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President's Opening Meeting – Celebrating Accomplishments, Planning for Future Success

Enrollment and student retention were on the mind of President Jack Miller when he welcomed faculty and staff to the fall 2013 Opening Meeting on August 27, but he began his remarks highlighting some of the University's more significant achievements during the past year.

His pronouncement that Head Athletic Trainer Kathy Pirog had earned the 2013 Distinguished Service Award (*see page 3*) inspired a rousing standing ovation. The President then talked of the Jazz Ensemble winning the prestigious 52nd annual Villanova University Collegiate Jazz Festival, the Center for International Education's Course Abroad program ranking 11th in the nation, the University's endowment more than doubling in the past six years to an estimated all-time high of \$48.5 million*, the women's softball team winning its first NEC championship, and the University ranking 17th among public higher education institutions for closing the academic achievement gap of African American students.

"We persevered and have succeeded in spite of budgetary concerns and changes in leadership, and we continue to exceed on almost every level that we assess," President Miller said to the faculty, staff, and administrators who had assembled in Alumni Hall. "By effectively dealing with change on a constant basis and working towards improvement, the University has accomplished much."

He emphasized that by "working together with a positive attitude, we can create a lot of change," and he went on to lay out his ideas for improving enrollment numbers.

Using data from the last several years, he showed that the declining number of part-time students pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees is, in large part, the cause of the reduction in enrollment.

Miller suggested that by continuing to raise the retention and graduation rates for all students the University would offset some of this decline. Over the last seven years, CCSU's six-year graduation rate has risen from 40 percent to 52 percent. "If we really want to be an exception-



al public regional University, that number needs to go to 60 percent... and it can. It's doable...not as easy as the first 12 percent, but it's doable," the President said.

Although the school's endowment of an estimated \$48.5 million* is larger than the other CSU institutions combined, the President pointed out that increasing its size and finding other sources for financial aid would provide both incentives to increase student recruitment and support for enabling greater student retention.

Other factors are critical to student recruitment and retention as well, according to Miller. His suggestions included: building a new residence hall and dining facilities, recruiting more out-of-state, non-traditional, and international students, expanding the pipeline between community colleges and CCSU, and building a closer relationship with Charter Oak College.

Miller also suggested that, "We've got to make more appealing schedules for our audiences by diversifying the times, locations, and delivery systems for graduate class offerings."

He concluded his presentation with a challenge to faculty and staff. "The single most important thing we can do is to commit every single person on the campus to support student persistence and success above all else."

*Estimated value at the time of the President's Opening Meeting, this number has since been adjusted to reflect the actual value of the endowment at \$47.7 million.

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