February 4, 2013

Dear Parents and Guardians,

At a luncheon last week in honor of the students, faculty and staff who exemplify and uphold the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., two student leaders from our Women’s Center spoke about the responsibilities we all share as citizens in a democratic society. Carter Goffigon ’14 and Skyler Volpe ’13 challenged our community to address global and local issues, and reminded us we all have an obligation to act.

I believe most college campuses see their fair share of activism. At Connecticut College, however, activism is deeply rooted in the intellectual life of the College. That became more apparent than ever to me this year when the directors of our five interdisciplinary academic centers approached me about organizing and presenting a semester-long, all-campus conversation, “Striving for Global Justice.” I couldn’t have been more pleased.

To kick off the initiative, we welcome Pulitzer-Prize winning author Nicholas Kristof to campus Feb. 11. Kristof’s “Half the Sky” has ignited a movement to empower women worldwide, and the messages in his book and subsequent PBS film are strong complements to the work many of our students are currently undertaking to identify and address global issues.

Our academic centers have set a very high bar for this type of work. Through specialized coursework, a funded internship and a sophisticated senior integrative project, students have the opportunity to delve into issues they care deeply about. I enjoy speaking with students about their internships and seeing how they use those experiences to inform their academic work. For example, our seniors are working to end domestic violence, protect coral reef ecosystems and explore resettlement strategies for Cameroon’s refugees, in addition to a broad array of other projects.

“Striving for Global Justice” comprises a series of events and discussions that will link Kristof’s lecture with an April conference and showcase of senior integrative projects. The conference will include presentations by 18 faculty members who have participated in a two-year global environmental justice study, visiting India, Peru and South Africa.

From global issues to hyperlocal issues on our own campus, our students are making a difference. This semester, we launched a reusable cup initiative in all of our dining halls and in the student center snack shop. With strong support from the Student Government Association, Molly Conlin ’13 and Sarah Huckins ’14 applied for a $5,000 grant from the Student Sustainability Fund to purchase reusable “to go” cups that students can take from the dining halls and return to any of the convenient receptacles on
campus for washing and reuse. This new program cuts waste significantly by eliminating the need for disposable paper cups and lids.

Our community encourages and supports this type of student initiative, and many alumni have told me that their experiences as change agents on campus have fueled their careers and post-graduate opportunities.

On Feb. 9, we will welcome nine young alumni to campus for our seventh annual Seminar on Success, a career-related program for juniors and seniors. Representing companies including Amazon, Facebook, Deloitte & Touche, Liberty Bank and J. Crew, alumni will talk with students about how they shaped their education into a successful career. For the first time this year, all nine alumni will conduct mock interviews with students – great practice for juniors seeking summer internships and seniors planning their careers. Please encourage your students to take part in this wonderful program and register right away. I understand there are still a few spots available, and students should have already received an email about it from our alumni office.

I am heartened by the connections that develop among our students and alumni – and always encouraged by how gracious our alumni are in offering time to mentor students and help them find internships or jobs. Later in February, we’ll host a “Sundays with Alumni” event in which alumni in marketing and public relations careers will share their career advice. We held similar events this fall featuring alumni working in the public policy field, as well as young alumni who took advantage of a “gap” year after graduation.

In other campus news, I am very pleased to share that Our Campaign for Connecticut College is at $197 million, well within sight of our goal to reach $200 million by June 30, 2013. This Campaign, which has provided a bold transformation of the College, couldn’t have been possible without the strong support of our parents, who have contributed more than $33 million.

I hope that you get a chance to visit campus this spring and see first-hand the impact the Campaign is making on this education. Founders Day is April 5, the global justice conference is April 19-20, and there are many opportunities to enjoy student performances and exhibits. Please refer to our events calendar at www.conncoll.edu/events for a complete listing. In addition, our spring sports season begins in early March – please check www.camelathletics.com for team schedules.

And, finally, Commencement is Sunday, May 19, and we will welcome Emmy-winning producer and author Howard Gordon as our keynote speaker. I look forward to this milestone in the lives of our graduating seniors. Until then, I hope to see you here on campus or during my travels this semester.

Sincerely,

Lee Higdon