

# Insights from College Presidents

## Graduates of Mercy and CNR Now Leading Their Institutions Through the Pandemic

Many alumni from Mercy College and the former College of New Rochelle (CNR) are now accomplished leaders in higher education. Worthy of praise is the fact that three of these illustrious alumni have risen in the ranks to assume the presidencies of colleges and universities.

A highly coveted and rare position, becoming the president of an institution of higher learning takes mastering multifaceted skills ranging from the fields of management and business, to communications, to academia, and requires an innate desire to be of service and inspire goodwill.

The Mercy and CNR alumni who have proven their capabilities to lead in this capacity include Marylou Yam '81, M.A., Ed.M., Ph.D., president of Notre Dame of Maryland University located in Baltimore, Maryland; Paul Broadie II '90, M.B.A., Ph.D., president of Santa Fe College located in Gainesville, Florida; and Jane C. Conoley CNR SAS '69, Ph.D., president of California State University, Long Beach located in Long Beach, California.

While Yam, Broadie and Conoley run institutions spanning different regions of the country and are tasked with addressing the unique needs of their college and university communities, commonalities can be seen in their leadership styles, particularly when it comes to dealing with a crisis – for example, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Maybe it is because they are all Bronx natives at heart, or maybe it is because they received their undergraduate degrees from colleges with similar guiding principles and core values of equalizing access to high quality education, but it is clear they have traversed the COVID-19 landscape with understanding, resolve and, most importantly, with students' best

interests at their foremost attention and concern.

They have done so by employing their schools' missions as guideposts when making difficult decisions, remained agile and responsive to changes in guidelines, and consistently communicated messages of hope and optimism to their organizations.

### Dr. Marylou Yam '81

PRESIDENT

NOTRE DAME OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY



Photo by Thomas Reis

In leading Notre Dame of Maryland University (NDMU) during the COVID-19 outbreak, Yam "called upon her inner strength," as well as her in-depth knowledge of the health care system, to stay focused on issuing health and safety measures while at the same time

implementing strategies to continue to educate students and advance her institution.

A nursing major at Mercy College, Yam began her career as a nurse and a nurse educator – experience she has drawn on heavily in the past year. While attending Mercy, Yam also found a passion for academia and scholarship generally and reveled in the potential to make a difference in the lives of other young people: “I admired my professors – they were my role models. Because of them, I fell in love with the academic environment and was exposed to outstanding pedagogy and top-notch advisement,” she explained. “Because of them, I became a professor.” As a result, she has instructed hundreds of students and published on subjects of immense topical importance in areas such as health assessment, domestic violence, leadership and research.

*“Mercy College instilled in me the importance of community engagement, service to others and academic excellence.”*

Years before women had the right to vote, NDMU was the first Catholic women’s college in the United States to grant the bachelor’s degree. Today, NDMU is a comprehensive university with a Women’s College and offers co-ed programs for adult, graduate and doctoral students, including a School of Pharmacy.

With Yam at the helm, university students benefit from a close-knit community with ample opportunities for leadership and confidence building. NDMU provides a liberal arts education along with professional programs that are essential to our country’s future. “In this role I am fortunate to have a chance to promote access to higher education, build inclusive communities and promote the advancement of women,” she said.

Yam uses insights gained from her time as a nursing professor, nursing program administrator and Mercy student to motivate her university staff and student body during this challenging time: “I communicate to them that we’re all in this together, and we’re going to manage through it, while continuing to innovate and move forward.” In fiscal year 2020, NDMU had its largest fundraising year in history raising over \$17 million dollars.

## Dr. Paul Broadie II '90

**PRESIDENT  
SANTA FE COLLEGE**



Photo by Matt Slamey

Broadie’s introduction to Mercy came from his father, who worked as director of commuter services at the College. When visiting the campus with his father, he thought: “This would be a great place for me to go to school.” His instincts were correct. Broadie loved Mercy and soon became active in student government and extracurriculars at the Bronx and Dobbs Ferry Campuses.

He acknowledges his Mercy experience greatly influenced his career: “My entrée into higher education started while I was a student. Mercy exposed me to the value of higher education and how it can change an individual’s life,” Broadie said. “My experience shaped the foundation of what I believe and what I impart to others now.”

Broadie is no stranger to the balancing act that comes with leading institutions through unique circumstances. Before his current position as president of Santa Fe College – which was named the number one community college in the nation in 2015 – he served as the president of Housatonic Community College in Bridgeport, Connecticut and Gateway Community College in New Haven, Connecticut simultaneously.

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*“I sing Mercy College’s praises in every speech I make.”*

# Alumni College Presidents (continued)

He was tasked with leading the two colleges through a Connecticut College and University System systemwide budget deficit and restructuring. He did so successfully, while strengthening their fundraising operations and balancing their limited budgets.

This unique experience primed Broadie to address the effects of the pandemic on Santa Fe College, and he did so while staying true to the College's mission of adding value to the lives of their students and enriching their community through excellence in teaching and learning, innovative educational programs and student services, and community leadership and service. "Our goal was to continue access to high-quality education. We did this by ensuring access to technology with laptop loaner programs and expanded Wi-Fi services," he explained.

Focused on bettering the lives of students from underserved backgrounds through the expansion of programs and opportunities, Broadie has led Santa Fe College, and its students, in an upward direction. "Even with the pandemic, there are so many opportunities for the future of higher education. At Santa Fe College, we're trying to capitalize on each one of those opportunities," he said.

In fact, in December 2020, the College received its largest-ever donation totaling \$40 million from MacKenzie Scott, which will be used to "...focus on shattering equity gaps and continue our focus on strong academic programs," according to a College press release.

## Jane C. Conoley CNR SAS '69

### PRESIDENT

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, LONG BEACH



As a women's college from 1904 until 2016, CNR normalized women in leadership positions, inspiring

Conoley's pursuit of leadership roles in student and community groups. "The nuns who were my teachers pushed me into experiences and entering contests that gave me confidence," Conoley remembered. As a result, when she started graduate school at University of Texas at Austin surrounded by students from big-name universities, she thought, with sound assessment of her abilities: "Wow, I really did get a good education."

*"As a CNR alumna, you'll be a learner for the rest of your life."*

With a Ph.D. in psychology, Conoley amassed research experiences, published and received grant funding, all of which strengthened her applications for higher-level positions. "It was important to demonstrate knowledge of and success in the role of faculty," Conoley explained. "People evaluated your scholarly record." Her success steered her westward, where she eventually held a leadership position at the University of California, Santa Barbara, then assumed the role of Interim Chancellor of the University of California, Riverside.

Now, as president of California State University, Long Beach, Conoley's leadership style – which has served her well throughout her career and during the pandemic – stems largely from what she saw practiced at CNR. "I exercise a leadership style that's steady, gentle and curious, and an interpersonal style that's persistent, non-argumentative and evidence-based." This style has helped her lead her university, which has changed the life trajectories of countless students, and see its four-year graduation rate soar from 16% to 36% since her inauguration. Despite the pandemic, her steadfast goal is to reach 39%, which seems in arm's reach.

When the pandemic hit, Conoley and her team acted swiftly to ensure continued student success through degree continuity. With a student body that consists of 57% Pell eligible students, it was imperative to funnel resources to safeguard not only students' health, but their educational pathways. She said, "When federal aid money came in, the first thing we did was to fund computers and hot spots to make sure students progressed in their degrees."

Staying mission driven when making decisions of all sizes propels Conoley forward with what she and her twin sister Joan M. Close, a high school educator in the Bronx, see as a main function of education: to uplift people. "We drank the same Kool-Aid," she laughed.