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

NOTES FROM READERS

>>What you think<<

On the cusp of a new academic year, we mark the end of our 12th year together with these Notes. I give thanks for your abiding support and encouragement – and most especially for the ways in which you model for others the claims of reflective practice in your lives, work and public engagement. The world needs you!

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.jgcounsel.com. The website version of Notes also includes helpful hyperlinks to sources for purchasing or subscribing to the various publications mentioned in Notes. I thank my friends at Johnson, Grossnickle & Associates for their many years of abiding support for our reflective practice.

*****

REFLECT ON THIS

>>Five year reflections<<

I am beginning my sixth year at Augsburg and as part of my annual evaluation conversation with our Board, I shared these themes for our work in the years ahead. I trust you will recognize the familiar vocabulary and focus of my leadership work in this remarkable institution.

“This marks the end of my fifth year as Augsburg’s president – a genuine privilege for me – and offers an opportunity to step back and consider what we have learned in our adventures together these past several years. To begin, I summarize three key themes of my leadership at Augsburg that seem worth noting as I reflect especially on the 2010-11 academic year.

The reality of abundance. I originally named abundance as one of the guiding themes for Augsburg during my inaugural year in 2006-07, and though there have been occasional challenges to accepting this concept as meaningful for our work together, I am more and more convinced that modeling “abundance” thinking and behavior is at the heart of Augsburg’s character. As a college community, we believe that we are called to work together to accomplish more than we could do individually. Whether in the classroom, the residence halls, administrative offices or in the community, I see example after example of where faculty, staff, students, alumni and Board members are offering a vision of life and work counter to the wider world’s “scarcity” mentality.
There is enough to do what we need to do, and when we believe that and live as if that were so, it is remarkable to witness what happens. Take our Campus Kitchen program, for example. Originally started as a fine volunteer program for students to prepare and deliver meals to our neighbors, now Campus Kitchen has expanded its work manifold to offer students and neighbors multiple opportunities to learn about nutrition and food justice, to experience fellowship with each other, and more and more to be a signature effort to educate “responsible leaders” and “thoughtful stewards.” Abundance in action.

The opportunities for co-creating. I would argue that my leadership at Augsburg has more and more been focused on what I call the “politics” of our work together. Though politics may conjure up negative images of polarized debates and backroom deals, what I mean by politics is its authentic focus on working alongside each other to build trust, engage each other, share power and be accountable for our individual and common work. This is not easy work, but I believe it is essential work if we are to sustain a culture in which solving our problems and creating our future is our common work. This sort of political work is characterized by a commitment to “co-creating,” working with each other to find common ground, to build coalitions, to share decision-making and to be accountable for those decisions - even when we may disagree and/or have alternative experiences. Our work this past year on the Commission on Campus Space and Master Planning is an example of where this genuine sort of political work was pursued. Over eight months, the campus community engaged in a variety of forums to discuss their hopes and dreams for our campus – its facilities and grounds. These were not always easy conversations, but they were civil and respectful, and in the end a plan evolved that reflects our best thinking as a community. We have begun in this process to “co-create” our future.

The demands for evolving social arrangements. The final theme of my leadership at Augsburg and our work together as a community is the openness to and possibility of organizing and doing our work differently. I am convinced that the future of higher education will be led by those individuals and institutions willing to imagine new ways of working together in organizations with very different sorts of boundaries than in the past. The gift we have at Augsburg is in our Lutheran theological tradition with its focus on *semper reformanda*, a challenge to think always about how we might strengthen our faithful work by being open to new social arrangements. This challenge has many levels. It is a deeply cultural issue, which runs up against the traditionally conservative nature of bureaucracies (especially academic bureaucracies!) It is also an imagination issue, which demands that we develop a vision of how our college might be organized differently to serve our students and mission. It is, perhaps most importantly, a behavioral issue, calling on each member of our community to consider how he or she might work in different ways, with various partners, to accomplish our objectives. Our various partnerships and alliances that have developed over the past several years are the most exciting example of how our culture, imagination and behavior have begun to embrace evolving social arrangements. The Center for Democracy and Citizenship, the Urban Debate League, the Associated Colleges of the Twin Cities, the Minnesota Math League – the list goes on and on – are all examples (of different sorts) of how our boundaries as a college have become more fluid, allowing us to see and pursue new ways of living out our mission.

These three leadership themes have evolved for me over the past five years as I have witnessed the ways in which the Augsburg community has worked together to name its strategic future. In this regard, the role of the various planning commissions – focused on enrollment, finances, alliances and partnerships, facilities planning, adult programs and identity – has been critical in providing forums for exploring institution-wide issues through an institution-wide conversation.
These commissions have enabled us to take stock of our realit(ies) – what we have become, planned or otherwise – and, at the same time, to plan together for what we hope to accomplish in the years ahead. During the past academic year, Commission Augsburg has attempted to consolidate these various conversations in a strategic mapping exercise. I would contend that the Commission Augsburg conversations, both on and off campus, have offered us a framework for future planning and given us occasion to tell our story in more clear and effective ways. I have seen a sense of engagement, pride and ownership for all constituents. At the same time, I have begun to recognize through these conversations and planning initiatives some clear challenges for our future work. These challenges will be central to my leadership at Augsburg during the next several years.

Knowing your whereabouts<<

For the third year in a row, I co-taught the Senior Honors Seminar (known as Honors 490) at Augsburg in the spring semester. This year – for the second time – I co-taught with Lars Christianson, associate professor of sociology and metro-urban studies (and all-around fine fellow!). The course title is “Legacies of Chicago: Ideas and Action in Place,” and our method is to share our common passion for Chicago as a city that has generated ideas and networks of activity that reflect the character of the particular geographical, cultural, economic and social place that is Chicago. We explore various legacies – education, neighborhoods, urban sociology, architecture, commodity markets, community organizing, literature and film, and even improvisational theater – that are connected to Chicago as place and that help students understand how place is linked to important aspects of our lives in the world.

We begin the course by reading Erik Larson’s Devil in the White City, a book rich with its depiction of late 19th century Chicago as a place aspiring for greatness (as reflected in its plans for the Columbian Exposition) and living with the messiness of its growth and allure (as illustrated in the parallel story of a serial murderer preying on young women new to the city). This tension between the aspiration for greatness and the messiness of urban life is at the center of many topics in the course.

As our initial class discussions unfolded, I was struck by how often we turned to a map of Chicago or to census statistics or to historical documents to begin to understand this place. In other words, our beginning curiosity about this city led us to want to name and put into context the “whereabouts” of the place we were studying. Only a handful of us in the class had spent much time in Chicago (I am the veteran for having lived there for 18 years), so we had work to do to explore the fundamental questions of what is this place and why it matters. Simple questions that reflect our sense that we can begin to explore connections between place and ideas and networks of activity in Chicago only after we “know” its whereabouts.

It is a profound insight – at the heart of all education, I would argue – that demands that we pay attention to our place in the world. I find essayist and poet (and farmer) Wendell Berry’s words in his prose-poem “Damage” particularly instructive when he writes: “No expert knows everything about every place, not even everything about any place. If one’s knowledge of one’s whereabouts is insufficient, if one’s judgment is unsound, then expert advice is of little use.”

Education, in other words, is not about taking someone else’s word for it; it is about finding our own way into an understanding of our world, our whereabouts. And education is at its best when you are asking questions of all the wisdom of the world; when you are engaging science and
common sense and expert knowledge from across the span of human history and experience in
dialogue; when you are seeking to know and understand and live so that you might use your
education to make your whereabouts safer and healthier and more fair and just.

This is how we think about education here at Augsburg. Students come here not to be filled up with
someone else’s knowledge, but to ask their own questions, to test their own hypotheses, to create
their own art and music, and to engage our neighborhood and world as they learn and serve.

This is what we will explore in our course on Chicago – knowing our whereabouts, our place –
finding there the ideas and networks of activity connected to place – and considering what
difference it all makes to those who inhabit that place. A great way to spend a semester with a group
of bright students, fine teaching colleagues and a remarkable city as text and classroom.

PRACTICE THIS

>>The etiquette of democracy<<

Here is a favorite entry which I returned to this summer while preparing a talk for a conference on
civility. When will we learn?

“Yale law professor, Stephen L. Carter, whose work I mention often in Notes, is writing a series of
books on what he calls the “elements of good character that are…”pre-political,” by which I mean
that we should all struggle to exemplify them, whatever our philosophical or partisan differences.”
The first in the series is “Integrity” (Basic Books, 1996), which I discussed in the last issue of Notes.
The book is fascinating, especially in the midst of this political season, as it challenges us to think
about how the call to be civil may force us to change the ways in which we organize political systems
and processes.

My primary interest in the book is the rules for the etiquette of democracy that Carter proposes. In
particular, I believe that there are important parallels between these good manners of society and the
close character of the organizations we all inhabit. Under the rubric of “The People We Can Be”, Carter
posits the following rules (among others) for a civil society:

1. Our duty to be civil toward others does not depend on whether we like them or not.
2. Civility requires that we sacrifice for strangers, not just for people we happen to know.
3. Civility has two parts: generosity, even when it is costly, and trust, even when there is risk.
4. Civility creates not merely a negative duty not to do harm, but an affirmative duty to do
good.
5. We must come into the presence of our fellow humans with a sense of awe and gratitude.
6. Civility requires that we listen to others with knowledge of the possibility that they are right
and we are wrong.
7. Civility requires that we express ourselves in ways that demonstrate our respect for others.
8. Civility requires resistance to the dominance of social life by the values of the marketplace.
9. Civility allows criticism of others, and sometimes even requires it, but the criticism should
always be civil.
There are other rules, but I think you start to get the sense of how these manners for democracy also offer helpful guidelines for our lives in organizations. Think especially about rules (3), (5), and (9)—there you have the foundations for a healthy and humane common enterprise.

Carter is savvy to point out that there are those who criticize civility, claiming that there are professions for which incivility is a requirement. His main point in critiquing this position is that, though we may have evidence for the acceptance of such uncivil work, we must never allow ourselves to forget that such evidence raises serious questions about the character of our common work. Surely we all experience the disheartening and disabling power of incivility in our lives—no wonder it is sometimes difficult to imagine the abundance and wonder of negotiating our lives together.”

>The charge(s) we lead and stories we tell<<

I like this simple piece that first appeared in my August 2003 Notes—a reminder of how leaders must be good story-tellers.

“Paul Danos, the dean at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College, was quoted in *Fast Company* (September 2003) responding to the question: What is the most important thing you have recently learned? A wonderful question to ponder—it was posed to him because it is a question on the Tuck admissions application.

Danos answers, “Progress cannot happen without a good narrative…I learned how powerful the well-communicated idea can be as a tool to inform new directions and inspire new energy. Leadership is an unbelievably hard communications job. You must have a firm grasp of your competitive environment, encapsulate the spirit of an organization, package it in strategic statements, and then emphasize those statements repeatedly, so that the message becomes part of the conversation.”

I have learned a good bit about the importance of good narratives from Bob Sevier, who consults and writes about colleges and universities. He draws together various sources to posit this list of effective leadership traits—each of which helps us to focus on telling stories more persuasively:

- Recognize the three key roles of leadership—be a team-builder, a living symbol, and a buck-stopper
- Get the right people on the bus—people of character, commitment, the right chemistry, and competence
- Have a vision and make sure it is important, believable, distinctive and relevant
- Focus, focus, focus
- Have a realistic, linked strategic plan
- Learn the most important word—integration
- Use data wisely—to make decisions, face the truth, assess performance, clarify options, and segment messages
- First build awareness and then generate responses
- Execute—think daringly, execute steadily
- Hustle—move fast and get it right!”
PAY ATTENTION TO THIS

>>Resources for your reflective practice<<

New resources galore….


_Poke the Box: When Was the Last Time You Did Something for the First Time?_ by Seth Godin (Do You Zoom, Inc., 2011) – I was referred to Godin’s work (especially his blog at seldo policing.typepad.com/) by Mike Good, my Board chair here at Augsburg.

>>Democracy<<

Parker Palmer brought these powerful words from poet Langston Hughes to my (and our) attention.

**Democracy**

Democracy will not come
Today, this year
Nor ever
Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right
As the other fellow has
To stand
On my two feet
And own the land.

I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course.
Tomorrow is another day.
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

Freedom
Is a strong seed
Planted
In a great need.

I live here, too.
I want freedom
Just as you.

>>Subscription information<<
Subscriptions to Notes are simple to establish. Send me an email at augpres@augsburg.edu, ask to 
be added to the list, and the listserv will confirm that you have been subscribed to the list. Please 
feel free to forward your email versions of Notes to others—they then can subscribe by contacting 
me. The current and archive issues of Notes are available on-line at www.jgacounsel.com.

>>Topics for upcoming issues<<

• Ten Years Later
• God’s mind changes
• Hospitality is not enough

(c) Paul Pribbenow, 2011