This year, the University is actively highlighting its four stated values—promoting community, fostering learning, instilling integrity, and achieving excellence—and their role in helping to maintain a cross-campus culture of accountability. How can the Stevenson culture, steeped in these values, sustain the University’s unique heritage and history? President Kevin J. Manning, Ph.D., explains the importance of this focus as the University’s growth continues apace.

V: How are Stevenson’s values tied to its culture and its strategic plan?

President Kevin J. Manning, Ph.D.: Most of the research on organizations and culture says that you either become explicit about your culture and values and help people understand what they are or the organization’s culture will evolve on its own. One example is that the United States wouldn’t be the same country that it is if we didn’t have the expressed values of democracy and the Constitution or symbols of those values, such as the American flag. The question really is, “How are these values part of the culture?” It’s important because of the need for synergy: unless you have shared values, it’s kind of like everybody singing their own song. So unless everybody embraces, say, the value of excellence, it never has quite the power in terms of the strategic plan and everywhere else in the organization. The best organizations have explicit values; they spend a lot of time on that, they connect them to the plans that they have and the organizations.

V: How do the values help the University bridge the two campuses?

KJM: In 2001, some of our vice presidents and I visited the Disney Institute in Florida to learn about their leader-ship excellence, quality service, and people management practices. At Disney, they created a robust culture that comes from their value system, which stemmed directly from Walt Disney himself. Their ability to operate the three main parks plus all of their other attractions comes from their understanding that these are not distinctive geographic locations but instead one entity that shares values across several parks. That’s why our core values are important: because they’re the same for the person who works in my office on the Greenspring campus and for the person who works in Admissions on the Owings Mills campus. If we’re not clear about what our values are, our two campuses become disconnected. If community is more important on Greenspring than it is in Owings Mills, then people are not going to feel the same thing on both campuses. The values are without parallel in our environment because they are the most important thing among so many different professionals. The best way to link all of the members of the community together is through our shared set of values. We’re all part of one family, one organization.

V: One of the values is “community.” How is Stevenson also connecting externally with the greater Owings Mills community, and why is it important to do so?

KJM: I feel that it is important for Stevenson to play a leadership role in the community. We are already very involved in the greater Baltimore community because we believe that higher education plays an important role in helping to build and shape other communities. Now that we have a growing presence in Owings Mills and Reisterstown, we are taking a more active role in that area. For example, there are a variety of activities that we sponsor, as an organization, to support the community. However, we support communities in a way that’s different from most smaller, independent colleges. We now have a designated person, Sharon Proutt, Special Assistant to the President, in charge of strategic collaboration for Stevenson to help make the decision about whether a collaboration is a good fit for us and who should be involved.

V: As Stevenson grows, so does its diversity, with greater numbers of students coming from out of state. How does this benefit the University and the student population?

KJM: Today, our students come from 29 states, including Maryland as well as Puerto Rico, and from 10 countries. If you think of the world we live in, we need to be adaptable—whether it’s in a relationship, in a family, or in a community—in terms of multiculturalism. The more diverse a campus is, the more adaptable people have to become, because you’re going to be dealing with differences in background, culture, personal values, and so on. We think that the growing diversity of our population makes us all stronger, which makes us more adaptable to a 21st century environment. It is also important that we prepare our students for a multicultural and international workforce. And Stevenson itself is expanding into that global workforce. Today, we are talking to a university in India about potentially collaborating in joint programs. Ten years ago, we never would have had a university from India come talk to us about such a venture. The reality today is that we all have to work together, no matter where we’re from or what we do.