2016 State of the University

Kevin P. Quinn, S.J., President
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Good afternoon. It is good that we gather in convocation as a university community. I have high hopes for our beloved University as we begin anew.

Congratulations to Susan Trussler on receiving the Jack Earl Award. Susan, you are a fitting addition to the august list of Earl Award winners and a shining example of teaching as a vocation. “Thank you for all you do for our students and our University, especially for your tremendous work on behalf of our aspiring Fulbright Scholars. Long before I considered coming to Scranton, I knew of its well-deserved reputation as a Fulbright powerhouse. Now I understand why. Just this year, for example, we can boast five National semi-finalists, chosen from over 10,000 applicants nationwide.

I also want to congratulate our Sursum Corda recipients—Susan Falbo, Tim O’Connor, Meg Cullen-Brown and Glen Pace. To our award recipients, simply a most sincere thank you for a job well-done, especially in “lifting up our hearts” with your contributions to the Jesuit mission of our University.

Finally, welcome to the newest members of our community. To you I say that I remain very excited to be here at Scranton, and I trust that you share with me that enthusiasm.

Let me begin by addressing the faculty climate survey and my response. Much has happened since I answered some questions related to the survey at a Faculty Senate meeting in November. Foremost, I recently provided an update in which I thanked the Faculty Senate for its efforts and briefly reviewed actions already in motion and/or planned for improved listening and dialogue with faculty, staff and students. My way of proceeding in this matter is motivated by a sentiment attributed to St. Ignatius Loyola: “Be slow to speak, and only after having first listened quietly, so that you may understand the meaning, leanings, and wishes of those who do speak. Thus you will better know when to speak and when to be silent.” In that spirit, with my encouragement, the Board of Trustees recently accepted an invitation from leaders of the Faculty Senate to meet and discuss topics of shared governance and university leadership. The Board’s Governance Committee will meet with a Senate ad hoc committee on March 3rd.

While looking forward to this meeting, I acknowledge that we have reflected on what “shared governance” means and how it should be practiced in our context at several other points over the past few decades. That said, I encourage us all this time to heed some other sage advice from St. Ignatius. At the start of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius talks about the relationship between the retreatant and the retreat director, and he says that they should always begin by presuming to put the best interpretation on what each say and do (see SE #22). In my opinion, it is in civil discourse that we find the truth.

Now let’s take a breath. I must insist again that I have high hopes. Why so upbeat? We have much to celebrate at The University of Scranton. I need not rehearse for this audience our university’s recent accomplishments: enviable national rankings, a dedicated faculty with much to give both professionally
and personally, students who continue to succeed on the national scene and a campus transformed. Just visit our website’s homepage, especially tabs “The Value of a Scranton Education” and “Nationally Ranked,” to confirm my claim.

These resources are part of an intense focus this year by our Enrollment Management & External Affairs team to communicate the value of a Scranton education, especially to prospective students and parents. I encourage you to review this information because we all play a part in telling our important story.

Let me chronicle a few other reasons for celebration on our campus:

- In Academic Affairs, our faculty and students are excelling. Along with the success of our Fulbright students, 24 of our students have received acceptances to 37 medical schools, and 4 students to 10 dental schools. Five students majoring in biochemistry, cell and molecular biology, recently presented their research at the 2015 American Society for Cell Biology annual conference, held in San Diego, CA. We have created new, or adapted current academic programs to fit the needs of our community, including a new Masters of Accountancy degree, MBA and nursing programs with Geisinger Health System, and soon to be inaugurated online Health Informatics Masters and Certificate programs. Our Master of Science in Human Resources Online program now aligns with Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM) guidelines, and the Department of Education has developed an accelerated program for the Master's in Special Education. The reality is that our exciting academic programs, graduate and undergraduate, position us to remain competitive with the changing landscape of higher education, and guarantee that our students will become men and women for and with others, men and women who will transform the world.

- In Student Formation and Campus Life, the Center for Career Development reported a more than double digit increase in the percentage of students served as well as internship and full-time employment opportunities made available. With 330 students now actively engaged, we added several new Residential Learning Communities, including Helping Professions and Global Exchange experience. Our students remain astonishingly active in intramurals, retreats, peer education, clubs and organizations, and leadership development, with over 15,000 hours of student engagement hours logged thus far this academic year.

- Finance and Administration is leading our efforts to prepare a balanced budget for fiscal year 2016/2017 that reflects the important realities of the new Strategic Plan, including affordability, efficiency and access. In collaboration with faculty, important work continues on the Comprehensive Resource Review process that is essential to implementing the aspirations contained in the new Strategic Plan.

- The University continues to work closely with CampusWorks on a number of important institutional priorities in Information Technology and other areas of campus. These include leveraging technology to support instruction, optimizing and streamlining administrative systems and processes across campus and improving our network and hardware infrastructure with a heightened emphasis on security.

- Also in facilities, the success of Leahy Hall and the Learning Center and graduate housing project on Quincy Avenue garnered rave reviews and community awards. We are preparing now to move forward with the demolition of old Loyola Hall as soon as the weather breaks. The landscaping plan that will replace it will showcase the full beauty of The Estate. In addition, we are also ready to begin renovations in O’Hara Hall as a new home for the Office
of the Registrar and Academic Services, which will create a modern student services center that combines the expertise of the Registrar’s Office and Graduate and Continuing Education Services. Lastly, Hyland Hall will soon be home to the University’s Veterans Center, an important resource that was previously located in Loyola.

• In University Advancement, we hosted more than 1000 guests at Alumni Weekend last June with $2.2M donated by members of the Reunion year classes. The annual Carlesimo Golf Outing and Award Dinner attracted 188 golfers and raised $95,000 for the Scranton Athletics Fund. In October, the 14th annual President’s Business Council Dinner hosted 550 guests and achieved its $1.1M fundraising goal. Finally, we recently secured two $1M gift commitments, successfully participated in the National Giving Tuesday program, and held six regional parent receptions hosted by the Parents’ Executive Council.

• The Department of Athletics, under the direction of our new Athletic Director, Dave Martin, has unveiled a new mission/vision program called “The Royal Way.” This important project, which more intentionally links our student-athletes’ experience with our Catholic and Jesuit mission, will help us achieve the goal of becoming the Division III school of choice for student-athletes. On the court, I would be remiss if I did not mention, our 23-0 Lady Royals basketball team is ranked #4 in the country and top seed in next week’s Landmark Conference Playoffs. I encourage you all to come out and support our students-athletes.

There is much to celebrate at The University of Scranton. Yet I urge us to reject the comfort of staying in neutral and to advance together boldly. Make no mistake: to encourage our students to succeed should always define our work; they are why we are here. And so “[o]ur strategic plan . . . reflects a common commitment to provide the best student learning experience,” one that educates and forms our “students in such a way and in order that they become men and women of faith and of service to their communities.” St. Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas’ master, delighted “in the pleasure of seeking the truth together.” This is the Scranton way and for it we are justly proud!

Before we adjourn to eat, I want again to congratulate Susan, Susan, Tim, Meg and Glen. Your recognition today is well deserved and you serve as an example to us all here at the University.

Also, let me celebrate those who made this event possible: Peggy Burke and the Provost’s Office staff for organizing everything; Patti Tetreault and her HR colleagues for their work with the Sursum Corda Awards; members of the physical plant who continue to amaze; and our catering folks who always feed us so well.

Thank you faculty and staff for all you say and do to make our University great.

I wish you all a blessed and grace-filled Lent. God bless you and God bless The University of Scranton.