

1996

Continuing the Dialogue: Augustana College

Sandra C. Looney

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections>

Augustana Digital Commons Citation

Looney, Sandra C. (1996) "Continuing the Dialogue: Augustana College," *Intersections*: Vol. 1996: No. 1, Article 10.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/intersections/vol1996/iss1/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Augustana Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Intersections by an authorized administrator of Augustana Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@augustana.edu.

Continuing the Dialogue: Augustana College
Sandra C. Looney

Mark Schwehn begins his address with Otto Paul Kretzmann's statement, given in October 1940, on Lutheran higher education: "We are committed to the principle that the destiny of a Christian University lies in the quality of the men and women who are graduated from its halls rather than in quantitative production." This commitment is the present commitment. How we define the quality we wish to promote varies over time and statement. Augustana College has been debating its present mission statement; what has triggered the debate *this time* is its length: too unwieldy, say some board and faculty members. I was a faculty representative on the large committee which developed that, yes, unwieldy statement. And the attempts to shorten the statement and yet encompass our mission stalemated. The 1994 Bush faculty, administration, and staff fall workshop started our defining process once again. Launching a productive year of discussion, the Mission and Values committee, led by religion professor Dr. Arthur Olsen, reached out to different constituencies and asked them to define Augustana's values. Augustana's named values are Christian, Liberal Arts, Community, Excellence, Service.

++++
I know we are not only watching ourselves, but we are being watched.
++++

Two values that particularly distinguish our mission are Christian and Community. We have elaborated each value word as it interprets the college mission. We are Christian by being a college of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We believe in Community by caring for one another and our environments. Community has further meanings of responding to needs, respecting human differences, empowering one another, tending to the ecology of place. The committee recommended a systematic review of college policies, procedures, and programs to determine whether they are currently reflecting the values statement. President Ralph Wagoner uses Augustana's fundamental values in his address to college groups and prospective students.

We continue to consider and revise our mission statement. In time we will probably alter the particular language of the mission statement, but the values will remain constant. The task of the Mission and Values Committee followed the critical self-examination conversations by ELCA Region III colleges on "What Does It Mean to be a College of the Church?" Augustana's local committee called itself the T'N'T--Through Thick and Thin--and organized four discussions as well as hosted a major symposium entitled "World, Tradition, and Task." The act of naming our fundamental values is itself powerful.

Sandra C. Looney is Professor in the Department of English at Augustana College, Sioux Falls South Dakota.

Yet I hear distinguished colleagues sadly voice their opinion that we do not know who we are or what we are about or that we are just now slowly getting back on track. Critics merit respect. A woman professional in my hometown, when learning I taught at Augustana College, pointedly said, "I hope Augustana knows what it's about. Some colleges don't." Her sons had graduated from another Christian liberal arts college. I replied, "We discuss our mission constantly." I know we are not only watching ourselves, but we are being watched.

At the faculty conference on the vocation of a Lutheran college, the discussion of Lutheran identity and the movement to the secular rather surprised me. Lutherans make up 56% of Augustana's student body; Roman Catholics make up 17%. Christmas Vespers is presented in both Our Savior's Lutheran Church and St. Joseph's Cathedral. We have daily chapel at 10:00 am, the center point of the academic day. The decision to maintain daily chapel, to have a student congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is important to our tradition and to our identity. Augustana has strong outreach teams and a church and college coordinator. For many faculty, worshiping and communing together is central to campus life. It is a fact that many students use chapel time for "power naps," breakfast, or study. It is a fact that some faculty want to replace the 10:00 am chapel time with classes. And chapel attendance varies with semester stresses. However, daily chapel helps define the shape of our institution. Even those who pass by the chapel as the Carolines ring across campus know that faith is a defining element of our college. What we uphold is literally in the air and part of our Christian landscape. The mind stores these associations.

Schwehn calls on Lutherans "to preserve and extend crucial interpretations of the Christian faith." We are, he further maintains, "voices within a conversation" of Christian colleges and universities. Yes, we are places emphasizing the freshness and the vital energy of the Gospels. Breathing a freshness into students' belief is what Lutheran higher education is about. In her chapel talk, Kayci Emry, Augustana senior, explained how her faith expanded over four years. She defined herself as one who had loved the fences, the spiritual rules that kept her right and safe. She spoke about coming to freedom, the freedom of the open gate and the awaiting Good Shepherd. Our colleges have the privilege to talk about the soul and the mind.

Augustana struggles with enlarging the number of voices in our conversation. Native American voices define our area and need to be heard in our college. We have succeeded in part and failed in part to hear them. We have had rich connections with the Jewish voices in our community, but our connections are intermittent. We have reached out in dialogue with the Islamic voices in the city and in the region. They are old voices in our region, but new voices to our awareness.

Augustana College faculty collaborate on Capstone classes, inviting students into conversations on moral and aesthetic issues. These conversations center on two questions: How shall we live in the face of fundamental moral and aesthetic issues? And how can we live as responsible members of church and society? Course titles show the richness of the questions: *An Invitation to Care: Issues of Life, Health, Death; Light in the Darkness: Courage and Evil in the Twentieth Century; The Land: Perspectives and Challenges; Odysseys of the Spirit; and Forced Options: Business, Technology, Values.*

In the March 1996 issue of the journal *College English*, Jeff Smith reviews recent critiques of American higher education. Smith feels that although students voluntarily and consciously choose to go to college, few understand why they're there. So the message of our

mission must be repeated, again and again, messages that are particular to our places.

Otto Paul Kretzmann's 1940s speech still reflects our core message: that our colleges and universities stand for things unchangeable in the midst of chaos, that our colleges and universities stand for the belief that evil will not triumph over good ultimately, that our colleges and universities stand for the belief that equipped with knowledge, understanding, and some wisdom, our men and women will exert a difference. .

Works Cited

Smith, Jeff. "Review: Why College?" *College English* Vol.58, #3. March 1996