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# Working Together, Building on our Accomplishments: A message from Bridgewater's new President

Dana Mohler-Faria

*Bridgewater State College*, [dmohlerfaria@bridgew.edu](mailto:dmohlerfaria@bridgew.edu)

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# Working Together, Building on our Accomplishments

A message from Bridgewater's new President

by Dana Mohler-Faria



It was the morning of the Opening Breakfast in the fall of 1991. I had arrived at Bridgewater a month before as the newly appointed Vice President for Administration and Finance. As I finished speaking to the hundreds of faculty and staff and returned to my seat, a young faculty member approached me and asked, "Do you remember me?" Quite frankly, I didn't recognize this young woman. She continued, "if it weren't for you, I wouldn't be here today. You were instrumental in getting me started on my college education many years ago." I suddenly remembered who she was. She was a student I had recruited while I was a counselor in a program designed to help single parents who were receiving public assistance to continue their education. Since my last encounter with her, she had completed both undergraduate and graduate degrees and was now a professor at Bridgewater.

As I walked back to my office that morning, I realized precisely why I was engaged in public higher education: it is an enterprise focused on providing access to quality education which transforms the lives of those who might otherwise never get the opportunity to be full and complete partners in the larger society.

Last December, shortly after the Board of Trustees of Bridgewater State College nominated me to become the college's eleventh president, a reporter from a local newspaper called and asked me for a comment. "It certainly will be a challenge following Adrian Tinsley, who has been such an outstanding president," I responded, "but I know this college well, and I know its people well, and I know we will do good things together."

As every member of our community is aware, we at Bridgewater have experienced a period of success that is unmatched in the college's history.

New academic programs have been added, three new schools have been created, \$10 million dollars have been raised by our Foundation, 70 acres of land have been acquired, and more than \$70 million in construction funds will allow us to open four new buildings within the next nine months.

By any measure, this is an extraordinary record, and I consider myself fortunate to have spent the last ten years of my professional life working so closely with President Tinsley and with the members of this campus community during a time of so many remarkable achievements.

The next phase of growth and development will be our responsibility, and I am grateful to so many of Bridgewater's students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees and friends who have contacted me to convey their confidence in my ability to lead us through this most exciting phase. As I prepare to assume the presidency of the college, I see in your expressions of goodwill my single most valuable asset—the talent and the commitment that these sentiments represent. I know also that the key to maintaining Bridgewater's extraordinary momentum lies in our ability to work as well together in the future as we have in the past.

Therefore, I would like to outline what I see as our major opportunities and challenges—both immediate and long-range—and I look forward to hearing from you to learn your thoughts and opinions on these issues.

I intend to concentrate my attention and energy on eight specific areas:

—*Focusing on excellence:* It is critically important for us as a community to begin defining excellence for ourselves and developing together the pathways that will help us achieve our goals. Your ideas are fundamental to this process, so among my initial tasks as president will be to develop ways for us to initiate this dialogue;

—*Building a stronger campus community:* Among Bridgewater's greatest strengths is the sense of cooperation and support that exists on our campus and in the community. How do we encourage more contact among the 10,000-plus people on our campus, and the more than 40,000 active alumni of the college? Similar to the effort to focus on excellence, I plan to seek new ways to expand opportunities for us to talk, share and plan together. Your suggestions are of course most welcome;

—*Expanding our work with international education:* Since 1872, Bridgewater has been involved with international education, and as advances in communication and technology bring our world closer, I believe it is important for us to expand our international program and support our students and faculty in their teaching and learning here and abroad, and to continue to attract students from countries across the globe to our campus;

—*Student/faculty research:* Under President Tinsley's leadership, and with the support of our faculty and staff and the wonderful generosity of alumni and friends, Bridgewater has been able to make substantial progress in providing new opportunities for our students and faculty to engage in high-level research projects. Supporting and expanding these opportunities will be among my highest priorities;

—*Professional development for faculty and staff:* It is of crucial importance for Bridgewater to continue to provide professional development opportunities to its faculty and staff so they may stay current with advances in their academic fields and professional activities, as well as to share the results of their work with the campus;

—*Teacher education:* Our first academic program and, today, still the field where the majority of our students pursue studies. This state and the nation need larger numbers of well-qualified teachers more than at any time in history. Bridgewater, the home of teacher education in America, has a nationally recognized strength in this area, and a singular responsibility to continue discovering ways to improve the educational process at every level of learning. Achieving new levels of excellence and innovation in teacher education will be a priority throughout my tenure as Bridgewater's president;

—*Connections to the region:* As the first president of Bridgewater in more than half a century who is a native of this region—I was born and raised in Wareham, Massachusetts and have spent my entire professional career in the public and community colleges of the Commonwealth—I appreciate the importance of Bridgewater's local ties and the value of those relationships to the col-

lege's future growth and prosperity. Since our founding in 1840, Bridgewater has been a close, working partner with the cities and towns of southeastern Massachusetts, now the state's fastest-growing region. I look forward to strengthening our ties and connections with the people, communities, and organizations throughout this part of the Commonwealth. As a public college, this is fundamental to our mission and has to be among our most urgent priorities;

—*Campus development:* As we work to improve support for scholarship and research, expand our technology resources, and increase outreach to the regional community, we will also remain focused on the next phase of physical development at Bridgewater. This includes our need to build a new science building, a fine and performing arts center, and a new classroom building. Fortunately, the college has land to grow, and we will make every effort to secure funding for these new facilities.

As I said to that local reporter who interviewed me just after my appointment as President of Bridgewater was announced, I'm about to assume an enormous responsibility. My preparation in Massachusetts public higher education over the past thirty years, my close ties to the region, and most importantly, my work here at Bridgewater over the past decade, have prepared me for this most important responsibility. The work we do at this institution has profound implications for our students and the greater community. We must provide high quality teaching and learning opportunities to each and every student at Bridgewater.

I have every confidence that beginning on July 1, 2002, we will shape a destiny that will match and, I trust, exceed our college's distinguished history. This is our greatest challenge, as well as our most important responsibility, and I am convinced that together we can indeed do great things.

—*Dana Mohler-Faria will be inaugurated in October, 2002.*