

NOTES FOR THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

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"What we have loved, others will love, and we will teach them how."
(W. Wordsworth, from "The Prelude")

NOTES FROM READERS

The new academic year dawned at Augsburg with record enrollments and a spirited launch to our 154th academic year. As I commence my 18th year as Augsburg's president, I am so grateful for our teaching and learning community that leans into the challenges and opportunities we face in the world. Cheers to each of you, who in your own contexts, are pursuing your reflective practice for the good of the world.

Occasionally, I (or my colleagues) refer to items from previous issues of Notes. If you have not been a subscriber previously, and wish to review our conversations, past issues of Notes are available on-line at www.jgacounsel.com. I thank my friends at Johnson, Grossnickle & Associates for their many years of abiding support for our reflective practice.

REFLECT ON THIS

>>Mission and place, vocation and location<<

For the past two years, I have worked with three of my Augsburg colleagues (Sociology Professor Tim Pippert, Nursing Professor Katie Clark, and former Sabo Center staff member Green Bouzard) on a volume that tells the story of Professor Joel Torstenson and his legacy at Augsburg in our curriculum, co-curriculum, and community engagement programs. Professor Torstenson, himself an Augsburg graduate, returned to his *alma mater* to spend his career as a professor of sociology. Along the way, he was instrumental as Augsburg embraced its urban setting and transformed the university's commitment to teaching its students at the intersections of mission and place, vocation and location.

The book is entitled *Radical Roots: How One Professor Transformed a University* and it will be published later this fall (more to come on how you can order a copy!). As we have shared the manuscript with interested readers outside the Augsburg community, the response has been gratifying because it confirms Augsburg's national reputation as a university that believes in the public purposes of higher education – a reputation that has been shaped by sixty years of innovation and genuine commitment to education for service.

As a teaser for the upcoming volume, here is an excerpt from the front material and the Introduction.

“Acknowledgements

This manuscript is a testimony of those who laid the foundation for Augsburg University to be the place and the community that it is today. As we engage in sharing the stories of our past, we want to acknowledge the intersections of our embodied identities and our positionalities as authors that reflect that of mostly white, cisgender persons. We feel this is important to name and recognize as it has shaped our worldview. During this writing process, we have stayed committed to reading and reflecting in a critical way in hopes to avoid causing harm in the stories that we tell. And, given the historical context of this written effort, we recognize that there are stories of individuals in this shared community at Augsburg that weren't equally recorded or shared. In addition, we realize that some of the language of the past may not be consistent with the inclusive language of the present. We also acknowledge that many of the key characters in this narrative are themselves white - and primarily male. This does not diminish the impact they had on their students, the university, and the wider community, but it does limit their understanding of the lived experiences of those they engaged. We must do better to document our stories of the past and present to shape the vision of our future. And we know that many of you share this passion. Thus, please join us in making a commitment to share the whole story of our universities as our sagas continue.

This book includes contributions from the following current and former faculty, staff, and students at Augsburg University: Rachel Svanoe Moynihan, Matt Maruggi, Dan Ibarra, Christopher Houltberg, Ben Stottrup, Joe Underhill, Natalie Jacobson, Isaac Tadó, Steven Diehl, Emily Knudson, Ariel Gutierrez, and Kane Balance.

The authors are grateful for financial support for this project from generous donors, including Margie and Mark Eustis (through the President's Strategic Fund) and Mark Johnson (through the Torstenson Endowment). Peer reviewers Bobbie Laur, Rita Hodges, and Michael Lansing made helpful suggestions that strengthened our

narrative. Stewart Van Cleave, the Augsburg University Archivist, was invaluable in our research. And we were most fortunate to work with Design & Agency, the undergraduate graphic design studio, staffed by Augsburg students and led by professors Christopher Houltberg and Dan Ibarra, who designed the book's cover and page design.

This book is dedicated to the generations of Augsburg students who have been shaped by the radical roots of Joel Torstenson and those who followed in his footsteps.

Introduction

"I use the term radical in its original meaning—getting down to and understanding the root cause. It means facing a system that does not lend itself to your needs and devising means by which you change the system"

Ella Baker, Civil Rights advocate and founder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)

This is the story of Joel Torstenson, born and raised on a farm in western Minnesota, who became a professor of sociology at his *alma mater*, Augsburg College (now Augsburg University). Torstenson embraced a radical vision of education that emphasized democratic engagement for his students and the society into which they graduated. Torstenson was radical in the footsteps of Ella Baker, the renowned civil rights advocate and founder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), who believed deeply in the power of returning to the roots of systems in order to equip individuals to shape their own destinies and the communities in which they lived. Torstenson's vision of education was about expanding the horizons of learning and scholarship by focusing on shaping the agency of his students so that they were equipped to engage their fellow citizens in the work of democracy. It was a place-based education, deeply experiential in its pedagogy, and it transformed the curriculum and community engagement of the university. It took practical form in new academic programs such as social work, sociology, and urban studies, as well as in innovative experiential learning opportunities such as internships, service learning, and cooperative learning. It is a legacy that has transformed Augsburg over the past sixty years, and it offers lessons for the work of universities across the country who aspire to educate students for democratic engagement at the intersections of place and mission, location and vocation. These are the radical roots that Joel Torstenson tended at Augsburg University.

These roots have their own history. In 1871, a small band of Norwegian settlers from Trinity Lutheran Congregation in the still tiny village of Minneapolis invited the fledgling remnant of a theological seminary in Marshall, Wisconsin, to come north to be an outpost for preparing preachers and teachers for the Lutheran immigrants of Minnesota. It was a humble beginning that has unfolded as an institutional saga with significant implications. Little did they dream, those intrepid pioneers, that more than 150 years later, Augsburg University would be a thriving small university, educating students of diverse backgrounds and equipping them to live out their vocations around the world. Little did they dream, those faithful few, that this institution they helped survive its early years, against all odds, would be an anchor in its urban neighborhood and an international model for linking education, community-building, and service to neighbors.

Our thesis is that Augsburg University's evolution as a community of learning suggests that all higher education institutions might find important resources for their lives by paying attention to the intersections of vocation and location, mission and place. Indeed, through these intersections, these institutions can discern best how to pursue their academic missions in the midst of a diverse and often turbulent world.

After more than 150 years, Augsburg is a university dedicated to the liberal arts, grounded in its Lutheran faith, and shaped by its distinctive location in the midst of an immigrant urban neighborhood. It is a saga that has been tested repeatedly throughout the college's history, but as detailed below, it is a saga that abides because it is infused into the identity and character of the institution. It is the saga of an urban settlement, exemplifying the inextricable links between education, faith, place, and service to and with the neighbor.

Augsburg's saga as an urban settlement has not always been embraced by the university. Though location and place are central to the university's identity, it is not sufficient to explain the integrative power of the university's character. For that purpose, it is critical that place (understood not simply as geography, but also as a network of people, cultures, traditions, and environments) be seen through the lens of Augsburg's academic mission and work. This integrated view of place and mission required a new way of imagining the university's core work of educating students.

As Augsburg expanded its academic programs in the mid-twentieth century and more students enrolled, the institution touted the benefits of life in the city, including cultural resources, opportunities for work experiences, and so forth. But clear links between urban life and curriculum, for example, were not apparent as the college entered the 1960s.

Then entered an unlikely champion for a different vision of Augsburg's mission and identity. Dr. Joel Torstenson, a 1938 graduate of Augsburg, originally came to the college from his hometown in rural Minnesota. Joining the Augsburg faculty in 1947, Torstenson, a social scientist, began systematically expanding the college's academic programs in the social sciences and social work. This certainly brought students and faculty into contact with urban life and realities, but that contact remained limited to particular departments until Torstenson returned from a sabbatical in 1966, transformed in his thinking about the promise of "The Liberal Arts College in the Modern Metropolis."

In an address to the Augsburg faculty in 1967, Torstenson argued that his decision to study the role of colleges in the modern metropolis was influenced by the emerging understanding that cities are a dominant community reality in society, that Augsburg was uniquely situated to develop an educational program responsive to this emerging reality about cities, and that Augsburg had much to learn from what other urban higher education institutions had done to integrate their locations into an academic program.

This momentous address included a myriad of practical recommendations for Augsburg to embrace its urban context as a "laboratory for liberal learning and research." From the most simple and pragmatic, such as hiring faculty who have a particular interest in urban issues, to curricular innovations such as a Metro-Urban Studies (now Urban Studies) program, to encouraging staff and faculty to live in the surrounding neighborhoods, to engaging with community advisors and partners, Torstenson's twenty-four-page address reads like a map to Augsburg fully embracing its location as classroom and context for a distinctive academic vision.

This, then represents the critical turning point in Augsburg's saga, as the college integrated urban location and academic mission in ways that infused the commitment to the city into everything the college said and did. Augsburg History Professor Carl Chrislock, on the occasion of the college's centennial in 1969, suggested that Augsburg's new commitment to the city was a response to an academic revolution underway in the mid-twentieth century focused on new ways of learning about humans and society. Augsburg President Oscar Anderson, writing during that centennial year, claimed that the city is an "unlimited laboratory where students and their teachers, through work-study programs, now have the opportunity to observe first-hand what textbooks have implied from afar." While some institutions, Anderson continued, might choose to retreat behind ivied walls, "Augsburg chooses to be of the city." The lessons from Augsburg's saga for other communities are grounded in the work of integrating mission and location. It's not enough to say we are in this place, we must be able to say with conviction, we are *of* this place. It is about infusing all we say and do

with this mission-based embrace of our place in the world. This connection of mission and location was undeniably catalyzed by the contributions of Joel Torstenson.

The purpose of this book is two-fold. The first is to document and celebrate the radical legacy of Professor Joel Torstenson, and to understand the impact of this legacy's inception, evolution, and current manifestations and impact at Augsburg and in the wider world. Professor Torstenson cared deeply about the public purpose of higher education, and Torstenson's model for what this public purpose might look like prompted massive transformation in Augsburg University's trajectory. The resulting experiments in education and commitment to the city flowered into a legacy that has spurred Augsburg University to create an innovative model for 21st Century education. This model has impacted everything from student learning and community life, to teaching and curricular structure, to the public mission of the institution and its presence in the city and world. Torstenson's creative—and even radical—work in the 1960s and 70s has been carried through the decades by continued innovation in teaching and learning based in experiential education, and a commitment to place and community building. This legacy has simultaneously advanced the public purpose and mission of the University.

Secondly, this book aims to share what are some of the lessons learned from more than fifty years of innovation following Torstenson's vision, with the hope that these lessons might serve the broader community of colleges, universities, faculty, staff, and students engaged in similar pursuits. Augsburg's innovative experiential education, place-based community engagement, and public and anchor institution work has been and will continue to be a model for other institutions. We believe that Torstenson's legacy, and the lessons learned through the years of its evolution, has lessons to teach and models to follow for our sibling institutions across the United States.

The story we aim to tell is one of an extraordinary man and those who carried on the vision of his work; of Augsburg's remarkable students, faculty, and staff and their commitment to experiential learning, social change, and accompaniment; and of an institution whose leadership has, over and over, committed to the public and democratic purpose of an institution in the heart of the city. The following chapters cover decades, starting with Torstenson's extraordinary life in and out of the classroom, and exploring his innovative work at Augsburg (Chapter 1). Torstenson's own writing on the purpose and possibility of a college being in and with the city can be found in Chapter 2, in his essay entitled, "The Church Related College in the City." Chapter 3 moves on to the contributions of Torstenson's successor, Garry Hesser, whose creativity, leadership, and dedication to experiential learning brought Torstenson's legacy into the 21st Century. Chapter 4 explores a wide variety of ways Augsburg's distinct mission and identity have

led to creativity in community-based learning and strong relationships in the neighborhood surrounding Augsburg, as well as three examples of innovation in experiential education across diverse disciplines. Chapter 5 turns to an outgrowth of Torstenson's legacy: the democratic purpose of higher education. How has Augsburg been a place that has cultivated civic agency amongst its students, faculty, and staff, so that their education, work, and daily living enliven the capacity to work together to act on all sorts of collective problems? Finally, in the conclusion, Augsburg's tenth President, Dr. Paul Pribbenow, reflects on the future of the democratic purpose of higher education in light of Augsburg's unique journey.

How can the lessons and legacy of the past sixty years inspire a brighter, engaged, and more vibrant future? How can we all learn from the radical vision of Joel Torstenson what it means to educate agents of equity and justice in our democracy? How can we embrace the challenge of reinventing democracy in every generation through the education we offer our students at the intersections of vocation and location, mission and place? These are the questions that we propose to address in this story of Joel Torstenson and those who bear his legacy of education for democracy.”

PRACTICE THIS

>>To forgive, divine<<

I return to this piece often (originally appeared in Notes 1-6) as I strive to learn from doing – even after 22 years as a president!

“In a recent article in “Fast Company” (June 2000), Alan M. Webber interviews Jeffrey Pfeffer, a professor of organizational behavior at Stanford on the nagging question, “Why can't we get anything done?” Pfeffer (along with Robert I. Sutton) has recently published “The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge into Action,” (Harvard Business School Press, 2000). Pfeffer offers 16 rules for explaining why, despite how much we seem to know, our organizations don't seem to get much done. Among the rules are:

- Doing something requires...doing something! All the recent literature about knowledge management tends to lead to great intellectual conversations, but what it needs to promote is actual practice, testing ideas, refining our knowledge...
- Have no fear. Learning organizations are only possible when we tolerate mistakes and inefficiencies and failure. That's the only way we will learn.

- Learning comes at a price. Pay it. There is a trade-off between proficiency and learning. You have to make those trade-offs.
- Sure, it's measurement—but is it important? The tyranny of measurement—promoted by the notion that what gets measured gets done—must be overthrown with a focus on strategic measuring. Measurement is crucial, but you must do the right measurements.
- Make knowing and doing the same thing. Build a culture of action. Here is the province of genuine reflective practice—how you think, who you are, and what you do are one in the same.

And my favorite:

- Doing means learning. Learning means mistakes. If organizations genuinely want to move from knowing to doing, they need to build a forgiveness framework—a tolerance for error and failure—into their culture. An organization that wants you to come up with a smart idea, implement that idea quickly, and learn in the process has to be willing to cut you some slack.

To err is human—it is the means by which we learn and grow. To forgive, divine—which may be an apocalyptic aspiration (!) but doesn't excuse us from trying.”

PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

A couple of new books came into my orbit these past couple of months, including:

Building: A Carpenter's Notes on Life and the Art of Good Work, by Mark Ellison (Random House, 2023), a lovely set of reflections on the lessons learned by one of the country's leading carpenters as he pursued his craft.

Knowledge Towns: Colleges and Universities as Talent Magnets, by David J. Staley and Dominic D.J. Endicott (John Hopkins University Press, 2023), which makes the case for the public value of higher education institutions beyond charity and service.

The English Experience: A Novel (The Dear Committee Trilogy), by Julie Schumacher (Doubleday, 2023), the third of Schumacher's (who teaches at the U of Minnesota) send-ups of higher education's many eccentricities – which often hit too close to home!

>>First Lesson, Best Lesson<<

A poem for the beginning of a new academic year...

Imagine your starfish hands reaching
For ocean floors, tapping attention alive
You discover and reveal yourself in sentences
That only perpetual error can provide

It's not the unknown that tugs you down
But what you don't know you don't know
That swallows your bright ocean whole
With learning lost in mad saliva tides

Swimming out in a line pulls you in deeper
Good or bad, you are twisted into it
Like a diving weight failing release
Leaving you in bubbles of a last breath

Unknown gills hide themselves in adult lungs
I knew all this when I was born;
Now, always, and never
Have I been so glad to be wrong

Will Hochman, poet

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>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

- Trusting institutions - again
- Stories we tell to ourselves and each other
- Big ideas!

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