Dear Members of the Xavier University Campus Community

Near the end of move-in day, as the reception for the parents and families of our new first-year students was winding down, a mother approached me sheepishly with a little confession. All the way down I-71 from Cleveland, she couldn’t get it out of her head that she really would have preferred her son enroll in a college closer to home. “I just can’t get comfortable with this,” she said to herself over and over again, “I can’t get comfortable with this.” But after a long move-in day, with the warm welcome and the Xavier embrace we have become known for, she told me that she had absolutely changed her mind: Xavier is where her son belongs.

Every now and again, I get one of these – a friend calls them “God winks” – and I hope you get them as well, namely a reminder all over again of why it is I – we – do what I – we – do for a living. But more than that, it was a reminder of how broad and deep our culture is across our faculty and our staff and how, at our best, we pull together, fulfill our Jesuit mission, and transform our students’ lives. And we are very often at our best!

As this new academic year begins, I thought I would take a few moments to provide you with a concise update on a variety of topics – budget, enrollment, University organization, academic priorities – with embedded links to additional information should you care to peruse it. Some of this material will be elaborated on in the coming weeks, particularly at the University Convocation in the Gallagher Student Center Theater on October 3. But I thought providing some information to you here and now might be helpful for you to have as we begin this new year together.

In June, later than usual and later certainly than we imagined, the Board approved the 2016-2017 budget. As you may recall, it was delayed because we were working to collect and verify financial information that would allow us to reset expectations to better predict and support our future. You are no doubt vividly aware that we have been skidding sideways on net tuition revenue for the past five years, even as our tuition rates increased. That lack of revenue growth is the overwhelming source of the financial pressures we continue to feel. Hence, it is only by growing revenue – especially net tuition revenue – that we will have the additional resources we need to fund our educational mission and continue to make a difference in the lives of our students.

Therefore, I am very pleased to tell you that our overall net tuition revenue results for the year to date are positive compared to budget. Although summer undergrad numbers fell short and a few other areas underperformed, they were more than offset by favorable results in other areas. There is some pretty good news to share overall, including:

- Full-time undergrad enrollment stands at 4,234 students, 85 over goal.
- We welcomed 1,107 new freshmen, 23 students below our goal. Our larger than usual summer melt owes to our strategic decision to lower the discount rate. The discount rate for the class of 2020 is 48.8%, 4.4 points lower than last years’ cohort and 3.7% under budget. That’s a very favorable drop, and was achieve five years ahead of the schedule called for in the Strategic Master Enrollment Plan.
- The 2016 incoming class has an average SAT score of 1156, up 15 points from the average score last year (1141).
- The 2016 incoming class is 19.2% student of color, down 1.9% from last year (21.1%), a percentage which still leaves us within our targeted quartile of Ohio colleges and universities, however.
- 42.5% of the incoming class is in-state (compared to 43.7% last year) and 57.5% out-of-state (56.3% last year).
- Freshmen to sophomore retention is up 4.5% over a year ago, at 86.8%.
- We exceeded our goals for transfer and veteran admission.
- Graduate enrollment is 112% to budget, or approximately 1500 credit hours above our budgeted target. The College of Professional Sciences is 111.5% to budget (or 1022 credit hours above budget), while the Williams College of Business is 110.9% to budget (or approximately 390 credit hours above budget).
This encouraging news tells me that the time so many of you spent developing and executing enrollment strategies and deliberating on our Strategic Master Enrollment Plan last year was time very well spent. Likewise, the organizational changes I announced early in the summer will build upon and broaden the successes noted above. As you know, enrollment management now reports directly to me, and I have likewise tasked Beth Amyot, Executive Vice President and CFO, to act on my behalf across divisions and departments to bring heightened awareness and organizational effectiveness to the work of revenue generation.

As important as generating additional revenue – especially net tuition revenue – is, we must, however, never forget that it is a means to an end and not an end in itself. And the means it is an end to is exactly the transformative educational experience we make possible for our students. Accordingly, our Interim Provost, Brian Levin-Stankevich, has already begun conversations with the Faculty Committee, the Deans and others toward the end of renewing the University’s Academic Plan sketched out several years ago. With broad collaboration across the University, and especially with the faculty, Brian’s expectation – and my strong hope – is to shape a clear path forward to reinvigorate our core academic enterprise, one which builds on our past strengths and successes and allows us to move forward, capitalizing on opportunities the world around us presents. This process will include a variety of initiatives already underway or which will begin shortly, such as the continuous improvement of our academic health through program review (and kudos to the Faculty Committee for their work on this over the summer), the NextGen initiative focused on supporting faculty resources and promotion (kudos in the same direction again) and the Signature Experience program which will stitch together our undergraduate efforts as called for by the Strategic Master Enrollment Plan. You will hear more about all these initiatives in the coming weeks.

Another important topic that you will hear more about in coming weeks is the Campus Climate Survey. Recall that the University retained Rankin & Associates last year to undertake this work on our behalf. I very much look forward to hearing with you the results of their work, which will happen at just about the same time we welcome back to campus from her sabbatical former CAS Dean Janice Walker. Her stepping into her new role as Xavier’s Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer this fall will come at an opportune time for us.

Expect to see our role as a place for passionate and challenging dialogue and engagement reinforced on campus this fall. A highlight of these efforts will be a public lecture by Ta-Nehisi Coates, who will kick off the 2016-17 Xavier University Ethics/Religion and Society (ERS) lecture series on September 26 in the Cintas Center. Coates has been called one of America’s most compelling, provocative and thoughtful voices on the topic of race in America, and his lecture is already generating excitement throughout the community. Indeed, during the summer, James Buchanan, Gabe Gottlieb, Janice Walker and others met with representatives from area churches and non-profits to collaborate on a set of lectures by distinguished African-American scholars and collateral, supporting events like the one by Ta-Nehisi Coates. Again, you will hear more about all of this in the coming weeks.

I began this letter to you all by describing a wonderful encounter I had as the school year began that told me something important about who I am and who you are and what it is we do together. My hope for us all as we begin this new academic year is that the year ahead of us will not want for moments just like this: Moments where we are exactly who we should be, doing exactly what we should be doing, with the good people here all around us. Doubtless, the year will have its share of frustrations. Every year does. But I am confident that, together, we will have a productive, inspiring and fulfilling year. Thank you for all you do for Xavier University.

Cordially,

Michael J. Graham, S.J.

P.S. I look forward to seeing you at Spirit Celebration on September 13!