Daytona State President Carol Eaton kicked off the new academic year last Wednesday, opening Fall Planning Week with a recap of the past year’s institutional accomplishments and a forecast for the months ahead.

Speaking before a standing-room-only audience assembled in the Daytona Beach Campus Theater Center, she lauded faculty, staff and the District Board of Trustees for their dedication during what has been a year of institutional transition, expressing pride in the collaborations that led to a string of fiscal and academic accomplishments. Her remarks, however, were a bit tempered by a cautious optimism for the year ahead, and she encouraged faculty and staff to continue aiming for excellence in all they do.

As fall semester approaches, Daytona State faces tight budgets and enrollment declines, as do most institutions within the Florida College System and nationwide. However, Dr. Eaton noted the college is about 25 percent above its fall enrollment projections. She thanked all who work directly with the roughly 13,000 credit students who have registered for fall semester. “Each of you makes a difference in the lives of our students,” she said. “You manage to treat each student as the only one that matters.”

She also thanked the board of trustees for its support during the past year. “They have worked toward a common vision,” she said. “They have approved our budget, and because of their diligence and their networking, this year will be our time to shine with regard to capital projects.”

Those projects include legislative funding of $7.6 million for a new classroom building on the Flagler/Palm Coast Campus, $2 million for a theme shop addition at the News-Journal Center, $2.4 million to begin plans for a new classroom and student center building on the Daytona Beach Campus, and $3 million for a new thermal storage building on the Daytona campus. “This is really wonderful news in these very difficult financial times,” she said, noting that she will convene town hall meetings in months to come to provide more details on the college’s operating budget.

Dr. Eaton also reflected on the success of the past year’s efforts to transition dozens of Tri-State workers to full-time, benefits-eligible college employees, as well as creation of a shared governance system that includes a cabinet comprised of college-wide representation. Of the latter, she said, “This is significant because we now have a structured way to improve upon our policies and procedures.”

The new academic year will bring a refined emphasis to the college’s focus on students and helping them meet their goals through quality academics, support and excellence in service. New tools are being developed that will allow the college to better document academic assessments and outcomes at the program and institutional levels, providing benchmarks for a mechanism of continuous improvements. Dr. Eaton noted that Karla Moore has been designated the new dean of academic assessment and Nancy Morgan will head the reconfigured Planning Council.

“These are difficult times,” she noted. “We all have to take an active role in helping to respond to the fiscal challenges ahead. People want us to prove our worth. We have many outside audiences, and the more data we have, the better we are able to provide evidence and state our case. Continuous assessment and outcomes allow us to have that evidence and show how well we are doing. It’s important to make sure that students are prepared when they leave us.”

On academics, the president noted the importance of advancing K-12 partnerships, including career academies, hand-in-hand with workforce development initiatives. She cited technology’s role in academics, in particular the upcoming Center for Interactive Media and a related new degree in that field. While praising advances in the college’s technology services, she reminded the audience, “It’s our human creativity that keeps us on the cutting edge.”
She asked staff and faculty to join her in being ambassadors for the college, noting, “We are so much better when we work together to tell our story.” And she encouraged the entire college community to get involved with helping to retain and attract students, to attend sporting and cultural events, be active with constituent groups and support the Daytona State College Foundation.

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