

PRESIDENT'S OCCASIONAL CAMPUS COMMUNIQUÉ

January 28, 2010

THE PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE – A BRIEF ESSAY

Linda and I like to look for antiques. Sometimes the hunt is purposeful—we mark a day on the calendar to visit an antique furniture sale in the Merchandise Mart or a large antique “mall” in southern Wisconsin. At other times we just happen upon a collection of antiques in a small store or a flea market as we’re driving along a highway.

Our taste for antiques spans a rather wide spectrum...from pieces of furniture we’ve refinished and now use in our home to old peanut butter glasses we use as water goblets with a new set of Fiesta ware dishes. I also collect presidential campaign pins, and Linda has a collection of old postcards.

I’ll admit that Linda’s postcard collection usually offers more reflective insight than my collection of political pins. Linda has focused her collection on cards which feature a reflective text, usually combined with an interesting photograph or other graphic element. Some are religious, others simply thoughtful; some quote Shakespeare, others are anonymous. Some bring tears, others elicit a chuckle.

A drawing of a farmer in a field, with a greeting for the New Year, reads:

*Plow deep while sluggards sleep
and you will have corn to sell and to keep*

Another postcard features a wine goblet with roses, noting simply “With Greetings to You” followed by this verse:

*The grape still grows upon the vine,
But sad is its condition;
Instead of being turned to wine
It’s turned to Prohibition.*

An older adult couple drifting in a boat named “Good Luck” comes with this line:

Still Sailing in the Same Old Boat

On yet another postcard two turkeys are cuddled close to each other while the clock on the wall ticks toward midnight; the caption reads:

*He sighed
She sighed
And then they both sighed*

Among my recent favorites is a card which features the drawing of an individual walking through tall trees with the sun shining from the distant edge of the forest. The poet writes:

*Alone thy stately corridors I tread—
The twilight sky gleams gold through columns tall
Low whispered benedictions seem to fall upon my head—
God's temple vast where peace reigns over all.*

Each time I read this card I transform the trees of the forest into tall buildings in Chicago, with the morning sun rising over the horizon of Lake Michigan. The “stately corridors” are the streets of our city and the “columns tall” are grand skyscrapers and two-flats. This is “God’s temple vast.” This is where God extends “low whispered benedictions.” This is “where peace reigns over all.”

This is our home—Chicago. This is our classroom.

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE FIRST FLOOR OF OLD MAIN

Most of the campus was quiet over the semester break with students on holiday and campus offices closed during the week between Christmas and New Year’s Day. During these same days, however, contractors were busy completing some improvements to the first floor of Old Main.

Brorson Lounge serves a broad segment of the campus community—from the Admissions Office to the Axelson Center, from the Board of Trustees to departmental gatherings—as a central campus location to hold meetings. This room is now better equipped for light food service, the lighting has been improved, and the room’s media capability has been increased with the installation of a ceiling-mounted video projector. A fresh coat of paint and some new furniture also make the room a more pleasant and effective place to hold campus meetings and seminars.

Additionally, a Transfer Center for the Admissions Office has been located in renovated space in the southwestern corner of the first floor. These spaces now include a conference room for meeting with prospective students, work stations for three full-time admissions counselors, and workspace for student assistants. About one-third of North Park’s new undergraduates each year are transfer students. We expect that this student population will continue to be important to North Park in the coming years, and the opening of a Transfer Center will enhance the assistance our Admissions Office is able to provide for those interested in moving to North Park as undergraduates. Though our transfer admissions counselors usually host prospective students, this group will be happy to receive any campus visitor and will “show you around” when you stop by.

FOSTER AVENUE AND CENTRAL CAMPUS BANNERS

January is the traditional month for us to launch North Park's annual Chicagoland advertising and marketing campaign. The 2010 series features current North Park students and introduces the community to www.mystory.northpark.edu, a website where through short video segments "these students discuss the impact of a North Park education on their lives, goals and aspirations."

The student stories, and the specific message provided in each segment of the advertising campaign, introduce the audience to North Park's core institutional identity—we are "distinctively Christian, intentionally urban, and purposefully multicultural." The campaign is presented on highway billboards, at CTA bus stops and EI stations, and on CTA vehicles including buses and subway trains.

Additionally, the 2010 campaign is presented in a series of new banners located along Foster and Kedzie Avenues and along the central campus walkways. These banners mark our space in the neighborhood and remind us of our core institutional identity as we walk across the campus (especially as the weather warms!).

Though this project involved a number of North Park departments special recognition is extended for the leadership in concept and design provided by members of the External Relations team.

SPRING COMMENCEMENT

Commencement convocations are always special times in the academic year. And in this spring's schedule we will introduce several changes.

- All three spring commencement convocations will be held on the same day. On Saturday, May 8, we will hold the undergraduate commencement at 10:00 a.m., the commencement for the School of Adult Learning and all graduate programs at 3:00 p.m., and the seminary commencement at 7:00 p.m. This will allow all students graduating from North Park in the spring semester to celebrate this milestone on a single day. The usual post-commencement receptions will continue for each of the convocations.
- The Baccalaureate Service, which we have hosted for several years at Queen of All Saints Basilica in Sauganash, will be moved this year to a new location. The 2010 Baccalaureate Service will be held on Friday evening, May 7, at the Fourth Presbyterian Church on North Michigan Avenue.
- In order to recognize all students who are graduating this spring we will re-cast the Baccalaureate Service as an all-university event. Specifically, students graduating from all programs (undergraduate, adult, graduate, and seminary) will be invited to attend this service. And all full-time faculty (undergraduate, adult, graduate, and seminary) will be strongly encouraged to attend this service.

Further details on each of these programs will be presented over the weeks ahead—where to gather for the receptions, how to receive discounted parking for the Baccalaureate Service, when to gather for each of the processions, who will be receiving honorary degrees, etc. But for now, please note the dates mentioned above on your calendars so we can celebrate with our graduates.

SEMINARY LEADERSHIP SEARCH

With the decision of Dr. Jay Phelan to step down from his responsibilities as President and Dean of the Seminary we have introduced a process to select new leadership for the seminary. A search committee has been appointed which includes representatives of the seminary faculty, the Covenant Church ministerium, the University's Board of Trustees, and the University's senior leadership team.

The search committee recently completed an "Opportunity Profile" which details the position responsibilities and leadership agenda for this position. Based on this profile we are inviting interested candidates to submit application materials for review by the committee. The Opportunity Profile and a number of related documents are available online at www.northpark.edu/About/Office-of-the-President/Seminary-Leadership-Search.aspx. We invite members of the campus community to review these materials and to submit nominations as you have interest.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

As is our usual custom, the Board of Trustees will meet on campus during the third weekend of February. This mid-year meeting annually provides an opportunity to consider items of importance to the future of North Park even as the academic year takes place.

This year I will present two matters in particular for Board discussion. The first is the ongoing work of the Seminary Leadership Search Committee (as noted above), and the second is our evolving challenges for student recruitment, with special attention to the recruitment of traditional aged first year undergraduate students.

As is my tradition, subsequent to this meeting of the trustees I will present to the campus community a brief report of the meeting and I will distribute a copy of my report prepared for the Board meeting.

SPRING SEMESTER ENROLLMENT

Our official census date does not occur until early February so we are not yet able to provide official enrollment numbers for the spring semester. We'll distribute our official enrollment report in the February Communiqué.

Though we don't have final enrollment numbers, nonetheless, two items are of special note.

- Through the good efforts of our Admissions Office we have been able to recruit (a) a sizeable class of transfer undergraduates, (b) an increased number of new students in adult programs (SAL), (c) an average number of new students in most graduate programs with a slight uptick in nursing enrollment, and (d) a group of seminarians which is larger than has been recruited in recent years. In many cases the new students at mid-year help to off-set a slight decline in enrollment at the beginning of this academic year.
- Though we are in the midst of careful analysis of undergraduate retention data, we are very grateful for the number of faculty and staff who referred one or more students for special attention in the fall semester through the newly-launched EARS program. These referrals provided the necessary point-of-contact for faculty advisors, members of our academic and student services teams, and personnel in the Student Development Office. Many, many thanks to everyone who assisted in this important effort.