

From the Dean's Desk

This year, the COLA community more than met the moment

Monday, June 7, 2021

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Dear members, alumni and friends of the College of Liberal Arts,

I hope everyone is keeping well and looking forward to some hard-earned summer relaxation. I am delighted to report that we just completed another highly successful year in the College. Its accomplishments are all the more remarkable given the truly extraordinary year the world has experienced owing to the disruptions caused by the pandemic and the many nimble, yet thoughtful, adjustments it required. I am deeply grateful to our faculty, staff and students for their dedication, their work ethic, and the flexibility and positive attitudes they demonstrated amid many challenges. I was also buffered by the warm support of alumni and families as we navigated this past year.

On Saturday afternoon, May 22, our College celebrated the in-person graduation of 568 class of 2021 liberal arts graduates in the buoyant fresh air of Wildcat Stadium. Because we are still adhering to COVID-related protocols, UNH held separate commencement ceremonies for each of the colleges and for the Graduate School. It was a busy week of impressive ceremonies — and deservedly affirming of our wonderful students. I invite you to read my [brief remarks](#) to the COLA 2021 graduates and to [enjoy some photos](#). On Sunday, May 23, we held a university-wide ceremony for the class of 2020 graduates who were able to be on campus — [2020 photos here](#).

We have, of course, terrific students and the profiles of our amazing [student fellows](#) who have served the College so well this past year — on prospective and admitted student panels, on search committees, and in outreach events with our undeclared first-year students — give a sense of the diverse passions and many accomplishments of COLA Wildcats.

Our faculty and staff too are tremendous — many of whom in the past year won coveted external research grants, awards and fellowships, as well as securing [UNH-wide recognition](#). And of an impressive 43 UNH faculty who were listed in a recent scientific study of the world's top two per cent of [most cited researchers](#), seven are in the College of Liberal Arts.

I am delighted to note that the College's and UNH's fall 2021 first-year student enrollments are strong, currently standing at 881 and 2,894, respectively. This is an increase on last year's robust numbers. Invariably, however, some students who have made deposits at multiple universities eventually opt not to join us. If you know someone who has been admitted to UNH, please do all you can to encourage them to commit to being a Wildcat, and please also encourage them to reach out to us (at liberal.arts@unh.edu) if they have any questions. Our staff and faculty will be delighted to talk with them one-on-one.

As many of you know, we had a resoundingly successful year of fundraising. The recently completed 603 Challenge yielded almost \$282,000 for the College. I am deeply grateful to all who made a gift and especially to our alumni who underwrote the various matching gift challenges. Many people also make generous gifts throughout the year, and all of this money is highly impactful in ensuring our students' academic success, their participation in an array of co-curricular and study abroad opportunities (hopefully resuming as soon as the pandemic recedes), and meaningful internships that enhance their career preparedness.

Gift funds also provide significant support to the College's many ongoing initiatives and dynamic future plans regarding diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). A highlight this past semester was the Zoom public lecture by the noted historian, Dr. Erica Armstrong Dunbar, author of the award-winning book, "Never Caught: The Washingtons' Relentless Pursuit of Their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge." Next month we will hold a [Juneteenth remembrance](#), whose significance will be marked this year for the first time as a paid holiday for UNH employees. This spring and summer we are also using the College's generous Mellon Foundation grant to support collaborative faculty-student research projects on racial and social justice. These projects emerged from our Mellon

Winter Academy, which also included a COLA-led workshop for UNH and New Hampshire Community College faculty on inclusive teaching. This past semester I have also benefitted from candid conversations with our COLA Development Board and other executives about their experiences and best practices regarding the recruitment and retention of a more diverse workforce. These conversations inspire me to double-down on our efforts to increase the diversity of our campus community notwithstanding the numerous challenges. (The recently released second edition of [Encompass](#), our DEI newsletter, provides additional details about our ongoing DEI activities.)

One of my great joys as dean is meeting with and getting to know so many highly successful alumni across the country (though restricted to Zoom visits these past several months). I leave each of those meetings truly in awe of what fine, deeply committed people have graduated from COLA. This has prompted me to inaugurate a College of Liberal Arts Impactful Alumni Award. This new annual award seeks to publicly recognize graduates who have demonstrated excellence in making a significant impact on the lives of others, whether through the advancement of innovative ideas or transformative actions that enrich the human experience. We will launch the Award officially in early fall when we will widely distribute the nomination details and deadline.

Environmental sustainability is a theme present across our curriculum and in faculty scholarship and artistry, and this year we marked Earth Day with a short outdoor program. I invite you to take a peek at the [program](#) details and [video](#) recording.

Amid a year of contentiously polarized political and social turmoil in America, I am pleased to note that UNH is hosting a new webpage as part of our commitment to free speech, truth and civility. We held a university-wide convocation on this topic at the beginning of spring and several subsequent panels and conversations on related issues. We will keep the page updated as new events get organized. I invite you to take a leisurely look – and to view the [featured recordings here](#).

In closing, I again convey my heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you for all you do to keep our College strong. And I wish you all the very best for a wonderful summer.



Michele Dillon
Dean, College of Liberal Arts

THE COLLEGE LETTER



University of New Hampshire

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