

TO: Faculty Senate

FROM: Tracy M. Stewart, Ph.D.
Interim Provost/Senior VPAA

DATE: November 1, 2024

SUBJECT: Provost Report for November 8, 2024

Reflections from the Interim Provost

Having reached the milestone of my ninth day on the job, all I can do is reflect on beginning this role mid-semester. I am breathless but very delighted to be here.

The weather has been kind, and the people even kinder. There is a wonderful vibrancy with the fall colors and the relatively warmer weather, where students are soaking up the last days in shorts and no coat temperatures. What a stunning campus.

I have experienced the generous spirit of the faculty and staff, even if at times couched cautiously due to the weariness of turnovers. People have shown me grace and patience as I endeavor to get up to speed as quickly as possible. What a wonderful community.

My office is working to set up as many meetings as possible with departments. I am starting with academics but will expand to all areas under academic affairs soon.

Please stop by, say hello, have a cup of coffee or tea. If I miss something critical, please let me know as it most likely just not knowing. Send me an email with your favorite burger joint, casual breakfast diner, easy hiking trails, best coffee shop, local artisan shops – I am partial to pottery and textiles - and recommended seasonal activities (or anything else that will allow me to enjoy Scranton and the surrounds).

Rankings

For three decades *U.S. News & World Report* has ranked The University of Scranton among the top 10 best regional universities in the north, placing Scranton No. 6 and placing us No. 6 for “Best Undergraduate Teaching” in its 2025 “Best Colleges” guidebook.

The *Princeton Review* listed us among the “Best 390 Colleges” in the nation and ranked us at No. 17 in the nation for “Best Science Lab Facilities.” They also ranked us at No. 23 in the nation for “Students Most Engaged in Community Service.”

These rankings reflect our commitment to our mission and our students.

Strategic Plan

Community Conversation on Shared Vision – Fr. Marina hosted two open forums to discuss our shared vision during the month of October, and all students, faculty, and staff were welcome to attend:

- October 29th at 10:00 am in the Kane Forum
- October 30th at 1:00 pm in TDC 401

We hope these conversations will yield additional ideas and information to develop our strategic plan goals.

Ethics Across the Curriculum

Ethics Across the Curriculum sponsored an Ethics Across the Curriculum Speaker, Kathrin Herrmann, “Beyond the 3Rs: How to Shift the Current Animal Research Paradigm” on October 24.

This presentation critically examined the prevailing use of animal models in scientific research and advocates for a transformative shift towards non-animal methodologies. Despite the adoption of the 3Rs principle—Replacement, Reduction, Refinement—animal experimentation persists, often with significant ethical and scientific shortcomings. Herrmann highlighted the limited translatability of animal studies to human health benefits, underscoring the failure of the current harm-benefit analysis (HBA) to adequately justify the continued use of animals in research. The presentation also addressed the ethical concerns and psychological toll on research personnel involved in animal testing. Driven by ethical imperatives, scientific advances, and public demand, Herrmann calls for a new research paradigm that prioritizes human-relevant methods over traditional animal models, aiming to enhance both scientific outcomes and animal welfare.

Dr. Herrmann is an expert on animal welfare science, ethics, and law, and currently serves as the Animal Protection Commissioner of Berlin. She works at the Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing (CAAT) at Johns Hopkins University where she directs the Beyond Classical Refinement Program.

Faculty Searches

Searches for seventeen faculty members have been approved; thirteen tenure-track positions and four faculty specialist positions.

- CAS – 7 tenure-track positions and 1 faculty specialist position
- LCHS – 6 tenure-track positions and 1 faculty specialist position
- KSOM - 2 faculty specialist positions

The Office of Community-Based Learning (CBL) announced the third cohort of its CBL Faculty Fellows Program. The purpose of the program is to recognize, reward and support exemplary faculty who are eager to fully integrate CBL as an intentional pedagogical strategy into their courses and/or curricular-based projects. CBL is an academic experience which involves students working with individuals, groups, or organizations in ways structured to meet community-defined needs. The Faculty Fellows program seeks to expand, strengthen and institutionalize CBL at the University as a demonstration of its commitment to Jesuit values and the common good.

This year’s Faculty Fellows are:

- Laura Chapman
- Rita DiLeo
- Nathaniel Frissell
- Christiane McDonald
- Stacy Smulowitz

Graduate Academic/Student Services

A Graduate Student Social was held on Friday October 18. Fifteen graduate students (including one PhD) and one dean attended. Students were able to socialize and get to know each other from across colleges. We served food and beverages. They participated in trivia and other activities, and all walked away with Scranton apparel.

We are in the process of migrating 117 courses to Brightspace from Engage with the support of Collegis. We have 23 courses in their final stage with another 16 awaiting faculty final review. The goal is for all courses to be in their final stages in March 2025, however, all intersession and spring courses will be

completely migrated around the end of November. Training for faculty to navigate Brightspace is currently being planned in collaboration with CTE to take place in November and January. We are also having discussions for student training. Any faculty who would like self-paced training can contact Brian Snapp in CTE.

For the 2024-2025 academic year we have 142 graduate assistants in positions for the fall, spring, or both. Their stipends range from \$1,100 per semester to \$4,400 per semester and tuition remission ranges from 25% to 75%. Graduate assistant applications for the 2025-2026 academic year will open the first week in November with a deadline of March 1. Hiring faculty will have a deadline of May 1 to submit decisions for positions.

OSSS/CTE Update

2024-25 CTE Programming for Faculty (created and presented, Tara Hamilton Fay)

3 Summer 2024 sessions:

- FAQs from Faculty
- Creating Student-Friendly Syllabi
- Career Competencies

Fall 2024 sessions:

- Talking About Teaching: Politics In Your Classroom, Race and Ethnicity Awareness Training
- Supporting the First-Year College Transition
- Race and Ethnicity Awareness Training (2nd date offered)
- Informational session about the PILLAR Program, (5) Talking About Teaching: Thankfulness in Teaching

Spring 2025 sessions:

- Talking About Teaching: Supporting Neurodiverse Students in the Classroom, Additional topics TBD

The First-year Faculty Mentorship Program is underway, having had two sessions to date (First-Year Report and Interpreting Online Course Evaluations). In November, a session about Plagiarism & Artificial Intelligence will be held.

Large increases in student accommodations have necessitated continuous improvement to our OSSS/CTE testing initiatives and modifications to Accommodate and Brightspace.

Support and training for Brightspace is ongoing and brisk. Mr. Snapp attended the Brightspace Annual conference in Toronto and has implemented many of the tools and techniques learned into our system.

CTE is heavily involved in the conversion of 110+ Wiley online courses to Brightspace and development of ABA, NURS, SLP online courses and programs.

Academic Integrity Tutorial Stats for Fall 2024

- 789 of 856 Freshmen completed for a 92.2% completion rate

Course Evaluation Stats for Spring 2024 (Evaluations Completed)

- First Years = 78.3% (*down 5% since 2021*)
- Sophomores = 83.6% (*down 6% since 2021*)
- Juniors = 87.8% (*stable*)
- Seniors = 87.7% (*down 2% since 2021*)

- Graduate = 77.8% (down 9% since 2021)
- Overall = 82.9% (down 5% since 2021)
- Percent of course evaluations with student comments = 63%
- Mean number of words per eval with comments = 58

Mr. Smith, Manager OSSS, was awarded Learning Center Leadership Certification from the International College Learning Center Association (ICLCA) in September.

The OSSS is collaborating with the Center for Career Development for a 4-part workshop series specifically for students registered with disability services.

- Session 1: Self-Assessment and Career Decision Making - November 7, 4 pm
- Session 2: Resume Building and Job/Internship Search – November 12, 12 pm
- Session 3 & 4: Interview Skills Part 1 & 2 (or alternate) Spring 2025

OSSS Fall 24 Data through October 22, 2024	
General Subject Tutoring Sessions	2844
Writing Center Consultations	463
Academic Coaching Sessions	727
New Disability Accommodations Requests	130
Total Students Registered w/ Disability Services	480
Exams Proctored	933
Note-Takers Hired	224
OSSS Classroom Visitations/Workshops	(12x) 163

Global Education

Planned Faculty-Led Study Abroad (FLSA) in Intersession 2025 include:

January 2025	Uganda	Dr Cyrus Olsen	Theology
January 2025	Ireland	Dr Julie Murphy - Dr Cristen Walker	Nursing
January 2025	Ireland	Fr Daniel Sweeney	International Studies
January 2025	South Africa	Dr Marc Seid - Dr Gary Kwiecinski	Biology

Intersession FLSA courses that were cancelled due to low enrollment include a Health Admin graduate course to Brazil and an OT course to the Dominican Republic.

Fall 2024 Semester Study Abroad Students

- In the Fall 2024 semester, we have 9 students studying abroad on Fall semester programs and 1 student completing their academic year abroad.
- The students' host university sites include Barcelona (1 student); Madrid (1); Florence (3); London (1); Seville (1); Edinburgh (1); Galway (1); and Wollongong, Australia (1).

Forecast for Intersession 2025 and Spring 2025 Study Abroad

- About 45 students plan to go abroad on faculty-led courses in Intersession 2025.

- About 25 students plan to study abroad at partner universities in Intersession 2025.
- About 35 students plan to study abroad for the Spring 2025 semester. Typically, our Spring semester study abroad numbers are significantly larger than Fall because Spring is more-often recommended for KSOM and PCPS majors due to class schedules.

Fulbright

- Fulbright award winners for the 2024-25 year are abroad. One is undertaking Study/Research in Rwanda; and one is undertaking an English Teaching Assistantship in Spain.
- Two undergraduate students have submitted Fulbright applications for the 2025-26 Fulbright Awards. One for Study/Research in Norway; and one for an English Teaching Assistantship in Taiwan. Fulbright will announce national semi-finalists in January 2025. Finalists (winners) will be announced in April 2025.
- OGE will hold a Fulbright information session at the end of November as part of International Education Week. Students wishing to apply for Fulbright awards for the 2026-27 year begin their applications in April 2025 and finalize their submission by September 2025 (e.g., by the beginning of their senior year).

International Students

- Students and Scholars enrolled in Optional Practical Training (OPT) – 289
- Students and Scholars enrolled in Fall 2024 – 213
- New Students and Scholars Fall Enrollment – 53
- New Degree Seeking Students (F1) – 38
 - Graduate 35 – India (30), Philippines (1), Saudi Arabia 3, Taiwan 1
 - Undergraduate 3 – Mexico (1), Dominican Republic, Ireland 1
- New Exchange Students (J1) – 8
 - Undergraduate 8 – Taiwan (3), Spain (2), S. Korea (2), Mexico (1)
 - Partner Institutions: National Taiwan University (1), Fu Jen Catholic University (2), Universidad Pontificia de Comillas (1), Sogang University (2), Universidad Loyola Seville (1), Universidad Pontificia De Comillas (1), Universidad Iberoamericana Puebla (1)
- New Exchange Scholars (J1): 7
 - Research Scholar (1) arrived September from Kazakhstan working with Dr. Sean Brennan
 - Visiting Professors (2) Taiwan Ministry of Education and Alex Foundation (Japan)
 - Fulbright Scholars (4) from Tunisia, France, Spain, Germany
- Total Returning Student and Scholars: 160
 - Degree Seeking: 160 Students
 - Graduate: 153
 - ❖ Doctorate: 2
 - Countries: Saudi Arabia (2)
 - ❖ Master's: 151
 - Countries: Canada (1), Cayman Islands (1), China (1), Ethiopia (1), Ghana (2), India (137), Pakistan (1), Kenya (1), Philippines (2), South Korea (1), Saudi Arabia (1), The Bahamas (1), Vietnam (1)
 - Undergraduate: 7 students
 - ❖ Countries: China (1), Dominican Republic (1), Ireland (2), Nepal (1), Ukraine (1), Vietnam (1)

Other things of note:

81 currently participating in Pre-Completion or Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) (as of Oct. 30, December graduates are within their application window, 3 December graduates have applied so far. There are another 5 applicants who will be processed by end of week these students have not yet been included in this OPT count)

- Pre-Completion OPT - 2
- Regular OPT (12 month) - 61
 - Approved - 57
 - Pending - 2
 - Requested - 2
- STEM Extension OPT (24 months) - 18
 - Approved - 15
 - Pending - 1
 - Requested - 2

It is still too early for a solid prediction for **Spring 2025**, however:

We have 76 Initial SEVIS records (I-20's) active for Spring 2025 and so far, 3 have successfully acquired a visa from the U.S. Consulate/Embassy.

Weinberg Memorial Library

- The Weinberg Memorial Library was named the **Pennsylvania Library Association's 2024 Library of the Year**. This award recognizes the outstanding professional service of the Library's faculty and staff, the innovative projects they have taken on in the previous 18 months, and the library's focus on accessibility and meeting the community's needs. PaLA's press release and virtual ceremony can be found here: <https://www.palibraries.org/blogpost/1652016/504460/Weinberg-Memorial-Library-at-the-University-of-Scranton-named-2024-Library-of-the-Year>.
- The Friends of the Weinberg Memorial Library will present Brandy Schillace, Ph.D., with the Royden B. Davis, S.J., Distinguished Author Award on November 16, 2024. Dr. Schillace is a noted medical historian and novelist. The Toastmaster and Emcee for the fundraising gala will be Chris Bank '86, President and CEO of the Autism Society of America. For more information, visit www.scranton.edu/author. There are several tables sponsored for student attendance. If you have students who you would like to recommend attend the event, please share their names with George Aulisio, Dean of the Library.
- The Weinberg Memorial Library's *American penmanship and pen art collections* have increased due to his granddaughter's donation of the Lloyd M. Kelchner Penmanship Collection. Kelchner (1862-1948), born in Light Street Pa, was an early associate of C.P. Zaner, whose Zaner-Bloser Penmanship Collection forms the core of our collections. The Kelchner Collection features penmanship samples and many examples of artistic pen flourishing.

❖ **Hope Horn Gallery**

- The Gallery launched a new website that showcases current and upcoming exhibits as part of the exhibition and program schedule: <https://www.scranton.edu/academics/hope-horn-gallery/index.shtml>.
- On display from October 21 through November 22, 2024, will be Hudson River and Delaware Valley: Selections from the Paul Biedlingmaier Jr. Collection. A gallery lecture was held on Friday, October 25, from 5:00 – 6:00 pm in Pearn Auditorium (Brennan 228) and a public reception in the Hope Horn Gallery (Hyland 405) from 6:00 – 8:00 pm followed the lecture.

❖ Schemel Forum

- The final Schemel Forum World Affairs Luncheon of the Fall 2024 semester will be held on Thursday, November 21, from 11:30 am to 1:00 pm in the Rose Room (Brennan 509). Dr. Josef Wegner, Professor of Egyptian Archaeology; Chair, Department of Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures; and Curator, Egyptian Section, Penn Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, will speak on *Ancient Egypt in Pennsylvania: Excavations, Collections, and New Discoveries*. The event is free for students, staff, and faculty, we just ask that you register in advance of the event. www.scranton.edu/schemelforum.

Updates

- Dr. Ashley Driver is the principal investigator for a \$551,957 NSF Major Research Instrumentation grant for the purchase of an Olympus FV4000 Confocal Microscope System that will enhance teaching and cutting-edge research in multiple biological fields for undergraduate and graduate students. Dr. Marc Seid, Dr. Jong-Hyun Son, and Dr. Joe Bague are co-principal investigators.

Dr. Driver said “the use of this equipment by our students in their coursework and research projects will give them advanced microscopy experience at the undergraduate level. It will make our students competitive for top-tiered graduate programs, as well as positioning them well for industry research positions.”

- Lori Bruch, Ed.D, associate professor, Counseling and Human Services Department, and faculty fellow, Office of the Provost, received the inaugural Ralph N. Pacinelli, Ed.D., Award, presented at the conference in honor of the lifelong leader in vocational rehabilitation.
- The National Science Foundation (NSF) awarded a \$1.8 million collaborative grant to Nathaniel Frissell, Ph.D. to provide sophisticated atmospheric measuring equipment to a nationwide network of ham radio enthusiast and citizen scientists that he developed. Dr. Frissell will serve as the lead principal investigator of the collaborative grant and will work with colleagues at Case Western Reserve University, the University of Alabama and the New Jersey Institute of Technology.
The grant will further the collective data gathering capabilities of the Ham Radio Science Citizen Investigation project led by Dr. Frissell. It will establish the only widespread coordinated high frequency, very low frequency and ground magnetometer measurement network that is distributed primarily across the midlatitude region.
- The CAS Dean has concluded listening sessions with faculty specialists, 1-2nd year TT and 3-5th year TT faculty, and is making her way through all CAS departments to attend their department meetings throughout the fall semester.
- The CAS Dean’s office has partnered with the Jesuit Center, KSOM and LCHS to have a dinner for first-year full-time faculty about our Catholic, Jesuit mission in early December.
- The CAS Dean’s office has completed its first round of reviewing undergraduate student applications to support research needs. We have dispersed \$8,250 in funds across 16 students.
- The CAS Dean’s office has established a Royal Synch account to gather great programming/events happening within CAS departments and programs to get the word out better to students.
- The CAS Dean’s office is reminding departments about their ongoing work on annual program assessment, particularly in light of the forthcoming self-study for Middle States to ensure institutional learning outcome 3 is met.