



Personal Reflections

11/25/2014

Greetings this Holiday Season-

In this season of giving thanks and family celebrations, I want to take a moment to personally thank you for your dedication and continued commitment—and to express my gratitude to each of you for helping IMSA to accomplish so much this year.

It's been a few weeks since my last personal reflection and I think today is a perfect day—at the start of this season of gratitude—to share my thoughts with you.

First, it has been an honor and a joy to serve as your President these past two months, ten weeks to be exact! During this time my Listening and Learning Plan was successfully implemented and some findings and theories have emerged. I'd like to share these with you and begin by restating that I consider IMSA to be a fine institution that does not need to be "fixed" or "turned around." Simply put, we're neither falling apart nor on the verge of closing.

However, I can state categorically that IMSA is not living up to its potential. It is clear that we have lost something over the past 29 years and have become untethered. It will be important for us to re-learn and re-cover some things from our institutional past, and I'm confident that together we can re-invent and re-envision IMSA into its future.

That said, it's exciting to embark on this re-envisioning process with you. Grounded firmly in our mission "to ignite and nurture creative, ethical, scientific minds that advance the human condition," I feel we are positioned and ready to boldly re-imagine IMSA into its even brighter future.

And so we begin. I'd like to share the following observations—not firm conclusions—based on my first ten weeks as your President:

1. Areas to Address (or Fix) Immediately

- *Selection of IMSA's next Principal.* We're currently recruiting and if you'd like to recommend a strong candidate, please contact Mary Spreitzer.
- *Communication between Faculty and Student Life.* Our students are most directly impacted by these two departments and joint meetings would encourage greater understanding.
- *Computer Science Department.* Prior to our new Principal's arrival, I'm addressing the feasibility of creating a Computer Science Department, separate from the Mathematics Department.
- *Alumni Engagement.* Better engagement with our alumni is needed for tapping into their vast intellectual capital, as well as accurate alumni data that is needed by our



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stakeholders and legislators (i.e., how many reside in Illinois, hold degrees in STEM fields, have started companies, etc.).

- *Economic Impact Study*. Related to alumni data, a formal study will be conducted this year and these results will demonstrate our Return on Investment (RoI) to the State of Illinois. These results will be used to further engage our alumni and elected officials.

2. Areas for Further Investigation

- *Academic Life*. With respect to our main charge, that of teaching and learning, I am interested in conducting a “deep dive” on the Student Inquiry and Research Program (SIR), an area of the Academy involving 20% of our time. Also, I want to investigate our grading practices and how they affect learning.
- *Student Life and Residence Life*. Are we effectively attending to the emotional well-being of our students—their stress levels and basic needs, such as sleep? There are several aspects of our Residential Academy that I will ask our next Principal to address.
- *Academy and Professional Field Services*. Can we develop greater integration so that our teaching and learning informs IMSA’s external programs and services?
- *International Strategy*. I have received inquiries from several countries regarding IMSA’s point of contact for international affairs. Different offices are engaging with our international partners and if IMSA is to be “internationally recognized,” a strategy is needed.

After listening and learning from you, I offer my initial thinking, preliminary observations and priorities. They’re not listed in any particular order and will likely be revised based on additional feedback and insights. I invite you to engage with what I’ve learned and then respond with your best thinking—I sincerely hope to hear from you.

Finally, I want to send you into the joyous Thanksgiving holiday with my best wishes and gratefulness: I’m thankful to the IMSA Board of Trustees for inviting me to serve as your new President and for supporting my leadership; to my Cabinet and Senior Leadership Team for their willingness to stretch and to see IMSA with “fresh eyes”; to our staff for their continued dedication and commitment to providing outstanding support; to our remarkable students who will undoubtedly go forward to “advance the human condition”; to our stakeholders and alumni for their generosity and steadfast support; and especially to our amazing and dedicated faculty for igniting and nurturing creative, ethical, scientific minds that advance the human condition.

It is an honor and privilege to work with you.

Mil Gracias,

José M. Torres