

**PRESIDENT STEVEN P. O'DAY  
AUSTIN COLLEGE**

**Service of Perspectives & Reflections  
President's Address to the Austin College Faculty and Staff  
August 14, 2018**

Happy New Year! The rest of the world may celebrate the new year in January, but for us in the academic world, this feels like the start of the new year. So Happy New Year! I am so glad to see all of you together. This is a special community.

I hope everyone has had a wonderful summer—a chance to enjoy family and friends, take a breath and refresh, maybe change gears a little, and think ahead for a new year of teaching and learning.

And here we are, about to begin the 170<sup>th</sup> year of Austin College! It's been a busy summer of preparing for the year ahead.

We welcome 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, NY (welcome to warmth!), where she was the dean of arts and sciences. Prior to Canisius, Beth spent 20 years at Randolph Macon 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 on August 6 and has already been meeting people, finding her way around, and serving as interim registrar as we conduct a search to replace Dawn Remmers, who accepted an assistant provost position at the University of North Texas at Dallas earlier this summer. So glad to have you here, Beth. Welcome back to Texas!

Speaking of welcoming . . . In three days, we'll be welcoming the largest incoming class in the history of Austin College—over 450 first year students and transfers, hailing from Texas and 13 other states and four other countries.

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 class!

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Through the hard work of a lot of people across all the divisions of the College, we'll have courses to teach all of those students, spaces to house them, and services to support them. Thank you to everyone for making that happen!

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 \$13 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.

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.

With regard to Academic Affairs, you've already heard me talk about the biggest news—Beth Gill's arrival. I also want to mention, however, a milestone for the Social Entrepreneurship for Poverty Alleviation (SEPA) program in which 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.

Preparation of the decennial report to SACS is in its final stages and will be submitted by September 10. Thank you to everyone for their contributions to the report, particularly Karla McCain who is leading the effort.

I am also pleased to announce that I have invited Charles Curtis, our Executive Director of Information Technology, to join the Senior Leadership Team of the College. Since Information Technology is at the crossroads of virtually everything we do at the College, I thought it appropriate to add Charles' technological and strategic expertise as well as his "can do" approach to Senior Leadership Team discussions. IT will continue to report to Academic Affairs, but we welcome Charles to the team.

Turning to Student Affairs, we had another successful season of summer camps with over 2,500 participants at 16 camps.

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You heard me mention earlier that accommodations have been made to house all of our historic incoming class.

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 will continue into the fall.

This fall, we launch 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 this fall with even more expected in the years to come. They are off to a truly great start with the opening weekend of competition in September that will include games against Brown, Bucknell, Harvard, and MIT.

Also, this fall, we will launch Esports at 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. Students, both current and prospective, have expressed strong interest in this. We have a faculty sponsor/advisor, installed base technology, and established a fundraising plan for the program. This is very much a strategic initiative to further enhance our recruitment efforts.

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 a really exciting space for our students to experience hands-on learning.

Looking ahead, September 29 will feature the 2018 TEDxAustinCollege event on campus—an exciting day of TED talks and student activities that will have the campus buzzing.

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In addition to that, the campus will be a hub of activity for the entire year with guest speakers, presentations, Homecoming, concerts, performances, recitals, service opportunities, athletic contests, and events of all kinds. I hope to see you at them whenever you can make it.

At today's luncheon, we're going to be recognizing new members of 'Roo Nation. We look forward to making these people feel at home here—and Cece and I know how great everyone is at doing that.

In just a minute, we're also going to recognize our valued colleagues who have been at Austin College for various milestones. I am so proud to recognize your remarkable service in advancing the mission of this extraordinary institution.

As I wrap up my reflections to you, I want to mention that this year we will be putting a special emphasis on “wellbeing” for all of us at the College. Just as I talk about the importance of educating the whole student—mind, body, and spirit—so is the wellbeing—mind, body, spirit—of each of you important. Accordingly, some initiatives to encourage wellbeing and community will take place this year. You should have already received a brief survey through email. We are continuing with a Day of Wellbeing on October 4. There will be more information coming about those plans later.

Finally, I'd like to thank each of you for your hard work to get us ready for this year and for your efforts in the coming months. Everyone contributes. We could not do this alone. We are a team. Everyone has a role to play, and everyone's role is important. I thank you all for your work, your energy, your commitment to making Austin College one of the finest colleges in the country. I am glad we're on the same team.

Let's have a great year—together. Go 'Roos!

Thank you.