

From: Eileen DeLuca

Sent: Friday, August 28, 2020 6:35 PM

Subject: Academic and Student Affairs Update-August 28, 2020

Hello,

Tonight's the night, we make history...

Do you ever have a song playing over and over in your head because the lyrics resonate with something going on in your lived experience? Often when that happens to me, the song was one from my youth that left an imprint. If you spent your middle and high school years in the 1980's like I did, you may recognize the lyric above from Styx's rock ballad, "The Best of Times." While we sometimes misunderstand the meaning behind the lyrics, which can often be misleading and enigmatic, this one is pretty clearly a love song, and songwriter Dennis DeYoung has said as much in interviews. However, this song, and particular this lyric has been ringing in my head all week not for its relationship to the great human experience we call "romance," but because of the phrase, "*we make history.*"

When we characterize an event as "making history" it is often because we recognize that (future) "others" will imbue it with retrospective significance, and retrieve the memory for a meaningful purpose in that (future) "present" time. This week, we have all witnessed and been part of what is certainly a historic moment in the trajectory of the institution now called Florida SouthWestern State College. In addition to students returning to college services and classes to find new policies and procedures for socially distancing and reducing viral spread, we also initiated two new teaching and learning modalities to provide expanded options to continue to support the acquisition of the student's academic and career goals.

The headlines read, "These are the worst of times"...When people lock their doors and hide inside...Rumor has it, it's the end of paradise...

It feels like an eternity since March 13, the day we decided to move remote operations. The decision was made after a whirlwind week where the scope and scale of the global issue was becoming increasingly clear. I remember the conviction I felt that day that we were doing the right thing, but looking back, I realize there was so little we really knew about how our world was changing in front of our eyes. We thought we were hitting "pause," but in retrospect it seems like we were actually hitting "fast forward" in many ways.

I feel so helpless like a boat against the tide.... I wish the summer winds could bring back paradise.

At the moment President Allbritten gave the final go ahead to move to remote operations, there was a certain amount of anxiety lifted as we knew our purpose: maintain academic continuity through to the end of the spring semester, and begin working on plans to re-open

campus when it was safe to do so. As has been outlined in the Friday messages to date, the work of many great minds and our collaborative spirit resulted in just that.

Thus, the “summer winds” (umm, summer humidity??) did bring back a type a paradise, which is this: we all let go of our concepts of silos and territory, and said, “let’s connect, collaborate and innovate” to realize our mission, despite the obstacle. We proved to be a leader in the Florida College System with our response.

I began sending these Friday messages on the day the decision was made to move to remote operations. Originally, their purpose was to inform as many people as possible as quickly as possible as part of our move to emergency operations. Over time, the updates became an outlet for me to express gratitude and pride for everyone’s collaborative effort. Additionally, it became a way to provide a window into my thinking about global issues, and the difficult decisions we have been making. I have to admit, writing these messages has also proven to be a form of therapy for me as I worked through the many emotions I was confronted with during this global crisis.

The return to the fall semester has opened up many communication channels to include school and department meetings, standing academic meetings, various ad hoc committee meetings, and the newly implemented *10 at 10 with Executive Council*. We also have cross-divisional groups like Dedicate to Graduate (D2G), the QEP Steering Committee, and SACSCOC Compliance and others that are kicking into high gear. These Friday afternoon “missives from the underground” that I have been penning would seemingly fade into the background, but rather, they have inspired me to change the practice of a monthly Provost 411 newsletter (which largely recounted the activities from the month before), into something more timely.

For this academic year, we will begin a new Provost’s Office newsletter that recognizes who we are today, as embodied in the title, “Connect, Collaborate, Innovate.” The newsletter will come out each Friday during the academic year, and going forward, I will share the space with other members of the Provost’s Office, so that each of us can give voice to an example from the week that exemplifies how we are achieving the College’s mission and strategic directions through connections, collaborations and/or innovations. Dr. McClinton, Vice Provost, Academic Affairs will author the first issue of “Connect, Collaborate, Innovate” next week.

Our memories of yesterday will last a lifetime

The 80’s came to a close for me my senior year of high school and during my own period of crisis in 1990, I enrolled in what was then Edison Community College. While there were many memories from that year, I clearly remember one day when I was walking through the cafeteria that was then located on the first floor of Robinson Hall and there was a television set (yes, old school, big box with channel dials). Normally it wasn’t heavily utilized but on that day there was a crowd standing around it. I went up to a student and said “what’s going on?” He turned and shrugged his shoulders exclaiming matter-of-factly, “we’re at war.”

In retrospect, what I witnessed was one of the live broadcasts one of the military actions of what is commonly now called the Gulf War. Many young women and men I had gone to high school with had joined the armed services just before that time, and that did not escape me at that moment as I walked to my next class with a heavy heart. Memory has deep connections to place, and whenever I engage with that history, often with high school friends who are now veterans of that war, I find myself back in the cafeteria in Robinson Hall.

This past Monday morning, I had an experience on campus that was equally impactful but in a very different way. I arrived to the Thomas Edison campus early, excited about seeing students moving about campus and in classes, but also anxious about potential issues that may arise due to so many changes being operationalized at once. I got out of my car and as I began walking towards Robinson Hall, I saw the most beautiful patch of light shining over the (now mask-sporting) statue of Thomas Edison (yes, I had to take a photo on my phone that I am sharing below). Naysayers be damned, I knew at that moment that the universe was sending a message to FSW, telling us we were doing the right thing, and that while we will continue to face obstacles and challenges, we are poised to do so as a team. My experiences throughout this week (Zoom outage excluded) have reaffirmed what I felt at that moment. From hearing the students on the ground tell us how much they appreciated coming back to campus, to listening to the successes from faculty teaching in all of the modalities, to seeing everyone so kindly pitch in to cover areas above and beyond “their own” to work through issues as they arose. Next Monday, we welcome back our 9th and 10th graders to the Lee and Charlotte Collegiate high schools, the final step in making our FSW family whole for this academic year.

As we transition to the new fall semester Provost Office communication, I wanted to write one last more personalized “love letter” to FSW. I know this place opened its doors to me when I knew where I wanted to go, but didn’t know how to get there. I know that my experience as a student here put me on the right path. Since coming back here as an educator, I have witnessed many moments of success at this institution but I have never been more proud to work here than in this moment. I recognize that things aren’t perfect, and that many of us are struggling at work or with personal issues. The enormous loss of life going on around us is not without notice or without objection. Despite this, I know we are rising to the challenge of each day to make it better, to do better, to help each other get through. In crisis, we discover our humanity and the resilience of the human spirit.

***We'll take the best, forget the rest
And someday we'll find
These are the best of times***

Sincerely,
Eileen

