Dear Alumni and Friends:

I hope you are well and enjoying this fall season. We are off to another year of positive developments at the School of Education and Social Services.

As I hope you are aware, the school regularly involves students and faculty in professional, career-related activities that enhance learning and develop skills necessary for success in the academic and professional environment. Recently, I have been impressed by our faculty’s commitment to broadening and deepening the experiential learning options available to our students.

Let me begin with this story from Virginia. During regular class time, the Public Policy Making in Criminal Justice (CRJ 560) graduate class conducted a mock trial in the Norfolk (VA) Circuit Court. The simulation was very realistic, with the Norfolk Sheriff’s Office providing security and a bailiff. Students were required to pass through standard security screening, with no weapons or cell phones allowed. A mock jury was seated with Saint Leo alumni and others. Volunteers played the parts of various witnesses, and Adjunct Professor Jim Grandfield acted as the judge. In the after-simulation debriefing, everyone expressed positive feedback on the exercise. The Honorable Judge Jerrauld C. Jones also met with students and discussed the impact of public policy on the criminal justice system.

In the undergraduate ranks of criminal justice, a Terrorism (CRM 332) class in Virginia staged a terrorist-threat-and-hostage situation at a school, aided by the Norfolk Police Department Special Operations Unit. The students established an Incident Command Center, and as the exercise advanced, students interacted with the Special Operations Unit, providing intelligence and acting as the primary agency onsite. As planned, negotiations failed, and the Special Operations Unit was needed to subdue the suspect and rescue the hostages. Again, student feedback was very positive.
In education, our undergraduate and graduate programs are making a meaningful contribution through leadership use of technology in teacher education, truly “hands-on” work. We make sure new teachers and in-service teachers are ready to use technology in meaningful ways in their own classrooms. Admittedly, there is a “digital divide” to overcome in some poorer communities where budgets cannot support technologically enabled schools. The Jesse Ball DuPont Foundation, however, is helping. It has awarded the university a $51,150 grant to purchase portable technology resources that will be used by in-service teachers training in certain rural communities. These teachers-in-training will have iPads, cameras, projectors, and whiteboards at their disposal as they teach their lessons. Their own performance as teachers will be heightened by the informed use of technology, and the children in their classrooms will benefit.

We are confident about this partly because of the example of one of our 2012 (summa cum laude) graduates, Christil Perez. Ms. Perez is now a teacher at the Academy of Holy Names in Tampa, where her principal has already recognized her as an innovator in the use of technology, and a mentor to the other teachers in this area. Even more impressive, she was awarded a scholarship to attend the Florida Council of Teachers of English annual conference in Tampa, where she delivered a presentation on using a variety of modalities to teach literature to adolescents. The Jean Stallings Memorial Grant covered all of our alumna’s registration, hotel, and travel fees.

Technological leadership in teaching methods is also important in our graduate programs in education. In recent weeks, students explored the use of Web 2.0 tools to improve student reading and the diagnosis of reading problems. The students created presentations about screening, diagnostic, progress monitoring, and (summative) assessments related to K-12 reading problems using programs of their choice: Xtranormal, Voki, Prezi, VoiceThread and Animoto, to name some. Part of the professional development came during the discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of each of the programs for educators. It is clear to us and our students that mastery of classroom technology is essential to sound teacher and educator preparation.

Our social work faculty, meanwhile, enjoyed success earlier this semester with a new “immersion day,” held for juniors and seniors ready to plunge into their chosen field. The purpose, as described by Dr. Marguerite McInnis, undergraduate department chair, was “to begin the process of socializing our students into the profession; and to establish a love of professional development that encourages life-long learning.” The gathering assembled undergraduates from all the Florida teaching locations that offer the B.S.W. curriculum, and so included traditional-age college students at University Campus, adult
learners attending classes at University Campus or at Pasco-Hernando Community College locations, and Saint Leo students from our Gainesville teaching location. This made for a group of 90, plus all the full-time faculty, a number of adjuncts, and some administrators who are particularly close to our weekend students. This mini-professional conference featured sessions on social work ethics, military social work, and social work and service. The faculty plans an even more dynamic event next year, based upon the enthusiastic response of students.

As Dean of the School of Education and Social Services, I am proud of the commitment of faculty, staff, and students to enrich education through experiential learning.

Carol G. Walker, Ph.D.
Dean, School of Education and Social Services