April 6, 2012

Dear Colgate Colleagues and Friends,

Colgate’s Board of Trustees met on campus March 29-31, 2012 and I write to provide my third report about the activities and meetings of the board. Our sessions last weekend confirmed the value of having three of our four meetings in Hamilton. While the business sessions summarized below occupied most of our time, I would like to begin by mentioning several events that were special highlights.

We dined on Thursday, March 29th at the beautifully renovated Colgate Inn with members of the faculty “study group” whose two week trip to India in early January demonstrated the value of an interdisciplinary effort to explore new ways Colgate can educate students in a global society. It was evident that President Jeffrey Herbst’s investment of a $100,000 grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to support the 27 faculty travelers generated very positive results. While their stories, photographs and insights were wonderful, especially impressive was their clear commitment to direct what they discovered into their classes, including “core” courses, as well as their conversations with students and professional colleagues.

Last fall we enjoyed dinner with a diverse group of students in Donovan’s Pub. This weekend we experienced the vibrant atmosphere of the Frank Dining Hall and enjoyed another set of great conversations. From checking in with Jean Brooks (who approaches her 35th anniversary at Colgate) to navigating our way through “the line,” the setting was superb for our contacts with our most important constituency, our students. Following lunch a number of trustees went on a campus admissions tour, led by some of Colgate’s most enthusiastic student guides. Through the tour we learned how Colgate is presented to prospective students and their parents.

On Friday evening Professor Anthony Aveni received the 2012 Balmuth Teaching Award. This award, which includes a generous stipend, is funded by Mark S. Siegel ’73 to both recognize the excellence of our faculty and honor Professor Jerome “Jerry” Balmuth. The annual presentation of this award forms a truly special event celebrating the great teaching talents of Colgate’s faculty. Mark, Jerry, Tony and Interim Dean of the Faculty Bruce Selleck delivered very inspiring (and humorous) remarks. It was an evening of Colgate stories spanning more than 40 years that will be remembered for another 40 years.

The board meeting on Saturday, March 31st, was preceded by a day full of committee meetings:

The Budget Committee met for a final review of Colgate’s 2012-13 budget that was advanced for discussion and approval by the board on Saturday. Colgate continues a record of strong fiscal management as evidenced by 50 (soon to be 51) consecutive years of balanced budgets. The Committee also received an overview of Colgate’s financial aid program. The board recognized the success of Colgate’s Passion for the Climb campaign and its very clear impact by increasing the number of students receiving financial aid (projected to be 41.3% of our incoming Class of 2016).
The Athletics Committee met with the leadership of the campus strategic planning working group that is shaping the future plans for Colgate athletics. It also received an update about the recent decision by the Patriot League to offer scholarships in football.

The Audit Committee discussed, among other matters, how best to review a topic the full board will soon consider: Colgate’s enterprise risk management initiatives.

All trustees participated in a session to “debrief” our board meeting in Palo Alto, California in January that concentrated on the impact of technology in higher education. We received an overview of Colgate’s efforts to utilize “social media” platforms as well as an update about the efforts of the strategic planning sub-group that is focusing on technology issues.

The next meeting of the board is June 8-9, 2012 and the agenda will include a progress report regarding strategic planning and the Passion for the Climb campaign. We also will monitor the progress of various capital projects, including several that were approved at our meeting: the construction of the Case-Geyer Digital Learning and Media Center, improvements in the Reid Athletic Center, the addition of the Shaw Wellness Center within the Cutten Complex, and the installation of campus card access to first-year residences.

The board also looks forward to an update about the review and conversations by the faculty about its promotion and tenure processes. Bruce Selleck provided an overview about the processes as described in the Faculty Handbook to the trustee Academic and Faculty Affairs Committee of the board in February.

The weeks leading up to our next meeting will be very busy, with major events including the Global Leaders Lecture Series (April 13-15), Commencement (May 20) and Reunion 2012 (June 1-3). The board remains grateful for the efforts of every member of the Colgate community who supports our students and our mission.

Please contact me at dfcronin@colgate.edu if you have any questions, comments or concerns. Thank you and best wishes from Colgate.