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SPEAKERS

Dean Melanie Stein, President Shirley M. Collado



President Shirley M. Collado 00:00

Hi, Melanie, thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me and share your thoughts. And I am so thrilled that you're joining us as the new dean for the School of Humanities and Sciences. So welcome.



Dean Melanie Stein 00:12

Well, thank you. Thank you for the warm welcome, which is representative of the welcome that I received thus far. And I am equally thrilled to be here.



President Shirley M. Collado 00:22

Terrific, terrific. Well, I thought that it would be really great to start with your rich roots in Ithaca, you came back to Ithaca in some ways, I think it's like coming back home. Yes. And just curious what you would want to share with the campus community about your roots here in this town and city?



Dean Melanie Stein 00:42

Well, I am, as a couple of the younger members in my office the other day remarked, 'You're such an Ithacan.' And I am no doubt I am an Ithacan I was born here, and grew up here and left to go to college, but then ended up coming back and having my kids here while I was studying in graduate school. So then I went off again into the world and never really expected that I would be coming back again. But here I am. And it feels like home to me, there's just no doubt this is this has always felt like home. And I think for all of us humans, we have this resonance with the place where we you know where we come from. And for me, that's Ithaca.

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President Shirley M. Collado 01:35

That's so wonderful. Well, I know that'll be a benefit to our students. And we certainly want this to feel like home to them. So it's great to learn about your background here. I want to get into a topic that I know, you know very well. And that is the real debate around the liberal arts and the power of being liberally educated, which I believe is at our core here. Yet there's a real demand and research and conversations that happen constantly about the relevance of what we're doing for employers and the future of the workforce in this country. Just wondering what you what you think about that as the Dean of a school that is committed to the liberal arts?

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Dean Melanie Stein 02:20

Yeah, absolutely. So this is something of course, that all of us educators are grappling with. And I guess the way I think about it is we're in this environment of such a deep skepticism and criticism, not just of the liberal arts, but really of higher education, overall. And it's just a, almost an anti intellectual political climate. But of course, there's masses of data flying around to counter this. And so some of the data could be initially viewed as perhaps making us a little more anxious. And so some of the things that I'm talking about, which I'm sure you've heard as well, things like 85% of the jobs of 2030 have not yet been created, or 5 million jobs will be taken away by artificial intelligence and robotics by 2020, which is next year. And today's college students are going to be on average will have 12 to 15 jobs over the course of their career, which is such a dramatic change from our own experiences, you know, folks our age. So this is the data that's out there. But what this what, but what this says is that it's a time of dramatic change in the workforce. So the old way of doing things, training for a specific career is in some ways out the window. What is required to prepare students to meet this kind of almost the unknown, such dramatic change and transformation in society, they need to be trained to be flexible. They need to be trained to think outside the box. And if you look at what employers are asking for, they're asking for a combination of basic skills. And when they're asked in surveys, when they're asked to list out the basic skills, the things they say, are going to sound really

familiar to any educator in a liberal arts institution. They're going to say critical thinking, creative thinking, quantitative literacy skills, oral communication, written communication, intercultural competence, civic knowledge, civic engagement, inquiry and analysis. These are the student learning outcomes of most of our classes and education. But coupled with that, there's a call for the ability to apply these skills in different contexts. So that speaks to the need to be flexible. And, to be really setting up a foundation for future learning, as opposed to building specific career skills. And this is something that a liberal arts institution and a student at an institution like Ithaca College with its actual, with its blend of the liberal arts and professionally oriented education is exactly in the right position to do.

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President Shirley M. Collado 05:37

I could not agree more; really, really powerful words about that. And I think as a residential college, with all of the things that you identified, what's also equally powerful is the ability to live alongside people you did not select as your neighbor or friend, before coming to college, and having the ability to debate, to persuade, to know how to adapt and really gain skills around conflict resolution. And I think we need it so much in this world and in this country. So I'm super excited that you have that viewpoint that what we're doing here, and we have been doing here, as it evolves, is really relevant for the future of the workforce. So speaking of the future, we've been putting so much energy into a really inclusive, engaging, incredibly expansive, and I think bold, and realistic, strategic planning process, that's now the strategic plan known as Ithaca Forever. And you're joining us at a pivotal moment. And I wonder what excites you about the strategic plan? And where do you see H&S specifically evolving in that plan?

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Dean Melanie Stein 06:57

Well, I love that the word that you just said, when you introduce the strategic plan, are some of the first words that come to mind with the question, 'What do you love about the strategic plan, Melanie?' Because I mean, I will admit that coming into a job with a strategic planning process that I hadn't yet seeing, was a little bit ... oh... is it going to align with what I believe? And you know, my own vision? And so, in, in first reading it, the first thing that struck me was the combination of realism. And you know, just the the straightforwardness with which the current context is accepted, the current challenges. So it's realistic, but yet optimistic, and a sense of excitement about taking on these challenges, and moving the institution in a positive way. And I think another thing that struck me was the way that strategic plan clearly treasures and respects the past of the institution, and yet recognizes and embraces the need to evolve, while also noting that this is not a new thing. I mean, this is really like all institutions. But this is I think you see it

and I see in a very dramatic way, the way this institution has evolved through the years and changed. And this is just one more point where that process has to keep going.

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President Shirley M. Collado 08:41

Well, we, I feel like we did our job as you interpret the plan as a new person coming here. And I've always thought that the DNA of this place, and I say it respectfully as someone who hasn't had years here, we have been so innovative and bold and interesting, and scrappy, and all those things for since since we started. And this is a point in that evolution, that's critical. So what about H&S?

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Dean Melanie Stein 09:11

I mean, H&S is of course the core of the institution, because it's carrying forth the liberal arts, part of the education that IC offers to all students. So some things in the strategic plan that I see is particularly aligning with things that H&S does particularly well, are the stress on the experiential learning, and the link between experiential learning and what goes on in the classroom. That's something that already I'm, of course, I'm just getting to know the faculty, but already I'm seeing the way that faculty have developed that on their own without having that be an institutional charge or direction. And so having that appear prominently in the strategic plan, I think, it's wonderful because it celebrates something that the school already has shown in its own DNA, that it that it's something that it really values, I mean, in myriad ways in these are experiential in terms of getting the students out in the community, but also in terms of getting the students engaged in faculty research. So all the different ways of getting students engaged in things outside the classroom, that link with our classroom learning, this is something that instinctively this faculty has always done. And so the call to develop that further, and in a more perhaps coherent, and collaborative way, with the with the college as a whole is particularly exciting.

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President Shirley M. Collado 10:57

That's wonderful. You have some terrific people at school, and I'm so glad that you see the potential of that so clearly. So, I know this might seem like a funny question to ask in the Academy, but it's relevant, certainly, to me. And, and, and really important for the future of the college. And I, I'm curious, I think people would be curious about how you would describe your leadership style. What might students, faculty, and staff and community members expect to see when you think about your first year, and how you show up as Dean or want to show up as Dean.

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Dean Melanie Stein 11:39

I would describe my leadership style as a collaborative one. So particularly, now, coming in new to an institution, I see my job initially as getting to know my faculty, getting to know the students, getting to know the community listening, hearing from the community. That's what I've been doing and sort of the, I guess, now, it's already two months, I've been around here for two months. So I've been listening hard, and understanding the the institution, the people, the way it works, people's strengths, people's desires. And you know, I guess I was asking the question of myself, where do you want to be at the end of the year? Yes. And I guess my hope is that by the end of the year, I'm going to know the institution in a much deeper way than I do right now. That I'm going to know my faculty, and they're going to really know me, but they're going to trust me and we are going to be in dialogue together. That's where I work. That's how I want the feeling to be at the end of year. And I think that's really the task of an incoming leader is to, at least that I view that as my task is in that first year to build that trust, and build relationships and get into a real collaborative working style with the rest of the school.

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President Shirley M. Collado 13:23

That sounds like a wonderful goal, and the right way to start. Yes. So I'd like to ask one final question. And I guess it's a it's a big one, but it's an important one. When we think about, what do you see as the most critical issue facing faculty today in the academy?

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Dean Melanie Stein 13:48

Well, I guess I can think of two issues which are actually perhaps not completely dissimilar. So one is the changing demographics of the student body. And the students that are coming into I think all of our classrooms are not necessarily like us. And the classrooms don't look like the classrooms that we were in when we were students. So figuring out how to teach the students that are there, and to make the classroom feel like an inclusive learning environment, which I think is what all faculty want, but don't necessarily have the tools that they need in order to do that. So I think that's really one of the big challenges in most educational institutions. And IC I think, shares this. So in my mind, that's kind of coupled with this is more when I think about faculty and how faculty are, we've all been in a mode for so many years of just growing, building; faculty love to create things. And those same changing demographics that are, you know, asking us to look deeply at who these students are, that we're pulling into our classrooms are, of course, challenging the financial model for tuition-based institutions like IC. So that I mean, this is the realism and the strategic plan, we have to think about, okay, well, in this financial reality, we're no longer in this endless growth model, where it's just making the institution bigger, adding new programs. So we have to stop and think about how exactly we do things. And that's

very hard. That's very hard for faculty to do. And, basically, it's change, which is hard for all people to do. It's changing the way the institution fundamentally organizes itself, and how it's growing. And then it's changing, perhaps things we are doing in order to reach students and most effectively teach them and change is hard.



President Shirley M. Collado 16:18

Yes, yes, it is. This conversations been really enriching. Thank you for your candor, and energy and insights. I know that everyone who's listening will thoroughly enjoy getting to know you better. So welcome again, and thanks for the conversation.



Dean Melanie Stein 16:35

Thank you so much, Shirley. It's been a pleasure.