

## Provost Remarks – Spring 2025 Academic Affairs Update: Feb 7, 2025

Good afternoon everyone and welcome to the Spring Academic Affairs Update. Thank you for taking the time to join today, and can you believe it is already the end of the third week of classes? Time sure flies! I make this fast movement metaphor on purpose as the theme of this year's update is accelerating distinction. As both the President and I have said at numerous moments coming out of the pandemic, the pace of change is accelerating, and everyone is seeking to find the secret sauce to maintain, indeed enhance distinction at a moment when we increasingly find ourselves competing for a declining number of students, at least with respect to traditional-aged ones. In this presentation, I will reprise a theme I integrated into last year's remarks, some most up-to-date, data informed, insights that provide a window into William Paterson in comparative performance context. More specifically, I will share a pre- and now well post-pandemic perspective on us vis-à-vis the other 12 New Jersey publics, the other 142 public master's large program institutions in our Carnegie Class, and the roughly 720 other public 4-year institutions in the U.S. And colleagues, a powerful story you shall hear. Following my presentation, Associate Provost Rabbitt, Hill, and Lincoln will in turn continue the theme of acceleration, going deeper via insights and updates from the activities in their respective areas. So let's get started. Before I formally start, please know you are welcome to ask a question or make a comment in the Q&A link on your Zoom screen. We won't be responding as part of the presentation, but will get back to any questions post presentation.

Our first story is the undergraduate one, and on the surface, it is not cheery. But wait as we go deeper on the next slide. Here you can see clearly what had been catastrophic for William Paterson - a large, and disproportionate decline in our undergraduate enrollment between 2019 and 2023, about 2,000 students, the most recent data currently available for U.S. higher education. However, all comparative groups lost enrollment over this period, but unfortunately, William Paterson lost even more. In so far as it possibly assuages your stomach knot, in New Jersey, only three institutions grew enrollment over this period, Rutgers – New Brunswick, NJIT, and Montclair. Within our Carnegie Class, 83% saw enrollment decline and 71% of 4-year publics saw decline. It was catastrophic for most everyone, but us especially so. However, based on just released new data from OSHE, this past fall we had the first undergraduate enrollment growth since 2012, data that does not include dual enrollment students. This hopefully signals that we are positioned to turn a corner, aided by attractive new programs to both domestic and international students, transfer credit alternatives, accelerated opportunities, certificates, and a soon to launch new UCC. We have more work to do in this space of course, most especially with respect to continuing to accelerate efforts to keep the students who start here through to graduation.

Now I want to update the undergraduate narrative in a powerful way. This is our undergraduate adult story. Here you can see that adult students also declined over this period in our 3 comparison groups, likely as a function of the pandemic and a post-pandemic economic upturn. But that story is definitely not the William Paterson one. Folks, to use a baseball metaphor, it is over the center field fence. And we are #1 in NJ, #2 in the Carnegie Class, and #17 among the 720 other 4-year publics. In NJ, everyone else declined; sadly, Thomas Edison the most at more than 2,000, but Montclair was also down by more than 300. And if you just look at the number of adults enrolled at William Paterson versus the average in the other three comparison groups, we are higher, and you know some of

those places have 2x, 3x, or more times our overall enrollment. Here we are #3 in total #s in NJ, with Kean only slightly higher than us and Thomas Edison higher than that. Montclair has 500 fewer than us. In summary, we are the emergent leader in this space, yes, largely attributable to William Paterson Online, but colleagues, THIS is the population that is large and growing while 18 year olds are declining.

OK, so now we switch to the graduate student story. Here I know you have heard about being #1 in nursing education, number 2 in MBA production, and growing quick in education. But look at these three comparisons. Whereas there was loss over this period at the undergraduate level per my earlier slide, there was some growth on average at the graduate level in our comparison groups But it pales in comparison to our growth. Using a golf metaphor this time, I liken it to landing on the green in one shot on a par 5. We were #1 in NJ by a long shot over everyone; in second place was Rowan who grew 200 fewer than us. Oh, and we grew more than 7x faster than Montclair. If you just consider our 1 year change based on the just released OSHE data, we are again #1, this time almost twice the next highest growing institution, Rutgers – New Brunswick, and almost 3 times Montclair’s growth. So how are we doing this? Distinction built on 4 foundations – an attractive program array, cost competitiveness, convenience for working professionals, and quality.

This slide again uses the OSHE data, so you can see the actual growth from highest to lowest. Five institutions saw a decline, NJIT the outlier most. But let me leave you with this warning. Others in New Jersey know our story and no one is sitting with their heads buried in the sand. We need to remain ever vigilant to continuing to innovate, assess, and monitor, including our brand identity.

Now I switch back to our undergraduate story, and one that is mainly about main campus students. In brief, you can see that over this period first-time, full-time retention was down across the board, albeit close to flat for all publics. However, here’s our William Paterson story. With the exception of a blip down at the start of the pandemic, we’ve been making steady upward progress every year. Here again, we were #1 in New Jersey for our growth, in the top 10% in our Carnegie Class, and in the top 15% among all 4-year publics. Furthermore, we were up again this past fall to 74.4%. Colleagues, this is a tough metric to move. But through the incredible efforts of numerous persons in Student Development, Enrollment Management, staff and faculty in Academic Affairs, and many others across all other Divisions, coordinated, data informed action is making a difference. Retaining the students we enroll is crucial and thank you to everyone that works tirelessly in this arena. And, doing so unlocks important performance funding from the state.

Here I want to adapt the story just a bit, but no less an important one to share. One’s student/faculty ratio is an important metric that has two primary functions. First, it seeks to signal value, and I doubt there are many institutions in America that don’t say they have small class sizes irrespective of what they may actually be. Implicit in that though is the belief that smaller class sizes are positively correlated with student outcomes. The other role that a student/faculty ratio serves is as a measure of cost – simply put, smaller classes are more expensive for an institution to deliver. We’ve clearly increased this metric over this time frame, and I know we all understand that we have a smaller overall faculty size now than we did in 2019 while we have total enrollments that have grown in the last few years. What is important to understand, though, is our relative positions. In 2019, we had a S/F ratio that was one of the lowest in the state, 14:1, with only the public liberal arts college, The College of New Jersey, lower at 13:1. Today we have a ratio that is at the average for both all publics and our Carnegie Class, and at 17:1, matches that of Montclair, Kean, and

Stockton. We also feel this is where we need to be, and it would be hard to go higher with the small classroom capacities we have here. The public institutions struggling the most in the state right now have student-faculty ratios down where we were. But it is crucial to vigilantly monitor the data and these three guard rails, for example, tell a story that we are not misaligned, retention as I mentioned is way up by any reasonable comparison, our non-returner numbers continue to go down, and our 4-year grad rate is going up. Furthermore, I did a correlation between retention and student/faculty ratio for all of the institutions in the data set and it was -.05. Yes, there is a small correlation, but it suggests that other things explain 99.5% of increases or decreases in retention. In summary, stewarding resources while maintaining peer and quality alignment are important.

For my last data comparison, I go deep on one of our strategic pillars, certificate programs. This data point represents number of programs, not student enrollment or graduates, so please keep that in mind as I share. Here you can see how we compare with in-state publics, basically with a story of fast growth. And, extrapolating the analysis for Fall 2024, our growth is notably up again. This is exciting for us, and as Jonathan shouted out the other day at the President's address, more than 1,000 students are fired up to earn one, and in some cases, more than one. These are new ways we provide value to students, and something more than what most other institutions provide, just degrees.

For my closing slide, I want to share how we are accelerating distinction going forward. First, on the left side I offer six forms of "what" distinction, elements that define our program array, some of which Associate Provost Lincoln will elaborate upon. These range from the launch of our new master's program in Computer Science this fall as well as our STEM MBA program, both being attractive to domestic students, but also international students. We continue to build a portfolio of certificates and are very engaged in new opportunities in the health industry including partnered efforts in medical imaging with our community college partner, PCCC on one end, and our hospital partner, St. Joes, on the other. And we have growing interest in our new MBA track in healthcare economics and management. The colleges are also heavily engaged with their Advisory Councils made up of industry leaders, and at the institutional level, very engaged with other health care providers. On the right side, are examples of how distinction, the means and methods by which we deliver our programs. Some examples here include continuing to sharpen and expand our pathways to advanced degrees, 3+2s and 4+1s, and not just one's linked to our own graduate degrees but that can sequence to others' advanced degrees when we don't offer it. Other distinction examples include expanding our visibility and leadership in the credit for prior learning space, including for main campus students, meeting the desire of our traditional students for more face-to-face courses on the main campus, being a strong partner with the Navigate Success Team initiative, being even more intentional with the integration of career building opportunities in courses, our UCC 2.0 with its emphasis on social justice and social mobility, and further expansion of AI literacy and prompt engineering in the curriculum. In closing, let me leave you with this quote from Jeffrey Selingo, one of the leading futurists in higher education. Here he reminds us that the college experience is both about the preservation of the past, or what I think of as the reason we have been around for thousands of years, while also not being consumed by it. We need to be ever transformative if we are going to optimally serve our communities, and students, whether traditional-aged or adult. It is an exciting time we are in colleagues, and I look forward to accelerating our contributions with you. [pause] It is now my pleasure to turn things over to Associate Provost Kara Rabbitt.