For more information, and to RSVP, contact the Office of Alumni Relations at 718-990-6232; alumni@stjohns.edu.
By Susan M. Damiani ‘87CBA, Director of Gift Planning and The McCallen Society

The Spring 2020 semester was challenging for all of us as we quickly transitioned to online learning and a remote workplace as the global health crisis unfolded. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to our students, faculty, administrators, and staff for their resilience and commitment as we navigated uncharted waters together to ensure that our students successfully completed the semester.

Although we wish life would return to normal, we continue to face challenges as the uncertainty of the pandemic remains. We worked tirelessly over the summer to allow our students, faculty, administrators, and staff to return to campus safely. Many of our students are now able to have an on-campus learning experience. As we continue to remain faithful to the mission and strengthen our commitment to student success, we have identified several focus areas for this academic year that I outline below.

Building on last year’s successful student engagement initiatives, we continue to instil the importance of these efforts as we actively engage students in positive, meaningful ways. More now than ever, our students need our support, particularly as class formats continue to evolve—from synchronous and asynchronous online classes, to rotating hybrid sections, and much more—that require us to connect with them in ways that may differ from anything we have done before. Student engagement remains paramount.

The pedagogical foundation for ensuring student success in online and hybrid modalities often looks very different from a traditional classroom setting, so we now have a renewed focus on faculty development with an emphasis on technology. Not only is it a critical means of engaging students, but increasingly, technology plays a central role in the evolution of academic disciplines.

Although we continually redesign our courses and curricula to meet course format changes, we have the opportunity to do so according to universal design principles and other inclusive teaching practices. Designing a course is intentional, so we need to focus on teaching and learning practices that improve educational access for, and the academic success of, groups traditionally excluded from or underrepresented in higher education. Focusing on inclusive teaching helps us revisit the question, “What is mission-centered teaching at St. John’s?” It challenges our traditional approaches and asks us to transform higher education into an approach that intentionally includes the histories and cultures of traditionally underrepresented or marginalized members of society.

On June 6, 2020, the University’s senior leadership released an Antiracism Statement. The power of that statement does not lie in its words, but in the actions we take. Our collective charge is to adopt a culture of antiracism, focused on sustained action with the intent to change a system or an institutional policy, practice, or procedure that has racist effects. This is not a one-time charge, but an ongoing process that must inform everything we do, from designing curriculum, to hiring colleagues, to choosing and working through research projects. As individuals, departments, schools/colleges, and as a University, we are committed to becoming an antiracist institution.

As we move forward through this academic year, we continue to face challenges—but we will face them together and emerge as a stronger institution.

By Simon G. Møller, Ph.D., Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

Facing Challenges Together and Emerging as a Stronger Institution

Office of the Provost

Message from Susan M. Damiani ’87CBA

By Susan M. Damiani ’87CBA, Director of Gift Planning and The McCallen Society

Greetings, Retirees Association members!

Hopefully by April we can once again meet for our annual luncheon. In the meantime, I hope you are all doing well and making the best of a difficult situation. The Office of Gift Planning constantly works on virtual programming, Power Hours, and an electronic newsletter to keep us all connected. If you are not receiving this information, please email me at damians@stjohns.edu.

During the 2020–21 academic year, St. John’s is celebrating its 150th anniversary! As retired employees, everyone at the University is grateful for your hard work and contribution. I encourage you to share your St. John’s memories, posts/photos, and reminisce about the wonderful times spent at our beloved University on our Retirees Association Facebook page.

Even though you are retired, you are still a big part of what makes this institution so great. As we all know, membership in the St. John’s family is forever! Please stay in touch and join us at a Power Hour.

May you and your family have a joyful, safe, and wonderful Christmas.

Retirees at the 2019 Luncheon

College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences

By Thomas Burke

As COVID-19 continues to spread throughout the country and around the world, St. John’s University is incredibly fortunate to have Cdr. (Ret.) Harlem J. Gunness, Ph.D., M.P.H. in its family. Currently Associate Professor/Industry Professional and Director of the University’s Public Health program, Dr. Gunness formerly served as Senior Officer with the US Public Health Service at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, where he conducted disease surveillance and epidemiological investigations on highly infectious communicable diseases, such as MERS-Cov, MDR-TB, and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.

Dr. Gunness is presently undertaking a comprehensive research study that explores the various demographic, educational, geographic, and socio-economic factors that contribute to the spread of COVID-19 in Far Rockaway and Corona, two disease hot spots in Queens County, NY.

“There is much that we already know about this disease,” he said, “but there is still so much more to learn. And we do that every day. As new information is discovered, we are able to develop strategies that people can use to keep themselves as safe as possible from this terrible plague. And what we learn today will ultimately lead to the creation of a safe and effective vaccine that will, hopefully, put this illness behind us.”

As an acknowledged expert on the spread of communicable diseases, he recognizes that some people have become weary of living with restrictions and are beginning to ignore the measures that so far have kept them and their loved ones free of infection.

“This is not the time to put our protective behaviors on hold,” he stressed. “Everyone needs to continue to do the simple things, such as wearing a mask when around others, maintaining social distancing, avoiding crowds, washing our hands frequently, carrying hand sanitizer in our pocket or purse, and using our arms rather than our hands to open doors. These are common sense things—and we know that they work.”

If you wish to make a gift to support Dr. Gunness’ research, please contact Susan Damiani, Director, Office of Gift Planning, at 718-990-7562, damians@stjohns.edu.

Office of Human Resources

Open Enrollment for Retirees

By Mirian Cepeda, Senior Benefits Representative, Employee Benefits

This year, the Open Enrollment period for retirees is November 9–30. As long as you are currently enrolled in medical, dental, and/or life insurance, you can make changes to your existing coverage or elect to enroll in new coverage. Elections made during the Open Enrollment period will be effective January 1, 2021.

The medical plan offered to all retirees is the Oxford Freedom Premier Plan. This is a robust plan which offers in- and out-of-network coverage, as well as prescription drug coverage. There are two dental plans to choose from: the Cigna Plan or the Aetna DMO Dental Plan. The cost will be provided to you in the Open Enrollment materials mailed to your home. Our retiree billing carrier will adjust your bill for any changes you make.

If you are enrolled in the medical plan, you will receive your new 2021 ID card prior to January. Be sure to begin using your new ID card on January 1, 2021. Use your new ID card with the Group Number 1328530 as of 1/1/2021.

For more information about Open Enrollment or any of the plans offered to retirees, please contact me at 718-990-2077; cepedam@stjohns.edu.