

OCCASIONAL CAMPUS COMMUNIQUE

August 17, 2012

The President's Perspective – A Brief Essay

Four years ago we began the school year with “the flood.” Over the course of one weekend a confluence of (a) lots of rain and (b) human manipulation of the flow of water in the Chicago River caused the North Branch to come very close to flooding its banks. In fact, the river rose high enough to flood the utility basement in the Magnuson Center. We vacated Burgh and Anderson residences for the weekend, canceled classes on Monday to give the campus a chance to recover, and for several weeks we transformed Hamming Hall into the campus dining hall. What fun!

The river is an important part of our campus even when it isn't flooding. This summer I've spent some time sitting along the banks of the North Branch as it flows through the campus. My favorite place to do this, during a warm summer, is in a lovely shaded spot just west of LHA next to the walking path along the river. In this location our landscape architects designed a small area that is great for sitting under the shade of a leafy canopy and next to some beautiful ground plantings. I've enjoyed the spot this summer on a number of occasions.

While sitting there I've thought of words penned long ago and recorded now as Psalm 1. (Some of you may recall that I referenced this same passage in my communique from this past April as well.) Here are the first three verses:

Happy are those
 who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
 or sit in the seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and on his law they meditate day and night.
They are like trees
 planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
 and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.

I don't imagine the person who wrote these words ever visited North Park's campus, and especially not since the river bank has been contained and the campus green has been made so beautiful. Yet the poet must have been sitting in just such a place to write this Psalm.

Not only does this psalm remind me of our campus, more than this, the metaphor used by the author describes so beautifully the purpose of North Park. “Trees . . . planted by streams of water . . . which yield their fruit in its season.” At North Park we “prepare students for lives of significance and service.” For a small number of years we plant “trees” in a nursery along the banks of the North Branch of the Chicago River. Here their roots are strengthened, their branches pruned, and their first fruit is harvested. And then we transplant these trees (we usually call this “commencement”), we uproot them from this nursery so they can be re-planted in another park, some nearby and some in more distant locations. When transplanted these young trees are ready to prosper.

This is a good reminder at the beginning of a school year, a way to recall the importance of the mission to which we are called.

Starting the School Year

As educators we all love the beginning of school. Undergraduates move into residence halls, seminarians settle into a new city, athletes join their team for preseason practice, students begin seeking out their faculty advisor, seniors display a certain anxiety about their last year.

We also anticipate the start of a school year in our respective place on campus. Buildings have been readied. Syllabi have been written and duplicated. Summer vacations have been enjoyed. Some of us are old-timers...we’ve been through this before. Others of us are new to the beginning of the school year at North Park. But for all of us, these are special days.

The school year at North Park begins with several important events. Faculty retreats are held on Monday, August 20. Gathering Day takes place at 10:30 on Tuesday, August 21—we meet in Anderson Chapel and then enjoy lunch on the lawn. Move-in for first-year students occurs on Wednesday, August 22, with our annual convocation for new students and their families at 4:00 that same afternoon. Threshold happens over the course of several days, stretching into the weekend. Classroom doors open on Monday, August 27. What a great week!

This past school year we spoke quite often about retention—about helping students to succeed at North Park, to ensure they return for the following year, and stay with us through the end of their studies. When we come together on Gathering Day we’ll provide an update about student persistence into this new school year .

Retention begins on the first day of school. This means the week I’ve just described is very important, not just for us as members of the faculty and staff, but for our students as well. Threshold week is the time when we begin anew to walk alongside our

students—to be there with them and for them. Thanks for walking alongside our students this past year, and thanks for the joy you bring for doing so again this year.

Anderson Hall Renovations

Anderson Hall is the tall cylindrical building on the south side of campus. It has served well for many years as one of our primary student residences.

This summer we've renovated the student rooms, as well as the entrance lobby in this building. New paint, new flooring, and for Anderson Hall perhaps what is most important is new modular furniture in the student rooms.

With this work we now have renovated and refurbished each of our student residences—first Burgh Hall a few years back, then Olsson House shortly after that, and Sohlberg Hall last summer.

If you want a tour of the Anderson Hall renovation now is the time to do this. Actually, the best time to visit is on Wednesday, August 22. That's move-in day for this year's new students. If you visit on that day you can greet new students and their families, and even pick up a box or two to make their move-in just that much easier.

New and Redefined Responsibilities

As we begin the new academic year we're pleased to announce several revised assignments in the areas of Enrollment and University Marketing and Communications.

- Mark Olson, who has served for several years as Dean of Enrollment and Director of Church Relations will lead a newly defined Office of Church Relations and Outreach Programs. Now as Senior Director of Church Relations Mark will work with the president to oversee an institutional strategy to build and maintain robust relationships with North Park's church constituencies, and especially with the Evangelical Covenant Church. Mark will be joined by Annette Moy who gives attention to outreach programs in Chicago and Kirsten Burdick who heads up the work of seminary student recruitment. Mark will be working from the second floor in Old Main; Annette and Kirsten will continue to work from offices in Old Main on the third floor.
- Aaron Schoof continues in his present capacity but he is also assuming responsibility for oversight of campus data management. His title has been changed to Senior Director of Student Administrative Services and Data Management.
- Chris Nicholson, likewise, continues responsibilities for adult and graduate recruitment and admissions, but he has also been assigned responsibility for new graduate program development. In this capacity, in collaboration with school deans and the provost he will work on researching and facilitating the

development of potential new programs. His title has been assigned as Senior Director of Graduate & Adult Admissions and New Program Development.

- With John Boyd's mid-summer departure to a position in publishing, Marcia Mawe has been assigned responsibility for leadership on the creative team in the office of University Marketing and Communications as part of her role as Director of Marketing. In this capacity Marcia now leads the marketing, web and social media, design and copywriting components of UMC.

Each of these individuals, along with their colleagues in the respective offices, contributes in important ways to our institutional well-being. I deeply appreciate their willingness to expand responsibilities and provide leadership in these areas for the coming school year. As you greet them on campus, perhaps at Gathering Day, be sure to note your appreciation as well for their work among us.