

# Campus inclusiveness, college affordability, more take center stage at President, Provost Forum

*Continued from Page 1*

The second online question, one that was a common refrain online at the beginning of the semester, asked why a brand new building (the Ed Kaplan Family Institute for Innovation and Tech Entrepreneurship) was being constructed on campus while tuition was increasing. Why, the submitter inquired, would the university dedicate resources to creating a multimillion-dollar construction project rather than renovating existing facilities and tamping down the economic burden placed on students? Cramb reiterated the fact that the Kaplan Institute was funded entirely by donations, not tuition money, and that its construction was only one part of a larger master plan to transform campus which included the already-complete renovations of E1 (now the John T. Rettaliata Engineering Center) and Life Sciences (now the Robert A. Pritzker Science Center), as well as the sale of Main Building to a private developer earlier this year on a 30-year land lease.

Prompted by a follow-up question from a student in attendance at the event, conversation was directed more toward the subject of tuition increases, putting the talk of campus facilities aside. Cramb asserted that annual tuition increases were largely inevitable due to the university's own constantly increasing expenses (such of which could be attributed to monetary inflation), but that Illinois Tech was attempting to grow the student body faster to bring down per-person tuition costs. Overall enrollment was lower than expected this academic year, but costs were reduced as well, and the university's brief deficit was remedied during the last fiscal year. Illinois Tech's Board of Trustees requires the president to present balanced budget annually, and Cramb expressed that the school couldn't simply generate money "from nowhere" to ensure that balance. Another student at the event asked whether the university had considered eliminating bonuses during unsatisfactory financial periods, to which Cramb explained that no bonuses were taken during the previous fiscal year and all staff salaries were frozen at the previous year's level (apart from promoted individuals) in response to budget issues plaguing Illinois Tech at the time.

Moving on after time had run out for that issue, a student approached the front of the room to ask whether plans were in the works at any level to increase the number of Teaching Assistants (TAs) aiding education at Illinois Tech. He pointed to examples of other technological universities which more thoroughly integrated TAs into their classes, and said that he had consistently advocated for the same to be done here but had never seen progress made. Dr. Chris White, the university's Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, and Dr. Joseph Orgel, Chair of the University Faculty Council (UFC), were both invited up to provide answers. White explained that TA numbers were largely up to each college, and offered an initial rebuttal to the premise of the question, stating that "what [Illinois

Tech] doesn't want to do is tip the balance more toward graduate students running the classroom." Orgel expanded on that idea, pointing out that one of the biggest selling points of this institution is direct interaction between well-regarded faculty and students, even at the undergraduate level. That said, he agreed that "the opportunity to assist instruction is a training and mentorship opportunity," especially for graduate students aiming for careers in academia, and expressed a personal view that "it could be folded into part of the education." He said he "would be willing to commit some [UFC] time to consideration of this and discussion of this," prompting a statement hope from the original asker that changes could be set in motion before his time at Illinois Tech ended later this year.

Next, another online submission suggested that moving the university's spring commencement ceremony indoors could avoid issues caused by inclement weather. Cramb stated that the university did have an inclement weather plan for each commencement, but that the scale of the main ceremony would not be possible within any on-campus facility. Both he and Bronet gave background to an analysis done in recent years to determine the costs of moving the ceremony to Chicago's McCormick Place conference center, expressing that college deans were asked to opine on the venue and the majority supported keeping it on campus for reasons of both cost and sentimentality.

The next question presented in the room came from a current member-at-large of the President's Student Advisory Council (PSAC), who asked Cramb's opinion of the current state of that group and the overall task of bridging the perceived gap between students and administrators at Illinois Tech. Cramb praised PSAC for re-forming quickly and efficiently with a slate of mostly new members this semester, but implied that some members of the group may have approached the beginning of the semester without the mentality that they were to represent the opinions of Illinois Tech students en masse (or the individual subsections thereof which certain members are delegates of), not themselves. Cramb said that the whole group had quickly learned that "none of the members of the President's Student Advisory Council are there to represent their own issue; they are there to represent the student body," and that conversation had been very productive since that point. He expressed hope that an effective PSAC could help address the latter half of the question asked, designing new input avenues and pursuing projects on behalf of the student body.

An online submission brought the focus of the event back to the dichotomy of campus improvements and tuition costs, seeking clarification about how students would be directly affected by the \$250,242,380 raised by the university during its Fueling Innovation donation campaign. Bronet spoke first about the utility of the aforementioned Kaplan Institute, which was funded as part of the campaign, and then turned to the broad topic of the distribution of the money overall.

"Fundamentally, when we're raising money, some of that is going into an endowment, some of it is being used to control the costs of the university...it is critical to bring in dollars that can be used for scholarships..." she asserted, alluding to the \$104,267,914 from the campaign which will go directly to the university's endowment and the \$48,677,561 which is earmarked for scholarships and fellowships. Cramb focused on faculty and facility improvements, citing 15 new endowed chairs and other hiring funded by the campaign, as well as the three major building projects which had been discussed earlier (all of which were part of the campaign). Addressing a follow-up question from an audience member who had viewed a recently published campus master plan (which includes major building renovations, demolitions, and construction through 2030 and beyond), Cramb explained that one of his priorities as president was to oversee transformation of most of Illinois Tech's on-campus housing, and that this work would be part of future funding campaigns. Though the master plan's constructions are largely unfunded at this point in time, Cramb stated that, "if we don't plan twenty or thirty years in advance, then it never happens."

An international student in the ballroom expressed concern about a recent uptick in robberies on both the eastern and western sides of campus, and asked Cramb what could be done to reduce risk to the university's students, especially international students (who are more commonly victims of crime than domestic students at Illinois Tech). Cramb spoke of a daily report he received from Illinois Tech's Public Safety Department, and of an increase in Public Safety staffing that had been enacted recently. He then brought Vice President of Facilities and Public Safety Bruce Watts forward to provide more detail. Watts explained that the Chicago Police Department (CPD) had increased their own patrols near the locations of recent robberies, and that Public Safety had modified the route of their shuttle service to allow drop-offs directly at the doors of buildings at Lake Meadows and Prairie Shores, two large apartment complexes east of King Drive that are very popular with international students. He also spoke about a meeting he had with the local CPD district commander to create sessions on campus for students to learn more about protecting themselves, with a particular focus on helping students know the process of pressing charges against those who commit crimes against them. For international students who are often unsure of their right to file a report with CPD and the mechanisms to do so, this program is meant to provide insight and confidence when interacting with police. Cramb also made an effort to mitigate fears that the spike in crime was connected in any way to an inherent aspect of the Illinois Tech campus, stating, "this is an issue of the city right now; this is not just here that this is happening."

The final question of the scheduled time for the President and Provost Forum, and the final online submission, expressed concern about significant administrative

layoffs announced during the spring, asking why that decision made and what was being done to get those offices functioning again. According to Cramb, "we could not actually get to a balanced budget without decreasing the number of people on our staff," an issue that first came to the forefront when the university reported an operating loss in the fall of 2015. In the end, he said, "It was a tough decision to make, but it was a decision we had to make." Cramb urged a more thorough examination, however, of certain vacancies which had been perceived by students as layoffs despite no cuts being made to certain departments, explaining that certain staff from the International Center, the One Stop, and more had chosen to leave following the layoff announcement and into this semester, and that many offices were currently in the process of filling voluntary vacancies and getting back to normal in that regard.

Prompted by a specific question about the Student Health and Wellness Center (SHWC), which is currently down on staff and has become the center of contentious discussion among many students, Vice Provost for Student Affairs and Dean of Students Katherine Stetz came to the microphone to explain that the SHWC had not been part of the elimination of positions at the beginning of 2016, but a training program of the office had been on hiatus due to a staffing vacancy, which removed six interns who would typically have seen students in appointments. As a result, wait time for appointments has been longer this year, but hiring is ongoing and the program is intended to be running once again after one more hire is made within the SHWC. Following up, Cramb said, "we are very serious about mental health, and we always have professional staff on hand for that." Students who have not been able to consistently receive a response from the SHWC when attempting to make an appointment were encouraged to contact Stetz to resolve their situation, and Stetz assured those in attendance that, "any emergencies we will be able to manage immediately."

Though the scheduled length of the President and Provost Forum was limited as always by the confines of the student lunch hour and the busy schedules of both Cramb and Bronet, students were encouraged to mingle after the event with many of the staff and faculty members present and to ask questions or brainstorm ideas with them for improving the areas of the university they oversee. Additionally, in this instance, Cramb and Bronet continued to take questions for an additional fifteen minutes beyond the President and Provost Forum's official 1:45 p.m. end time, conversing with students who did not have to leave for classes at the time. If the tradition of the forum itself is continued by SGA, the next President and Provost Forum will take place in the Spring semester.

## American Express offers resources for business and consumers on Small Business Saturday

**Teesta Jain, Donna Rockin**  
KNAPP ENTREPRENEURSHIP CENTER

Small Business Saturday is a relatively recent American tradition that has been gaining momentum each and every year since it launched on November 27, 2010 in Massachusetts. This year, be part of celebration and shop at your neighborhood independently-owned and operated stores on Saturday, November 26th. Small Business Saturday is during the Thanksgiving holiday weekend between Black Friday and Cyber Monday.

American Express is the official champion of the "shop small" movement. American Express and the City of Chicago's Department of Business Affairs and Consumer Protection hosted the Small Business Saturday Bootcamp in Chicago, IL, on Tuesday, October 18 from 4 to 7 p.m. at the Chicago Cultural Center (78 E. Washington). The Boot

Camp featured small business strategist Ms. Rhonda Abrams. Abrams is president of The Planning Shop and a publisher of books for entrepreneurs. Her column appears Fridays at USATODAY.com.

The small businesses are major anchors of local economies, creating employment opportunities and serving as engines of economic growth to local, neighborhood economies. Small businesses preserve neighborhoods around the country and make these neighborhoods more livable and convenient. They bring growth and innovation to the community and help to create and implement new products and services the community needs.

American Express launched its new Shop Small Studio to make it easy for small businesses to participate and create a buzz in their communities. Check out about. americanexpress.com/news/pr/2016/amex-new-shop-small-studio-tools.aspx to take advantage of the free resources, customizable

materials, and education content to help small business owners to prepare for Small Business Saturday. Easy to use free resources are available at americanexpress.com/us/small-business/shop-small/. Available resources include event flyers and posters, website badges, Facebook and Twitter cover photos and other social media assets. Small Business 101 includes a multimedia hub (americanexpress.com/us/small-business/shop-small/promote#/sbs101). American Express also offers big rewards for shopping small this particular year.

Finally, on Saturday, November 26, remember to help the small businesses in your neighborhood thrive and survive. Shop and invest your dollar power on Small Business Saturday at your local hardware store, bakery, beauty salon, florist or independent restaurant, pizza parlor or sub joint. In 2015, it is estimated that 95 million people went to their neighborhood streets to shop small. The statistic cited is an estimate based on consumer self-reported data from the

Small Business Saturday Consumer Insights Survey commissioned by American Express and the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB). The survey was conducted anonymously by independent marketing performance specialist Ebiquity, on November 29, 2015 among a nationally representative sample of 2,363 males and females 18 years of age or older. That sample was collected using an email invitation and an online survey, which has an overall margin of error of +/- 2.0 percent, at the 95 percent level of confidence. Mark your calendars and be part of the Small Business Saturday movement and put your money where your home is!