

From Laurel's Desk – June 2019

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The Power of Appreciation and Gratitude

It's the time of year when we celebrate and reflect. We celebrate the accomplishments of our students at convocation and our colleagues at the various retirement celebrations being held across the college. We look to the future as well and we reflect on our progress and learnings over the past year. With so much change underway, our tendency may be to focus on challenges and problems. Such responses are understandable, particularly in light of the criticism and complaints which overshadow in number and tone the recognition and thanks we receive. Social media provides platforms for sharing grievances, rating services, criticizing one another, or aligning with like-minded individuals – as well as learning. Personally, I want to promote the appreciative inquiry approach which focuses the conversation on identifying our collective strengths and building on these strengths to design and move towards our “compelling future,” one that is more meaningful than the past and current states and is persuasive, irresistible.

As educators, you recognize your students' strengths, you see their potential, and recognize the role you can play in helping them shape and begin the first steps to moving toward their own compelling future. It's likely one of the reasons you chose to teach or to work in education. I've witnessed the results at convocation, as students light up when they see their faculty and the staff who supported them. It is astonishing to consider the multiplier effect: thousands of graduates and the impact of their collective “compelling futures” on their families, their place of work, and society. What does the appreciative inquiry approach look like at the program, department, school, faculty, or division level? I suggest it begins with strengths-based, focused discussion framed in the collective, recognizing and showing appreciation for the individual and team contribution to the current state, and identifying what is needed to move toward the compelling future for the team and larger organization. We need to seek out



others at Seneca with complementary strengths to advise and contribute to the achievement of the vision. By opening with statements that are grounded in strength rather than weakness, focusing on enhancing learning for students, doggedly moving toward the shared vision for the future, and taking the time to express appreciation and gratitude to one another, we will set ourselves on a good path.

With this, thank you for all you do to make Seneca and our students successful. Have a lovely summer,

Laurel

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