

***Remarks delivered by Westfield State University President Dr. Ramon S. Torrecilha
Town Hall Meeting & Strategic Planning Kick-off***

September 8, 2017

Good afternoon. Thank you all for being here and for your continued commitment for another Academic Year at Westfield State University.

We are honored to have the Massachusetts Commissioner of Higher Education Dr. Carlos Santiago with us today. You will be hearing from him later in today's event as we kick-off our Strategic Planning process at Westfield State.

I want to take a moment to acknowledge two new members of the President's cabinet, who you may or may not have had the pleasure of meeting yet. First, Dr. Parviz Ansari is our new Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs; and second, Dan Forster is our new Vice President for Enrollment Management. Both of these gentlemen will be quite busy in the months and years ahead as we put a careful focus on their respective areas.

I want to extend a warm welcome to all of our faculty, especially those new to our campus this year—welcome!

And finally, I welcome all staff, specially those responsible for getting our new students acclimated to their new home away from home. Thank you.

It's a great time to be a part of Westfield State University. This week, we welcomed 1,300 first-year students. These young men and women come to us from mostly from Massachusetts—92.5. This underscores our charge in educating the sons and daughters of the Commonwealth, the majority of whom will stay in Massachusetts to build their lives and careers following graduation.

312 first-year students come to us having not declared a major, so the responsibility is now on us to help those students find their passion and identify a major that suits them.

An impressive 67 of our first-year students completed the Urban Education Summer Bridge Program and an equally impressive 150 member of the Class of 2021 are student athletes; and as you know, athletics is a major source of pride for us at Westfield State.

Thanks to your collective hard work, the campus as a whole enjoyed major accomplishments and progress over the last year.

As we move into the new Academic Year, we are immersed in critical planning—to build on our strengths and support *the vision of Westfield State University as a model public comprehensive institution committed to student success.*

As we work on the realization of that vision, priorities for this year include:

1. A focus on Strategic Planning. Throughout this year, the Strategic Planning Committee will work to set a roadmap for the university through 2023. The success of this process will rest with the full university community; expressing your input and voice will be essential.

If I may, I'd like to introduce you all to the members of the Strategic Planning Committee.

- Provost Ansari
- Department of Psychology's Dr. Joe Camilleri
- Office of the Registrar's Jennifer Carlson
- Institutional Advancement's Patrick Carpenter
- Department of Economics and Management's Dr. Susanne Chuku
- Department of Languages and Culture's Dr. Enrique Morales Diaz
- Student Marcus DiBacco
- Department of Biology's Dr. Jennifer Hanselman
- Athletic Director Richard Lenfest
- Trades & Grounds' Angelo Mazza, who unfortunately couldn't be here today
- Office of the President's Dr. Diane Prusank, who serves as chair
- Student Arielyss Santiago
- Department of Social Work's Dr. Rose Sullivan
- Administration and Finance's Stephen Taksar

I thank you all for putting your commitment, energy and time into such a crucial process for the university.

I'd also like to introduce Dr. Fred Seamon from MGT Consulting Group, who will serve as our main facilitator through this important planning. Thank you, Dr. Seamon.

2. The second priority for the year will be the Budget: Carrying over the success of a more strategic budget process in 2017, led by Steve Taksar and his team in Administration and Finance, we can expect a comparable timeline this year.

Also, and similar to last year's approach, Steve will conduct informational sessions on budget priorities and process.

Steve will work with all of us to construct a more long-term budget forecasting and planning for 3 to 5 years out.

3. College Structure: As I mentioned earlier, Dr. Ansari will be leading the transition of Academic Affairs from nearly 30 departments to four colleges. As you know and feel, this is a sea change, but a wise and productive shift in the interest of student success.

For this year, we will conduct national searches for the deans of three of the colleges—the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, the College of Mathematics and Sciences, the College of Education, Health and Human Services.

As you know, Dr. Shelley Tinkham has been named the dean of the College of Graduate and Continuing Education.

4. Westfield State Experience: Designed to better engage students early on, this initiative will help to increase graduation rates, increase retention (especially from years one to two and two to three), and lessen the achievement gap.

The role of experiential learning and highly relevant learning opportunities will bring about optimal results for our students.

Academic Affairs drives this project, but enjoys synergy from Student Affairs as both areas improve student success and engagement.

5. Enrollment Management: With a new vice president for Enrollment Management on board, there is plenty of work to do. Vice President Forster has led an effort to take a more sophisticated approach to enrollment management. He has made some key hires to diversify Admission and Financial Aid staff and is currently putting together a four-year enrollment plan—looking to stabilize enrollment management despite the shrinking demographic of the traditional student, while increasing the academic profile and retention at Westfield State.
6. Renewed Philanthropy Culture: Building on much success on this front over the last year, the fundraising goal for FY18 is \$2.25 million and we plan to increase alumni participation in the Annual Fund by 25 percent.

We all play a role in this, as we are ambassadors of the university and represent the living brand of the institution.

So, we appreciate all you can do to continue to relay your pride in this university and work with Institutional Advancement to identify alumni and others inclined to make a gift in support of our continued success.

As we enter this year of planning, I'd like to introduce GUIDING PRINCIPLES that was recently established as part of a Cabinet Retreat over the summer. As we discuss the planning that will take place over the academic year, it was pivotal to provide better rules of engagement.

PRINCIPLES SHOWN ON SCREEN

I know some Cabinet members have shared this with their divisions to customize within their teams, but I thought it was important to share these with all of you today.

As we work through this critical year of planning, I want us to pause and reflect on the pride we feel for Westfield State.

All of us play a role in the education of our students. Our interactions, expressions, attitudes, random acts of kindness make a difference.

Take pride in the way in which we serve and educate our students. Each student's success is the result of our collective work on their behalf. Westfield State University is a great institution. It's a great time to be part of Westfield State.

As we set the university apart through the values of affordability, inclusive excellence, and accessibility, I look forward to another productive and insightful year for all of us at Westfield State University.

I'd now like to introduce Dr. Carlos Santiago, Massachusetts' Commissioner of Higher Education.

Dr. Santiago was appointed Commissioner by Governor Charlie Baker in July 2015. Working with the Board of Higher Education, he is responsible for providing overall direction to public higher education in Massachusetts and helping shape state-level policies that maximize the benefits of higher education to the Commonwealth and its citizens.

Dr. Santiago joined the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education in April 2013 as the Senior Deputy Commissioner for Academic Affairs.

He brings more than 30 years of experience in public higher education with academic appointments as far as the University of Wisconsin, with others in the State University of New York system, closer to home.

He holds a Ph.D. in economics from Cornell University. He is also the author or co-author of six books and has published dozens of articles and book reviews, many of which focus on economic development and the changing socioeconomic status of Latinos in the United States. Dr. Santiago has twice been named one of the 100 most influential Hispanics in the United States by *Hispanic Business* magazine.

COMMISSIONER SANTIAGO SPEAKS/PRESENTS

CLOSING REMARKS:

Thank you, Commissioner Santiago.

Now, let's go over how all of you as faculty, staff and students will engage in the process.

As I mentioned, the Strategic Planning process will take place over the course of one year.

During the fall semester, the Strategic Planning Steering Committee and the consultants will make a concerted effort to seek your thoughts, ideas and visions for Westfield State University.

Just as the consultants have been speaking with union leadership; trustees; Cabinet and other constituents, they will be looking to hear more broadly from all of you at designated communication sessions over the course of the fall semester.

Know that we will also conduct an environmental scan engaging our community partners so we have a better vision for our role in the region.

All of this information gathering will help us shape our Strategic Priorities, scheduled to be in place by the end of December.

The design of the implementation, financing and assessment of our strategic priorities are critical for the success of the Strategic Plan.

That is why, once set by January, those Strategic Priorities will be shared at the Divisional level.

You will be asked to engage in the process of designing the implementation of the strategic priorities from the perspective of your work area and with your immediate work colleagues.

Our intention is to filter the implementation, financing and assessment plans through the divisions and cabinet, and to the Strategic Planning Steering Committee, in an iterative process throughout the spring semester.

The goal is to have an implementable plan by June.

Following our planning work this year, we then will have a clearer map to follow that will guide us through 2023.

If this sounds like a lot of work, it is!

But, it is important as it will help all divisions prioritize their focus over the next several years.

This roadmap will help us realize our vision of Westfield State University as a model public comprehensive institution committed to student success.

To help us all stay informed on the process and as a way for folks to submit input online, there is a web page designated to the Strategic Planning effort: The URL is:

<http://www.westfield.ma.edu/about/strategic-plan>

Thank you all for coming today and we hope you join us for the reception to follow.