

**Convocation 2016**  
**Wednesday, September 21, 8 AM to 1 PM • South Seattle College**

Dear faculty, staff, colleagues. On this auspicious day when we convene to reconnect and to kick off the 2016-2017 Academic Year, I bid you good morning and extend my warm welcome! Although I am meeting many of you for the first time, allow me to offer you my collegial greetings. I may be new to Seattle Colleges, but I feel at home; I feel I belong. I sense a strong connection with you. This is not only because I am among community college educators, but also because we share the same love for students, the same zeal for the work we do, and the same passion for the cause we believe in. We are connected by the same commitment to the fundamental community college mission.

I have spent nearly 25 years in the American community college. It has been such a rewarding and fulfilling career for me on both a personal and professional level. I have thoroughly enjoyed this work because, in my—estimation—I have served with people who have the biggest heart, who are the most passionate, the most purpose-driven, and the most committed of all educators in America. I have only been here for a little over two months, but I have concluded that the faculty and staff of Seattle Colleges are among the best in the country. I am honored to continue my life's work here with you.

The Board of Trustees appointed me as chancellor in May, and I reported to work in mid-July. Needless to say, I traded the intense summer heat of Arizona for a nearly perfect summer escape in Seattle. Heeding off warnings of rain and cold that are coming in a few weeks, I have been trying to soak in as much sunshine as I can.

Beyond the weather, it has been an exhilarating experience of learning and discovery from day one. I am deeply touched by the warm reception and gracious offers of support from everyone I have met. Over the last 70-plus days, I have read through many documents, spoken with many faculty and staff members, and interacted with many elected officials and business and civic leaders. I discovered that Seattle Colleges is held in high regard across the city. As a flagship community college district in the state of Washington, we have built a significant cache of good will, and we enjoy a great deal of support. Because Seattle Colleges has opened its doors wide open to diverse students from all over Seattle and King County, and indeed to students from all over the world; because we have well prepared hundreds of thousands of them for jobs and continued education; because we have forged

strong partnerships with city government, business, civic, and educational organizations; and because we have made an impact in so many countries, we have assumed our place in Seattle as an intellectual leader, a workforce developer, a community organizer, and a change agent. For close to 50 years, we have built an extensive network of alumni, scholars, technicians, partners, friends, and supporters. We have much to celebrate; we have much to brag about.

Unequivocally, it is the collective work of the faculty, the staff, the administrators, the community partners, and the Board of Trustees that has made Seattle Colleges what it is today. For that, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank you for the sweat equity, the sustained devotion, and the selfless sacrifices that each of you has made, whether you've been on the job for two months like me, or an impressive 37 years like Luanda. *Thank you for your service, Luanda, and congratulations on your award.*

As we gather here to prepare to launch the new Academic Year, we move forward with significant experience, and we build from a strong foundation. As we join hands and hearts in shaping a shared future, we will be well served to remember the wise words of President Kennedy:

**“Hold fast to the best of the past and move fast to the best of the future.”** His words serve as a poignant reminder that we can and we should work together in honoring Seattle College's proud past and in securing a bright future.

Those of us who work in the community colleges know this truism: community colleges are the most transformative institutions of higher education in America. And we do this by being adaptive, resilient, and agile in how we serve students, how we partner with businesses, and how we respond to our community's constantly changing needs. We do that by being relevant.

**My vision for the future is for Seattle Colleges to become the most transformative and the most relevant community college system in the country.**

Without a doubt, Seattle Colleges enjoys a strong track record of being responsive and nimble in how we serve students and community. With my fresh eyes looking at the catchment communities we serve in Seattle—reflecting what our Board of Trustees, the

community leaders and business partners have shared with me over the past two months—it is clear that more than any other time in our history, Seattle Colleges is expected to be adaptive, nimble, and entrepreneurial in our delivery of instruction, workforce training, programmatic offerings, and community service. In fact, I see several forces at play that constitute a fast-evolving environment in which we serve our mission.

This morning, I would like to consider how our mission and strategies for moving forward square with the changing forces that present us new pressures and challenges, and I would also like to share with you a few preliminary thoughts about how we might address those pressures and challenges. My goal is that we open the Fall Quarter with a shared sense of our strengths, our challenges, and our strategies, and a collective commitment to the district's long-term viability.

I quickly learned that Seattle Colleges is not only underfunded, it is likely facing a deficit of approximately \$8 million in the next four years if the current trend of student enrollment and funding continues. My colleagues around the country do not believe me when I tell them that securing financial stability is the number one challenge for us because of all the news that few regions in the world can top Seattle's economic boom and prosperity. However, we tend to be slow in realizing that parallel to this good fortune is the widening disparity between rich and poor. In fact, in the midst of the hot Seattle-King County regional economy, I see two paradoxes, both of which present serious challenges for us:

First, on one hand, we see that young talent imported from outside the region are making six-figure salaries; on the other, we see many local youth are struggling to balance getting a college degree and making a living. We have some students coming to a Seattle college campus hungry, and some of them live in their cars. The very sector of Seattle's population that needs post-secondary credentials the most—the low-income families, the unemployed, the homeless, and the marginalized opportunity youth—is moving farther away from our college campuses, simply because they cannot afford to live in the city. In other words, the booming economy has had a negative impact on the demographic trend in our catchment areas.

Second, while local employers of medium and large companies have brought in thousands of highly-skilled professionals to this region over the last few years, they also frequently cite difficulties in finding well-trained, entry-level technicians and middle-level skilled workers.

We are challenged to work with all levels of government, businesses, nonprofit agencies, and civic organizations to train and retain local youth for middle-income jobs.

The third challenge comes from intense competition, from not only nearby colleges but also from universities and for-profit institutions. All of the higher education institutions not only compete for students through the traditional media—TV, radio, bus advertisement, printed materials, and billboards—but also through social media. Because we have very limited funds for advertising, sharing Seattle Colleges' stories—the breadth, comprehensiveness, and high quality of our programs—mostly depends on word of mouth. In this digital, multi-media world, we are at a competitive disadvantage.

The changing funding model adopted by the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges presents the fourth challenge for us. The new funding model includes provisions which will likely mean a cut of \$4 million from our budget because it does not take into consideration the high cost of offering certain programs that train students for living-wage jobs; further, it ignores the real cost-of-living differences between Seattle and a rural town. Salary for faculty and staff has been stagnant for years. This issue affects the recruitment and retention of talented faculty, staff, and administrators and impacts the quality of teaching, learning, and support services.

I can go on with other issues and challenges, but suffice it to say that we have come to a special moment in Seattle Colleges' history. For almost 50 years, our three colleges and the Seattle Vocational Institute have built a proud legacy of excellence in teaching, learning, innovative programming, training, community engagement, activism, and social justice.

And yet, as we prepare to celebrate the 50-year milestone, our future is uncertain. We live in a time and place of movement and change; we are experiencing paradoxical forces, both positive and negative. In these special moments, our commitment to the fundamental mission is retested; our determination and capacity to meet old and new challenges is on display.

I have no doubt, and I am certain that it is true for everyone who works at Seattle Colleges, that we can and we must rise up to the challenges in full solidarity. Seattle Colleges will not skirt away from our responsibilities; Seattle Colleges will not let down our students and our

community. Words of the American spiritual teacher, author, and lecturer, Marianne Williamson, is most fitting for our inspiration:

**“In every community, there is work to be done. In every nation, there are wounds to heal. In every heart, there is the power to do it.”**

So, how can we go about addressing these challenges and secure the long-term viability for Seattle Colleges? In the remaining time, I would like to share a few initial thoughts. Before I do that, I hasten to point out that exploring ideas for addressing our challenges has as much significance for the community we serve as for Seattle Colleges. This is what I mean: when we successfully address our challenges, we will be in a much stronger position to help advance our mission—help all residents in our community, particularly the underprivileged, achieve the middle-class American dream through economic security.

**“The Seattle Colleges will provide excellent, accessible educational opportunities to prepare our students for a challenging future.”** This is our mission statement, and it is powerful and profound. In one sentence, we proclaim that we exist to provide students high-quality education, we commit to open-access education, and we strive to equip students with the intellectual, emotional, and technical capacity to thrive in a world full of known and unknown challenges.

Today, more and more community leaders and residents in the city are concerned about the widening economic inequity; more and more are looking to us to be a significant part of the solution.

**We are called upon to renew that fundamental mission.**

Here are few data points that illustrate the urgency of the call:

Despite all of the efforts to increase the college-going rate for high school graduates from Seattle Public Schools, roughly 35 percent of them do not go on to postsecondary education. For students from Seattle schools located in South Seattle, only 61 percent enroll in a college or university the year they graduate from high school. Of all of the students who continue education at a community or technical college or a university, only 36 percent of them complete. That is why in King County, there are more than 15,000

youth between the ages of 16 and 21 who are not in school and do not have stable jobs. These young people are sometimes termed “disconnected” or “opportunity” youth. It matters little what they are called; it matters significantly what we can and will do in ensuring that all youth—especially the marginalized and under-resourced—access and complete a postsecondary education through Seattle Colleges.

This means that academic offerings, course scheduling, administrative decision-making, and resource allocation must be student-centric and conducive to student learning, persistence, completion, and graduation.

This means that we will need to actively partner with community organizations, such as the Urban League; the Seattle Public Schools; and the Road Map Project in offering ESL, ABE, GED and other transitional programs on and off our college campuses.

This means that we must aggressively adopt national best practices proven to drastically improve student learning, persistence, and completion in our classrooms. By now, we know what works well and what doesn't, in terms of helping the most academically-vulnerable students succeed. We need to implement these proven strategies and find ways to scale them up.

Beyond serving diverse student needs, employers have persistently reported that they struggle to find qualified applicants at the mid-skill level to fill vacancies. By 2023 when the “Silver Tsunami” hits, there will likely be a crisis. This is true for a variety of industries in the Seattle region, including IT, health care, aerospace, maritime, construction, and advanced manufacturing. For that reason, the Seattle Region Partnership was created in 2015 to bring together city government and private sectors to strengthen and improve middle-income job creation, retention, training, and placements. Again, Seattle Colleges is called upon to recommit to the public promise of supporting the City's economic development through workforce training.

This means that we need to align academic programs and instructional delivery methods in such a way that we contribute viable and relevant solutions to the problems we see in Seattle and King County: under-education of the under-resourced population; disappearing middle wage jobs; and the widening gap between the demand and supply for low- to mid-level skilled workforce. *Jill, congratulations on your award, and thank you for streamlining*

*student intake and increasing faculty collaboration, and especially for your work in bringing together faculty to address technology inequities in ESL courses.*

This means that we will aggressively seek opportunities to work with community partners—employers, universities, and community groups—to brand the value of a community college education and to incentivize community college certificates, associate degrees, and bachelor of applied science degrees through scholarships and internships. We heard of a great example earlier when we recognized SkillUp Washington as our Constance Rice Partner of the Year. *Thank you, Susan, for your leadership and support.*

This means that we need to continue to be responsive, innovative, and nimble in responding to training requests and in finding solutions. The successful introduction of bachelor of applied science degrees at all three of our colleges is a powerful testimony of our capacity to rise to the challenge. Faculty and staff at South Seattle's Georgetown campus are leading the way in the complex ecosystem of credentials by involving employers in developing portable credentials and industry-sponsored certificates in hospitality.

And this means that all of us must see Seattle Colleges not as a place or a collection of buildings or programs but as a public purpose ... a problem solver ... an economic engine.

As we recommit to our public promise and renew our mission, I am convinced that we will find new energy, new approaches, and new resources to make Seattle Colleges truly transformative and relevant. Yes, we will still have challenges, we will still have difficult choices to make. But we will grasp a better control of our destiny. Rather than reacting to changes we cannot predict or forces we cannot control, **let's recharge our collective future.**

This means that we will develop an aggressive legislative agenda and publicly—passionately—advocate for Washington's technical and community colleges and proudly tell Seattle Colleges stories to all we encounter.

This means that we will work with the Board of Trustees, faculty and staff in the coming months to develop and implement a set of integrated strategic priorities that provide the blueprint for the next five to 10 years.

This means that we will re-conceptualize the relationships between the colleges' foundations and the district foundation and realign our fundraising efforts in order to dramatically increase private donations and federal and private foundation grants.

This means we will exercise fiscal discipline in our operations, support internal collaboration rather than competition, increase operational efficiency through striking an optimal balance between district-wide integration and college-based differentiation.

As a multi-college district, we will operate under a shared identity and unified vision. The integration is about adopting a cohesive set of values, strategies, and policies; the differentiation is about enabling individual colleges to serve the needs of their student populations and external communities with distinctive and innovative approaches.

The long-term viability of Seattle Colleges depends on maximizing system synergy and efficiency while developing a solid plan for improving employee compensation and working conditions.

Colleagues, **education is the only true liberating and equalizing force; a community college education is the most transformative one.** We carry a special responsibility and a distinct honor. There are people, families, and businesses who depend on us. We must carry on this important work, no matter what challenges there might be; we must not let our community down, no matter how difficult it might be. Seattle Colleges has a solid track record, and we are capable of achieving greater distinction and prominence.

We enter into a time to recommit, renew, and recharge. If you allow me to compare Seattle Colleges to a good-sized ship in Puget Sound, then it is time to steady her keel, refuel her generator, and refill her sails. As your new captain, I pledge to do my very best to steer her to calm waters and safe harbors. I ask you to join me in the exciting task of building the most transformative and relevant community college system. I cannot think of a task that is more urgent, more worthy of our collective efforts. The captain cannot do it alone. We need all hands on deck.

The commitment and efforts of every one of us in the coming months and years will define Seattle Colleges; its future belongs to all of us. Let me end my remarks by quoting poet and writer Carl Sandburg:

"All we need to begin with is a dream that we can do better than before. All we need to have is faith, and that dream will come true. All we need to do is act, and the time for action is now."

Thank you all.