

PRESIDENT'S OCCASIONAL CAMPUS COMMUNIQUÉ

November 23, 2009

THE PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE – A BRIEF ESSAY

The Epistle of James instructs that we should be “doers of the word.” When James wrote these words I’m sure he didn’t have North Park University in mind, but I often wonder whether an organization—one like North Park—can be a “doer of the word.”

Of course we can. And most often it is our students who lead the way. Our students lead the way in approaching the mandate of the prophet Micah to “do justice, love kindness, and walk with God.”

Learning is a noble endeavor, but learning is most noble when used to benefit others. With the gift of learning comes responsibility. As our students learn we encourage them to serve others, to turn faith into action, believing the principle taught by Jesus: “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required.”

In mid-November Linda and I gathered one evening with a group of students for dinner at the Sheraton Hotel on the riverfront just off Michigan Avenue. We were there to attend the annual gala dinner sponsored by Casa Central, the largest Hispanic-serving social service agency in Chicago.

The particular reason for attending this dinner was to receive the Faith in Action Award from Casa Central. Our students were proud because their university was recognized for its work with Spanish-speaking communities in Chicago. I was proud because most of North Park’s work in these communities comes through the service of our students. We offer graduate classes in nonprofit management at the central offices of Casa Central in Chicago’s Humboldt Park neighborhood, so North Park takes its education into the community. But our students really are the ones who make a difference—through internships with social service agencies, by volunteering through church-sponsored programs, and by teaching in the Chicago Public Schools—serving others across this city.

Our students enter the community and make a difference.

Our students put faith into action.

Our students lead the way.

NATIONAL SURVEY ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

During the spring semester of this past year our first-year and senior students participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). The NSSE clusters a large number of effective learning practices into five categories and measures the extent to which students participate in these important learning-directed activities.

Among the clusters are Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student Faculty Interaction, and Supportive Campus Environment. In each of these areas the experience of North Park University students often mirrors those of students elsewhere—we do well, and we can do better.

But in the fifth cluster—Enriching Educational Experiences—the student experience at North Park is considerably better than the norm. Here we excel! We excel in providing students with specific kinds of educational experiences which research has proven to be highly engaging and effective in advancing student learning—learning which draws on relationships with others, especially others who are different from us.

These kinds of learning experiences are at the heart of North Park's core institutional identity. They include such activities as “frequently having serious conversations with students who are different from them in terms of religious, political, or personal beliefs,” “frequently having serious conversations with those of a different race,” and “engaging in spiritually enhancing activities such as worship and prayer.” These three and many other activities are numbered among the kinds of practices which provide for an “enriching educational experience” and which advance learning in important areas.

The good news for North Park, and especially for our students, is that the commitment of our faculty and dedication of our staff, coupled with our very location in the heart of Chicago, have come together in a special way—a way that advances student learning. The NSSE has identified some ways in which we can improve (and we'll give attention to these) but it also has identified certain learning practices at which we excel (and we'll keep up the good work!).

BOARD OF TRUSTEES – OCTOBER MEETING

As is our custom, the Board of Trustees met on campus in late October for its fall meeting. Attendance was strong and trustees were pleased to be together again. This is a very competent and dedicated group; I'm pleased to work with them.

The Board had a very active series of committee sessions. Most items brought to the Board at this time are “in process;” they are presented as drafts for discussion and input from the Board rather than direct action. So while the number of decisions made by the Board was relatively small, nonetheless the Board's discussion is an important part of their work on our behalf.

A highlight of this session was the afternoon reception with faculty. Attendance was strong, and for this I'm especially thankful to the four faculty representatives on the Board who encouraged their colleagues to drop by the reception for a few minutes. Relations between the Board and the faculty are important, and a strong relationship is best established and strengthened through informal interaction such as that available through the afternoon reception.

Actions from the October Board meeting included the following items:

- The Board welcomed seven new trustees:
 - Virgil H. Applequist – Palatine, IL
 - Paula A. Banks – Chicago, IL
 - Bruce P. Bickner – Sycamore, IL
 - David Helwig – Thousand Oaks, CA
 - Carole J. Johnson – Northbridge, MA
 - Nancy A. Nyberg – Naperville, IL
 - David A. Otfinoski – Chester, CT
- The Board unanimously supported a motion to expect participation from 100% of Board members in support of the annual fund and the forthcoming fund raising campaign.
- The new Audit Committee, appointed at the May meeting, met for the first time and received the FY '09 audit report.
- Positive reports were received from the Board's two investment agencies.
- The Board approved a drawdown from the University's endowment, in line with previously established policy.
- The Seminary Committee discussed a draft of a new strategic plan, and received it as a work-in-progress.
- The University Mission Committee received a report on the start-up of the Collaboratory for Urban and Intercultural Learning, and several Board members visited the new location for the Collaboratory in Caroline Hall.
- Both the University Mission Committee and the full Board received an update on progress on preparation for the HLC accreditation review.
- The Student Recruitment and Retention Committee heard presentations from several students who have participated in the Compass program.
- Reports were presented to the Academic Committee by faculty who had received sabbatical leaves during 2008-2009.

- The Board reviewed plans for undertaking a search for new leadership for the seminary.
- Sabbatical leaves during 2010-2011 were approved for the following individuals:
 - Nancy Arnesen
 - Jim Bruckner
 - Stephen Chester
 - Linda Craft
 - Boaz Johnson
 - Brent Laytham
 - Max Lee
 - Jay Phelan
 - Soong-Chan Rah

SALARY ADJUSTMENT FOR 2010

I'm pleased to announce that effective January 1, 2010 we will provide a 3% wage and salary increase for all full-time faculty and staff. In addition, a small reserve is available for salary increases linked to faculty promotions (adjustments made in August) and to selective staff equity adjustments. The salary adjustments total approximately \$1 million in annual payroll expenses.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

These are two words we've all heard much of during the past year. And we'll continue to hear these two terms repeated during the coming years as well.

The success of North Park depends on enrolling a strong and vibrant group of students each year, in all of our programs, and then assisting these students so they remain enrolled and make good progress toward completion of their respective degrees.

The challenge with assuring strong recruitment and effective retention is that no one person is responsible for any single student's admission to the university and graduation from a degree program. And often if no single person is responsible then it's easy for each of us to think that we are not responsible, that someone else will do what is necessary to recruit and retain our students.

But the fact is that recruitment and retention rests on each of our shoulders. Our recruitment success for this coming year needs to outpace our experience during the past year, and our goal is to increase retention by at least one percent between the fall and spring semesters and again over the summer. We can achieve these goals, but it requires for each of us to embrace the challenge and assume our respective responsibility.

Thanks for doing your part!

