



OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

Greetings,

You may have noticed that this message does not bear the subject line “Covid-19 Update.” Instead, it is a return to my monthly message to staff and faculty where I’ll update the community on strategic initiatives, celebrate our achievements, and offer reflections on the state of higher education and its impact on Lewis. Of course, things *have* changed utterly, and just about everything we do in the coming months will be impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

And as I’ve mentioned in my recent messages, I’m inspired by the response I’ve seen from students, staff, and faculty to this crisis. Your response speaks to our creativity, resilience, and compassion as a community, and to the strength of our academic mission and our Catholic and Lasallian traditions. I’ve seen countless examples of members of the Lewis community reaching out and supporting students and colleagues in remarkable ways, helping them to feel comfortable, cared for, and understood. In that work, and in our support for each other during this transition, we can see so clearly what it means to work together and in association.

In this spirit, our community continues to achieve great things. Just a few of many examples: Dr. Teresa Bixby was selected to the [ADVANCE ASCEND](#) program by the National Science Foundation; Dr. Mallory Havens has been named a [PALM](#) fellow; the MSW program received its initial accreditation from the Council on Social Work Education; The Master of Science in Speech-Language Pathology (MSSLP) program achieved Candidate for Accreditation status from the Council on Academic Accreditation in Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology (CAA), and will welcome its first class of students in the summer term.

This summer will mark my twentieth year working in Lasallian education. I have not only been the beneficiary of a great deal of lay formation over the years, but I’ve also had the privilege of seeing many different Lasallian institutions—both universities and elementary and secondary schools from all parts of the world—live out the charism of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. I have been reflecting both on the history of the Brothers, as well as the history of Lewis, and I am struck by how often our educational institutions have faced significant challenges brought on by political, economic or cultural change, and how the Brothers have found ways to adapt to the signs of the times and emerge with renewed strength and purpose.

This message is intended to focus on only one aspect of our strength and purpose, an element that reaches deep into the Lasallian tradition and to the core of our work as a university: the classroom. What makes Lewis unique, in my view, is what the Lasallian tradition suggests about our craft as teachers. As you know, De La Salle was creative, controversial, and entrepreneurial, an innovator who changed the way schools are run and the way students are taught. It is really his model of restless experimentation, and his drive to adapt to the needs of communities impacted by poverty, that feels to me so prescient, and so relevant to our work during this crisis.

What makes a Lasallian university classroom special? This is, of course, a question for our entire community to answer together. One part of that community conversation is centered around the great work of the Faculty Center. The Faculty Center and Faculty Development have done excellent work in recent years to build a community of professionals and to provide high quality support. With this message I'm announcing a new task force on Lasallian Pedagogy, led in collaboration among Drs. Bill Chura, Anne Rapp and Kurt Schackmuth. This task force will build on the great work that has come before and lead a conversation about how our approach to teaching and learning can be further inspired and informed by Lasallian pedagogy.

To get the conversation started, I'd like to posit three general areas of distinctiveness that constitute a unique Lasallian pedagogy: inclusion, practice, and innovation.

Inclusion. Diversity is an institutional imperative; inclusion is a pedagogical imperative. De La Salle famously said that students "need good teachers, like visible angels," and his radical vision of kindness and respect for students guides all of our work. A commitment to inclusion means we create spaces for belonging in our classrooms, spaces where students feel they are recognized by the instructor as a whole person with unique characteristics.

Thriving Lasallian classrooms invite and value contributions from all members of the classroom community, and Lasallian educators know how to work through bias and exclusion to produce the most fruitful learning environments. Lasallian classroom environments function with an implicit understanding that the outcome of learning is additive rather than subtractive, that students are wholly formed human beings rather than broken or incomplete, and that the role of pedagogy is to enrich strengths rather than replace deficits. Lasallian educators say to students: *what you know and what you have experienced in your life is a benefit to you and to us, and we want to build on that.*

Practice. Here is De La Salle, writing in his *10th Meditation*: "Your zeal for the children who are under your guidance would be very imperfect if you exercised it only by instructing them. It will only become perfect if you practice what you are teaching them."

This concept of practicing what you teach can have endless permutations. It might simply be engaging in dialogue in human terms with students about issues important to them and to society, it might mean doing a lab experiment alongside the students, it might mean engaging with external partners to create an internship or course requirement for community engaged learning, or it might mean incorporating the wisdom of your experience in business, industry, or health care in order to contextualize what students should be learning.

In one sense this is deeply practical, providing students an easier transition into the demands of new careers or new positions in their organizations. In another sense, the most important thing we want our students to get from a college education—no matter their age or purpose—is the ability and the zeal (to use one of De La Salle's favorite words) to learn how to learn. And modeling that passion for learning is one of the best ways to do it.

Innovation. It is vital for us to maintain De La Salle's spirit of innovation in education. Understanding the realities of the moment, and appreciating the constraints under which we operate, universities operating in the Lasallian tradition are poised to achieve extraordinary success in addressing the diverse needs of people around the world.

It is important to note that all the innovative methods introduced by De La Salle—schools for the poor, instruction in French instead of Latin, teacher trainer schools, and the use of the simultaneous method—had been invented and tried in some form elsewhere. De La Salle and the early brothers

simply adapted these ideas and techniques to the needs of the students in his schools and combined them to great success.

This is a reminder that pedagogy is a means to an end, and that end is student learning. We should restlessly experiment with technique and technology, attend to what is working in the profession, adapt new ideas to our context, and determine through assessment what works best.

I'm so grateful to everyone who has attended my provost lunches, office hours and the most recent "Conversations from Stritch Hall" event, and thanks to everyone who has continued to submit comments and suggestions to the [faculty staff portal](#). Please try to attend the next UPBRAC meeting (April 14, 2:00 p.m.) and other opportunities to stay informed and share ideas, and look for increased opportunities to attend office hours.

In the early days of the Christian Brothers, when De La Salle was struggling to hold together the small group of Brothers who were committed to weathering hard times, he would often exhort them to carry on by using an Old Testament saying: "O Lord, the work is yours."

Thanks sincerely for your faith and zeal in this work we do together.

Christopher Sindt