Engagement at Stevenson

Each year, the University chooses a new academic year theme that best represents current conversations about Stevenson’s mission, vision, and values. As the University enters the 2015-2016 academic year with the theme “Engaging Students, Engaging Faculty, Engaging Staff,” Ventures spoke with President Kevin J. Manning, Ph.D., about the new theme as well as to reflect on the previous two.

VENTURES (V): As we transition into the 2015-2016 academic year, it seems fitting to reflect on the academic themes from the past two years and assess their impact. Why was it appropriate to have the theme of focusing on the four values—community, learning, integrity, and excellence—from 2013-2014 and then singling out “integrity” for the 2014-2015 theme?

President Kevin J. Manning (KJM): Look at it this way: When you enter a room, values are essentially the doorway through which you pass. That is how you get into a space—by first learning what rules govern it. Values are powerful because they’re a tactical manifestation of what we’re doing—along with our mission and vision, our values are part of Stevenson’s strategic plan. They are the glue of an organization. The Stevenson Way, our focused approach to promoting our values, provides guidelines for life at Stevenson. Integrity is an applied value that is especially important in any collegiate setting. Each member of a university community—students, faculty, and staff—must operate at high levels of integrity both in and out of the classroom in order to succeed and to foster that success.

V: The theme of the 2015-2016 academic year is “engaging students, engaging faculty, and engaging staff.” Why is it now important to focus on engagement at Stevenson?

KJM: The concept of fostering engagement is crucial to any organization. It is impossible to give meaning to anything unless there is engagement of the mind, spirit, or values. For example, experiencing the arts is a transformative experience because you are, at many levels, engaged in what you’re seeing or hearing. Engagement is also a common human experience: we all seek engagement in our lives, whether through relationships or shared interest in a certain topic.

Engagement is a very practical and elemental reality of growth. When you are the age of a college student, your maturity level still needs to grow—you have to be transformed constantly through engagement on a particular topic, such as your academic major, where you work with faculty and fellow students to explore and learn.

V: How does Stevenson engage with the larger community outside the University?

KJM: We have several different external audiences. These notably include our Board of Trustees, our President’s Advisory Council, and our alumni. For each of these groups, the engagement is based on the same concept—it’s the spirit of wanting to be a part of something more meaningful, which is, of course, the Stevenson University experience. There are many concrete moments that illustrate this with large numbers of participants, from when we gather at Commencement and Convocation to when we enjoy Homecoming activities and cheer together for our athletics teams. For the greater Baltimore community, we sponsor the Baltimore Speakers Series, promote initiatives such as the Maryland Rising economic forum, and support family-oriented events such as the JCC’s Summer Block Party. It’s all about bringing people together through common connections and engaging them with the University.