

State of Campus Address, February 23, 2010

It will surprise no one here that one of my favorite St. Norbert people is Don Salmon. That's not only because he's a true gentleman, or because he's been so unbelievably generous with his time and knowledge, or because of his constant encouragement and good cheer, or because he looks smashing in a bow tie.

It's also because he's a book person--an avid and discerning reader, yes, but also a giver of books as gifts. And not just any books, but often as not books from his own library. Not long ago Don asked me if I'd ever read a book entitled *Academic Procession*. I hadn't. Don said that it had been written a while back but there was much wisdom in it, and he thought I might enjoy it. He said he had the book in his collection and would get it to me. Well, in checking, Don realized that at some point he loaned out *Academic Procession*, and apparently it never came back. Now, this book written was 51 years ago, so it's not like you can just trot down to Barnes and Noble and pick it up. But Don being Don, he went online--which really impressed me, since I wasn't sure Don knew where "online" was--and tracked down a used copy. Sure enough, when I got back after Christmas, *Academic Procession* was waiting for me.

Academic Procession was written by Henry Wriston, one of the 20th century's most distinguished college presidents. He started his career down the road at Lawrence, in 1926, and in the Forties and Fifties he was president of Brown. And Don was right, it is a remarkable book, something of a self-help manual for college presidents. Despite the passing of half a century, it was amazing to see how many of his insights are just as valid today. Here he is, for instance, on the singularity of what we do: "Institutions of higher education occupy a unique place in the scheme of things in that they graduate individual people--no two alike. Since commercial operations cannot produce people, general comparisons with businesses which have wholly different objectives are more likely to be confusing than revealing. There is no such thing as machine-made education."

And here's how important he considers our pedagogical core mission: "A good teacher is a prize, a great teacher a jewel beyond price." Here's one I thought Anindo in particular might like. Wriston reminds us that the word curriculum, which comes from the Latin, literally means "race course." But fear not, Anindo, we're in the home stretch!

And here he is on faculty: "A president cannot 'boss' a faculty these days. It is rare indeed when he can lead it. But he can stimulate it, and he should. Such activity will not make him the benign or the well-beloved; but the object of holding office is educational progress; not popularity."

Well, it would never be my intention to "boss" anyone here, even if I could. But certainly I hope I am taking up Wriston's admonition to "stimulate" you.

It is almost two years to the day that I first met you, during the presidential search, and actually for most of us that introduction occurred right here, in this very space. I don't know how the time has gone for you, but for me those two years have been a veritable blur. In the interim, we've

seen many exciting and beneficial developments on campus, even as we've slogged together through the nation's worst recession since the Thirties. Seems to me it's as good a time as any to take stock of things at St. Norbert College.

First, let's talk about some of the tangibles. The student body that we now have on campus is the largest in our history, and also one of the strongest academically. And this fall looks even more promising. In every category--applications, admissions and deposits--we are running well ahead of where we were one year ago. In fact, as of today we're over 50 deposits ahead of this time last year! We also have seen a strong retention of our current students and are about 5 percentage points ahead of where we were last year, with nearly 94 percent of first-semester students staying for their second. All of this reflects a tremendous amount of inventive outreach and hard work many of you in the room, and most especially the division of Enrollment Management and Communications.

Now we must deliver the incoming class and retain our students, of course, and as you have heard me say repeatedly, that obligation belongs to us all. And thankfully, you are responding in meaningful ways. Many of you have been at the receptions, presentations and events for our prospective families. You are meeting with our students who might be struggling with finances or selection of majors or other issues. Your presence and helping hand make a difference, and for that, we say thanks.

Similarly, we are seeing a string of successes from College Advancement. For the second year in a row we are going to register an increase in alumni giving to St. Norbert, and for the first time in many years we think we'll finish above 20 percent. We are running far ahead of last year in total donors, thus building our base. We expect to hit our St. Norbert Fund target of \$1.5 million. In the past year and a half we have raised nearly \$10 million to build the Donald Schneider Outdoor Athletic Complex. We recently secured a \$1 million gift for our scholarship endowment, and we have received several informal commitments for gifts of comparable or greater size. I am pleased to say we're also making major headway in our alumni relations. Our overall pursuit of excellence quite literally depends on that, for all the reasons you know.

On the facilities side, you see that the transformation of Todd Wehr Hall into a beautiful student-service center is nearly finished--right on time and ahead of budget--and people will begin moving into their offices this week. This project represents not only a creative re-use of Todd Wehr but a major advance for the campus. Our students are also our customers, and this move brings together into a single-stop venue the offices that students consult most often from a consumer standpoint.

The Schneider complex should be done and ready for our football home opener against St. Thomas University on September 4. We are currently discussing the best date for a formal dedication and celebration. We'll let you know more on that front soon.

In addition, we have been fine-tuning the schematic design for a renovated and expanded science building, and now that the Trustees have given that project the green light, we will begin fund-raising in earnest. In a sense, we've already secured the first \$1 million, with a federal earmark that will go for immediate purchase of lab-related equipment and technology that we can begin

using right away, and the Wisconsin delegation has invited us to submit a proposal for a second round this year. The past year has also brought real upgrades in our technological capacity--more wireless on campus, much improved Internet capacity, the Zimbra email and calendaring system, and a new data storage and backup system.

So those are just a few markers that are readily measured or seen. But I'm just as excited about many developments that, while harder to detect, are every bit as important.

I continue to be delighted by the caliber of the faculty here--both in terms of the long-resident expertise but also the outstanding young men and women we have been recruiting to St. Norbert in the last several years. One c.v. is more remarkable than the next. Happily, more and more of these talented newcomers are women, and more and more of them are from historically underrepresented populations.

In early May, I get the opportunity to speak specifically on the subject of faculty scholarship, so I will save individual examples for that discussion. But I will say that we are entering a new and exciting era of faculty research. Look through every division and you will find copious examples of scholarship and creative work that have national, even international significance--and it's happening across the ranks and disciplines.

It's even happening with once-unlikely partners. I'm tremendously proud that the upcoming symposium on Sports and Society is the first such enterprise we know of co-hosted by a college and a professional sports franchise. We are most thankful that our friends in the Packer organization were open to this. I particularly want to thank Mike Marsden for conceiving the idea, and Kevin Quinn for expertly bringing it to fruition. If you haven't been to the website to read about the impressive academic presentations that will be a part of this conference, I encourage you to do so.

I'm equally proud of our students. They are demonstrating both academic commitment and socially responsible engagement. The Student Government Association underwent a complete reorganization this year that dramatically expands student representation. Other student groups have taken the initiative to raise awareness of men's health, fight breast cancer, build a Habitat home and raise funds to help Haiti's homeless. And that idea of service is spreading, not only in traditional extracurricular ways but increasingly in partnership with their classwork. To cite a conspicuous, but hardly isolated, example, we launched this year the Center for Community Service and Learning, a great collaboration between Mission and Heritage, Student Affairs and Academic Affairs.

We will keep challenging our students with a rigorous Honors program under the leadership of Marcie Paul, with the second-language competency requirement the faculty passed last spring, and with the new general-education curriculum that is making its way to Anindo's finish line. And on the subject of the gen-ed review, let me just say I think the discussion that has occurred since I've been here is on point and healthy, including last week's on diversity in the core. It seems to me the faculty is moving toward a consensus on what the framework of a new gen-ed program should look like, and I would urge you in the strongest terms to stay on course to decide that framework by the end of this semester.

Of course, overseeing much of the aforementioned activity will be our new academic dean. As you know, the third of our three candidates is on campus right now, so we will be bringing this search to a conclusion shortly. I hope you have been as impressed as I have with the candidates. It's comforting to know we will have an outstanding person to build on the substantial record Mike Marsden has fashioned in his seven years as dean.

And helping point the way for the new dean--and indeed for all us--is the updated strategic plan that has been taking shape throughout the academic year, and which we expect the Board of Trustees to approve in May. Your feedback is still coming in, but this will be a true blueprint for excellence, and I want to thank the strategic plan committee, under the leadership of Mike Peckham and Fr. Jay Fostner, for their great work.

As you know, the Trustees have approved a budget for 2010-11 that resumes our compensation plan. For the sixth year, we will be raising salaries in our continuing effort to get everyone to national norms for their respective job classifications. I don't have to tell you this is a complex formula, and because we had a one-year "pause" due to the recession, Eileen Jahnke will soon send out an explanatory memo reminding you how we use the CUPA national data to establish individual salary targets. Consistent with past practices, those employees farthest from their market target will receive the largest increases, but in any event, all employees' compensation is expected to be at least 91 percent of their market target. My thanks to every one of you for your hard work and continuing commitment to St. Norbert College despite the absence of raises last year.

All in all, then, I view the state of the campus as quite positive. You should all take a moment and give yourselves a pat on the back. Enjoy it...then file it away and get back to business, because we have no shortage of business still in front of us.

If I were to detail all those challenges, it would take even longer than it took to chronicle all the accomplishments. But let me raise just a few I consider especially vital to our long-term success. Later this spring, in conjunction with Faculty Chair Paul Johnson, I would like to conduct an open forum on higher education in the digital world, which as you know was the subject of an op-ed that I wrote last fall for the Chronicle of Higher Education. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for every campus, and I look forward to a dialogue about how best for St. Norbert College to respond.

We must press ahead on every front with elevating the public profile of St. Norbert College. Make no mistake, the single best thing we can do to guarantee our long-term viability 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 requires institution-wide marketing, embracing viral marketing via social media, getting our talented student artists, musicians, scholars and athletes in front of wider audiences, and taking leadership positions in our respective disciplines. And remember, we need to communicate all that wonderful faculty scholarship and creative work I referenced earlier. After all, new knowledge does no one any good if it's not transmitted. Please do not be shy about sharing your work. Let us know of your presentations, your creative works, your voluntarism and your leadership. It's only through sharing the good news that others will learn of

what is truly possible at St. Norbert College.

We talk a lot here about the importance of community and creating a sense of extended family. And as a campus, we do clearly cherish those ideals. To my dismay, however, I am not persuaded that every individual embraces those values, nor do all campus departments. Remember, the idea of *communio* extends to being responsive and courteous to all our constituencies, from students and their families to businesses to neighbors to our campus colleagues. I challenge each one of you to look within yourself and make sure you are truly living the idea of *communio*.

And while on the subject of climate and civility, let me reinforce in the strongest terms that our pursuit for a truly diverse campus remains one of my top priorities, and I expect it to be one of yours too. Again, we can rightfully point to many advances on this front in the past year, from more diverse candidate pools to the establishment of the Chuck Holton Multicultural Center to better support of our students of color. But these are merely steps on a journey we are taking together.

The final challenge I would cite is the need to raise more funds for everything from endowed professorships to financial aid to faculty and staff development. We have been doing a great deal of donor cultivation, in part because we want to launch a new comprehensive campaign in conjunction with a recovering economy. Until we can liberate St. Norbert's budget from its almost total reliance on tuition, we will never be able to make those investments that turn very good colleges into truly great ones.

Let me offer one more observation from Henry Wriston, who wrote: "The central business of a president is to do everything he can, and facilitate everything anyone else can do, to stretch individual students to their full capacity, to stimulate them to independence in thought, word and deed." I daresay if I asked anyone in the hall today, "What is your primary responsibility as an educator?" you would respond with some variation of Wriston's observation. Indeed, as this institution moves forward, we must always be posing the question of ourselves: Does this activity, this facility, this policy, this course, enhance the student experience?

St. Norbert College has kept the student foremost in its mission for 112 years. And we continue to do so today. A good example is a project I referenced earlier, the planned renovation and expansion of the Minahan Science Building. As you know, with the opening of the Mulva Library, an expanded and state-of-the-art science facility is easily our most important academic capital priority. This is a building that not only will enhance our work and pedagogy in the sciences, but it will much better accommodate our growing commitment to undergraduate research, help us train tomorrow's teachers of science, and literally bring the outside world onto campus to experience the wonders of science.

Toward that end, we have been continuing to fine-tune the schematic design of that proposed facility, and we recently shared the latest iteration with our Trustees, who blessed it and told Phil Oswald and I to start trying to raise the nearly \$40 million it will take to build and equip our 21st century science building. Our friends at Performa produced a short "fly-around" video of the design that I'd like to share with you now. [PLAY THE VIDEO AND REPEAT.]

I hope you agree with me that this would be a beautiful and exciting addition to St. Norbert College, and another symbol of a campus on the move.

Make no mistake--great things are happening all around us. Thank you--and thank you again--for helping make it so.

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Thomas Kunkel
President

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