August 19, 2019

Dear ESF Family,

I ended my last communication of the spring semester with lyrics from Joni Mitchell's great song "The Circle Game." I won't repeat them here, but around the circle we go again, the students are back! We welcome you, and your energy and enthusiasm, and I look forward to watching and celebrating all of the great things you will be doing this academic year.

Over the summer, our faculty have been busy across the four corners of the world with their research projects, and members of the College's faculty, staff and administration have been working on a number of other important initiatives, including completing The ESF Discovery Challenge Report. A draft report has been reviewed by SUNY Chancellor Kristina Johnson leading to some minor edits and additional information and clarification
I am happy to report that we have found a replacement for the seemingly irreplaceable Director of our Human Resources Office, Marcia Barber, who will be retiring Sept. 2. She asked that we not throw a party, which officially makes her a party-pooper, but this should not stop you from poking your head into her office and thanking her for many years of service to ESF. For my part, I have very much enjoyed working with her over the last year-plus. It is always a great thing when you are able to identify the talent you need from inside the institution, and reward hard work and dedication to ESF; so, it is my great pleasure to announce that Tim Blehar has been promoted from Associate Director to Director of Human Resources. Tim is a talented administrator with deep SUNY and institutional knowledge. I also know he has a good heart, and Tim is a real Stumpy! Please congratulate Tim when you see him around campus.

You may have noticed an interesting installation that recently popped up on the north side of Bray Hall — a mini forest of giant pencils inscribed with the names of our academic departments. Thanks to the hard work of our facilities and grounds teams for making this happen. This hammock forest is actually a gift of the class of 2017/18. BYOH — bring your own hammock! Personally, I love it, I just need to pick up a hammock. I'm always impressed with the creativity of our students.

Speaking of creativity, last fall we had a contest to design a bike jersey, and now we have a beautiful bike jersey in the bookstore thanks to the combined designs of Meghan Dwyer and Maximilian Eckhardt. This fall’s contest is for an ESF-specific Ultimate Frisbee design. We will be spreading the word through flyers, but if you have an art and graphic design bend (or, even if you don’t!), I heartily encourage that you submit one or more entries. This year we want to spread out the fun and engage our talented employees as well, so there will be two winners, one from students (grad and undergrad) and one from staff and faculty. I will be awarding each winner $100, and the winning entries will be custom printed and sold in the bookstore. Tossing the disc is one of my favorite things to do, and I am a Frisbee snob, so the ESF Frisbee will be a 165-gram official Ultimate Frisbee weight DiscCraft. Contest rules will be coming soon. Feel free to ask Dan Ramin, our Director of Intercollegiate Athletics, when ESF will have its own collegiate Ultimate Frisbee team!

On the sustainability front, our green student leaders, sustainability team, and other College administrators and staff members have been busy. Starting this fall, in stages, we will be going smoke and tobacco free. This is personal for me as my mother died of COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) after years of being addicted to cigarettes. Ironically, she quit well before the COPD set in. Like many smokers, she started while in college at Syracuse University. In my position, I cannot allow ESF to sanction and facilitate students becoming addicted to these poisonous products. Working with Upstate Medical University and others, we will be offering smoking cessation programs to do what we can to help our community members “kick the habit.” However, starting in the 2020 spring semester, use of tobacco products, including vaping, will be banned from College properties, including our satellite campuses. Lest you believe the nonsense advertising that vaping is a safe alternative to smoking, check out this New York Times article. A final note on this subject, I believe we are the last SUNY campus to go tobacco free. Better late than never.

We are moving to the use of green cleaning products, approaches, and technologies college-wide. Right now, these procedures and products are only required for use in our LEED Platinum Gateway Building, but the new procedures will soon include all College facilities. Our sustainable facilities staff members will soon be making available information about acceptable green cleaning products. Nearly all cleaning products to be used on campus will need to be on this list of acceptable choices. Recognizing there are instances where there might not be a green option, there will be a process for approval of variances. We encourage you to adopt the use of green products in your homes as well.

Also, student leaders from our Green Campus Initiative and USA’s Sustainabiliteam,
among others, helped identify the need to do better with solid waste management. Our current recycling and composting rate is below 25% — an unacceptable reality for us. We listened. Over time, our intent is to reach the eventual goal of a 90% diversion of materials (a.k.a. waste) from landfills and waste-to-energy facilities. In addition to numerous environmental benefits, this will save us money. This process was accelerated last year by changing our solid waste disposal and recycling management to the private company, Syracuse Haulers, on the Syracuse campus. Syracuse Haulers has a very good recycling track-record, and is helping us implement aggressive reduction, reuse, composting and recycling initiatives. We expect to implement similar sustainable materials management programs at our satellite campuses. It is important to roll-out an education and outreach program clarifying items that are recyclable and compostable, as well as explaining related new procedures. Look for a message this week from our facilities and sustainability leaders about both the green cleaning and materials diversion initiatives. In the coming weeks, we also plan to work with student leaders on a number of waste reduction initiatives; so, stay tuned!

The Marshall Hall remodeling project continues to move forward and is on schedule to begin at the end of the 2020 spring semester. The architects Chiang / O’Brien have completed their drawings and renderings, and it is stunning what they have been able to do while simultaneously emphasizing and restoring the historic architectural elements of the building. Over the coming weeks, look for public presentations of the design and plan.

You may have noticed that the construction of Syracuse University’s the “Barnes Center at The Arch” is winding down. The grand opening is scheduled for Sept. 13. As part of the shared services contract with SU, our students will have access to this remarkable recreational facility. I have been watching with fascination as they built the climbing wall visible on the east side of the building. SU Chancellor Syverud will be announcing times for tours in the coming weeks.

On a personal note, after attending the University Climate Change Coalition meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia in July, my wife, Mindy, and I were able to spend some time with my brother in Sechelt, British Columbia (where I caught the beautiful Chinook salmon shown above). We then continued on to Juneau, Alaska to visit with Mindy’s daughter, Katie, where she works as an environmental interpreter at the Mendenhall Glacier Visiting Center.

Despite a summer filed with construction both here and on the grounds of our important neighbor, SU, our dedicated custodial, grounds, trades, and facilities teams have done a great job getting the campus ready, and it looks beautiful, thanks!

There continues to be many great things happening at ESF, but I try to make these missives a digestible bite of the apple, and by the way, it will soon be apple season in Central New York, so go out and pick some apples and eat some apple fritters!

Sincerely,

David C. Amberg
Interim President