

PRESIDENT'S OCCASIONAL CAMPUS COMMUNIQUÉ

September 7, 2010

The President's Perspective – A Brief Essay

On several occasions last year I encouraged us to “walk alongside our students.” In response to my comments some of you have described to me how you walk alongside students and your encouraging and insightful comments have alerted me to an area where we should invest a little more effort.

A few years ago in preparing our strategic plan we reviewed our mission, vision, and institutional identity. Since then we've been successful in framing a common vocabulary for telling the North Park story.

In this same part of the strategic plan we also identified seven ideals which describe the distinctive educational experience students can expect at North Park. In the second year of this strategic plan I wrote a brief essay on each ideal and distributed the essays with my monthly campus communiqués. Since that time we haven't done much to bring these ideals to the forefront of our community discourse. We need to re-engage this discussion in order to increase our common understanding of and commitment to these ideals. When we regard these ideals as central to our mission and identity they will mold our curriculum at all levels—undergraduate, graduate, and seminarian, shape all our co-curricular programs, and provide overall guidance and direction for our entire educational program.

In the strategic plan, we affirm that students at North Park University experience an education that:

- Is rooted in and committed to the Christian faith and its sacred text, the Bible;
- Engages Chicago as a dynamic context for learning and service;
- Embraces all people and celebrates the richness of cultural difference;
- Affirms learning in all its forms—in the classroom and beyond—as a gift, a joy, and a sacred obligation;
- Encourages dialogue as a means of learning where open inquiry, integrity, and civility guide our life together;
- Seeks to form and transform the whole student (intellectually, socially, and spiritually); and
- Values each student for who he or she is and who they will become.

These are the ideals we live by at North Park; these are the commitments which shape our work with students; these are the factors which form a distinctive learning experience for each student.

Each of us is an educator at North Park, and in our role as educators it is our responsibility to know these ideals, reflect on them periodically, and turn to them as we determine how best to fulfill the specific responsibilities assigned to us in our respective positions—faculty and staff, counselors and coaches, teachers and office managers.

When we were together for Gathering Day I commented that the best way for each of us to walk alongside students is to identify one or more of these ideals which we individually can embrace in our respective area of responsibility. We don't all need to be responsible for all seven ideals. Rather if each of us selects one or two for our special attention, through our combined individual efforts we'll transform these ideals from mere rhetoric into the reality of everyday campus life at North Park. And when we do so student lives will be transformed.

I thought about this in a new way two weeks ago while in church on a Sunday morning. One of the texts for the day was from the early verses of Hebrews 12: "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us." This is the image we should claim: when we walk alongside our students we offer them a great cloud of witnesses which sustains our students as they run toward the goal of preparing for a life of significance and service. Together we can form a beautiful cumulus cloud through which we wrap our arms around our students as they run the race before them. This is our highest responsibility as a community of educators. The fundamental ethos of our work together must derive from a commitment to walk alongside our students.

Academic Convocation – We'll gather as faculty and staff colleagues on Monday, September 20, at 10:30 a.m. in Anderson Chapel for our annual Academic Convocation. Please join us in this time of special recognition.

In this program two groups of faculty members will be recognized and applauded: (a) recently promoted and/or tenured faculty, and (b) recently published book authors. In addition, this year we will install three members of the faculty to endowed chairs, and we will install a new Director of University Ministries. The individuals listed below will be recognized in this year's Convocation.

- Recently Promoted and/or Tenured Faculty
 - Liza Ann Acosta
 - Ilsup Ahn
 - Rachelle Ankney
 - Angelyn Balodinas-Bartolomei
 - Chad Eric Bergman
 - Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom
 - Gertrude DeWaters
 - Alice Gorguis

- Kathryn Maier-O-Shea
 - Bradley Nassif
 - Kristy Odelius
 - Jonathan Rienstra-Kiracofe
 - Matthew Schau
 - Joel Willitts
- Recently Published Book Authors/Editors
 - Noelle Baker
 - Mae Elise Cannon
 - Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom
 - Paul De Neui
 - John R. Hjelm
 - Scot McKnight
 - Soong-Chan Rah
 - Rupert Sims
 - Joel Willitts
- Installed as Director of University Ministries
 - Anthony Zamble
- Installed to Endowed Chairs
 - Linda R. Duncan – Gretchen Carlson Memorial Endowed Chair in Nursing
 - IIsup Ahn – Carl I. Lindberg Endowed Chair in Applied Ethics
 - Julia Lynn Davids – Stephen J. Hendrickson Endowed Chair in Music

This Convocation will be a moment of grand celebration in the academic life of North Park. Please join the campus community for this program. Bring your colleagues with you, and invite students to attend as well.

A public reception will follow the program.

Bridge Events – Building on the new student orientation events from Threshold, the early weeks of the semester include a number of events and activities designed to actively involve students in the social life of the campus and enhance their early connection with North Park. A full calendar of these events is available on the North Park web site.

Though designed specifically for our students, the events are most successful when attended by faculty and staff members. Most events are free and the others come at a modest cost. Please choose one or two, or a half dozen, to attend during the early weeks of the semester. Our students will be very happy to see your there.

President's Campus Addresses – Some members of our community have requested printed copies of the State of the University address I presented on Gathering Day and the comments I offered at the Convocation for new undergraduate students and their

families. PDFs for both addresses are attached to this communiqué. In addition, the addresses are available on the University web site. From the University home page click on [About North Park](#), then click on [President's Office](#), followed by [Campus Speeches and Communication](#).

Priorities for 2010-2011 -- As is our tradition, during the summer months the senior leadership team prepared a list of tasks, initiatives, and priorities which should be addressed during the coming year. This rather long list is distributed to all faculty and staff as an attachment to this communiqué.

This document is still in draft form. During the early weeks of the semester I'm encouraging several groups to review and discuss the draft and to submit their comments and suggestions to me. These groups include the Deans' Council, the University Faculty Senate, and the University Council. Once we receive input from these groups, and any individuals who wish to comment on it, the statement of priorities will be presented to the Board of Trustees in October.

Homecoming 2010 – If you haven't yet seen the promotional video for Homecoming 2010 you should quickly link to it via the University web site. The dates for Homecoming 2010 are October 1-3. As always, this is a great time for alumni to return to campus, and thereby a great time for us to reconnect with our former students. Plan to participate, along with family and friends. Full details are available on the Homecoming web site.

Campus Improvements – Place influences learning. Of course people influence learning as well, but place is more important than we often credit. This is one of the reasons we promote our location in Chicago as important to the education students receive at North Park. But place doesn't need to be as large as a major city; place is also our campus at the corner of Foster and Kedzie Avenues.

Because place influences learning we pay attention to our campus. Summer is a good time to care for the campus and as students returned to North Park this fall they discovered a number of projects completed over recent months. These include:

- Renovation of the gymnasium entry lobby area—new doors and windows, improved lighting, new flooring, upgraded bathrooms, and a restored NPU athletic Hall of Fame recognition; improvements have also been made to the plaza outside the gymnasium with new walkways and improved landscaping.
- Locker rooms in the gymnasium were improved in response to increasing demand from the football team which has recruited a record number of players.
- Upgrades to two student residence halls include a total recarpeting and repainting of Ohlson House, along with bathroom renovation as necessary, and relighting, repainting, and recarpeting of common areas on each floor of Anderson Hall.

- Selective improvements have been made to the first floor of Old Main, with attention to Brorson Lounge, a new photo exhibit for the guest waiting area, and a handsome display of the University seal and mission statement. Additionally all exterior windows have been replaced for energy efficiency as well as continued preservation of this historic building.
- And a number of smaller projects were completed—new brown turf on the baseball and softball diamonds at Holmgren Athletic Complex, interior and exterior repairs to Isaacson Chapel in Nyvall Hall, and expansion of our electronic lock system to additional student residences—each designed to enhance the University campus.

Major building additions to the campus are funded through special campaigns. But ongoing repairs and improvements like these are funded through the University's operating budget. Incremental changes like these help to make the campus an attractive place to study—and a good place to work as well.

Student Recruitment – We made a significant effort this past year to recruit and enroll a new class of students to North Park—first-year undergraduates, transfer undergraduates, adult learners, graduate students, and seminarians. This work is challenging, and it requires everyone's effort along with careful and diligent work by those with direct responsibility for student recruitment.

To support the work of student recruitment in coming years we are making some important changes in the way we build student enrollment. Much of this is internal to the practices adopted by our recruitment team. But some of it has a public expression as well. One example is a name transition underway in the office of Undergraduate Admission. We are now calling this the Office of Undergraduate Recruitment and Enrollment. The language of admission will still be used in a few places on the web site, as it is common language prospective students recognize. Internally, however, we will be more focused in the future on "recruiting and enrolling" students as we believe the change in office name will help to communicate this. Please begin thinking more in terms of student recruitment, a task in which the whole campus participates.