

# OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT



## A Welcome Message from President Sosulski

Two weekends ago, our community enjoyed the long-standing tradition of hosting Fall Family Weekend, and the joy in being able to come together on our beautiful campus was palpable. Simple pleasures like sharing a meal, cheering on our athletic teams, getting out on the Chester River, and being there in-person on a beautiful fall day to meet and chat with students and their families were all reminders of just how wonderful it feels to be back.

It was a great reminder to me personally to appreciate all the gifts and opportunities available to us, even in the midst of the continuing uncertainty of COVID. Connecting face-to-face with so many also gave me the chance to talk about how things are going here at Washington College and I'd like to share some of those highlights with all of you.

Welcoming our entire community back and returning to the in-person operations that are essential to this close-knit campus is absolutely a highlight. The students, staff and faculty did a phenomenal job of adapting and overcoming over the past three semesters, but it feels awfully great to come home. The campus is fully alive and crackling with energy and that is something that all the innovations and virtual adaptations in the world can't replace.

Within those students that we recently welcomed to campus are the 275 members of the Class of 2025. This is equal to last year's incoming class, which means that enrollment has held steady. Given the obstacles presented by COVID, this is great news and speaks to the passion, creativity, and professionalism of our dedicated Enrollment Management staff.

Renewed energy and enthusiasm is evident all over campus, and one excellent example was the Concert Series that hosted Bernard Dotson on campus earlier this month. Bernard is a Broadway artist who has appeared in *Finian's Rainbow*, *Chicago*, *Jesus Christ Superstar* and the Tony Award-winning musical *Ragtime*. His cabaret-style performance blended song, humor, and anecdotes, to highlight the joys and challenges of working in a field with limited opportunities for Black artists.

Our fall sports teams are off to an excellent start as well – all of our teams are competing well, and our student-athletes continue to display great athleticism and sportsmanship as they represent Washington College at home and on the road. Getting back in the game is a big victory given how COVID impacted the fall teams a year ago. I'll note too the excitement over Men's Soccer recording an historic victory over the F&M Diplomats -- defeating the #2 ranked team in NCAA Division III is absolutely cause for celebration! The show of support at home for women's and men's soccer and women's volleyball was great to see during Family Weekend—let's keep that momentum going throughout the fall!

The recent launch of the Wellness Advocacy Program is another good news story on our campus. Having students who are trained in mental health first aid serve as a frontline support system for their peers is an innovative approach and I applaud this partnership between Counseling Services and the Psychology Department. This is collaboration at its best. I encourage all students to consider utilizing this peer resource if you feel you could use some assistance in navigating the stressors of the semester.

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In case you missed this piece of good news, there was the mid-summer announcement by Governor Hogan that the Fiscal Year 2023 budget includes \$1 million to Washington College to fund a new senior position with the Starr Center for the Study of the American Experience. The position is the Miller Director of Civic Engagement and will oversee programs that utilize history to address contemporary challenges. This is in honor of the Maryland State President Thomas V. “Mike” Miller, Jr., a longtime friend and ardent supporter of the College.

In similarly exciting news, the College recently received a \$1.25 million grant from the Maryland E-Innovation Initiative Fund to establish a Chair in Natural & Cultural Resource Management, and GIS has been awarded over \$650,000 in federal highway safety grant funds. This will allow GIS to expand their ongoing work with the Maryland Highway Safety Office, which has their largest dedicated student internship budget.

Another point of pride is that we truly have a thriving arts community that is doing fantastic, thought-provoking work. If you haven’t already been through, I encourage you to visit the wonderful RENEW exhibition at the Kohl Gallery (open through Oct. 1), which features work by Jahan Bose, a Bangladeshi and American artist, lawyer, mother and activist on women’s issues and the environment.

In general, having our performance spaces in use again, and knowing that our campus is alive with music and dance and theater is significant. I encourage our community to attend the performances that are planned for later this semester, to include the staged reading of the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee, and Dancescape, an annual production that will feature exciting new choreography by a mix of current students, alums and professionals, among many others.

In the category of new experiences that I’m personally excited about, I’ll also mention the First-Year Reading that will be presented by the Lit House later this semester. As we all know, the Lit House is an invaluable asset and resource, and I’m delighted to have the opportunity to see first-hand all they do to help students grow as artists and writers.

Over our Fall Family Weekend, I had the distinct honor of presiding over the official dedication ceremony for Thomas E. Morris Hall. This initiative, to rename a building in honor of the College’s first Black graduate, is the Class of 2020’s legacy and it is a remarkable one. As we continue the urgent work of creating a fully equitable and inclusive community, I am heartened that we can now point gratefully to the name that is proudly etched into that residence hall for inspiration. Thomas Morris is due an enormous amount of respect and officially honoring his legacy, with his family present, was a great moment. The very personal and heartfelt remarks that Dr. Morris, Thomas’ widow and Mariama Keita, BSU Vice President, delivered were also terrific. They both spoke eloquently about the significance of the dedication, and also about the important work of equity and inclusion still to be done.

I stand with both of them and so many others in confirming that this is work that must, and will, continue. Creating a sense of belonging for students of color, LGBTQIA+ students, students of differing abilities and religious minorities is non-negotiable. Even as we look to take concrete steps and tangible actions in the area of diversity, equity and inclusion I want to encourage everyone to adopt the “see something, say something” mindset. Because the louder the voices of inclusion and respect are, the less space there is for intolerance.

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This is simply a small slice of the goings-on here on campus – there are so many other wonderful initiatives, programs, events, ideas and stories that it is simply not possible to capture them all here. But I do hope you will stay tuned to our News feed on the website as well as our social media accounts to see and hear more about the fantastic things happening at Washington College.

As I close in on my first month as President, I am extremely excited about the opportunities that await us. I greatly appreciate the warm reception I've received, as well as the open and honest conversations I've been able to have with many of you. I anticipate many more. These conversations and insights are critical as we chart a path forward for Washington College.

In the spirit of honesty and transparency, I think it's important to balance the good news with the reality that we are still facing serious fiscal challenges. I firmly believe we have the opportunity for a fresh start, but getting there is going to require more time and hard work. We will need to work together in solidarity and trust to make this College everything we know it can be. As we move into this rebuilding phase, I ask you to extend grace and goodwill to one another. This moment, and ultimately our success, calls for a shared sense of unity and purpose. I am confident that our collective love of this institution will bring about the bright future I know we all want to see.

In closing, I want to say thank you. Thank you to the incredibly hard-working staff for making it possible to come back to campus at all. Thank you to our talented and dedicated faculty for giving your very best to our students in the face of great and enduring challenges. Thank you to our valued alumni for your support and enduring love for this institution. And last but certainly not least, thank you students (and your families) for choosing Washington College. This is a College like no other, and by working together we can look forward to our next chapter with optimism and hope.