



## Dean's Remarks Fall Conference 2023

Dr. Camille Johnson

Good morning and welcome.

I am so excited to see all of you today. Before we begin, let's take a moment now, a deep breath, and acknowledge how wonderful it is to be here together. Let's also show gratitude to the wonderful staff who put together today's breakfast, the photo booth, and created this celebratory space. Finally, let us take a moment to remember those who are no longer with us, as we appreciate the power of our gathering.

We are beginning 2023-2024 academic year.

And as we know, there will be more storms, metaphorical and literal, as embark on what our vitally important endeavor.

Our mission is to *cultivate intellectual development, ethical reasoning, and aesthetic sensibility to support creative and critical thinking in a diverse world of competing challenges.*

This mission has never been more important. As you know, there are so many competing challenges.

We live in a country where high school students in Florida learn only that Rosa Parks was asked to change seats and do not learn about the racism or courage behind her defiance. We live in a world where misinformation is easier to find than the truth. We live in a world where it is easier to sit in isolation than to connect with others. We live in a world where human connection, with all its friction and heat and spark, can be seen as less valuable than efficiency. We live in a region where you do not need to travel far from this room to find symbols of hate and oppression and acts of intolerance.

That is why the mission of this college has never been more important.

And that is why I am so excited on this first day of school.

Because as staff and faculty at a comprehensive university that is more proud of who it admits than who we turn away, and as the College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences, which teaches students about the nature and texture of humanity, we don't have to hear these things about our world, or read the dismaying headlines, and feel powerless. John Dewey said "**Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife**" and today we begin again.

This week we will be part of the solution. We will go into our classrooms and offices and work together to create meaningful educational experiences and **connections** for students so that our graduates can improve the human condition, participate fully in the defense and vigor of our democracy, and better the world.

As we engage in this work together, there will be differences of opinion, conflict, compromise, and agreement. We will all, at times, not be our best selves. We will get mired in our frustrations, caught up in the obstacles and forget our destination.

So, as we embark on this year, I ask that we remember that we share a common goal of creating **sustainable solutions that help students succeed**. To remember that all of us are

here for the singular purpose of helping students feel that deep sense of satisfaction that comes with accomplishment, that flash of insight that follows curiosity, and that sense of comfort that stems from connection.

For my part, I have three priorities for my first semester and first year, all focused on this goal of creating sustainable solutions that help students succeed.

- First, I need to learn as much as I possibly can about the people and programs in the CLASS. This is my 51<sup>st</sup> day on campus and I have learned a lot. I have met with the chairs and department staff, and have read many documents and webpages. I have asked many questions. Now that we have returned to campus, I look forward to meeting with the academic advisors and with each department. I need to learn your backgrounds: your connections to CPP, your discipline, and the area. Because your experiences, expertise, and ideas will be needed to create and implement the solutions that support student success. As you know, we face considerable enrollment and budget challenges – and will need everyone’s help in overcoming them.
- Second, I believe, like you, that the disciplines in CLASS should be the hub of the university. Scientists can create a vaccine, engineers and businesses can design delivery systems, but social scientists and humanists are needed to get those vaccines into arms. The greatest challenges facing the world require an understanding of human nature and minds. My goal will be to improve how our story is shared and to actively assert our accomplishments. I will also facilitate and support connections between CLASS and the other colleges and the community, including curricular partnerships, research and scholarly collaborations, new student recruiting, and philanthropic gifts.
- Finally, we will honor the work done five years ago in creating a CLASS Strategic Plan, by celebrating our accomplishments. This plan was created five years ago, and then COVID happened. But the college continued to strive towards the goals outlined in that plan and has accomplished a great deal. I want to recognize and celebrate all those efforts and successes. Then, I will ask the faculty and staff to work together to plot a new way forward with a new strategic plan that will focus our work and resources for the next five years.

I want to leave plenty of time here for me to answer your questions, so I want to close with this.

Thank you for being here. Your presence is a present. It is a gift to your colleagues and to your students. We live in a world where there is an epidemic of loneliness, anxiety, and rusty social skills – we are experiencing it as adults and our students are experiencing it. There is a richness of life that this generation has missed and our classrooms and our hallways are places where we can help them get it back.

As you know, college is not just content and a career is not just a collection of tasks. It is an experience – it is friction and flow and fluency and *friendship*. Your physical presence enhances that experience for your students and for your colleagues. We hire 9 new faculty this year and 9 the year before. Your newish faculty need their senior faculty down the hall. We need your physical presence. Thank you for being here.