Celebrating our Purdue Family

Remarks by Patricia Hart to the Board of Trustees
December 20, 2014

As we enter the holiday season, let me bring you warm greetings from the faculty. As the year draws to a close, there is a lot to celebrate—a bumper crop of grants, awards, patents, prizes, books, articles, drama, music, and visual art. Our undergraduate graduation and retention rates are up, and student debt is down. The institution is in the black, and the future looks bright.

At this time of year, when a third of the people on earth observe major religious holidays, we might reflect on philosophy and ethics. A well-rounded university should prepare students for a lifelong pursuit of wisdom and goodness. No matter what ups and downs our graduates face, their comprehensive Purdue education should be something that no one can ever take away from them, and will make their time on earth richer. All parts of that education should work together harmoniously.

By its very nature, science relentlessly seeks out what is possible, while the humanities add the study of what is moral and what makes good public policy. Technology is transforming our lives in marvelous ways, but even as we discover new wonders, we need more than ever to ask the eternal questions. The university must make room for that which cannot be commercialized and should not be beholden to government grants or buffeted by the winds of political change.

The New Year reminds us that life is short. Our graduates will spend a lot of their lives at work, so let’s give students a chance to explore and find their passions. We should not be in too big of a hurry to shorten their educational experience or hustle them out the door with vocational training for a job that may no longer exist in ten years. Today’s graduates may change jobs or even careers several times, and a Purdue degree should give them the broadest possible chance to succeed.

While we are celebrating, we should take a minute to recognize how well the different parts of our Purdue family are working together. When all members of the family do our parts, the results can be stunning. Let’s each focus on what we do best, respecting each other’s unique qualifications. Taken together, the faculty members of our Purdue family have literally thousands of years of experience in designing and imparting higher education, and we believe we have earned your trust.

We can all celebrate the new work-life study designed by the Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education, or COACHE, which will be administered in early 2015, and will build on the positive results from the 2012 study. As you may recall, that survey resulted in the formation of Child Care Task Force that led to the decision to build an additional campus daycare facility, set to open in 2016. The faculty is very happy about
this development, and would just like me to pass on the reminder that the greatest need is for the care of infants and toddlers. They want me to tell you that they hope a significant number of the 100 proposed slots will be used to serve the littlest customers.

The previous COACHE study also led to the creation of a new Promotion and Tenure Task Force, which, under the thoughtful leadership of Interim Vice Provost Laurel Weldon, has created a document that is now finding its way through the senate. Purdue faculty must always be front and center setting and reaching superlative goals. This is as it should be. The faculty is committed to accountability, and you will see us take even more responsibility for self-examination in the future. One important goal of post-tenure review is to provide paths to success, opportunities for professional development, and incentives for excellence at every stage of an academic career. Purdue faculty has a history of dedication to distinction in teaching and discovery, and we hope to be a shining beacon for accountability and self-governance in American higher education by holding ourselves to exacting standards.

The last words of celebration that I bring are for you, respected members of our Board of Trustees. Thank you for your excellent work in keeping our institution strong, for your generosity with your time, your skills, and your resources. Thank you for your dedication. From all of the faculty, let me wish you very happy holidays, and a wonderful New Year full of opportunities to Boiler Up!