

Provost's October Newsletter – October 18, 2023

Dear Members of the University Community,

In order to keep you informed about the many areas of operation of the University, I am sharing the following report. As you can see, there are many exciting and significant developments on campus.

Family Weekend:

Family Weekend saw 781 families and 2,386 people visit Sewanee! The opportunity to see more than 300 students being inducted into the Order of the Gown at our fall convocation drew many families back to Sewanee. Thanks to Susan Askew and Teresa Smith in the Office of Alumni and Parent Programs who organized much of the weekend, Facilities Management who set up tables and chairs for the gatherings, Sewanee Dining for feeding the large number of visitors, Technology Access and Support for setting up audio and visual technology for events, and the many offices and staff who made the weekend possible. Photos from the fall convocation were taken by the Marketing and Communications staff and are [available online](#).

Board of Trustees Meeting and the Installation of the 18th Vice-Chancellor:

The coming week is chock full of activities and celebrations. The installation of Dr. Robert Pearigen as the University's 18th vice-chancellor will take place at noon Thursday, Oct. 19, in All Saints' Chapel, followed by a picnic on the Quad, beginning around 1 p.m. The installation celebration begins with a concert by the Sewanee Symphony Orchestra this evening at 7:30 p.m. in Guerry Auditorium and continues with a number of activities through the weekend. Members of the University community are welcomed and encouraged to attend many of the events. A full list of the week's events can be found on the [installation website](#).

In the midst of the installation week celebrations, the Board of Trustees will convene on campus for its annual meeting. The Board of Trustees meeting is an opportunity for board members to hear reports from their various committees, learn about campus activities and initiatives, and consider resolutions that are a part of their regular governance process. The installation of the 18th vice-chancellor is timed to allow members of the Board of Trustees to attend the week's festivities.

Strategic Planning and Quality Enhancement Plan:

During this academic year, the University community will engage in two important processes: writing a strategic plan and determining the focus of our next quality enhancement plan. Both of these processes will be led by the University's Strategic Planning Committee. The strategic plan will lay out a vision for the University and strategic initiatives that will help to realize the vision. Watch for opportunities to learn more about the developing framework for the strategic plan and to contribute to its completion.

The quality enhancement plan is required as part of the University's 10-year report to SACS-COC, the organization that accredits our institution. The quality enhancement plan must outline a focused initiative that introduces new approaches to learning objectives for students or enhances the learning environment for students. During the course of the year, the Strategic Planning Committee will engage with various stakeholders—students, faculty, staff, and members of the Board of Regents—to determine the subject of our quality enhancement plan. Next academic year, a committee will be responsible for writing the quality enhancement plan that we will

submit to SACS-COC in fall 2025. The last quality enhancement plan focused on a speaking and listening initiative, which resulted in the founding of the Rhetoric Department in the College, the training of faculty and student tutors in the teaching of speaking and listening skills, and the creation of the Center for Speaking and Listening in duPont Library.

Dormitories and Deferred Maintenance:

A recent open letter in the *Sewanee Purple* raised concerns related to the lack of upkeep in Bairnwick Women's Center ("the Wick"), a theme house, and some of the University's residence halls. In the case of the Women's Center, the flashpoints were raccoons entering the building and a flea infestation. The administration takes such problems very seriously, and, once alerted to the situation, the Facilities Management team acted quickly to remedy the problems.

Deferred maintenance issues at Sewanee are a challenge, just as they are at many institutions. For the last several years, the University has allocated approximately \$1.5 million to address deferred maintenance needs each year. Even in good years, the budgeted amount could not resolve all of the deferred maintenance needs, but the COVID-19 pandemic worsened the situation. During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic construction work was made difficult by social distancing, labor shortages, and inflated material costs. While the pandemic has officially ended, prices for construction materials remain relatively high, requiring larger expenditures for routine maintenance. A committee comprising members of the administration meets regularly to discuss how to allocate the funds available for deferred maintenance, and residence halls are a top priority.

The Unpredictability of Fall:

Fall is my favorite season because it brings cooler temperatures and the changing of the leaves. It is a time for the season's first cup of hot cocoa and to unpack sweaters, sometimes only to rediscover a hole in the elbow of your favorite sweater that you forgot to patch over the summer. Because fall weather can be fickle, there are often surprises during the course of a week or even day. The jacket that was necessary on a ride into work becomes a cause of sweat on a ride home.

This fall has brought more than its share of surprises of a serious nature, as we have seen in the last two weeks. Amidst the successful launch of a fall semester, a joyous Family Weekend, and the upcoming installation festivities (did I mention that the community is invited to attend the many celebrations?), we had a fire damage the tack room of the Howell Equestrian Center and witnessed the sudden outbreak of armed conflict in Israel and the Gaza Strip. We were fortunate that no people or horses were harmed by the fire at the equestrian center. Miraculously, the horses had all been removed from the barn the night before the incident in anticipation of a scheduled dinner to be held the night of the fire. The scenes from the Middle East (and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine) are unsettling and a reminder of the general tranquility that we enjoy in Sewanee.

Amidst the turmoil of the world, take time to appreciate our good fortune to be surrounded by friends and the beauty of nature.

Best wishes,
Scott