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Sharon Kinsman Salmon

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Pathway to Prosperity

Collaboration and Innovation

By Sharon Kinsman Salmon

It is sometimes difficult to take a step back and view one's institution with a fresh pair of eyes in the midst of turbulent economic times and in the face of challenging print and on-line articles questioning not only the cost of higher education but also the need for that education. Yes, we live in challenging times, and economics and demographics are working against us. But with great leadership we can nonetheless thrive if there is a willingness on the part of a supportive board to encourage their president in the pursuit of collaboration and innovation. This is not only the formula for survival, but it is also the path to prosperity.

Le Moyne College is at a turning point in its relatively short history. We have new leadership in President Linda LeMura. We have an engaged and committed board of trustees; and we enjoy an amazing community of faculty, staff, and administrators who are excited about this new leadership. Of course, we also have a rich, nearly 500-year-old Jesuit tradition to build on and a

tradition of excellence here at Le Moyne in preparing students for a changing world through our arts and sciences-based curriculum. This combination of thoughtful innovation and a timeless foundation, harnessed by new leadership, makes us hopeful for the future of our college.

As part of a nontraditional leadership change about a year ago, the board began to engage in conversation at all levels of the organization – with faculty, staff, administration, students, and the broader Syracuse community. This leadership change provided a unique opportunity for all constituencies to have open and honest dialogue, not only about leadership,

Sharon Kinsman Salmon, a 1978 graduate of Le Moyne, is now chair of the Le Moyne College board of trustees. She retired from Pfizer Inc. in 2008, where she served as vice president and assistant treasurer responsible for investment management. She spent the last two years as senior vice president of global compensation and benefits.

but also about the future of the institution. That dialogue was the start of a new strategic planning process which is currently underway and which will determine our institutional priorities for 2015-20. It will be smart, nimble, focused on the future, and flexible. It also recognizes the importance of including community leaders in the discussion. As a school located in an economically challenged community, it is imperative that we continue to be a strong partner with the community and work toward rejuvenation of the economy in which we live.

Collaboration

Even as we are engaged in our strategic planning process, President LeMura has hit the ground running. Prior to her elevation from provost to president in July 2014, she was well known and respected in the Syracuse community. She recognized the importance of collaboration in these challenging times with the local community (city, county, and state), with local higher education institutions, and with the global Jesuit network. Dr. LeMura has been at the forefront of groundbreaking articulation agreements and collaborations with local institutions including Syracuse University, Cornell University, and Onondaga Community College, as well as with several Jesuit institutions in the U.S. – and these types of agreements are poised to expand.

Le Moyne is also deepening its relationship within the broader Jesuit network – 28 Jesuit institutions in the U.S. and 189 institutions around the world. According to the AJCU, our Jesuit network has the singular distinction of being local, regional, national, and international. No other group of higher education institutions that I am aware of can make this claim. Moreover, Jesuit institutions offer students a very special and distinctive type of education. Le Moyne's Madden School of Business has been globalizing rapidly with a focus on establishing creative partnerships within the international Jesuit network. We currently have partnerships with Jesuit universities in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Spain, India, and Taiwan, and more are on the way. Why is this creative and unique? These partnerships focus on what Le Moyne calls "formation abroad" – a new model that is smarter and more comprehensive than the typical study abroad program. Students study in the Jesuit institution in the mornings, work in global companies in the afternoons, participate in community service on the weekends, and are immersed in the culture by living with a local family. Such programming reflects our commitment not only to expanding our collaborations with our international partners but also our intention to produce global-minded, service-oriented, creative, and prepared leaders for the future.

Innovation and the Third Revenue Stream

Given the rapid pace of change and middle-class wage stagnation, there is immense pressure for all of us on the discount rate. Le Moyne is a young school, so while we have a strong endowment fund for a school of our size and age we cannot rely on philanthropy to make up the financial gap. The board clearly recognizes the importance of developing a third revenue stream, a need that our new president fully understands. She stresses the need to be innovative and explore "big ideas" while maintaining the strength of our pedagogical tradition, and so the higher education/business collaborative model is being aggressively pursued. In economically challenged communities, these initiatives give our students opportunities to study, to innovate, and to work, and they help reinvigorate the local economy.

The New York State "Start-up NY" initiative is just such a model. We will find the appropriate business to partner with that meets the criteria of this model, syncs with our mission, provides faculty research opportunities, offers internships, mentoring, and job opportunities for our students, and provides occasion for potential revenue sharing and faculty endowment opportunities. In addition, Le Moyne is working closely with the city, county, and state regarding a state-funded economic development program that could potentially include economic revitalization grants.

This collaborative model is one of the hallmarks of the Jesuit tradition; having the conversation, widening the circle, and including everyone who is important to the conversation are key. We need to ask the tough questions, have a true dialogue, and develop new groundbreaking solutions for the betterment of our Le Moyne community and the broader community in which we reside.

In today's complicated world, a Jesuit education and all that it stands for offer our students a distinct advantage. In my opinion, we have been too reticent about marketing the advantages our students have over graduates of non-Jesuit institutions. We are educating our students so that they are not only good citizens but so they can also be flexible and adaptable in meeting an uncertain future. I may be overly optimistic, but I believe that we are at a point in history where all of us in this incredible, global Jesuit network have the opportunity to be bold and to help craft solutions to higher education challenges and to the challenges facing our surrounding communities. With vision, strong leadership, creativity, and cooperation and with the Jesuit model of conversation, discernment, and debate, we can thrive as we continue educating young people to be better citizens for others. ■