
State of the University Address
“ . . . because our home is in Chicago ”
August 20, 2009



David L. Parkyn, President

How good it is to be together again – to greet each other, to sing, to read God’s Word, to pray, and (soon) to eat.

All of us wonder what sort of year this will be at North Park. So I invite you to briefly reflect with me on the year just past and to consider what activities and initiatives we might approach with special effort and enthusiasm in the year ahead.

The Past Year’s Challenges and Achievements

The past school year opened with apparent success measured by good enrollment numbers in most of our undergraduate and graduate programs. Our optimism for the year was quickly “dampened,” however, with the flooding of the North Branch of the Chicago River in September followed by a rapid decline in the financial markets and the national economy in October. Yet, in spite of these challenges, we stepped up to two considerable achievements during the year.

First, with the help of everyone gathered in this room, over 500 students graduated from North Park this past year. This was a record number. And, as Jen Pope reports, 23% of our undergraduate seniors spent time abroad during their years at North Park. Dennis Bricault also notes that our graduating class included 11 students who started their work at North Park in our English as a Second Language program, and one of these 11 graduated with honors.

Second, again with the help of everyone in this room, we ended the fiscal year with a positive financial balance. We all contributed to this accomplishment—through careful management of departmental budgets, through deliberate attention to students in difficulty which resulted in successful retention numbers, and through personal sacrifice during a year without pay raises.

I speak for myself, for my senior administrative colleagues, for members of the Board of Trustees, and most importantly for our students and their families, when I say “Thank you.” Thank you to each of you for your individual effort and for being part of this community that makes North Park University a special, deeply caring, and quite effective learning community. What we achieved in student learning and budget management was a collective achievement.

We also reached a number of other important accomplishments this past year.

- We launched a new University website.
- We advanced our efforts in student recruitment through athletics – with a 36% increase in campus visits initiated by our coaches, resulting in a corresponding increase in applications.
- We received a 10-year accreditation approval for our athletic training program and University-wide we began preparations for our next accreditation review by the Higher Learning Commission.
- The faculty approved a reorganized governance structure with a Faculty Senate to be introduced this year.
- We restored the mechanical basement in the Magnuson Center
- We implemented several safety initiatives including electronic locks on many doors, a new ID card system, and an emergency notification system.
- Our faculty published 12 books this past year, with another from the previous year recognized as “book-of-the-year” in its field.
- We expanded our program in Urban Outreach, with 83% more students involved in these activities than five years ago.
- The University published a book on North Park’s history which features a retrospective collection of photographs from all periods in our institutional life.

Beyond these activities, the University also received national recognition on several fronts.

- The American Institute of Architects recognized the greening of North Park’s central campus with a national award for landscape architecture.
- The University was named this past year to the President’s Honor Roll for Community Service.
- Our “Do Justice” print ad series won a bronze award from the National Newspapers on Higher Education Marketing.
- For the second consecutive year one of our students received a Fulbright Award.

None of these accomplishments comes through the work of any one individual. All we achieve is the result of teams of people coming together not for their own interests but to collectively address the tasks before us. The achievement of a two teams in particular bears special mention.

- Special thanks to Residence Life, Campus Safety, Dining Services, Physical Plant, and the Emergency Management Team – for a great response to the September flood.
- Special thanks to External Relations and Information Technology Services – for design and implementation of the University’s new web site.

Throughout the year we rallied to the challenges and embraced the opportunities which were before us.

Entering the New Year

Where do we go from here? What are the priorities that should guide our work in the coming year?

It's important to realize that the challenges we faced this past year were not temporary, they will be present for years to come. Recovery of the economy will take some time, and however it occurs we can be sure that the "new normal" will be different from what characterized recent years. In planning for the years ahead we must realize that:

- As an institution we have not yet adopted and implemented an academic planning model which assures quality, stability and efficiency, along with an appropriate flexibility, or nimbleness, to respond quickly to changing environments.
- Families will be cautious for years to come about burdening their future with debt incurred for their children's college education.
- Graduates, whether from bachelors, graduate, or seminary programs will continue to face a difficult environment in which to find placement and employment.
- Students in all programs will want to know how what they are studying is preparing them for the work-world they expect to enter.
- The demographics of high school graduates will evolve with growing numbers of students coming from populations which traditionally have not gone to college and a shrinking of populations which in past years have been the core of our enrollment base.

These are among the principle challenges we will face during the coming years, and North Park must find ways to effectively accommodate this changing environment.

We have two options. (i) We can hunker down. We can circle the familiar wagons, our way of life at North Park over recent years, the steps we've taken to address our mission as well as we could in years past, and rely on the strength of this past to guard our future. Or, (ii) we can strengthen our core. We can commit to what we believe is most central to our mission, and identify ways in the present environment to do what we do even better.

Hunkering down isn't a very exciting or useful option. Let's agree not to take this approach. Rather, let's opt to strengthen our core, to stay with and execute as well as we can the strategic plan, the vision, we developed over the past two years for North Park. In this plan we identified a set of four overarching objectives to be the framing story for the years to come. We agreed that we should:

- Affirm a distinctive, ownable, and sustainable "space" for North Park,
- Offer students a transformational education of measurably improved quality,
- Embrace Chicago as a resource for ensuring the strength of our educational programs, and
- Strengthen our infrastructure—our finances, our people, and our facilities—to support the learning environment at North Park.

I believed then, and I continue to believe now, that these four objectives point the way to a vibrant and strong future for North Park. And I believe that our present and rather challenging environment is exactly the right environment to successfully attain these objectives. This is a North Park we can build, provided we choose to build it together.

We don't have sufficient time this morning to discuss each of these four objectives, so I've chosen to comment only on one of them – our objective to embrace Chicago. Part of my reason for selecting this objective is because it holds the secret to accomplishing the other three. That is, through achieving our objective to embrace Chicago as a resource for learning North Park also will be able to affirm a distinctive, ownable, and sustainable “space” in higher education, offer a transformational education of measurably improved quality, and strengthen our infrastructure. So in the next few minutes I want you to dream with me of what it might mean for North Park to more fully embrace Chicago as a resource for learning.

Embracing Chicago

Let's consider a small number of illustrations of what we're already doing successfully and ask how we might build on this success even further.

Faculty Scholarship. Some faculty members have discovered Chicago to be a wonderful resource for their research and writing. I'll name just three examples from this past year: (a) Al Kamienski completed his doctoral program at Loyola University by writing a dissertation based on research linked to the place, role, and success of charter schools in Chicago; (b) Chad Eric Bergman presented a conference paper on the topic, “Big Ideas through Bantam Stages: Using Chicago's Storefront Theatre Model as the Foundation for a Theatre Curriculum;” and (c) Rupe Sims presented a conference paper titled “Thomas Dorsey, [Chicago's] ‘Father of Gospel Music’: A Case for Christian Rap.” Each of these three is a good example of faculty members successfully embracing Chicago as a place for professional scholarship.

How might we expand this practice? One option could be for the faculty to agree to dedicate a portion of University-provided professional development funds for faculty proposals which link their scholarly interests to our Chicago context. Based on the success of these funded projects we could annually host a mini-conference in which faculty would present their research to our students and to invited guests from the various places of research. We can do this, because our home is in Chicago.

School of Nonprofit Business and Management. Ten years ago this school launched the Axelson Center which has since become one of our most successful links to Chicago. This past May the Axelson Center's annual spring symposium brought over 500 guests to our campus from nonprofit organizations across the city and beyond. The center also sponsored workshops throughout the year, and a week-long “bootcamp” for new directors of nonprofit organizations. And, there is a full curricular component to the Center's program as well, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

What might be the next step for increasing the imprint of the SBNM? Given our location and mission perhaps this school should develop an expertise, and an emphasis to be integrated in all its curricular programs, in managing across cultures. Students would receive the traditional content at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, but in addition, students would develop an expertise in marketing across cultures, leadership

formation across cultures, management practices across cultures, and organizational development across cultures. The city of Chicago would be the laboratory in which this curriculum is taught, and expertise could be drawn from our own faculty and from professionals working in a host of businesses in the city. Managing across cultures could become a signature element in the SBNM. We can do this, because our home is in Chicago.

Study and Travel Abroad. As I mentioned earlier, Jen Pope reports that 23% of the undergraduates who marched in the commencement ceremony this past year had studied and traveled abroad, in university-sponsored programs, during their years at North Park. This is a great achievement, and certainly one in which we should encourage further growth.

How might we enhance the effectiveness of this growing tradition among our students? When I taught in study abroad programs I discovered that some students learn more effectively than others in an intercultural context. Here's the key: the more you know of the host culture before you visit the more you'll learn during the visit. If this is true, wouldn't it make sense to expect students who plan to travel and study abroad to first spend time getting to know people in America who are from the host culture? So before traveling to Thailand, India, Mexico, and Croatia students would come to know a small number of Thais, Indians, Mexicans, and Croats living nearby. Then on return from their travels, our students could deepen even further their relationships with these recent immigrants as they tell of their journey abroad. We can do this, because our home is in Chicago.

School of Music. During this past academic year this school reached out on several occasions into our Chicago neighborhood. We became a host site for the Chicago Children's Choir. We were a supporting institution for the spring Music for Peace Festival organized by several of our students. We held the annual Christmas Concert at Our Lady of Mercy Church. Our musicians joined with musicians from Northeastern Illinois University to perform Brahms' Requiem.

Could there be more, however, to the School of Music's embrace of Chicago? Earlier I suggested that the SBNM might develop a curricular expertise in management across cultures. In a similar way, could the School of Music develop a cross-curricular emphasis on ethnomusicology—music from around the world? A few existing courses could be adjusted as necessary to ensure the students' contact with various music traditions, each concert and recital, both vocal and instrumental, could include an international repertoire, and musicians from around the world (or should I say, from our neighborhood?) could be invited to perform with our students. A program-wide emphasis on music across cultures could become a signature element in the School of Music. We can do this, because our home is in Chicago.

Field Experience. Students in nursing, education, and business all draw on the rich tradition of the city to enhance the applied side of their education. Clinical experiences, classroom visits, and business internships are all enhanced by our place in Chicago.

How could this reach beyond these professional schools? The arts and sciences draw students with a deep interest in some of the classical academic disciplines. Students who major in these areas develop not only expertise in the respective disciplinary field, they also enhance their abilities in writing, speaking, critical thinking, and persuasion. But in today's environment these same students want to know how their classroom studies link to the world of work. Some of our programs open these doors for students – for example, Jeff Nelson takes biology students to the cadaver lab at Rush Medical Center, and Lida Nedilsky helps senior students in sociology explore intercultural identity with a practicum experience at the Hibbard School. Could we build on this, I wonder? Might we set in motion the expectation that students from every discipline in the humanities, social sciences, arts, and natural sciences will complete an internship in an appropriate workplace in the city? We can do this, because our home is in Chicago.

Dialogue. I'm a champion of programs like this which introduce students to the life of the mind by selecting an interdisciplinary topic and in seminar fashion sharpening the students' abilities in areas critical to academic study.

How might we enhance our present practice in the Dialogue program? Here's an idea: In Dialogue I we could establish an agreed upon on a set of common learning objectives, select a theme or topic for study in each section based on the respective faculty member's interest, and also agree to use the city of Chicago as a common "text" for each course section. How this common text is incorporated into the course will vary from one section to the next, but through a semester students would be introduced to some of the rich opportunities for learning available in Chicago. We could get even more adventurous, and introduce all first-year students to this idea of Chicago as "text" with a guided walk through the streets of Albany Park. Who might lead such a walk? Perhaps it would be Tony Zamble and Julia Styliēs Hastie who would make it a tour of social service agencies. Perhaps it would be Ida Maduram and Wanda Ward who would make it a tour of neighborhood schools. Perhaps it would be Catherine Marsh and Lee Sundholm who would introduce students to the family business tradition which undergirds the neighborhood economy. Perhaps it would be faculty fellows in the Collaboratory for Urban and Intercultural Learning who would introduce students to their neighbors from around the world. We can do this, because our home is in Chicago.

Seminary. A few months ago Soong-Chan Rah wrote a book called *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity*. This summer I read a review of this book which had this sentence in the second paragraph: "Unfortunately, few western Christians have the opportunity to learn from believers in other cultures." How true, and how mistaken. True for most people, but mistaken for students at North Park. Here students have opportunity to learn from people from other cultures.

How might we take advantage of this? Might the school year begin with a three-day Journey to Mosaic here in the city of Chicago through which our new seminary students would, as the very first part of their studies in ministry, be introduced first-hand to

Christian perspectives from around the world? Or a second idea: could it be the one of the required “texts” for the students’ first course in Bible or theology include the expectation that students visit a variety of local churches – the Assyrian Christian Church on Bryn Mawr Avenue, Congregation Shaare Tikva north on Kimbal Avenue, the Korean Presbyterian Church around the corner from Starbucks, At-Takaful Islamic Center on Lincoln Avenue, Emanuel Covenant Church a few steps east along Foster Avenue, St. Demetrios Orthodox Church next to Swedish Covenant Hospital, Spanish mass at Nuestra Señora de la Merced on Kedzie Avenue, and afternoon services at Iglesia del Pacto Evangélico just across the street? We can do this, because our home is in Chicago.

I haven’t tried to be comprehensive in my suggestions, nor do I think my ideas are the best. These are merely some possibilities which I hope will whet your own imaginations and uncover means far beyond my suggestions for connecting the student learning experience at North Park with the city of Chicago.

Why Should We Do This?

2008 was a watershed moment in the development of human society worldwide. For the first time in history, more than half of the world’s 6.6 billion inhabitants lived in cities rather than rural areas. And each week the cities of the world grow by a net of one million people.

North Park now stands with the global majority, and most faith-affirming colleges and universities because they were established in small towns and distant suburbs across America are today located within the shrinking minority. North Park must now assume an enormous responsibility: to prepare students for lives of significance and service in tomorrow’s cities. Very little happens around the globe which is not shaped, most significantly, by urban systems—whether economic, political, cultural, financial, social, educational, medical, or religious. Today, more than ever, cities shape the world. What is demanded of us, of North Park University, is to dedicate our all-out effort to shape a generation of young leaders who will link their skills, their privileges, their dedication to justice, their commitment to loving kindness, and their passion for walking with God, to the well-being of the city.

We must embrace Chicago,

. . . because doing so is consistent with our mission and identity;

. . . because doing so expands our resources for learning, at little expense, far beyond what North Park could otherwise provide;

. . . because doing so demonstrates that all of God’s people have something to teach us – rich and poor, business person and pastor, immigrant and long-time resident; and

. . . because doing so sets us apart from other colleges and universities, it differentiates us in the marketplace, by showing that learning at North Park is especially deep, rich, and engaging because our home is in Chicago.

Last year *Foreign Policy Magazine* rated Chicago as the second best global city for getting an education . . . the second best place in the world to attend school. In this ranking, Chicago is second only to London. And this is why at North Park we claim that Chicago is our classroom, and all Chicagoans are our teachers.

This Is Now Our Responsibility

Centuries ago God's people were taken into exile, seemingly abandoned by God and left to fend for themselves. The prophet Jeremiah came their way and encouraged them, even in this time of distress, to seek the peace and prosperity of the foreign city into which they had been exiled. Now I ask you, if refugees in Babylon could settle into life in a foreign city, raise and educate their children, and seek the well-being of Babylon, how much more might we be expected to do this in Chicago, and be blessed by God?

I deeply believe that we are perfectly positioned to offer an excellent and profoundly transformative urban-infused education. In 1979 North Park University had the opportunity to move out of the city. But on that occasion this community said, "No, we will stay in the city." The responsibility for living faithfully within this mandate now rests on our shoulders. We stand at the intersection of what our University is and what we hope it will be. Tomorrow can be North Park's finest hour.

In the city of big shoulders we carry on. Will you join me this year to envision how we can best move forward with this part of the strategic plan? Throughout this fall semester, let's invite each other to coffee and conversation to explore how the University's curriculum and co-curriculum can be best connected to our city. Within your respective department, might you choose to spend a portion of each regular team meeting this year to consider how to improve your effectiveness by further integrating Chicago into the learning environment you're responsible for?

This city is numbered among the greatest resources North Park possesses for shaping the education of our students; Chicago is our gift from God. So let's embrace Chicago, and in doing so learn how to ever-more fully prepare students for lives of significance and service in the city.

The road is long; yet I rejoice that we travel it together.