



Dear Colleagues,

It has been one week since our VP for Enrollment, Scott Clyde, shared [an update with the campus community](#) regarding our first-year enrollment. While we expect some movement over the summer before this class arrives in August, it is unlikely that we will see significant increases in cohort size. I want to take a moment to review this situation and to share with campus our next steps.

You will recall that we adopted a new strategic approach to our enrollment at Xavier about one year ago, “*Recruiting Sophomores*.” This strategy was built around recruiting students who have a greater demonstrated likelihood of retaining into their sophomore year and, ultimately, persisting through graduation. Over the past number of years, Xavier had drifted towards recruiting cohorts of first year students with increasing needs for resources – primarily financial and academic – which began to outstrip our ability to support their success, in keeping with our Jesuit Catholic mission. The result? We saw decreasing rates of students who were able to successfully complete their first year at Xavier and continue as sophomores. In fact, only 78% of the fall of 2023 first year students returned as sophomores last fall. Many of these students had financial and/or academic needs that we were simply unable to adequately resource. To me, continuing to admit large cohorts of students with high academic need and high financial need, given our resources and with the knowledge that a large percentage of those students would be unable to return after one year – or even after one semester – felt very contrary to our mission.

As Scott has shared, our first cycle of the *Recruiting Sophomores* strategy has led to a class that is extremely well-qualified, academically, and that has lower average financial need. Does that mean that we are no longer supporting higher-need students? Absolutely not. But I believe students who share those characteristics in this class will have a much stronger likelihood of successfully returning as sophomores just over one year from now. In fact, all indicators point to this class having first year retention rates in the 87% range. From my perspective, that suggests that we are keeping our collective promise to new students who come to Xavier; namely, that we will provide to them the resources that, when coupled with their efforts, will lead to success.

However, it was certainly our strategy to recruit a larger class of students this year and, despite the efforts of everyone on campus – recognizing that we all have a role to play in recruiting and retaining students – this aspect of our strategy has not been achieved this year. Efforts will continue throughout the summer to enhance this class, and to ensure that each and every student in this cohort has the ability and resources to succeed at Xavier, through graduation. So many of you participated in last weekend’s Commencement exercises and I know you would agree that

there are few moments in the life of the university that remind us of the transformative impact of a college degree or, more particularly, of a Xavier degree.

So, where does this leave us on our new strategy? I think of this as a new *conversation* that we have begun with our market of potential students, their families and the many resources they employ (college counselors, online sites, etc.) to assist in their college decision. We signaled a new approach, and I am encouraged by the response that we received. I believe we have recruited a class of first-year students who will have all of the Xavier resources that they need to be successful, retaining as sophomores at very high rates, and persisting through graduation. I also believe that this strategy supports our Jesuit Catholic mission of forming students who can set the world on fire. However, the market may also be telling us that it needs a bit more time to evaluate this new positioning for Xavier. We are currently completing a significant review of all recruitment data – the inquiries, the applications, the deposits, qualitative data from students who we admitted but who did not choose Xavier, etc. That comprehensive analysis will assist in a fulsome review of what unfolded this year and how to strengthen our approach in the year ahead.

Following the release of our first-year enrollment numbers, I asked the Executive Cabinet to develop a plan that addresses the University's evolving budgetary needs for the upcoming fiscal year. As you know, like many similarly situated universities, Xavier is heavily dependent on tuition revenues, something that we are actively working to change as part of Sustaining Excellence. But for now, the fact remains that we will have less incoming revenue than we expected to have and we must address that as sound stewards of the university. There has been a shared commitment across university divisions to collaborate and shape the most effective approaches for this effort, balancing our short-term realities with building for a thriving future. This is difficult work, and I appreciate the efforts being made by Xavier's executive leadership to strike this balance.

In terms of the thriving future, our larger strategy is taking place with great intention, beyond the early hopeful indicators surrounding recruitment and retention and the greater likelihood of success for our students. There are many other areas that indicate growing positive momentum.

After nearly a decade of sharp decline, graduate enrollment is currently tracking 15% ahead of last year's pace in overall credit hours, continuing our upward trend. For Fall 2024, we posted an 8% year-over-year increase in graduate credit hours compared to Fall 2023. Similarly, our transfer deposits for this fall are up 40% over last year, and for APEX, Xavier's adult-education program, we are seeing positive response to the introduction of new certificates that respond to market demand and workforce development needs.

We continue to be encouraged by all efforts related to the College of Osteopathic Medicine, ranging from the new facility being built through to successful steps along the way to full accreditation. We have launched eight new undergraduate degree programs for this fall in fast-growing fields such as Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity, and Neuroscience. We have also

expanded summer offerings, introduced new graduate and certificate programs, and experienced unprecedented philanthropic support. As we work through our Campus Master Plan process, the university-wide working group is considering countless ways for Xavier to position our physical campus for success as well. There are many exciting ideas now being advanced among the 250 Sustaining Excellence initiatives that came from all of you. Your creativity and devotion to excellence continues to inspire me, and I am reminded on a daily basis of your relentless commitment to holding our students at the heart of every discernment and every decision that we make for our future.

As we move into our second full year of Sustaining Excellence, I recognize that not all change is easy. We have had some difficult conversations this year and I suspect those will continue. Why? Because if transformation were easy, we would have done this many years ago. As we continue to shape our internal practices, processes and common experiences, there will be continued moments when we ‘hit a nerve’ that suggests this change is simply too much. But the reality remains that this change is long overdue, and, without it, Xavier will not enjoy a thriving future. As painful as it may feel, at times, that cannot be a reason for abandoning change and adopting the status quo.

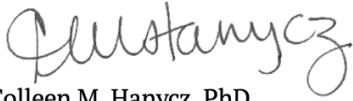
Rather, we must recommit to productive, constructive dialogue, especially across difference. I have continued to benefit from my direct engagement with Staff Committee and Faculty Committee this past year, in particular. To that, I have added the model of the “Salon” - an opportunity to engage with faculty colleagues around key philosophical approaches. This year, I received great input from two salons – one on institutional neutrality and one on academic freedom. In both cases, my thinking was reframed, and I am hopeful that I was not the only one who came away with a reshaped perspective and better understanding. I am also actively working to develop other specific models for deeper conversation around challenging topics as we continue to advance, with courage, this agenda of transformation.

The statement that “the landscape of higher education is shifting” has become so overused as to almost lose its meaning. We have been talking, nationally, about the demographic cliff for over a decade. To this, we have added more recent shifts that have put significant pressure on our familiar models of financial support, creating communities of belonging, and how we should be positioning the university as a thought leader for society. The work of *Sustaining Excellence*, as difficult as parts of that are, is one of the tools that we are using to navigate this evolving environment. I remain confident, as does our Board of Trustees, that Xavier is on the right course. As we adopt a culture of constant self-assessment and continuous improvement, we will be positioned to succeed through this moment, and whatever moments lie ahead.

As communicated last week, this important work will continue through the summer. My commitment to you is to remain in regular communication – as decisions are made, as strategies are implemented, and as we prepare for the year ahead. Do not hesitate to reach out directly – as many of you already do – with your thoughts and ideas. We are in this together.

In the meantime, I echo the call for patience, positivity, and trust in the process. Together, with clarity, focus, and a shared confidence in our mission, we will continue to shape Xavier's future with purpose and to form our students for leadership and justice in a world that desperately needs both.

All For One,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Colleen M. Hanycz". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Colleen M. Hanycz, PhD
President