

Dear Students, Faculty, and Staff,

Welcome back to Manhattanville College!

To those of you I saw crisscrossing our beautiful lawn on the Quad on Monday when we were out on the Castle terrace celebrating the White Coat Ceremony for our new Nursing students: it was good to see Valiants back in action! To those of you who cannot join us in person this fall: an equally hearty Virtual Welcome! Despite the geographic and physical distances forced on all of us, one way or another by the pandemic, Valiants know how to forge community with each other, and for each other, amidst the most trying circumstances. We have survived, for almost two hundred years, through previous pandemics and wars and financial challenges, and we have always emerged stronger, with new ideas, new commitments and new programs. Whether face to face (though masked and with appropriate social distancing) or online: Manhattanville College faculty, administration and staff are here for the students. To all of us, each fall term is always like an entirely new beginning, and we are excited to have our students back. Welcome to your college!

Last year at this time, I was thrilled to share with you the news about the opening of our Center for Design Thinking, news about enhancements to the Berman Center lobby and plans for a thorough renovation of the Brownson Student Lounge. We had also made some improvements to our laundry facilities, based on what we had heard from students.

Well, after going through a fairly lengthy and rather bureaucratic permit process with the Town of Harrison, we did complete our renovations on the Brownson Lounge (and expanded it a little in the process) – but now all that beautiful new furniture is stacked in a corner somewhere because we had to redo Brownson Lounge again, to create a small, socially-distanced space for commuter students to go in-between classes. We have also created spaces for commuter students in the Berman lobby and the Center for Design Thinking (in addition to existing spaces in the library).

Over the summer and going into the current academic year, Manhattanville College spent half a million dollars on retrofitting classrooms, Plexiglas protection, signage in all heavily traveled areas of the campus, automatic sliding doors in Dammann and Tenney, the front door of Spellman as well as the Center for Design Thinking (we are still working on Brownson and Founders), safety equipment, refrigerators and air conditioning units for students living in the residence halls, new faucet handles, touchless water fountains, as well as huge amounts of additional cleaning supplies that we placed in strategically important parts of the campus. We have also increased outside air flow in rooms with heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems.

We have also significantly increased our capital spend in the information technology (IT) area to ensure that we have the appropriate software and tech support needed to enable those students and faculty who need to connect remotely for health reasons or who have elected to stay remote for this semester to participate. We purchased hot spots and a limited supply of laptops to help students who needed to connect remotely for health reasons but did not have the technology required to access our online teaching platforms.

We have run a large number of workshops over the summer to prepare our faculty to unlock and optimize the technological potential of our amphibious learning environment so as to provide an exciting, interactive and accessible teaching experience for all our students, whether they are online or physically on campus. Faculty will continue working with staff to incorporate even more tools and techniques throughout the term to further enhance the learning experience.

While we decided, along with other Skyline institutions, to cancel athletic competitions for this fall out of an abundance of caution for our student athletes, our Athletics Department, coaches, strength trainers, and graduate assistants will be on hand to work with students on individual training programs and to provide scrimmages that will enable our Valiant athletes to further hone their skills in preparation for Spring 2021 when we hope that we can not only run spring competitions but also fall sports competitions that have been rescheduled for spring.

While the fall may look a bit different for our campus, there is no shortage of campus events or opportunities to get involved. Various offices throughout the College have collaborated to provide virtual events and activities each week such as Sunday Bingo, Thursday Trivia, and live performances, intramurals, and gaming activities on Fridays and Saturdays. These programs are in addition to the continued service opportunities, leadership development workshops, and of course our clubs and organizations. You can find out more about all of these various events by visiting [The 'Ville online](#) or by downloading the app onto your phone. You can also learn more by visiting the involvement fair on Wednesday, September 9, from 1 - 3 p.m.

Our new Manhattanville School of Nursing and Health Sciences is up and running with a total of 72 students enrolled in our inaugural class (some already started earlier in the summer!). This Monday we had the traditional White Coat Ceremony for new students along with the official ribbon-cutting.

As if a life-threatening global pandemic were not enough of a challenge for the nation, we also have to find a way, working together, not against each other, to confront the continuing and equally life-threatening violence committed by part of our population against Blacks and African Americans, LatinX and other minorities, with the continuum of racism stretching from thoughtless offensive remarks to daily discrimination in stores and shopping malls and finally to brutal killings and shootings of African Americans, violence against Black Lives Matter demonstrators, the arson attack on a Chabad Center for Jewish Life at the University of Delaware, or the killing of a man demonstrating in favor of the President's agenda, whatever our opinion of that agenda may be. Looting of businesses or violence against innocent bystanders, whether on the left or the right, is never justified or justifiable under any circumstances.

Working with the Black Student Union, the Student Government Association, Black alumni, as well as faculty, staff and a special task force of our Board of Trustees, my administration has developed a twelve-step plan to combat both intentional and unintentional racism on our campus and increase intercultural communication, to rethink our curriculum, map out a plan for hiring more Black and LatinX faculty members, open lines of communication with the Harrison Police Department and work with all members of the Manhattanville community towards a better understanding of intercultural concerns perspectives. You can read the plan [here](#).

I am grateful to Vice President of Student Affairs Dr. Cindy L. Porter for taking on the role of Interim Chief Diversity Officer in addition to her other duties. Likewise, I hope and expect that

our Center for Diversity and Inclusion will play a pivotal role in that effort and would encourage all of you to go to their web site and take advantage of its rich array of (virtual) offerings this semester.

Finally, I want to thank all of you, students, parents, faculty and staff for your trust in Manhattanville College during these challenging times. With your help, we can get through this pandemic, as Manhattanville has already emerged successfully from so many crises in its nearly 200-year history. I would like to thank especially our students for their discipline in adhering to our campus safety plan. Recognizing the mental stress some of these constraints may cause, we have hired an additional counselor for students who need help coping with the anxieties caused by the pandemic and, following a suggestion from our Black Student Union, we are also in the process of hiring an additional counselor who can address the double anguish experienced by our Black and African American students. So I would strongly encourage you to seek help, medical or psychological, whenever you might need it.

I would also like to extend an invitation to all of you. If, given the constraints all of us are working under, you have ideas for how my office, or the Provost's Office, or Student Affairs can help you with additional academic, co-curricular or extracurricular programs or initiatives to create the most interactive and engaging environment possible under the circumstances, I invite you to share them with us. I have virtual open office hours every Thursday from 3 - 4 p.m. You can come by and share ideas or concerns you might have, but please also feel free to just drop by to tell me a little about yourself and how you are doing. If the Thursday office hours do not work for you, please contact Ms. Deborah Fallone, Executive Assistant to the President, and she will find another time for us to talk.

I wish you all a successful academic year. I know the extraordinary resilience of Manhattanville students and the Manhattanville community. There is not a doubt in my mind that we will prevail.

Go Valiants!

Michael E. Geisler, Ph.D.  
President

