

PRESIDENT'S NOTEBOOK NO. 15 Spring 2012

Here we are, just about to complete Lindenwood's 185th year as a pioneering higher education institution. I get excited every time I rediscover how near we are to the University's bicentennial. Planning for the colossal celebration should begin in about a decade. That's a long way off, right? Yeah. So was the end of the first decade of this century when we exhaled after the relatively untrammelled ringing in of Y2K.

Graduation Gratification Ahead

Commencement is the apex of the academic year at Lindenwood and most other colleges and universities. By all accounts, we are looking at another spectacular and decorous pair of graduation ceremonies again this year. Yes, we will set records again as well. The total number of students who will have finished their degrees in a 12-month period will very likely exceed a true (rather than just theoretical) 3,000, compared to 2,700-2800 (actual) completers in the previous two years. More than 1250 students will walk in Saturday's ceremony, and 900+ will march on Friday – both figures being the highest ever for the respective occasions.

Our ceremonies have become so large that we have, in a sense, outgrown the St. Charles Family Arena. There is not sufficient room for our faculty members to share the floor with the degree candidates. So the professors will sit in the stands behind the dais. They will look even more distinguished than usual in that deservedly elevated, symbolically exalted location.

In a theme repeated from last year, both of our commencement speakers are Lindenwood alumni. The Very Reverend DeLiza Spangler (Class of 1975), Dean and Rector of St. Paul's Episcopal Cathedral (Buffalo, NY), will address the graduate students on Friday, and Mr. Dan Korte (MBA Class of 1988), President of Rolls-Royce Defense Aerospace, will speak to the undergraduates on Saturday.

Two Lindenwood professors entering retirement will be honored with the bestowal of the rank of Professor Emeritus: Dr. Michael Castro on Friday and Dr. Raymond Scupin on Saturday.

(By the way, Dr. Scupin will be working for us even in retirement. He plans to continue directing Lindenwood's Center for International and Global Studies and will remain the managing editor of Lindenwood's *Journal of International and Global Studies*.)

As is customary, virtually all Lindenwood employees will be working at the Family Arena to make the ceremonies a success. I would like to express enormous gratitude to all of you for the extra time you will put in this weekend in behalf of our students and the University.

Non-Random Acts of Kindness

The other-centeredness ethic is a deeply ingrained tradition at this University. Our students, faculty, and staff regularly reach out to perform heartwarming community services and acts of goodwill in the nobler interests of humanity. This spring alone, for example, we received word of several examples of this characteristic of the campus:

- The Lindenwood Student Government Association organized the “Swab for Sean” bone marrow donor drive, to come to the aid of Sean Murry, a Lindenwood sophomore majoring in Acting, who has a very rare variety of anemia that might be curable through the contribution of the right match of bone marrow.
- With the help of many other Lindenwood students and staff members, Ellie Lorenzen, one of Lindenwood’s Fashion Design majors, planned and directed Missouri’s first Miss Amazing Pageant. This event offered dozens of young women with special needs the first chance in their lifetime to compete for talent recognition.

- Under the leadership of adjunct faculty member Dorothy Phillips, students and faculty members in Lindenwood's Department of Recreation Administration organized a 5-kilometer race to raise funds in support of one of our alumni, Chris Lister, who had been seriously injured when a car struck him. Recently, Chris' family wrote to say that, "We were overwhelmed and humbled that Lindenwood University would reach out to Chris in this way and are deeply grateful for all of the efforts in both the planning and hosting of the event."
- Very recently we received this note from Mr. Jeff Fernhoff: "This past Saturday some of the young gentlemen that play football for Lindenwood came out to assist us with the Eastern Missouri Special Olympics athletics event. I wanted you to know what a wonderful job and what a terrific group of young individuals these are, and how well they represent Lindenwood."

All of us should be very proud of these kinds of altruistic behaviors fostered by this University. I say "Thank you" to the many citizens of the Lindenwood Nation who so often represent us well by selflessly lending a hand to those in need.

Belleville Tidbits

Denizens of our remarkable Belleville, IL, campus are always up to something creative or otherwise exciting. The campus now has about two dozen full-time faculty members (and dozens of adjunct professors) and will be adding at least seven more full-time scholar-teachers to its teaching corps this fall.

The LU-Belleville faculty and administration continue to seek and receive state approval for new majors that are in demand in that region. The campus will offer several emphases in its Communications program, including radio and video production and broadcasting. The Lindenwood Board of Directors has approved a proposal to construct new broadcasting studios and offices at the Belleville campus.

Just last week, the Belleville operation was also approved by the Illinois Board of Higher Education to offer a BS degree in Biology.

In the realm of intercollegiate sports, LU-Belleville is in the process of reconstructing and upgrading its football stadium – and just in time! The Belleville Lynx football team will terrorize the gridiron in its inaugural season this fall semester, under new head coach Jeff Fisher (no genetic relationship with the St. Louis Rams coach).

The school was accepted into full NAIA membership this spring and will compete in that intercollegiate athletics association starting in September. It is also bidding for membership in the Heart of America Athletic Conference.

The Value of Diversity

Diversity, defined as natural, contrived, and inadvertent variation in the characteristics of people, places, things, and events, has an importance that cannot be entirely captured in a simple verbal account. We hear a lot about that concept today, and it is tempting to construe it as either a pervasive fad or a long-term focus of persons and organizations obsessed with political correctness. Or perhaps it should be considered a growing pain in social evolution. In the main, it is none of these phenomena, although all of the latter play a role in the discussion of diversity and the management of its effects and ramifications.

Understanding and leveraging diversity are keys to human progress and the quality of civilization. Norms and averages are useful for making predictions and tracking trends for large organizations and populations, and those statistics are essential for identifying lawfulness in nature. They are of little utility, however, for the understanding and management of the effects of variation in complex situations of

everyday life. Such diversity of characteristics affects how people interact and adapt to one another. In fact there is a whole field of study called Differential Psychology that is devoted to the investigation of the correlates and consequences of the interaction of diverse traits in natural environments, such as university campuses, or factories, or cities.

Diversity is what enables evolution of species. It is necessary if living things are to survive, prosper, and even improve in the face of environmental changes and adversity. It also powers human creativity and spawns opportunities for civilization to advance. In human reproduction, it provides the serendipitous combinations of traits that generate new varieties and levels of beauty, grace, genius, and character. In the words of Scott E. Page (*Diversity and Complexity, 2011*), “Diversity can provide insurance, improve productivity, spur innovation, enhance robustness, produce collective knowledge, and, perhaps most important in light of these other effects, sustain further diversity. . . .The single word that jumps to mind in thinking about diversity is *wonder*.” (p.3)

Lindenwood is a college built on diversity from the very first day of its founding when it crafted higher education for women on the expanding American frontier. The college has welcomed and benefited from the presence of foreign students throughout its long and storied service and

produced women leaders long before that was fashionable. Lindenwood helped pioneer accelerated adult higher education before that was acceptable. In the 1970s and 80s, the school attracted a motley melting pot of creative survivors, who were collectively resourceful enough to adapt in ways that kept our school going. The diversity-enabled adaptability paid dividends in the late 1990s and the first decade of this century and made us the strong, vibrant institution that we have become.

We pride ourselves on being broad-minded and tolerant. We teach more than 900 foreign students from more than 90 countries. A large majority of our students is comprised of women. At least 15 percent of our students represent racial minorities, far exceeding the corresponding ratio for the general population in St. Charles County. We have been cited as the County's champion of diversity. We are.

We teach, preach, and act affirmatively regarding the value and function of individual differences and varied perspectives. I pray that we will always have the wisdom to do so.

It is not that we are free of all diversity-related challenges. I can see that the age-old tension between liberals and conservatives in politics and religion is alive and active at the University right now. The preeminent question for us is whether we are "big" enough in institutional character

and intellectual maturity to treasure and learn from the differences. I firmly believe we are.

Sincere Personal Thank-You

Finally, I want to thank the many members of the Lindenwood community who offered prayers, wishes and words of support, and beautiful cards and notes to impart comfort and emotional sustenance following the death of my father in April. It is at times of intense grief that the abiding spiritual network of Lindenwood stands out most clearly and reassuringly. Your kindness was healing and is deeply appreciated by both Lois and me. I am sure my dad, the extreme optimist, is pleased to know his faith in human nature was well placed here.

In that same spirit, I want to again express my faith in this inimitable learning community and bid each of you a pleasant summer.

JDE

May 6, 2012