

Freeing angels from marble: SUNY Broome focuses on student success

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When it comes to academic inspiration, SUNY Broome President Kevin E. Drumm goes old school. Ancient school, in fact.

During Thursday's Faculty Staff Assembly, he asked the campus community to ask themselves WWAD – what would Aristotle do?

While the Greek philosopher lived centuries before the start of the Common Era, he'd probably use Starfish, a student success software system that the college is currently implementing in three phases. But first, he'd probably start a community college – something that he already did, in a way.

Once a student of Plato, Aristotle broke with his former teacher and his Academy after disagreements, President Drumm recounted. He then began his own school, the Lyceum, in rebellion. In a similar way, the community college system rebelled against the system of higher education in place before World War II, when college was attended largely by the sons of the elite.

"Community colleges are the Lyceum of our time," President Drumm said.



WWAD, or What Would Aristotle Do?



This year's theme is Student Success, however it is defined, according to Executive Vice President and Chief Academic Officer Francis Battisti.

One can think of student success in terms of another old-time figure, although not one as ancient as Aristotle. Michaelangelo was once asked how he could carve angels from a block of marble; he replied that the angel was already there, and he carved the marble to set him free, President Drumm related. Similarly, students contain a scholar within and education provides the tools with which to free him.

"Like marble, education is hard," Dr. Drumm said. "Teacher expectations affect how students perform. And not just teacher expectations – all of our expectations."

Expectations and care for the college's mission extend further than just the circle of teaching staff. Maintenance staff keep the physical campus looking beautiful because they believe in the worth of students, President Drumm noted. And indeed all campus operations can contribute to the college's mission of student care, whether or not they take place in a classroom.

"Not every student makes it, but what if our expectations were that everyone could and our attitudes reflected this?" President Drumm asked.

During his presentation, Dr. Drumm remembered late instructor Ralph Hall, who "embodied Aristotle's teachings." He also reflected on future plans to address the agricultural sector, one of the biggest economic sectors in New York, and the importance of diversity on campus. The past year saw the implementation of the President's Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion.

"Diversity is one of the greatest strengths of any community college," President Drumm said. "No sector of American higher education is more diverse than our community colleges."

Celebrating achievements

The assembly is also a time to celebrate the previous semester's achievements, honor retirees and greet new members of the faculty and staff. It was also a chance to showcase the campus' musical talent. Cricket Tombs, a Calice Scholarship student in Applied Music, performed a rousing rendition of Vittorio Monti's "Czardas" on violin, accompanied by Music Instructor Pej Reitz on piano.

Cricket Tombs gets a standing ovation at the Faculty Staff Assembly

Executive Vice President Francis Battisti also discussed the campus' academic goals for the year and faculty accomplishments, including SUNY Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), which will bring international education into the classroom and allow faculty members to travel to Turkey, Colombia and Mexico.

Vice President Francis Battisti during the Faculty Staff Assembly

The Broome Community College Foundation, which provides many scholarships to students and supports capital projects on campus, also had a successful year. Contributions this year totaled more than \$4.35 million, including \$3 million from the Calice estate, according to executive director Cathy Williams. The Foundation is also funding a two-sided digital sign on campus

Coming up on Dec. 1 is SUNY Broome's first-ever 24 Hours of Giving, which takes place on national Giving Tuesday.

While the federal SEED program has ended, SUNY Broome is seeing a new cohort of international students, including 11 from Becalos, Mexico, noted Vice President for Student & Economic Development Debra Morello. The Student Village, now in its second year, is again full with more than 360 students. Student life has become vibrant, including increased attendance at athletics games.

And people really seem to like Stinger, who will be leaving the hive more often.

"Stinger will be everywhere," Morello said.

Returning students have risen by 3.3% and graduation numbers are on the rise, noted Vice President for Administrative & Financial Affairs Regina Losinger. She also noted the success of students in the Binghamton Advantage Program, which has students attend class SUNY Broome before transferring to Binghamton University. Of last year's 180-member cohort, all but 36 have moved on to BU. It's a story that resonates with Losinger.

"I was not a success at college," she said, describing how she "washed out" at BU during her first year. The next year, she attended class at SUNY Broome – a good decision that led her to an associate's degree, followed by a successful return to BU for her bachelor's and masters.

"It prepared me well to be a success," she said, remembering the professors who had made such a difference.

Regina Losinger at the Faculty Staff Assembly

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