Transformation as a University

BY KEVIN J. MANNING, PH.D.

We’ve made outstanding progress in the four years since we transformed from Villa Julie College to Stevenson University. This important development stemmed from a four-year study to evaluate the feasibility for our institution to function as a university and to consider a new name that would reflect this new vision. Based on the detailed findings of the study, the Board of Trustees approved the transformation from college to university status and then changed our name to Stevenson University in June 2008.

Following these decisions by the Board, administrators worked closely with the Faculty Council to develop the new structure for the University. Their deliberation resulted in the creation of six Schools. The School of the Sciences, The School of Humanities and Social Sciences, the School of Education, and the School of Design are all located on the campus of Villa Julie College of Arts and Sciences in Greenspring. The Brown School of Business and Leadership and the School of Graduate and Professional Studies are located on the Owings Mills campus. Looking ahead, the recent purchase of a 28-acre property adjacent to the Owings Mills campus will create a new home for the School of the Sciences and the School of Design by the fall of 2013.

These seminal changes have created significant developments on both campuses. To begin with, we created six dean positions to manage the various Schools under the overall leadership of Paul D. Lack, Ph.D., Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs. These leaders are all providing the necessary energy and direction to make Stevenson a national leader in career education. We have seen important changes in curriculum development, faculty renewal, and greater attention paid to various student needs.

One of the more important outcomes of the university designation has been the success of the School of Graduate and Professional Studies. This is both our online division and the School in which the majority of our adult students matriculate—currently, more than 1,000 students are enrolled in its accelerated undergraduate and graduate degree programs. To learn more about the growth of the School, please see the feature article on page 8.

The evolution of this School led to two important developments for the University as a whole. One has been the creation of online courses for our traditional undergraduate students. The other is our ability to use the School’s growing financial resources to help support our undergraduate instruction.

Stevenson University’s move into online instruction is a critical step toward our future. Higher education is quickly changing via Internet capabilities, yet for traditional higher education, the move into online learning has been costly and complicated. Stevenson’s university status has helped boost its growth in this area and put us ahead of the game in the educational marketplace.

Another outcome of our shift to university status is reflected in our enrollment. For years, researchers have reported that high school graduates prefer to attend a university rather than a college. This is likely due to the perception that the former offers a broader variety of programs, diversity of students, and activities and sporting events.

The numbers say a lot. Since our move to university designation, we have found that our student populations have significantly grown at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. We have had the largest overall enrollment in our history and two of the largest freshman classes. In addition, we have seen a dramatic increase in campus diversity. The number of male students and the geographic representation of students have steadily increased as well. These developments have made Stevenson an institution with more diverse students and activities that attract significant regional as well as national attention.

With the growth of our student population we have also seen dramatic increases in student engagement. For example, today, more than 700 student-athletes contribute to the success of our athletic teams. We have set a goal to be a national leader in Division III athletics, and with the addition of a football team, women’s ice hockey, a marching band, and a 3,500-seat athletic stadium, we are already making strides toward that end.

With all of these changes, Stevenson University is well on its way to becoming a significant regional institution that is focused on career education within a liberal arts context and provides leadership in Division III athletics.

Yet the focus of all of the choices we have made since attaining university status has been the well-rounded education of each Stevenson student. We care about all of our students and the quality of their experiences here. The evolution of Stevenson University is really a reflection of our desire to help our students shape their futures and create their own paths toward personal and professional success.