Dear Dillard Family and Friends,

When I last wrote to you in the summer, I had just completed my first year at Dillard. I shared with you all the wonderful things I learned about the University and highlights of our achievements over the course of the year. This letter will cover a shorter time span but still keep you abreast of where we are and let you know some of our future plans.

I promised to share the good and the not so good with you. With that being said, I want you to know that in the fall 2014, our enrollment numbers dropped by 10%. Part of this decline was due to the economy as well as the residual impact of the new standards for qualifying for the Parent PLUS Loan. The average family income of our students is $31,500 a year and they are less likely to qualify for these loans. If it’s any consolation, some of our sister institutions didn’t fare as well as we did. One local school had a 30% decline in their fall enrollment expectations. In addition, over the past two years most UNCF schools and all HBCUs experienced a decline, ours less than the average.

With these new challenges, we are trying new strategies to recruit students as well as old ones that worked but had been abandoned. The first was to separate enrollment management out of student success like it was in the late 1990s so that we could focus on this key area. We also developed a Board enrollment committee that has helped find additional funding to recruit students, which for most of our students means offering more financial aid. Students and parents are actively shopping for the best deal, and schools offering more aid are getting more students.

This spring, the Dimensions Program, in which faculty and alumni participate in local recruitment fairs along with recruiters, was implemented in three locations in Louisiana: Baton Rouge (Feb. 20), Shreveport (Mar. 6), and Lafayette (Mar. 20). We encouraged each member of the Dillard family to assist us with recruitment as well as student retention. Our goal is to eventually get to all areas, so if you didn’t see us this time, please know that we are coming. So, while we have some new strategies, we need alumni to build our recruitment war chest to not only advertise but to provide scholarship dollars.

On October 19, 2013, I was officially invested as the seventh president, so I’d like to take this opportunity to thank all of those who attended and supported the university’s efforts to make this event both memorable and fruitful. While the inauguration was an important milestone for the university, I want you to know that the most significant result of the entire occasion was the University’s introduction of the Student Aid for Financial Emergencies (SAFE) Fund. As you may know, the SAFE Fund was established to assist students who incur financial hardships that are unable to be met through traditional financial aid. Our research clearly indicates that the number one reason we lose students is financial need.

I can’t tell you how much it means to have had Dillard alumni and trustees step up to be first in giving this critical fund momentum. A huge thank you goes to Cynthia Butler-McIntyre, ’76, and the National Delta Sigma Theta Sorority for providing $50,000. She started a challenge among the other Greek organizations and my father, a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, raised the challenge to $75,000. Shortly thereafter, the fund grew to nearly $150,000 including contributions from alumni, faculty, staff, and friends. Trustee Emeritus David Dillard offered a challenge to the Board of Trustees. He would provide $100,000 if all of the other Trustees contributed that much collectively. Every Trustee immediately responded, resulting in over $200,000, most of which went to the SAFE Fund.

As a result, we have been able to provide critically needed assistance to 70 students thus far. Some students needed as little as $100, while for others the need was as much as $5,000. Although this is a good start, we still have much to do.

As you peruse this letter, please don’t skip the piece on Richard Johnson, one of the students for whom the SAFE Fund was life changing. We would be remiss as an institution if we didn’t at least make a good-faith effort to help students reduce the financial burden that may stand between them and the path to success. So, I encourage each of you to give whatever you can to support the SAFE Fund.

Sincerely,

Walter M. Kimbrough, PhD
President

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Students Exemplify the Value of a Dillard Education

We have students who are doing amazing things and demonstrate the value of their Dillard education. Students like Calvinesha Weaver, junior biology major, who completed Phase I of an internship in Peru during the winter break in a Tropical Pathology and Infectious Disease Association Medical Internship Program (TPaIDA). Calvinesha will return to Peru in May for the second phase of the program. Calvinesha’s faculty mentor is Dr. Eric Buddes, associate professor and coordinator of biology. Another student, Nicole Tinson, a senior political science major, was recently named by the White House as a 2014 HBCU All-Star. Nicole credits much of her success to faculty mentors Dr. Nchor B. Okorn, professor of political science and member of “The Pact,” shared his room physician, best-selling author and member of “The Pact,” shared his experience growing up in cramped living quarters in Newark, New Jersey and his sojourn to medical school and beyond with students during their weekly convocation. His latest book Living & Dying in Brick City: An ER Doctor Returns Home, was co-authored by Dillard alumna Lisa Frazier Page, ’84. He was followed in February by leading gospel singer and motivator Kirk Franklin, who fascinated the audience with his story, and did an impromptu accompaniment with choir member Autumn Durgan.

Featured Speakers:
• March 12 - During Women's History Month, Joyce Roché, ’71, former CEO of Girls Inc. and chair of Dillard's Board of Trustees, spoke about her experiences chronicled in her new book, The Empress Has No Clothes: Conquering Self-Doubt to Embrace Success.
• April 2 - Brain Food will feature the National Black College Hall of Fame Legacy Panel.

SAFE Fund assistance marked pivotal point in students’ academic future

For Richard Johnson, nursing major, the $1,300 he received from the SAFE Fund was a life saver. “It basically saved my life and that of my two girls,” he said. Johnson found himself in an unimaginable position last spring when he was suddenly thrust into the role of a single parent to his two and three year old daughters. Although Johnson worked at the casino at that time, he was forced to take another job that would allow him more time with his children and still maintain his studies at Dillard. Unfortunately, his employment at Winn Dixie was not enough to make ends meet and he and his children sought shelter where they could find it. They eventually found themselves homeless. Dillard’s Keys to Degrees, which provides accommodations for single parents was able to assist him with housing on campus; however, he still fell short of funds needed to continue his education. That’s when he was referred to financial aid and applied for emergency help through the SAFE Fund. He is now back on track with his studies and should be a sophomore by the end of the semester.

Dillard garners funding for research and training

Pulse Laser Deposition (PLD)/Polymers

Dr. Abdalla Darwish, Interim Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Physics, over the past couple of years has secured about $1.75M from the U.S. Department of Defense for PLD and laser ablation research and the development of new technologies.

Dillard has also helped Dillard maintain a top ranking nationally in Physics.

Clinical Research Associates/Health Disparities Research

Dr. Charlotte Hurst, Associate Professor of Nursing, through her work with the Dillard-LSUHSC Minority Health Disparities Research Center implemented a successful model to train nurses as Clinical Research Associates (CRA), which also addresses a major on-going challenge in healthcare - effectively increasing the number of minorities participating in clinical trials. Dr. Hurst was recently awarded a grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), to further her research along with Dr. Michael Hagensee at LSUHSC on “Education of Health Disparate Woman about Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), Cervical Cancer and Preventative Vaccines”.

Upcoming Events:
May 8 - Pre-Commencement theater performance of the play ‘Ain’t Misbehavin’ at 7:30 p.m., Georges Auditorium
May 9 - Dillard University’s Baccalaureate Service at 6 p.m., Avenue of the Oaks
May 10 - 2014 Commencement Service at 8 a.m., Avenue of the Oaks