

ADVANCING THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE



A white paper by President Thomas Kunkel

ST. NORBERT ASPIRES TO BE THE MOST HIGHLY ESTEEMED LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE IN WISCONSIN AND ONE OF THE TOP FIVE CATHOLIC LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES IN THE UNITED STATES. THIS ADVANCE WILL REFLECT THE SUCCESSFUL PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE BY EVERY MEMBER OF THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY.

— ST. NORBERT COLLEGE VISION STATEMENT

Some years ago, a Trustee emeritus and longtime supporter of St. Norbert College, Marianne van Drisse, made a gift to us of six beautiful stained-glass windows. The windows had been commissioned by her parents nearly half a century earlier when Marianne was a nun in the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, and they hung in the order's Green Bay chapel until it was razed in 2001.

There was just one problem. The windows, outstanding examples of contemporary stained-glass art, were nine feet tall, and being made of thick chunk glass and concrete-like resin they were extremely heavy. It was not immediately evident how we would put them to effective or appropriate use. Meantime, as we contemplated our dilemma, the windows sat in storage, their colorful brilliance hidden away from appreciative eyes.

Then came the recent renovation of Todd Wehr Hall, our former library. The plans called for transforming the old atrium into a reflection space. Here, surely, was a perfect opportunity for Marianne's windows. But how? As actual windows? There were no window openings. As a hanging mobile? Interesting idea, but the atrium roof couldn't support the weight.

Finally, drawing on the collective imagination of our own Art faculty and our construction partners at Performa, we arrived at a plan. We designed the six windows to stand in a gentle arc, a kind of stained-glass "screen" to define the boundary between the reflection space and the rest of Todd Wehr. The windows were incorporated into a handsome wooden cabinet that made the whole assembly a work of art unto itself.

Now when people come into Todd Wehr, they are immediately drawn to what has been christened the St. Theresa of Avila Reflection Space, one of the best new spots on a campus full of them.

Moral of the story? When resources meet creativity, the result is opportunity.



THE CHALLENGE BEFORE US

IT IS THAT SIMPLE, STRAIGHTFORWARD CHALLENGE TO OURSELVES THAT MOTIVATES US TO BE THE VERY BEST COLLEGE WE CAN BE.

In many ways, this is the best of times for St. Norbert College.

This fall we welcomed the largest freshman class, and experienced the largest overall enrollment, in our history. More to the point, the academic profile of these students is strong and growing stronger by the year. This year's incoming freshmen, for instance, had an average ACT score of 25—up almost a full point from the year before—and 171 of them earned our top Trustee scholarships, 35 more than we have ever bestowed before. And that difference is no sterile statistic; it means this cohort will likely produce an additional dozen or so professionals and scholars with Norbertine values undergirding their practices.

We opened the gates on the spectacular Donald J. Schneider Stadium, a resource that, alongside such recent enhancements as the Mulva Library

and Gries Hall, puts our facilities in the front ranks of the nation's liberal arts colleges.

And the intellectual life of the campus has never been more vibrant. Our outstanding faculty combine the college's traditionally superior teaching with creative and compelling research. In the past year, for instance, the St. Norbert faculty have published important books on topics ranging from the Incan civilization to interpersonal communications to the Norbertine intellectual tradition. Our "Sport and Society in America" conference, held last May in collaboration with the Green Bay Packers, was a first-of-its-kind national event that brought hundreds of scholars and sports experts to campus and garnered extensive media attention.



There is no question that the momentum here is palpable. Yet this is also a pivotal moment in the history of St. Norbert College—a time when the institution determines whether or not it will go on to realize its remarkable potential.

This is not a question of vanity. It's not about national rankings, such as those produced annually by U.S. News. We're already moving smartly up that list, and we will keep doing so as long as we pay close attention to business.

No, this moment is about something much deeper, about our institutional fortitude and character.

We are asking ourselves, as a college, the same question all people of faith ask themselves at some point: Are we doing literally everything we can to best use the talents God has given us?

It is that simple question, that straightforward challenge to ourselves, that motivates us to be the very best college we can be. It fuels our ongoing Pursuit of Excellence.

WHAT ARE OUR CURRENT STRENGTHS?

AS THE CHESHIRE CAT TOLD ALICE, “IF YOU DON’T KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING, ANY ROAD WILL GET YOU THERE.” BUT AT ST. NORBERT COLLEGE, WE DO KNOW WHERE WE’RE GOING.

The college’s strengths are many. First and foremost, we are proud to be the only Catholic, liberal arts and Norbertine institution of higher learning in the world. We are true to ourselves and our core mission, and at a time when many colleges have forgotten what they stand for, St. Norbert stands for precisely the things it did when the college was founded 112 years ago by Bernard Pennings: a commitment to the greater good; a call to challenge minds and souls to reach beyond the comfortable; and a passion to prepare leaders, equipped with Norbertine values, to tackle the global challenges of today and tomorrow.

We have a lovely and welcoming campus that impresses all who see it, whether prospective new students or alumni who have been away for years. Housed within the traditional brick structures are resident halls and classrooms equipped with 21st-century “smart” technology. While we have recently brought online such wonderful new facilities as the Mulva Library and Schneider Stadium, we are at the same time renovating our older buildings, like Todd Wehr and Old

St. Boniface Church, in examples of efficient and creative re-use.

Our students are smart and engaged.

Coming primarily from a part of the nation known for its work ethic, these young men and women are not at all blasé about their education—they work hard, put in the time, and take their academic commitment seriously. But they also manifest the Norbertine belief in social responsibility. In recent years our student groups have taken the initiative to generate awareness of men’s health, fight breast cancer, erect a Habitat home, raise funds to help Haiti’s homeless and travel to Zambia to help build schools. And that idea of service is spreading, not only in traditional extracurricular ways, but increasingly in partnership with their classwork.

The other signal characteristic of these students is that they graduate—and typically in four years, when their counterparts in public colleges are taking five, six or more. (In fact, last year we had nearly 12 percent of the senior class graduate in three and a half years!)

The college has a tradition of **strong and pragmatic management**, and as such it has nimbly navigated the rough waters of the economic downturn over the past two years. At a time when so many other colleges have been struggling just to stay in place, the current at St. Norbert is strong.

And that's in no small part due to the **generosity of our friends and alumni**. For the second year in a row we saw a marked increase in the number of total donors to St. Norbert, despite the tough economy, and our alumni giving percentage continues to climb. In the past year and a half we raised \$10 million to build Schneider Stadium, and nearly \$10 million more for student scholarships and other campus needs.

Finally, after a yearlong campus visioning process, we are now operating with **a new strategic plan**. As the Cheshire Cat told Alice, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." But at St. Norbert College, we *do* know where we're going.

The strategic plan details seven overarching priorities for the college—academic excellence, a renewed dedication to our unique mission and heritage, a continual refreshing of our facilities, strong financial



management, a commitment to diversity and equity, greater outreach to the wider world, and better communicating the St. Norbert story. Taken together, these priorities form a blueprint for the next five years and beyond.

WHAT DO WE YET NEED TO REALIZE OUR POTENTIAL?

WE MUST CONTINUE TO ELEVATE OUR PROFILE AND COMMUNICATE OUR VISION.

Perhaps our most pressing need as we go forward is guaranteeing access and affordability to any qualified student who wishes to come to St. Norbert College. We are nowhere near as lavishly endowed as many other private colleges, so this basically means we need more financial support for student scholarships, grants and work-study opportunities.

Similarly, we require additional support for our hard-working faculty—everything from endowed professorships to greater opportunities for undergraduate research to faculty development. As the academic accomplishment of our students soars, so do their expectations,

and we need to ensure that our faculty are equipped to meet that challenge.

As suggested earlier, our campus facilities indeed constitute a strength. But there are several glaring exceptions. The most conspicuous is the Minahan Science Building, which is nearly 50 years old and in dire need of expansion and renovation. The STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering and math) are driving the modern world, and we need to do our part to ensure they are taught well and in the appropriate environment. That includes our students who are training to be science teachers.

Additionally, our cafeteria and a number of our residence halls are showing their age. And we have long wished for an indoor sports complex as state-of-the-art and welcoming as the new Schneider Stadium. This complex—most likely an expansion of the Schuldes Sports Center—would include a student exercise center, a competition-caliber swimming pool, and refurbished track facilities up to modern standards. These are not “nice to have” amenities, but resources critical to our being truly competitive for top students.

We need to ensure that we are doing a better and more creative job of using technology in our teaching. Today’s young men and women



are products of a digital environment. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for every campus, including St. Norbert College.

We must continue to elevate our profile and communicate our vision. Make no mistake, at a time of incredible competition in higher education, the single best thing we can do to guarantee the long-term viability of St. Norbert is to make sure more college-bound men and women know what a great place this is—and that it *already* is, much less what it will be. That means embracing viral marketing via social media, better communicating our unique research and creative work, getting our talented student artists, musicians, scholars and athletes in front of wider audiences, and taking leadership positions in our respective disciplines.

Put another way, if it reaches its potential, in not too many years St. Norbert College will be:

- ✦ Widely acknowledged as the best liberal arts college in the state of Wisconsin.
- ✦ Ranked among the top five Catholic liberal arts colleges in America and known for our Norbertine distinctiveness.
- ✦ The kind of college other institutions point to when they ask, “What does excellence look like?”

- ✦ Populated by a faculty all of whom are respected nationally and internationally in their disciplines.

- ✦ A campus as diverse and collegial as it is hospitable.

- ✦ A place where every qualified student who *wants* to come to St. Norbert College *can* come to St. Norbert College, regardless of his or her station or financial circumstances.

We’re already on our way. After last year’s Homecoming festivities, we received an e-mail from an alum who hadn’t been back to campus in many years. He had been dazzled by what he encountered around every corner. He went on at length about the beauty of the campus, the new library, the excitement of the football game, the warmth of the reception he’d received everywhere he’d been. It had been a perfect day, he said, and he closed with this:

“Why on earth would a student want to go anywhere but St. Norbert College?”

Why, indeed?



THOMAS KUNKEL
PRESIDENT OF ST. NORBERT COLLEGE

Thomas Kunkel is the seventh president of St. Norbert College. Tom began his presidency in 2008 following his tenure as the Dean of the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland. He has written or edited five books and spent much of his early career in newspaper management. Tom and his wife, Deb, have four grown daughters and live in De Pere.





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