

PRESIDENT STEVEN P. O'DAY
AUSTIN COLLEGE

State of the College Address

October 4, 2018

Good morning! Thank you for being here. It has been nearly a year since my first day as the 16th President of Austin College, and I am thrilled to have this opportunity to share with you some of the news from campus. The strategic initiatives we have put into place are beginning to bear fruit. Many exciting things have been happening, and we look forward to a continuation of the incredible momentum building.

This academic year is the 170th year of Austin College, and we welcomed the largest incoming class in our history: over 450 first year students and transfers, hailing from Texas and 13 other states (Arkansas, California, Colorado, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, New Mexico, Nevada, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington, Wisconsin) and four other countries (Bolivia, Cameroon, Liberia and Pakistan).

This historic group, with people of color representing 50 percent of the class, brings with it a notably strong academic profile with an average high school GPA of 3.65 and over 70 percent ranked in the top quarter of their graduating classes. This class includes 172 student athletes (40 percent of the class), 40 students with legacy connections, and 84 first generation college students.

This larger class does not in any way lessen our commitment to the personalized, individualized attention that is the hallmark of an Austin College education—we have the capacity. Rather, it has brought an increased energy and critical mass to campus.

We welcomed not only a new incoming class, but also a new Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty—Dr. Beth Gill. Beth grew up in west Texas and is a graduate of Trinity University. She comes to us from Canisius College in Buffalo, New York, where she was the Dean of Arts and Sciences. Prior to Canisius, she spent 20 years at Randolph-Macon College in Virginia, where she served in a number of roles including Chair of the Social Sciences, Chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, and Acting Dean of Academic Affairs. Beth officially began her work Austin College on August 6th and is already immersed in the life of the College.

Over the summer, our fiscal year in Institutional Advancement wrapped up. It's been a record-setting year with almost \$32 million in gifts and commitments. That is likely the largest single year in the history of the College. More than \$10 million of that will go toward enhancing the College's endowment, which, in large part, allows us to continue to offer scholarships and need-based aid to our students. This also includes:

- \$7 million from the Morris Family Foundation,
- \$4 million from Nancy Bryant and Jerry Taylor for STEM teaching and learning,
- \$1.5 from Bob and Joyce Johnson for Faith and Engagement, the Johnson Center, and scholarships, and
- \$1 million from Mary Kay Grum in honor of Glifford Grum toward the renovation of the Wynne Chapel.

We're already off to a great start to the new fiscal year with a lead gift of \$500,000 from the Jordan Family Foundation that will allow us to install a new, and badly needed, competition surface to our tennis courts.

Be on the lookout for other exciting announcements in this area soon.

The campus continues to be a hub of activity.

Last weekend, our third TED Talks conference, TEDx Austin College, was held. Current students, alumni, faculty, and staff gave fantastic talks. They were truly ideas worth spreading. Next week, "The Haunting of Hill House" will be performed at Ida Green Theater. Our fall sports seasons are well under way with many exciting and competitive games, including a football victory that looked like a water polo game in the midst of a deluge of biblical proportions.

Speaking of water polo, we also launched two new varsity sports—Women's and Men's Water Polo—with the men competing this fall and the women in the spring. This initiative brings 27 new students to campus from states that are not usually represented, and even more expected in the years to come. They are off to a truly great start competing against teams like Brown, Bucknell, Harvard, and MIT.

There is another new arrival to campus. Esports has also come to Austin College as a club. Esports is competitive video gaming. This phenomenon is international in scope, a \$500 million industry, and taking college and university campuses by storm. We have a faculty sponsor/advisor, have installed base technology, and established a fundraising plan for the program. Thirty-nine current students have joined, so the program is taking off. Esports is very much a strategic initiative to further enhance our recruitment efforts.

Some other events on campus that should not be overlooked. The Social Entrepreneurship for Poverty Alleviation (SEPA) program reached a milestone. In this program our students spend the summer writing grant applications for local non-profit agencies. Well, when the numbers come in this fall, the SEPA program will pass the \$1 million mark for grants for those local agencies!

Faculty members Elena Olivé, Associate Professor of Spanish, and Terry Hoops, Associate Professor of Anthropology, recently received a Department of Education Undergraduate International Studies & Foreign Language Grant. The funding will support the first phase of *Infusing Languages and Global Competency Across the Disciplines*, which will expand Austin College's already strong Spanish language and Latin American and Iberian studies programs, especially related to training in professional and pre-professional programs in economics, finance, international business, and health fields.

Over the summer, the College received a NetVUE Professional Development Award through the Council of Independent Colleges with support from the Lilly Endowment. The grant's main goal is to "re-introduce" the concept of vocational education to faculty, since our Lilly Theological Exploration of Vocation grant ended a decade ago, by preparing interested faculty to help students think about their careers and lives in a broad, holistic light grounded in the liberal arts.

NETVUE (the Network for Vocations in Undergraduate Education) is a nationwide network of colleges that Austin College is a member of, and from whom we received a \$10,000 faculty development grant. We have a group of 15 persons participating in a year-long discussion whose goals are to educate the group members about the concept of vocation and consider how we might initiate students into the process of vocational discernment.

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The group is comprised of 13 faculty from Asian studies, biology, chemistry, education, English, environmental studies, media studies, music, philosophy, political science, and theatre as well as the director of career services and the head women's basketball coach. Mark Hebert, Associate Professor of Philosophy, is directing the project.

Preparation of the decennial report to SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, our accrediting agency) is complete, and the report was submitted early in September.

Also this summer, a task force comprised of faculty and staff has been working with Dr. Peter Lake, a nationally renowned expert in Title IX compliance, to review and update our own Title IX policies and procedures. That process is in progress through the fall.

Turning to Information Technology: over the summer, we were able to make two significant technology enhancements on campus.

Hoxie Thompson was upgraded to all-new projection, lighting, and sound technology to transform the revered space into a truly multi-purpose teaching and learning, meeting, and performance venue. Work should be completed in the next few weeks, and we look forward to unveiling that very soon.

Also, we now have a dedicated location for our Product Lab in the Jackson Technology Center. The Lab includes a maker space with 3D printers and collaboration rooms. This is really exciting space for our students to experience hands on learning.

Although we need to continue to work within budgetary constraints, the State of the College is strong. The enrollment trajectory is up at an unprecedented rate. Our endowment is at an all-time high. We are moving ahead, emboldened by the knowledge that this College and all of 'RooNation are energized, confident, and optimistic. Our initiatives are strategic and innovative and are bearing fruit.

Austin College is an exciting place to be. You can see this in the wide-ranging news I have shared this morning. Everyone has contributed. As I told faculty and staff at the opening of

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school, we cannot do this alone. We are a team. Everyone has a role to play, and everyone's role is important. You are part of that team as well. We need you, too! We need your support, in all its forms. I'm glad we're on this team together.

I look forward to a great year and our continued work together to even further deepen the Austin College tradition, 170 years in the making, as one of the finest colleges in the country!

I am *proud* to be a 'Roo! Thank you.