lays claim to a more research intensive focus spurs me ever onward to continue making scholarly contributions to my field. Coming into the job at the beginning of this year, I was fortunate to have a book, several research articles and book chapters, and a federal grant in various stages of completion, allowing me to maintain continued research productivity over these past 11 months. More and more, however, I realize that I will need to step up my game and carve out some smaller blocks of time in order to keep up even a modicum of empirical output. Happily, my attendance at this conference has re-energized me to do just that!

Speaking of research, both the Executive Committee (EC) and Faculty Assembly (FA) meetings taking place over the last two weeks have focused on research-related topics, with special emphasis on the generation of scholarship by and with our undergraduate and graduate students. In large part, the EC discussion centered on the report recently released by the Ad Hoc Research Committee. This report contained several recommendations that would have both short-term and recurring budget implications, prompting EC members to propose that there be some assessment of the general degree to which our campus community is ready and willing to embrace student research as a primary concentration of our time and effort prior to their endorsement of the report and its recommendations. As it turned out, however, the subsequent FA discussion led to a call for the report to be released in its entirety to the full faculty in order to better inform this discussion. Faculty President Terri Fisher will be collating responses to the report and its recommendations, so please make sure that your comments and concerns are registered with her as soon as possible.

In the meantime, I would like to share with our campus community a rather compelling example of some research being conducted by our faculty that has teaching and service implications both locally and on the national stage. Last week, work being conducted by Professor Lee McEwan and Associate Professor Heather Tanner was featured in a gathering of educators and community stakeholders at the Mansfield City Schools that I attended on Thursday, November 10th. Known nationally as the Algebra Project, this work seeks to impact the math skills of high school students who enter the ninth grade in the lowest quartile of math ability level. While these researchers are expressing cautious optimism about the initial results being reported from

their first two years of work, university partners and benefactors from various locations across the country were on hand to express their desire to provide significant investments in this project over the next several years. Already funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation, new support is being directed to the project by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation that will allow Dr. McEwan and Dr. Tanner to partner with other collaborators – including Associate Professor Terri Bucci – in order to begin training math educators in new and innovative methods discovered through the Algebra Project's efforts. In addition to witnessing the full and complete support of the Mansfield school district for this work vis-à-vis the words and actions of Superintendent Dan Freund, I was also struck by the strong endorsement of these efforts by Dr. Randy Smith, the Vice Provost for Academic Programs. This very much is a project to watch in the weeks and months ahead!

Moving on to other topics, I met with the Curriculum Committee last week and, among other things, we discussed the opportunity to send representatives to a meeting being held on the Columbus campus on November 22nd in order to begin a dialogue about the possibility of creating a bachelor of general studies degree. Based on the experiences of other campuses across the country, the initial vision for such a program would be centered in Arts and Sciences, would be granted only on the regional campuses, and would represent an ideal opportunity for recipients of Associate degrees to complete a baccalaureate program by taking a variety of upper level classes in each of the three divisions of Arts and Sciences (Arts and Humanities, Natural and Mathematical Science, and Social and Behavioral Sciences). The Curriculum Committee endorsed sending representatives, and Professor Bill Putikka, Professor Gary Kennedy, and Advisor Bill Bauer all volunteered to attend the meeting (subsequently, Associate Professor Scopas Poggo also volunteered to attend as an at-large representative).

I had the pleasure of holding my first informal chat of the year last week with staff in Bromfield Hall as part of a series of meetings being sponsored by MSAC. By design, much of the dialogue was centered on the relative progress our campus is making in its movement toward a more performance-based culture for staff members. The initial reactions to such things as the development of precise performance indicators and the participation of employees and supervisors in quarterly reviews was overwhelmingly positive as indicated by the staff members attending that first meeting. There were some concerns that were expressed about what lies ahead, including whether or not there could be some consistency developed for expectations both within and across departments. Many of these issues can and will be addressed in my ongoing discussions with my senior administrative staff, who collectively are responsible for setting the appropriate tone and tempo of these performance-based shifts, as well as in subsequent informal meetings I have with staff throughout the remainder of the year.

Several months ago, President Gee had appointed me to represent his office on the Strategic Planning Committee of the Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland. This group has been tasked with increasing college readiness, access, and completion of degree programs for students in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. In turn, I had asked Ken Sigler (Director of Admissions), Nick Orosan (Director of Development), and Dametraus Jagers (Coordinator of the Multicultural Affairs Office), to attend the inaugural meeting of this committee in order to share information about all of our present and future plans to connect with Cleveland students, their families, and education professionals in their district. Similar to our plans to connect more locally with school districts throughout North Central Ohio, this contingent discussed the possibility of our bringing professional development opportunities to educators within the Cleveland schools in combination with increased family visitation days on our campus and more regular placement of our admissions and multicultural staff in school buildings and communities served by the district. While students from Cuyahoga County currently comprise the second largest contingent of our student body (only Richland County sends more students), the proposed efforts with and for the Cleveland Metropolitan School District will allow us to attract even more students from Northeast Ohio in the years ahead as called for by our Campus Strategic Plan. In essence, by combining efforts to help educators more effectively engage the families of their student population with a more intensive physical presence of our admissions and multicultural staff, we will create a more systematic pipeline for students to apply and attend The Ohio State University at Mansfield.

Finally, and on a much lighter note, I wish to note that I was pleased to have attended my first-ever Buckeye Bash this past Tuesday. As the keynote speaker, I had been asked to make some short remarks about our campus and its direction (but also had been warned that the typically boisterous crowd might not pay too much attention to what I had to say). The prediction of a lively and energetic crowd was on target, and I am not at all sure about how much of what I said was actually heard. However, I was gratified to look out over the Scarlet and Gray clad audience and to realize how deep the support runs for our great university and all that it stands for locally. And certainly on a more one-on-one basis, members of the crowd seemed to genuinely appreciate my thoughts about how Mansfield really can and should be better positioned to look and act like the Big 10 college town that it is!