

State of the Senate Address – President Martin

Madam Vice President, Mr. Speaker, members of the 1st ever Student Senate, distinguished guests:

As the last three months of the current administration begin, I am reminiscent on the changes we have wrought in our brief time in office and eagerly anticipate the impact we will continue to have through your efforts. Today, I urge us all to remain focused on the goal of sustainable student advocacy we have worked so hard to establish. No time is more pivotal than now, as the decisions we make in the coming months may well form the future of the State of the Senate.

It seems just yesterday I took a seat in the Madonna University Library and embarked on the task of drafting the Student Senate's constitution and bylaws. Much has changed since that February day two years ago, but the focus of "students first" remains. I was uncertain of how to establish a fully functioning Student Senate at the time; all I knew was that I would do whatever it took to make the group a reality. Today, I am proud to say that the Student Senate is what I dreamed it could be then: comprised of the greatest student leadership on this campus and ever striving toward more complete student advocacy.

Vice President Papasoglu and I entered office with lofty goals. Fifty passed resolutions, a full Senate, increased student engagement with the snap of a finger, and for me personally, gray hair by my 22nd birthday. As of February 2, 2017, we are 24% of the way toward goal one, 83% toward goal two, and snapping still does not increase student engagement; though, not for lack of trying. While we may not address all of the issues we set about to remediate in April, there is a small chance I will have gray hair by next month.

All joking aside, yes, fifty resolutions would have been quite a feat, but as the old saying goes, "quality beats quantity." We soon realized that if we could focus all of our attention on perfecting a few areas, we could have a much greater impact than if we performed with mediocrity in every domain. Theodore Roosevelt noted this when he stated: "a man who goes into politics should not expect to reform everything right off,

with a jump.” Since entering office, the inaugural Student Senate has passed twelve resolutions to date and brought student engagement to a much higher level in the last year and a half than it had been in my freshman and sophomore years. This is what success looks like. The road has not been easy, nor has it been clear, but when you bring all of the greatest student leaders on campus into one room, the possibilities are endless.

We are humbled by the positions we were elected into and driven by the students we represent to positively change this campus and enhance community dialogue. Twelve resolutions sounds great, but students want results, not numbers; in our first nine months in office, we provided results. Resident students felt their weekend food options limited, so we set about in September to pass a resolution in support of doubling weekend food service hours. Working in tandem with Sodexo and food services, former Senator, now Secretary, Freemantle put in the groundwork to make this resolution a reality. Additionally on the topic of extending hours, the Senate supported the extension of library hours to 1 a.m. Sunday through Thursday and the Stack’s deli late night offerings last semester.

Campus safety and emergency protocol was another area we focused on heavily in the fall, with two resolutions passing mid-semester. The first, authored by Senator DiMilia, was written in response to the fire-alarm malfunction on September 29. The resolution was passed through the Senate just one day later. It asked for a more structured emergency protocol and opened discussion on emergency generators, emergency evacuation, consistent alarm decibel levels, and emergency communication methods. Three weeks later, Vice President Papasoglu authored a similar resolution asking for consistent communication from campus safety regarding crimes on campus and in surrounding areas. Written in response to several crimes that took place in late September and early October, this resolution asked for honesty and transparency regarding potential dangers, in order for students to better protect themselves. University administrators were appreciative of the recommendations within both resolutions and are working consistently to improve all areas of emergency management on campus.

Not all of what the Senate accomplished was policy related. With one of our primary goals being student engagement, our Special Events committee set about to host the first ever Homecoming Week. This week, comprised of several events in which teams

of students competed for the Crusader Cup, culminated with the second annual Homecoming Dance, which drew over 200 students. In addition to Homecoming, the Senate hosted move-in week events and supported students during midterms and finals weeks by offering free refreshments, pencils, Scantrons, and bluebooks.

These resolutions and events are just a small window into the work of Student Senate over the last nine months.

When Vice President Papasoglu and I entered office, we rode a dense platform of new policy ideas with our sights set high. However, the birth of such an impactful student group came with a learning curve for the entire University. Noting this reality, we slowed our approach in the first semester and strengthened our campus presence. Though as a Senate we proceeded in policy slower than our initial hope, those goals were not discarded. Our intention today is as clear as it was in April; where students are concerned, we will never stop speaking up and reaching out. After establishing firm traction in 2016, we are confident the winter semester will feature more than a few resolutions in the areas of student engagement, health and wellness, and facility availability and functionality.

Our focus in these last three months is on four areas in particular: succession planning, student engagement and recognition, sustainability on campus, and student wellbeing. Of the first, it is extremely important as we transition into the new Senate administration in May that the strides made this year are not diminished or lost in translation. To you Senators and Secretaries, I ask that you proceed in everything you do with the realization that one day - maybe this year, maybe in the years that will follow - you will no longer hold this office. With that in mind, it is my expectation of myself and of you all, that we accomplish all we set out to do and prepare the positions we hold for those who come after us.

We, as a Senate, have done much in the area of student engagement and I expect this to continue in the winter semester with the hosting of two new events. After hosting over 200 students at each of the three previous dances hosted by the Student Senate, our members in the Special Events committee are currently working on bringing a new dance

theme to campus this March. The funds raised will be used towards a semester-end student recognition banquet. So many of our students and the organizations they participate in do great work for the campus community. Unfortunately, they are not formally commended on the work they do. This year will be different. The nomination process will be unveiled this month for the first ever Student Recognition Banquet hosted by Student Senate to be held in April.

As the most prominent student group at Madonna University, it is important that the Senate represents the Franciscan values of the institution and exemplifies them through our actions. Among these values is Reverence for Creation. I am happy to announce that the Senate has embarked on a sustainability initiative to promote a greener campus. In the winter semester and for all those that follow, we will conduct business without the use of paper. We hope that our efforts in being a more sustainable group will inspire the entire University to do the same. President Grandillo has already expressed his intent to pursue better sustainability on campus, and I am looking forward to working with him and administration in this aim.

Lastly, it is my aim and that of the Senate as a whole, that student wellbeing in every area is improved through our efforts both now and in the future. In this department, we will continue to advocate for every area of student wellbeing, from their mental and physical health to the quality of the services and facilities available to them. A movement has begun at many institutions of higher learning to make counseling and mental health services more available to students. We have been working with our student government partners nationwide to improve our campus in this area. As of this week, Senator Globke is laying the groundwork for a resolution to add mental health and counseling information to all course syllabi. It is my expectation that he will work with the pertinent faculty and administrators in making this resolution come to fruition.

In terms of services, it is my hope that with the work started by Secretaries Freemantle and Szalay, we will continue the dialogue with administrators begun in the fall semester on the tuition concerns of many students and the composition of resident meal plans. On the topic of facilities, Senators Szalay and Adams have been working for months with library faculty on a proposal for an update to the library, in order for it to be better utilized by students. Senator Griesbeck is similarly looking at potential renovations

throughout campus and working on her own proposal as chair of the Committee for Campus Life & Affairs. Together these proposals will help administration understand what students need and prefer in order to thrive in all that they do at Madonna. Lastly on the topic of facilities: many students both this year and in the past have expressed their concern with the residence hall facilities. After meeting with President Grandillo regarding this topic, I am privileged to announce to the student body that new residence halls will be coming soon to Madonna. It's an exciting time to be a student and we are proud to work alongside administrators who continually go the extra mile for all members of our campus community.

These, my fellow Crusaders, are the matters regarding the state of our Senate that I have found of the greatest importance at this time. I am honored to represent you in these aims and anticipate your judgment regarding these tasks to yield effective resolutions. I have full confidence that if all do their duty, and consider these tasks in light of their importance for this institution and its students, we shall prove ourselves as a successful Senate, and thus become sustainable in our efforts.

To University administrators: this group was founded on the principle of student advocacy. As such, it is my goal, as well as the goal of the Senate, to continue decreasing the length of the bridge connecting students and administrators by increasing the relationship we have with all of you. Many of you I have already met with regarding the student body and our joint effort in making their concerns heard. Those who I have not met, I encourage you to become further acquainted with the Student Senate and all we stand for. In doing so, we can more wholly serve our students and our institution.

To our advisor Amanda Geraci: your insight and recommendations continue to guide us in all that we do. I am appreciative, as are we all, for the dedication you exemplify for this group every day. Without your consistent presence and guidance, the Senate and all it stands for could not exist in its current state.

To the Senate: after 43 weeks in elected office, you great leaders continue to exemplify the founding mission of the Student Senate in every action; that We, the Student Senate of Madonna University, in order to form a unified student voice; protect students' rights, interest and opinions; institute the respect for the dignity of each person; foster positive change; enhance community dialogue and understanding; and enrich the overall student experience, pledge our servant leadership to the benefits of the student body of Madonna University, within the Catholic tradition and in accordance with the Franciscan values of the institution.

Thank you.