OCCASIONAL CAMPUS COMMUNIQUE

February 18, 2013

The President's Perspective – A Brief Reflection

Over the Christmas break I read a book recently authored by Scott Jacobs, a long-time urban affairs reporter for the *Chicago Sun-Times*. This book, titled *Never Leave Your Block*, is comprised of 30 or so short pieces through which Jacobs reflects on experiences from living in Chicago. The topics range widely, from "The Rat Hunter" to "The Virgin Under the Viaduct;" from "Lito's Weapon" to "Breakfast at Whole Foods;" from "Potty Boot Camp" to "Shoe Shopping with Men."

The last essay warmed me in a special way, however. Titled "Uneven Sidewalks," in this essay Jacobs reflects on what you learn about your neighbors when it snows in Chicago. Each morning Jacobs walks a couple of blocks to Pepe's, the corner store in his neighborhood. Usually there's no challenge in this. But when it snows, the way to Pepe's is dependent on each of his neighbors. Each neighbor has his or her particular approach to clearing snow from the sidewalk. Jacobs writes,

Some are large and wide, an edge-to-edge sweeping of snow off the concrete. Others are no more than a pathway, a shovel-wide acceptance of civic responsibility. A few, but only a few, are not shoveled at all.

In the shovel ways in front of their houses, I judge my neighbors. I know one is 78 years old and retired, but he is the first to shovel. The bank executive down the street is out of town, so I excuse his malfeasance. A neighbor down the way has just bought a snow blower, so I applaud his exuberance in clearing his—and both his neighbors'—sidewalks.

But as I look at the overall pattern of sidewalk clearing in the snow, I see tidiness next to sloth, exuberance and isolation knitted together into a mosaic of the citizenry. And somehow it all works because somehow, every time it snows, there is a pathway to the corner.

In the uneven clearing of sidewalk snow, we discover little things about our neighbors, and ourselves, that stay with us through the year. Our paths are all connected.

Our paths are all connected. We learn this in the city. We learn this in the community of learning called North Park. The adventure of living is that we live together—paths connected with people we know well, paths connected with people we've never met yet depend on so deeply, paths connected with some who have been part of North Park for two or more generations, paths connected with some who are new to North Park and

are here temporarily to pour concrete in a big hole in the ground. Our paths are all connected.

Construction

I toured the construction site this past Friday and it's an exciting place to be on our campus this semester. Our monthly electronic update sent to all faculty and staff provides the details on how the project is progressing. In addition, we can all watch the work through the live-feed easily accessed from the university's web site. And we can all get a view of the action from the steps of Hanson Hall, through windows along the north wall on the second floor of Nyvall Hall, or perhaps the best view of all, from the tower room on the third floor of Brandel Library.

When I toured the construction site I promised our construction manager I would pass along a special word from him to our campus community. First, he deeply appreciates our attention to safety near the work site. Second, the crew members simply love the warm reception from everyone on campus. We don't interact with them frequently, but when we pass on the sidewalk, or follow their directions around incoming traffic, or simply greet them on their way to and from the work site—well, our welcome is as warm as they've ever received. I told him that no doubt this is a natural extension of our commitment to walk alongside our students!

Budget

As I noted in my comments on Gathering Day, we're getting our hands around this year's budget. When we started the school year we faced a \$2 million deficit in this year's budget. Since that time we've worked hard to address this, and I'm pleased to note that our deficit now stands at approximately \$250,000. We've made good progress and I'm thankful to each for your part in this.

We still have work to undertake on the budget, as our deficit needs to be at "zero" when the year ends. Budget managers across the campus continue to work with us on this and I'm confident that at year-end we will together be able to celebrate a difficult, yet balanced, budget year.

Spring Semester Enrollment

One aspect of responding to our budget need is linked to spring semester enrollment. I'm pleased to report that enrollment for the spring semester is good. Recruitment of new students reached very close to the mark we anticipated, and more importantly, retention of returning students has been very strong.

The specific numbers for the spring semester, compared with previous years, will be distributed electronically later this week.

Enrollment for Fall 2013

Our colleagues in student recruitment continue to work with urgency toward ensuring a good enrollment next year in all program levels. We are pleased to report a healthy application period through the fall semester for next year's group of new undergraduates.

But getting applications is not enough. We need to turn those applications into deposits and into students studying at North Park in the fall. We haven't decided whether the right metaphor for this is "landing the plane" or "harvesting the crop"—but whatever the case, we need to turn applications into registered students.

Whose work is this? Yours. Mine. Ours. This spring will be filled with visitors to the campus, and we must warmly welcome each one. This spring will also be filled with phone calls, email and text messages, and personal visits with hundreds of prospective students. There's a place for each of us in this effort—we each must find our place and fill it.

Institutional Planning

A major project on campus this semester is continued work on planning for the future of North Park. This takes shape in two particular ways.

First, a large group of people are involved in a dedicated enrollment planning effort designed to assess our present position, evaluate areas of student interest, and identify the programs which hold most promise for enrollment at North Park. We're assisted in this by a good group of consultants from Noel-Levitz, but the large part of the effort is being assumed by dedicated people from our campus community—our colleagues in several office units—who are picking up this assignment over and above their regular work load.

Second, from January through March I'm meeting with 20 groups of faculty and staff from all parts of the campus to consider the strategic and longer term direction of the university. Many of you have already participated in this. After these sessions are completed we'll revise our draft documents and also combine this with information we learn through the enrollment planning effort. This is a big project and will extend well into the summer.

Board of Trustees Winter Meeting

Our dedicated volunteers on the university's Board of Trustees met in early February for the board's winter meeting. This was an occasion for mid-year updates—on enrollment, finances, construction, fundraising, campus life, curricular review, and so many other topics. A good number of our faculty and staff contributed to this, especially in presenting to one or more of the committee sessions.

The board noted just a couple of action items. One item involved nominating a group of individuals for the next class of trustees. These nominees will be presented for confirmation this spring. A second item was to set pricing for graduate and adult programs for the coming year.

My common practice is to provide you with my written report to the board. This will be distributed electronically later this week and will also be posted on the university's web site.

Two Milestones

In recent years we've sensed an increased momentum at North Park. Using the image of a flywheel we might described North Park as an institution that is turning with increasing speed and effectiveness.

We measure this in many ways. In one of the communiques from the fall semester I described our momentum at North Park as it pertains to student learning. This is our priority responsibility at North Park; if we're not securing student learning in a faith-filled environment then little else matters. The findings from the National Survey of Student Engagement affirm the good things happening in student learning at North Park.

In recent months we reached two other markers that are helpful in describing momentum at North Park. And these aren't just any markers—these are really important markers.

 The central focus of Campaign North Park is to raise funds for construction of The Johnson Center. We've reported often on our progress in this area. There are, however, three other components in the campaign: endowed scholarships, funding for academic initiatives, and annual giving to support the university's operating budget.

Here's the first milestone: **Total gift commitments for all components of Campaign North Park, during the past four years, have <u>exceeded \$60 million!</u>
Advanced by the good work of our colleagues in the development office, and made possible through the deep generosity of many friends of North Park, including members of our campus community, we have witnessed God's faithfulness at North Park.**

 Endowment funds at North Park are the primary source of scholarships awarded by the university. Throughout our school's history faithful partners have provided gifts to the endowment which are wisely invested so a portion of the returns can be awarded each year to students as scholarship assistance.

Twenty-five years ago when Carl Balsam, our CFO, first came to North Park the university's endowment had just reached \$6 million. This provided for some financial

aid to students but it was hardly sufficient. So over the years loving friends of North Park have provided additional endowed funds, often through estate provisions. Along with this, Carl and members of our Board of Trustees have been faithful stewards of these invested funds. As a result of both new gifts and careful investment of funds our endowment has grown over the past two decades.

Here's the second milestone: For the first time in our school's history, the North Park endowment has reached <u>beyond \$70 million!</u> These funds, carefully invested by our trustees, each year provide a return that funds scholarship awards which make it possible for many students to study at North Park.

The generosity of many makes a difference each day in each student's life.