

Welcome to President's Day 2024 and thanks for the warm welcome. I trust you had a wonderful summer and spent time with friends, family, and loved ones. It's exciting to see you all back on campus as we kick off this academic year. Your presence today means a lot - thank you for coming!

I am Bradley Lane, President of Seattle Central College. If I haven't had the chance to meet you yet, and I know there are quite a few of you, I'd love to meet you. If you see me today, please don't hesitate to come up and introduce yourself. I'm genuinely interested in meeting you, learning about your background, the work you do, and why you chose Seattle Central.

Today marks the third time I've had the privilege of addressing you on President's Day, but the first time in a permanent capacity. It's taking me a minute to drop the interim part when I am introducing myself, but I couldn't be happier to serve you and our students in this role.

This summer, I celebrated my 15th work anniversary at Seattle Colleges and it's been my honor to be part of this community for so much of my career. I look forward to the next 15 years and beyond. This place has felt like home to me for a while now, but I realize so many of you are new or "new-ish" to the college. We've been busy hiring and staffing up this year! We welcome you to Seattle Central and the Tiger family!

Reflecting on my first President's Day address back in 2022, it's striking how much has improved over the past two years! Back then, we were just starting to emerge from the pandemic, grappling with so many challenges. Our college, like many nationwide, experienced a large decline in enrollment during the pandemic. We know that more than 1 million students stopped out of higher education during COVID and at a time when people are questioning the value of higher education in the first place.

We've made significant strides reconnecting with students, which is so important because open-access colleges like Seattle Central are drivers of educational, social and economic mobility. Education creates lasting, generational impacts for families and communities, especially to communities that have been historically excluded from higher education. There is still work ahead of us, but in a moment, I'll share more about our exciting enrollment numbers and our expanded outreach into the greater Capitol Hill neighborhood!

Two years ago, Seattle Central garnered so much media attention and rallied so much energy from our community when budget deficits nearly caused us to close popular programs. This proposal was driven by an immediate need to respond to financial challenges, but closing programs and eliminating pathways to middle-class jobs would have had far-reaching implications for our students, faculty, and community.

That's because our role as a college extends beyond education. We've served as a cornerstone of the community since 1966 and have provided opportunities for economic advancement for its members ever since. It's true now, as it was then, Seattle Central is a vital part of a larger ecosystem and contributes significantly to the overall strength of our city. This is such an important role for us to remember.

As proof of our impact, and why so many students choose Seattle Central every year, I had the chance to learn from some of the 730 Seattle Promise students at Central when they were on campus for Summer Bridge in August. I wanted to share a selection of their career goals with you.

- The vast majority are looking for financial stability for themselves and their families; others
- want to open a rescue or service animal organization
- want to work in civil service as a city planner in transportation
- want to get a master's in international studies and join the State Department
- want to enter medical school and train to become an ER doctor
- want to make the world a better place through art and history
- want to create a brighter future for their parents

What I've found over my years here is our students don't just attend class. They choose Central on purpose because of our mission.

You choose us because of our mission too. What I've found most inspiring in my time as President is your commitment to our mission, even when the path forward was unclear, when there were multiple vacancies and interim assignments, when everyone was just trying to balance work and home life.

In my 2022 President's Day address, I presented several challenges to you. I challenged you to use our setbacks as new starting lines – just like we tell so many of our students. I challenged you to change what doesn't work, to take full advantage of our strength as a community, to reimagine, rebuild, and revise our college together and to draw strength from each other because going back to "normal" just wasn't an option.

And now we get to this year, where the theme for this President's Day is **Moving with Purpose**, and not just because President's Day is held in the MAC. We've spent a ton of energy these last few years to achieve stability. But that is not enough to prepare us for our long-term success.

I'm so excited for the year ahead. We are bracing for growth and offering new programs instead of facing enrollment declines. We're opening our doors to the neighborhood, forming new partnerships, and hosting new events. We are preparing for more innovation with the use of AI, transforming the student experience with new student support programs in First Year and Career Services, and finding ways to care for the college's people, its culture, and community. Our resources aren't unlimited, and there is always some volatility and uncertainty with state budgets and the upcoming legislative session, but we will invest our budget in areas with the greatest potential for impact for our campus community and community stakeholders that can support our vision and amplify our impact. I am ready to embark on a new era for the college and am asking you to join me!

So today, I have the privilege to celebrate so many of our wins together and to share some of the ways we have been **Moving with Purpose** together as a college.

In no particular order, here is a list of 8 things that really excite me, where I see us moving with purpose together.

1. **Enrollment** is up for the third consecutive year

First things first, enrollment is up once again, and our state student numbers are on par with pre-pandemic levels. More stats in a sec!

For context, enrollment peaked in 2010 when we welcomed almost 20,000 students to campus. That's individual headcount, but the full-time equivalents (or FTES) of those students would be looking at around 8,500. Those are incredible numbers!

From 2010 to 2022, enrollment at Seattle Central declined each year, with a sharper drop during the pandemic, mirroring a nationwide trend where fewer students returned to school after rebounding from the 2008 recession. That lasted nearly a dozen years. However, in 2022, we began to see a turnaround with a modest 1-2% increase in FTEs. Last year, we gained about 8% in FTEs, which is an outstanding achievement in itself!

For this academic year, our enrollment numbers are looking even more promising. As of yesterday, our latest reports show that enrollment is already 22% higher than where we were at this time last year. That's a major win! And we still have time to register more students. But we are expecting around 12,000 headcount and getting close if not surpassing our goal of 5,000 full-time equivalent students.

Breaking down the data, we see:

- A 48% increase in international students
- An 18% increase in State Funded students; and
- A 20% increase in Running Start

- I'm going to be talking a lot about Seattle Promise in the coming year because the levy that funds some of the staffing and support for Promise will be on the ballot to be renewed next year.
- Of the 1,600 Seattle Promise students, Central will welcome 730 on campus this year, representing over 45% (almost half!) of all Promise students district wide.

We've said before that enrollment is everybody's job, and this is everybody's win. It's been my goal to reach 5,000 FTEs by this fall quarter, and I am thrilled to see fuller classrooms and busier hallways. But that's just part of the story. This year, we will be reinventing and refining our strategic enrollment process with the new Vice Chancellor for SEM at District.

We will be optimizing our recruitment efforts AND finding innovative ways to retain the students we have. As far as how we do this, more on that in another item on the list.

2. Seattle Maritime Academy

But next- #2. Seattle Maritime Academy!

I can't emphasize enough how far Maritime has come in two short (but incredibly full) years!

As an example, Maritime was a program considered for closure because of budget constraints. It is one of the more expensive programs to run because of its specialized equipment, small cohorts with low student to faculty ratio, and high-tech facilities, which means it costs more to operate than the tuition it generates.

But what a difference two years makes! Today, Maritime is thriving and has garnered media attention for all the right reasons. Here are some key highlights:

- If you read the news, you understand we are in a ferry system crisis right now. We signed a memorandum of understanding with Washington State Ferries that creates a direct pathway from Maritime to employment with the ferries, allows ferry employees to use our training facilities, and participate in co-designing classes that align with current industry needs. Given that Washington has the largest ferry system in the nation and a significant portion of its workforce is nearing retirement, this is an ideal opportunity to place young and diverse mariners into rewarding, stable careers.
- We received a \$1 million grant from the City of Seattle to boost outreach and increase representation of women and people of color in SMA programs.

- US Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, and House Representative Pramila Jayapal visited Maritime as part of a federal “Raise the Bar” initiative. This initiative focuses on building strong education-to-employer strategies that align with local economic needs, and we were recognized by our government leaders for our excellence during this visit.
- SMA was designated as a National Center of Excellence by the US Department of Transportation last February, recognizing the high standard of our maritime education and training.
- And if you went to the Mariners game in September for our first ever Seattle Colleges night, you might have seen on the Jumbotron that Maritime, the Foundation and the Mariners have partnered up for the “Stay in the Game” initiative – a program that provides funding for needs beyond tuition, like childcare or transportation or housing! I know who I was rooting for in the Mariners vs Mariners matchup!

SMA is another example of how we moved with purpose as a college and congratulations to the team there for the remarkable progress!

3. Community Dinner

Win #3: Community Dinner!

One of my goals has been to revitalize the college’s connection with the community. I want to ensure our campus plays a role as a cornerstone of the neighborhood, and is open and accessible to everyone, even for those who aren’t enrolled in for-credit classes. There is so much to engage with here, from dining at one of our restaurants, taking in a show, or a Continuing Education class, volunteering, tutoring, mentoring and so much more.

Last year, I became involved with Capitol Hill Ecodistrict, a local nonprofit that focuses on enhancing the livability and sustainability of our neighborhood. We were invited to a masterclass in Copenhagen to study public planning and community activation and to brainstorm ways to make Capitol Hill safe for pedestrians and walkers, full of public art and street activities, and more livable overall. What resulted from that trip was Community Dinner at Seattle Central. In February, we hosted 175 of our neighbors on campus for dinner prepared by the Seattle Culinary Academy – simply to connect, break bread, and engage in meaningful conversations with our neighbors.

If you haven’t experienced Community Dinner, we are going to do more of them! I’d like to show a brief video that captures the essence of the event. Stay tuned for our next dinner, coming on October 25. Tickets will be available soon!

When you're out and about, talking with friends, neighbors, old co-workers, welcome them to one of our Community Dinners.

4. FYCS

Another Moving with Purpose example: First Year and Career Services – New Student Orientation

I saw a lot of you at New Student Orientation in September! So many of us remarked on the energy and enthusiasm that comes with a new academic year – and hearing about students' plans and aspirations is truly inspiring.

Last year, NSO was held in Broadway Performance Hall, and we were thrilled by the huge turnout. BPH was at capacity, with about 175-200 students in attendance. This year, more than 500 RSVP'd, so it was held here in the MAC!

Programs like NSO are essential to our strategic enrollment management efforts at the college. What we're finding in the research is a strong positive link between a student's use of on-campus support services and their persistence in college. That's why it's so important to set a supportive tone during New Student Orientation and ensure that students are connected with the resources, services, and tools they need for success.

In the last three years:

- 58% rated the orientation experience as excellent
- 91% of participants felt more connected to the college

This year, First Year and Career Services will begin collecting and analyzing data to assess how New Student Orientation impacts student retention rates. This data will help us refine our programs, enhance support services, and ultimately create a more effective and supportive environment for our students. That's moving with purpose!

5. New Employee Onboarding

From New Student Orientation to New Employee Orientation!

We're welcoming a ton of new faces to the college, including 82 new employees this past year, 52 of which are classified, WFSE union members. The year before we hired almost another hundred. If you are new to the college, we are so excited to count you as our colleague. If you served on a search committee over the past year or two, thank you for your service as we build our community!

To give you some perspective, Seattle Central has between 5-600 faculty and staff. 172 new employees over two years means 1 in 3 or 1 in 4 of you have been hired recently. That's incredible!

Just as we're paying so much attention to retaining our students, we want to foster a sense of belonging for our new hires so you can see a long-term future with this college. We are so glad you are here, and we want you to feel the same close connection to our college's mission and community as I do.

Thank you to HR for creating a new Employee Onboarding Program, with monthly sessions. Our intent is to transform the traditional, often impersonal introduction to a new job into an engaging experience that lets you meet others and start forming relationships. Expect more on-boarding support and fuller attention to employee training going forward as we work to create a stronger employee experience and to keep increasing employee morale and retention too.

6. BAS Teacher Education

When I was a faculty member, an instructional dean, and a VPI, I always loved a new educational program! And this year I want to shout out our new BAS in Teacher Education.

We've proposed a new bachelor's degree at Seattle Central – our seventh as a college – a BAS in Teacher Education, expanding on the Academy for Rising Educators which is entering its fifth year. If you aren't familiar with this program, it focuses on developing and supporting aspiring teachers from underrepresented backgrounds, providing them with the training, resources, and certifications they need to have a successful career in K-12 education.

I'm so proud of this program, and so excited to expand its offering at Central – ARE seeks to diversify the teacher workforce in Seattle, address the pressing need for skilled educators, and to increase retention of educators in the district. About 50-60% of Seattle Public School students identify as students of color, yet only 25-30% of the educators in the school district are people of color.

Having teachers who represent the communities they teach in is an enormous advantage to student success. It's about intentionally bridging school/home divides, providing culturally responsive education, enhancing educational equity, and improving student outcomes.

Graduates of the BAS program will commit to a lifelong developmental understanding of anti-racist methodology, and strategies and techniques to create safe learning spaces for all students, employees, and community members. This program will sustain a high-quality, inclusive educational environment that benefits all students across Seattle.

Special thanks go to Dr. Pat Russell, Dr. Daude Abe, and Kendrick “KO” Wilson for their work stewarding this BAS program into development.

I can’t say enough about it. I look forward to sharing more details in our monthly Town Hall meetings as we get closer to opening the program for recruitment.

7. AI Taskforce

The next example is a district-wide example—the district AI taskforce.

This summer, I attended a retreat at Microsoft where we discussed the role of AI in higher education. I know many of you are thinking about how it’s changing the nature of student work, how it’s changing our own processes and systems, and how it can potentially transform higher education. It’s not an exaggeration to say that we may be living through another printing press moment.

I’ve been so glad to see the district’s AI taskforce take shape this past year and get its work underway, creating an ethical framework for how we use AI at Seattle Colleges, investigating technology and providing tons of resources. It’s also such a strong example of shared governance because it has a wide array of faculty, faculty librarians, student services, eLearning, IT, deans, and other staff from all colleges.

Be on the lookout for updates from Kevin Bowersox Johnson, Executive Director of eLearning who is chairing a district-wide taskforce as they keep moving with purpose together.

I was also watching a Tiktok recently from the American writer and sociologist Tressie McMillan Cottom, who was talking about AI and educational inequality. Dr. McMillan Cottom reminds us that AI should not just be about transforming work to be more productive. We should marshal it to allow us to have more and better relationships with each other, not just fewer and more efficient interactions. She says that relationships are almost all we’ve got left in higher education, and I agree with her. The college or university does not have to be a corporation, and we need it not to be a corporation if it is to have a relationship with society at large that isn’t destructive. Colleges work best when there is a healthy middle class.

We have to embark on the work we are doing innovating, changing, transforming—we have to do it together and we have to do it through relationships. As McMillan Cottom also said in this TikTok (to be fair, it was a long TikTok!), “talking to each other is the work.”

8. BSTT

And that leads me to Central's Black Solidarity Think Tank.

When we embarked on Guided Pathways, we knew if we were designing a model that was supposed to create more equitable outcomes for Black and Brown students, it had to be in partnership with individuals from communities that were directly impacted by educational injustice. The Black Solidarity Think Tank was created to nurture and center Black lives at Seattle Central, to name the structures, practices and policies that harm Black-identified students, staff, and faculty. They have been creating partnerships, networks, institutes, and policy recommendations since.

When BSTT presented at NCORE in 2023, colleagues from around the country recognized how unique and powerful this model was. And as Associate Vice Chancellor D'Andre Fisher stressed at Convocation this year, if we are going to be an anti-bias, anti-racist institution, our work has to start from a place that addresses and works against anti-Black racism specifically.

I've been in conversation with members of the Black Solidarity Think Tank to have a more connected role in our shared governance as a college and provide perspective in groups like College Council and Curriculum Coordinating Council. We are also working jointly to transform institutional practices and policies that contribute harm to our students, faculty and staff. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to work together, for the dialogue, for their partnership and for their framework that can help us address systemic issues and drive transformative change.

I attended a panel discussion downtown that was about supporting Seattle Public Schools and the message from the panel was this—in order to be transformational, you have to build or rebuild the relational. We can't do this work just by being transactional with each other. We have to celebrate our wins and our losses together. We have to take the time to build our relationships.

This is the same message the Black Solidarity Think Tank has brought up with me, and if we can do this work, it can be soul giving, it can be affirming, it can be purposeful and even joyous, and we can truly move with purpose together.

In other meetings, I have spent time laying out our priorities for the year as we finalize our strategic plan and embark on operationalizing those plans. Maybe you heard me talk about that at Convocation, and you also heard about strategic planning earlier.

We had budget priorities that identified how we are going to practice strategic enrollment management to keep growing enrollment, retention, and completion for students, and our new AVC SEM at the District, Dr. Cedric Howard, is helping us to up our game there.

We have priorities that focus our Guided Pathways work on first-year and cohort experiences—and I saw TRIO, UMOJA, ANNAPISI, and learning communities engage with students at New Student Orientation.

We will keep sustaining ourselves financially as we move to better planning and forecasting in the budget, move to multi-year budgeting, and diversify the kind of revenues we bring in.

We're also going to keep doing our community work—not just external community with outreach or Community Dinner, but internal community too. The work that student leadership and EDIC have been doing to build our communities: our affinity groups, onboarding and orientation, and training. Restorative practices and repairing the harms that were caused by our bureaucracy and our processes, our systems. And lots of opportunities like President's Day where we can form relationships with each other and also just have fun.

I really want to focus on how we can take care of ourselves and each other better. It's been a rough couple of years and even a rough couple of weeks for lots of us. People today feel like institutions are failing, and it certainly feels like they fail individuals and well as fail systemically. We are one of those institutions. We are trying, we are working hard, we are still failing people and sometimes failing as a system. We have so much work to do together. But we are also succeeding, sometimes more than we think, and sometimes in ways we can't imagine at the time.

This final sentiment that I want to share with you is just thanks. Thank you for making Seattle Central a space you contribute to. Each of you makes a difference for our students, each of you makes a difference for your colleagues, and each of you makes this place special. No matter how busy we get, no matter how overwhelmed we may get, we cannot forget that.

And thank you for your time and attention. It was a lot of talking but also excitement and appreciation to share. Please share in the excitement for a new school year. Lots of people have been working hard to make this day, this week, and the fall quarter happen. And the excitement is contagious.

Happy President's Day!