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President Davila:

Hello, I'm Robert Davila, president of Gallaudet University. Welcome to Bob's Vlog again. I'm very pleased to have you here and to visit with you.

Today, I have two very important members of the Gallaudet community with me and I want you to meet them. I'll have some questions and discussions with them. First, I have Robert McConnell who is president of the Gallaudet University Student Body Government (SBG). He's a junior majoring in communication studies and government, and is from Youngstown, Ohio. Last summer, Robert worked as an organizational management assistant in the office of Administration and Finance. In the past, he's been involved in a variety of student activities. For example, he was a former leadership assistant in the Campus Activities group, chief of staff for the Student Body Government, public relations chair for the Rock Festival in 2006, layout editor for the *Buff and Blue* student newspaper, parliamentarian for the Student Congress, writer for the Office of Admissions, student assistant for the Technology Access Program (TAP), and literary editor for the *Tower Clock*. In addition to

all of that, he's still a good student. That's an impressive record and welcome, Robert.

Robert McConnell:

Thank you.

President Davila:

Another important person I have today is Sara Collins. She is a senior majoring in sociology with a concentration in criminal justice. She is from Sheboygan, Wisconsin. She is a senior here at Gallaudet and she is vice president of the Student Body Government. She previously served as Student Congress secretary in 2006 and 2007, and has served as president of the Hillel group on campus. She was a member of the Circle K club, and has also participated in the Women's Leadership Training Institute. She also worked as a tutor helping other students with their studies. These two officers are wonderful, hardworking, and good students. Welcome, Sara.

Sara Collins:

Thank you.

President Davila:

I am really very pleased to have you here with us. I have some questions so that our audience out there can get an idea of the extent of involvement you have, and the hard work that you do, to help other students to really get the most benefit from their college experience

here at Gallaudet. I want to start with you Robert and with this question: I know that you have been involved in many things but I want to ask you, what are some of the internship and mentoring experiences that you feel have helped prepare you for your position as president of the SBG?

Robert McConnell:

Thank you, Bob. I'm glad you asked that. Thinking about this and looking back, I owe who I am today to three individuals because of the experiences I have had in my life. The people I want to thank are first, Frank Turk, a classmate of yours in the 1950's; secondly, Mary Lott, coordinator of Student Activities and Community Services Programs here; and thirdly, Fred Weiner, who works in the Administration and Finance department here. These three individuals have given me some incredible experiences in allowing me to work for them.

Frank, who is in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, is amazing. When I entered Gallaudet, for the first two years I did not do well. As a result, Gallaudet decided to get rid of me. I didn't know what I was going to do. Then, I got an internship with Frank's team at CSD and I worked for Frank and for Ben Soukup, as well. I also worked in Sioux Falls for one year. That experience was an awakening for me, and it taught me what I could do to contribute to the deaf community and it taught me how to apply myself in ways that I never knew I could.

Once I left CSD and came back to Gallaudet to continue my studies here, I started working with the *Buff and Blue* newspaper and that was a really good job. Then, I got involved with the guest speakers program which expanded to a student leadership program with Campus Activities. I was involved with a lot of programs and I was chair of two leadership conferences here on campus. Students from NTID and CSUN came together with Gallaudet students for workshops about Deafhood, coordinating with others, negotiation skills, and so on. That was one of my proudest accomplishments.

Then, just last summer, I worked with Administration and Finance, and that was a great experience as well. When I was elected SBG president, I thought how can I really work within the system in order to serve students better during my term? After some discussions like that, Fred paged me and congratulated me on the election. From that page, and others that followed, the concept of a student internship program evolved and was formed with a pilot group of six students. We came to A & F and performed different duties – some as ASL tutors, some focused on organizational management which is my major, some were in ITS, and some in finance and accounting. I am now continuing with some of those duties throughout this year.

A & F looks for placements for students so that they are prepared after they graduate. Students have benefited from the experiences that were provided to them, and are prepared to enter the real world and business related fields. Because it is a hallmark of Gallaudet,

many students major in deafness related fields as well as sociology, psychology, and education, but business is one thing we need to focus on and that's one big thing I'll be working on.

President Davila:

That's a very impressive list of accomplishments. You are certainly on your way to becoming a very important contributor and leader in the future. It's good to hear all of that, Rob. Thank you.

Now, Sara, I want to ask you a question also. I understand that you had a very interesting internship recently. Tell us about that.

Sara Collins:

It's my pleasure to explain. My internship was a really amazing experience. This past summer, I went to work for Abt Associates in Bethesda, Maryland. They are a research and consultant company focusing on evaluation of various policies and programs. I worked on gathering data, reviewing it, writing reports and making recommendations. I really enjoyed that rich experience because I am a sociology major and what I was learning at Gallaudet really applied to the internship. Also, I had the chance to interact with people at work, people who are quite accomplished in their fields. I met so many people and found that so inspiring. Now I have a goal after I graduate to, maybe, pursue work in the research and consulting field. I truly enjoyed it.

President Davila:

That is also very impressive and I think a valuable experience for you because it will help you with the things that you plan for yourself in the future. That's very impressive. Thank you so much, Sara.

Now, another question for either one, or both of you: What are some of the things that the Student Body Government is currently working on and planning for students?

Sara Collins:

I will go ahead and start by saying that right now in the SBG there are so many programs in process which have yet to be completed. It will be an ongoing process. One of the things that we are working on is that this Saturday, September 15, there will be a large gathering of Gallaudet students who will go to the White House to protest the war in Iraq. We want to encourage Gallaudet students to be more connected to what is going on externally to the campus. We want to encourage more of that.

Then, another focus is on statistics and tracking our paperwork because we feel that the SBG needs to become more efficient. That's important for business and overall management of the SBG. Then, a very large and successful project that we started, and continue to work on, is the Fellows Program. That program is for freshmen or incoming transfer students. They can apply through the SBG and are interviewed, and that group of students decides for themselves what

kind of projects that they can do to contribute to Gallaudet University and the community at the same time. I am responsible for overseeing that program.

We also work with several different departments, like First Year Seminar (FYS), Campus Activities, and the Community Services program. I work with each of these groups. It is a very cooperative group and we are committed to our investment in the freshmen students. That is so essential.

President Davila:

That's very impressive. Now, Robert.

Robert McConnell:

The opportunities available to Gallaudet students are impressive. The Fellows Program is amazing and it is for both freshmen and transfer students. For other students, we really want to jump-start the student organizations. Examples include the Black Deaf Student Union, the Latino Student Union, the Asian-Pacific Organization, and the Rainbow Society for LGBT students here on campus. These organizations have seen a decline in membership; however, we must realize that those organizations are the heart of this campus and without them and all of us working together and looking to each other for guidance and advice, we wouldn't be here. We have gained nothing if we just have an officially established organization which exists in name only as part of a system. We have to take ownership

of that system and make changes which fit us. That is what will make Gallaudet belong to all.

President Davila:

Thank you, Robert. Those are very interesting responses. Very good. I am pleased to hear that. I have another question for both of you, or either of you. You know that we are excited about the, “New Gallaudet.” Many things here are changing and we are trying to improve the university and its ability to serve students better. Now that you have been here a few weeks, and some of you were here throughout the summer, what changes have you seen on the campus that pleases you? What have you seen as improvements? Tell us what you’ve seen.

Robert McConnell:

I’ve seen incredible things. I am so impressed with the administration and other directors. They may be very young in terms of their time on the job, but they are so responsive to concerns – things that in past years might have been swept under the rug – just move on, forget about it, and focus on the next day. But now, a week or two ago, someone came to me with an issue and to take care of it, I approached Dwight Benedict, the executive director of student affairs and, after we talked, I got the answer I needed right then and there. The problem was solved. I informed the student and it all worked out. People are responding so quickly now, so much better than before

and that trickles down and impacts everything else. Once you have motivated people, you can do anything.

President Davila:

That's wonderful; I'm pleased to hear that. Now, Sara, would you like to add something?

Sara Collins:

I am pleased to add to his comment. It's not only that the administration is more responsive to students; it's that they show more willingness to work with us. That's a big change because we may not always agree, but they are willing to compare notes and find common ground. That's big and new for me, and I hope it continues.

Another big thing I notice all over campus is a greatly improved morale. Previously, people just passed one another by as if in their own world, but now people say, "Hi, how are you?" And that community feeling of Gallaudet has started to come back. I hope to see that continue.

President Davila:

I'm really impressed. I'm pleased to hear that, Sara, and I want the two of you to know that we are going to continue to work hard to make this change permanent so that people here can enjoy their experience at Gallaudet. Would you like to add anything, Rob?

Robert McConnell:

I'd also like to mention that since I've been going to classes and I'd like to mention that I'm a full time undergraduate student – both of us are, I want to emphasize that – and I see that in classes, students are asking questions and engaging in debate. We really want to learn. Before, we were just going through the motions. Some days I'd go to class and some days I wouldn't, but these days I wake up and think I've got class, I've got projects and things to do. I'm excited to get up every morning. I haven't had that feeling in a long time.

President Davila:

That's very good, and thank you for sharing with me. I have one last question, but first I want to tell you that I am really very pleased to see the cooperation that has developed among all the different groups on campus. I want to keep that going, but as leaders of the student community at Gallaudet, if you had the authority or the ability to implement improvements or changes in some areas, what are seen as important needs for students? What would they be? Any ideas? What changes would you want to implement because you feel students would want those changes quickly?

Robert McConnell:

One thing I notice is that our work is not over yet when it comes to university governance. That is ongoing. It won't happen overnight, but the vision is that I really want to see students involved and taking on greater roles within the university, the SBG, and in other ways. We,

as students, have to learn the system first and work our way up from there. We have to produce our own leaders and make it happen. University governance is a big topic right now, especially with last year's events, and people are starting to want to be more involved with university affairs. At the same time we are students, but we all have a vested stake in Gallaudet and we want to make sure that the decisions made benefit everyone.

President Davila:

That's good. Sara, do you want to add anything?

Sara Collins:

Yes, please, thank you. I will talk to you about two things. I commend your administration for starting the process with diversity. That's a good start, but I want to also encourage not only a focus on cultural and racial diversity, but also an expanded focus that would include a diversity of opinions, religious diversity, GLBT diversity, and all of these differences. I think a good step for the university would be to put religious dates on the calendar and to take those dates into consideration, and maybe we can initiate more of a dialogue, an open space, on different issues on campus. That would be a great step for the university and I would encourage that.

Secondly, as members of the SBG, we value the viability of organizations and we want to make sure that those organizations last. As Rob just mentioned, there has been a problem with dwindling

memberships. I know that part of the problem is because they don't have office space. We have been working on that very hard. Rob and I, Dwight Benedict, and the provost have looked this over trying to find a solution. We need for organizations to be able to have their own office space where they can develop, grow, and have a space where they can come together to interact. That's really an important key and the heart of this university.

President Davila:

Wow! I really want to thank you two for your wonderful ideas that you have shared with me. I think we have set the groundwork for some good, successful efforts in the future. I promise that I will stay in contact with you, involve you, and ask for your opinions and suggestions as we move forward. We continue to develop a new Gallaudet that will respond better than ever to the needs of our Gallaudet students and others who need support from Gallaudet University. I want to thank you for joining me this morning.

I want to tell our audience that I am very pleased to have been able to give you a little peek, although brief, at two of our outstanding leaders on this campus. We have many wonderful students, and many good and developing leaders on campus, and we need to continue to promote their development because they, at some point in the future, will become leaders in the larger community after graduation. I am really pleased that I am personally here to see this kind of improvement in the development of young people. That is really the

kind of student that we have here, and the kind we want to continue to serve.

Thank you very much for joining us today and enjoy yourselves.
So long!