

IMPLEMENTING THE VISION

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Updating the Vision

I am grateful to my colleagues for the eloquent manner in which they have reflected upon the progress of the college in implementing and expanding the vision contained in the Augsburg 2004 documents. It is with appreciation that I note that this document has remained alive and has not retreated to the archives like so many planning documents before it. This suggests that we have either discovered a new "planning perseverance" or that we are on to something that is at the core of the goals and purposes of the college. I believe the evidence suggests the latter interpretation.

The new leavening that has been added to the planning process is the increased emphasis that the college has placed on "vocation" as guiding principle in conducting our work with students. I welcome this addition, because it provides us with a lens through which to view the broader impact - both cognitive and affective - that the college has on the growth and development of the student.

B. F. Skinner once wrote that "Education is what survives when everything you have learned has been forgotten". For decades educators have been interested in describing and measuring the human growth and character building dimensions of a college education. William Perry (1970) described the intellectual and ethical development of college students. Sharon Parks (1986) outlined faith development in the college years. Arthur Chickering (1993) asserted that there are seven critical development tasks for college students, including the formation of a realistic self identity and the development of a clear sense of purpose.

Vocation is an attractive concept in that it encompasses components of all of the theories described above. It assumes an accurate assessment on ones own gifts (identity), the formation of an ethical basis for our actions (service to neighbor) and the rooting of our purpose in life within the values and beliefs of the Christian Faith. Certainly, becoming what Luther describes as a "mask of God" in service to neighbor (Veith,) is a powerful image for all Christians who reflect on the meaning and purpose of their actions in the world. Vocation is a helpful way of extending and interpreting Augsburg's long-held motto of "Education for Service".

Implementing the Vision

How does one assess the progress of the college in implementing the 2004 vision five years after it was written? It makes sense to make this examination within the guiding principles that were set down within the 2004 planning document. Briefly stated they are:

- 1) Affirm Augsburg's identity as a college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

- 2) Provide a "transforming" education that unites the liberal and the practical
- 3) Help students with a wide range of academic experience achieve excellence
- 4) Maintain a work community that reflects the mission of the college

A College of the ELCA

A key factor in the health and viability of any college is its public perception. Augsburg 2004 asserts a reaffirmation of the Lutheran roots of the college. The case can be made, however, that Augsburg has come to be seen as somewhat of an "outlier" among the colleges of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America . As the most truly urban college of the our denomination, Augsburg has been viewed by some as the most liberal of the group. The emphasis of the college in seeking and providing access to a diverse population of students - along with building a diverse work community of faculty and staff - has contributed to the notion that Augsburg is guided by a liberal intellectual humanism rather than its Lutheran heritage and belief system.

Work needs to be done here. Mark Engebretson points out in his paper that the balance of public perception with regard to Augsburg has tilted toward access, openness and engagement rather than toward its Lutheran character. I believe this is the case. Both for reasons of mission and survival, the college has emphasized openness. The problem perhaps has been that we have not adequately rooted this openness within our public character as a Lutheran college.

A helpful insight regarding the tension between openness and Lutheran tradition has been offered by Dr. Darrell Jodock, who holds the Bernhardson Chair in Lutheran Studies at Gustavus College. In an article titled "The Third Path", Jordock contrasts the "sectarian" college, an institution that prizes religious uniformity and seeks to serve those of the same religious identity, with the "non-sectarian" college, with prizes inclusiveness and seeks to serve all segments of society. The dialectic here (tension between apparent opposites) is openness versus commitment. Jordock proposes a "third path" for Lutheran institutions, where colleges choose to be open ***and*** committed.

It is my opinion that there is no college of the ELCA that is more appropriately a model of a Lutheran institution that is on the third path. Augsburg's presence in the city, the vanguard of society, along with its history of social engagement and education of a diverse student population, make it the most appropriate college of the ELCA to test the idea that a college can take its religious tradition seriously while it ***also*** seeks to serve the whole community. Maynard Nelson, ELCA pastor and former Augsburg regent, once said that if Augsburg didn't exist, the ELCA would have to create it. Our denomination needs a college that is out there on the front lines actively struggling with the dialectic of openness and commitment.

It strikes me that Augsburg's new focus on vocation provides us with an opportunity for redefinition in public perception. We are asking students to reflect upon what it means to be a person of faith and commitment who is in service to the world both in career and

way of life. I suggest that the Marketing Committee of the Board convene a taskforce that includes key faculty and staff along with the pastors who serve on the Board to formulate a plan that helps Augsburg claim its leading role as a college on the "third path".

Transforming Education

I have long held the belief that Augsburg can deliver an education that is more powerful than a majority of colleges in the nation. All the necessary components are present: strong faculty, committed staff, multicultural community, immediate access to urban resources, residential campus community, a daily call to spiritual reflection, opportunities for experiential learning and international study, and a full range of extra-curricular activities.

Unfortunately, it is also quite possible to get an education at Augsburg that is commonplace and undistinguished. If a student commutes to campus, forms no close relationships with faculty and staff, does no experiential learning, participates in no campus activities and takes classes that fill requirements and don't present a personal challenge, then the outcome of an Augsburg education can be quite pedestrian indeed. The essential point here is that if we claim to provide a "transforming education", then I believe it behooves us to make certain that the more powerful educational impact is likely to occur.

How does a college make certain that it has a "transformational" impact on students? I believe that over 30 years ago Nevitt Sanford (1967) outlined a pivotal educational strategy for colleges that seek to have a human growth impact on students. This strategy can perhaps best be described as "challenge and support". In this view, a college must create some "disequilibrium" in students. It does so by presenting students with ideas and experiences that require new responses and more complex thinking. Sanford asserts that students must be helped to take risks and then be supported when they face these challenges.

Given the complexity of the Augsburg student community (i.e. residential and commuter, traditional and non-traditional age, undergraduate and graduate), the one place that we can challenge and support all students is through the curriculum. Mark Engebretson in his paper points out the proven value of experiential learning in both academic and professional contexts (p. 9). I applaud this recognition and confirm that in my work with students over the years it has been experiential learning pedagogies that have had the most transformational impact on students. This includes embedded experiences within a given class, international study, service learning and internships. I am pleased that the "Augsburg Experience" requirement in the new general education program requires this kind of learning experience. I do have a concern, however, that we need to mentor students to select experiences that are "challenging" and not simple extensions of what that commonly do. I will say more about this issue in the section on work community.

A second concern I have about the impact of the curriculum on students is reflected in Joan Griffin's paper. She reports that the Intercultural Awareness requirement has been dropped in favor of "infusion" (p. 5). Joan indicates that there are some risks with this approach, and I agree. I believe that the infusion of intercultural components across the curriculum rather than specified as present within selected courses is good in theory. I am concerned about how this works out in practice. Again, I have noted that Intercultural Awareness courses, along with courses that have met the "City" perspective, have been courses that have had a transforming influence on students. Over the years as an administrator, I have noted these courses within our curriculum and have tried to make them frequently available to students. With the "infusion" approach, I am concerned that responsibility and practice related to intercultural awareness will become diffused and unaccountable. Also, with our significant use of adjunct professors, the responsibility can become further diffused, especially in our adult programs where the use of adjuncts is most pronounced. It is my hope that the Academic Affairs Committee and the Dean's Office will take on the role of actively monitoring this "infusion" so that a potentially powerful learning influence on students is not diminished.

Excellence and Access

The 2004 document asserts that Augsburg will remain committed to serving students with a wide range of academic experience. Over the years we have continually struggled with this dialectic of access versus excellence. We seem to maintain some sort of split personality on the matter, uncertain of how to represent ourselves to the outside world. Expressions of mission in this regard have been somewhat apologetic. We have created several "developmental" courses and the Academic Skills Center and C.L.A.S.S. office have developed some excellent support programs. Some have complained that the college is better known for its access than its excellence. On occasion, faculty have expressed concern that they are being asked to deal with a debilitating range of ability and academic preparation within a given class.

To fulfill the spirit of the Vision Document with regard to this access issue, it is my belief that we must get past our split personality and move to a more positive and affirming position. Some of us have expressed the idea that it is time to revive the "Augsburg Academy". As we will remember from Carl Chrislock's book (19), the Augsburg Academy was created initially to help pre-college students prepare for the demands of college work. It has been proposed that the Augsburg Academy be reinvented within the Augsburg academic program. In this view, students with a marginal academic preparation would be admitted to an academy program that would contain a limited set of introductory courses (10 - 20). The faculty who taught in the Academy would do so out of choice and would perhaps receive an added stipend for doing so. The faculty would work together as a team with Academic Skills staff to prepare an integrated approach to the learning and development of each student. At the end of the first term (or first year) the successful student would be articulated into the broader college program. Students who were assessed as not able to do the full Augsburg baccalaureate program would be counseled into associate degree programs or other appropriate career pursuits. This idea

has some risks, but it might indeed be a more direct and honest approach to the access versus excellence issue and would allow assert that we are intentionally serving both aspects of our mission.

Work Community

In Augsburg 2004, we state that the college will maintain a work community that exemplifies the mission of the institution. I am highly supportive of this goal, because I believe that "it takes a village" (to coin a phrase) to have the most powerful impact on students. Our task as a college is to make certain that students are challenged and supported as they progress toward a more complex understanding of themselves and the world, discovering a fit between those two realities - a sense of vocation.

When I first came to Augsburg in the 70's, fresh from graduate study, I set for myself the task of trying to "map" the Augsburg College experience in such a manner that it would allow students to select the experiences that would challenge them to grow. This idea was based on what I came to understand was a mistaken assumption. I first believed that if we showed students the experiences and programs that were "good for them" that they would intentionally choose these challenging experiences for their own growth and development. I was wrong. Unless they were required by the college to do so, students tended to not select courses and experiences that involved risk or discomfort. There was, however, a positive side to this discovery. When the mapping of the college experience was paired with a mentor who encouraged and supported students in taking risks, then positive development started to occur (Thoni, 1977).

I believe the challenge to the college is clear. If Augsburg wants to claim that it "transforms" and develops a sense of vocation in students, then it must commit itself to requiring experiences that are likely to produce such growth or to mentoring students in such a manner that they will select these experiences on their own. With regard to requirements, the "signature elements" in the new general education program are a good beginning. However, these are limited and somewhat general (e.g. there is a broad range of activities that can meet the "Augsburg Experience" requirement, with no certainty that the experience selected will challenge or stretch the student). It also would be a mistake to offload too much of the responsibility on the two required "Search for Meaning" courses taught by the Religion Department.

I believe the success that we have in helping students have a "transforming" academic experience relates to our willingness to mentor students. This is a demanding responsibility. Asking ourselves to be regularly available and present in the lives of students can be emotionally taxing. However, I am suggesting that for students to discover passionate interest and commitment in their own lives that they need to see it present in the lives of the people who teach and serve them.

There are at least two problems with expecting active mentoring to occur in the lives of our students: (1) To make mentoring a reality for most of our students, we will need a

broad commitment from the entire campus community - faculty and staff. (2) It is difficult to maintain the passion for learning, growth and commitment to vocation in the midst of the continuous and inexorable "cycling" of the educational process. Each of these concerns deserves some comment.

It has been my experience over the years that one cannot expect a majority of faculty and staff to be regularly willing to take on a mentoring role with students. Appeals for additional commitments for activities related to mentoring often do not get huge responses. Frequently, it is the same group of people who respond to requests for a presence at admissions events, orientation, advising sessions, "Major Mania", etc. Part of the problem is that a number of the academic departments are overloaded with majors, thereby limiting the time available for mentoring. There is a heavy dependence on adjunct faculty in a number of academic areas, making a consistent approach to fostering vocation more difficult. We have shifted the responsibility for general advising to the Advising Center, whose limited staff cannot take on a mentoring role with students. Also, it has been my experience that a majority of the staff do not see themselves in a mentoring role with students, even though they might physically see a student more hours in a week than faculty.

This issue of having a sufficient number of willing mentors might indeed have something to do with continuing to feel the passion for learning and growth. Carl Glickman (1985) has studied the adult development of teachers and has concluded that the profession of teaching can mediate against healthy adult development. The problem appears to be that the cyclical and repetitive nature of education can lead to boredom and passivity in teachers. Teaching a course, doing an experiential learning component, and sitting down for lunch or coffee with a student can be exciting and meaningful for the first few times, but is hard to maintain the passion and interest when it is the 20th time it is done - or the 100th. Faculty and staff are engaged in a cyclical and repetitive process while the student's life is more linear. Students do not repeat the same course (usually!); they progress from entry status to senior status and graduate; faculty and staff remain to repeat the process with a new group of students.

What can be done? To commit ourselves to mentoring students with regard to their search for meaning and vocation would mean that we need to focus some active attention on our own growth and development. The activities of the Center for Professional Development are good, but again seem to be attended by the same core of people. The sabbatical program is good, but it can be used by only a few and the intervals between opportunities can stretch to great length. The move to the short semester might help, giving people more time between terms, but many faculty teach Weekend College and Summer School while the workload for staff is quite constant over the year.

We need to do some creative thinking here. Some actions that might be considered are:

- 1) Develop mini-sabbaticals of limited time but more frequent opportunity
- 2) Extend the mini-sabbatical program to staff

- 3) Utilize more all-college "holidays" to focus on mentoring and vocation
- 4) More actively expect and reward professional development activities (related to mentoring, experiential pedagogies and vocation) as supervisors do work reviews with staff and faculty.
- 5) Continue to move the workforce in the direction of where there is student demand. (Note: Due to workload, faculty in departments with the highest number of majors and staff in the areas of most frequent contact with students are often those who have the least time to give attention to the growth needs of students)
- 6) Remunerate long-term adjunct faculty who participate in professional development related to using experiential pedagogies and developing vocation in students.

In sum, I believe we will be successful in providing a "transforming education" and fostering a sense of vocation in students in direct proportion to the extent to which we get students to participate in activities that "challenge" this development and to the extent to which we have the time to mentor students in their search for meaning and vocation.

Marketing to Prospective Students

A few words must be said about the issue of using "transforming education" and "vocation" in marketing to attract potential students to the college. This is a difficult issue. It is important here to draw a distinction between what people *feel* is important and what we would *like* them to feel is important.

Let us consider for a moment this recruitment issue in light of what current students report as the reasons they attend Augsburg and what new college students in general report they are looking for in a college program. For many years Augsburg has participated in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), more commonly known as the Astin Study (CIRP Report, 2002). This program involves collecting information from nearly 300,000 college freshmen at 437 of the colleges and universities in the country. Listed below are the top five reasons that 2002 Augsburg freshmen reported as "very important" in deciding to attend college. At the right are the responses of students at other "Religious Four-Year Colleges"

REASONS NOTED AS VERY IMPORTANT IN DECIDING TO GO TO COLLEGE	<u>Augsburg</u>	<u>Other Colleges</u>
To learn more about things that interest me	69.3%	75.2%
To be able to get a better job	68.3	66.1
To be able to make more money	67.5	61.0

To gain a general education and appreciation of ideas	60.5	64.4
To get training for a specific career	59.9	71.4

Happily, reasons one and four match very well the goals and purposes of a liberal arts education. The other reasons, however, reflect the very pragmatic career-related goals that students have for investing in a college education.

While we do not have as concrete and objective information about our non-traditional age adult students, my experience over the last 20 years of working with these older undergraduate students indicates that non-traditional age adults have educational goals that match very well with the practical goals of traditional college freshmen. It has been my experience that the most frequently mentioned reasons for attending college within this adult population are to either gain a degree to qualify them for a higher level job in their current field or to gain the credentials needed to change careers. Evidence in this regard can be found by the majors selected by non-traditional age students. Business, teaching licensure, and computer-related majors consistently have been the top choices for older adult students.

What can this information tell us about the use of Augsburg 2004 and vocation in marketing an Augsburg College degree to undergraduate students? I believe we must start with an active recognition of their current points of motivation. The dominant motivation for our undergraduate students appears to focus on career enhancement, job ascendancy, and earning power. It might not be wise to try to "sell" transforming education and vocation as the first point of engagement with potential students.

Perhaps I can use an anecdote to illustrate this point. A mother of an Augsburg student recounted a recent experience with her son, a bright, pre-professional student with a very high cumulative GPA. The son was recently engaged in a Religion class that addressed as one element the issue of personal choices in Christian living. The son reported the following response to his mother: "This class wants me to think deeply – I'm only 20 years old!"

Recognizing the pragmatic motivation of potential students, we need to find "bridge words" that link our understanding of transforming education and vocation to these points of motivation. I know that we are currently using outside consultants to help us translate the educational mission of the college into words and images that touch potential students where they live and think. I have great hope for this project.

Finally, we must accept the reality that there is a "subversive" element within our educational program. The goals and expectations that students have when they leave the college are appropriately quite different than when they entered. This is perhaps one of the measures of the "transforming" power of an Augsburg education. It is our task as a

college to meet students where they are and walk with them to new and more complex understandings of themselves, the world and their place in it.

Conclusion

What can we say then about our progress five years after the writing of the Augsburg 2004 planning documents? I agree with the other writers that we have come a long way in the planning process but that there is still work to do. We should celebrate our progress at the same time we commit ourselves to continuing the task. The comforting thought is that we have a document that has proven itself to be helpful in guiding our work and in evaluating the outcomes of our efforts.