The Purpose of a University

Most mornings I begin my day by scanning a few newspapers and websites, especially with an eye to news and analysis of academic life and universities. Two pieces about the purpose of colleges and universities recently caught my eye. They probably would have in any case, but they did so especially as I was thinking about Calvin’s vision for 2030 and working toward becoming a university in the next year.

The first, in the Chronicle of Higher Education, reflects on the relationship between the American university and democracy. It argues that our universities are essentially modern institutions, evolving to serve the needs of capitalism and democracy. There is a tension here, one that the article explores in relation to several other recent essays. Some observers say that “the university has been fully and irrevocably colonized by private interests.” We serve labor markets and students focused on jobs. Perhaps so. The authors argue, normatively, that universities also must keep mission in mind, emphasizing that a “distinctly democratic purpose” ought to be part of their mission.

The second, a post on the Patheos blog, is by Chris Gehrz of Bethel College in Minnesota. He links to a 90-minute video called Why We Teach that interviews 15 teachers from Bethel. (He’s one of them.) There’s a feast of material here from the full interviews of the 15 faculty to clips about “the liberal arts, relationships with students, and the art, craft, and science of teaching.”

We’re all well into the busyness of the school year. Some are busy with the first rounds of heavy grading; others with committees, day-to-day administrative work, planning for Calvin 2030, and the like. Whether now, because we need it, or later, when we can catch a breath, it’s important to remind ourselves why we do this work. We live in times of change, much of it difficult, some of it exciting. In such times, keeping our mission and calling in mind as individuals and an institution is essential. What we do matters, and it changes lives.

Will Katerberg, associate dean for programs and partnerships

UnLearn 365 Week 2018: October 8–13

UnLearn 365 Week, presented by the Multicultural Student Development Office, provides a safe, campus-wide forum for panel discussions, lectures, presentations, and workshops that aim to increase self-awareness of deep-seated prejudices and stereotypes, to encourage personal evaluation of attitudes and actions toward those with different cultural values, and to increase knowledge of different cultures. View the schedule online.

From the Faculty Activity Reports

- Cynthia Slagter (Spanish), “Supporting and Retaining Language Learners: A Collaborative Approach” (lecture, American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, Salamanca, Spain, June 26, 2018).

Be sure to fill out your Faculty Activity Reports regularly. If you have questions, see the FAQ page.
**Coming Up on Campus** (Check the campus calendar for a full list of events)

**Monday, October 8**
- Chapel. UnLearn Week. 10:00 a.m., Chapel

**Tuesday, October 9**
- Chapel. Bob Crow and Joella Ranaivoson, “Lectio Divina.” 10:00 a.m., Chapel
- Mathematics and Statistics and Computer Science colloquium. Al Erisman, “Navigating a Technologically Infused Society.” 3:30 p.m., SB 010
- Physics seminar. Brian Seper, Ivan Lainez Aleman, Ryan Balili, Forest Rulison (Hope) and Paul DeYoung (Hope), “Identification of Photo-Initializable Point Defects in Carbon Related Materials by Optically-Detected Magnetic Resonance.” 3:45 p.m., SB 110
- The 4:04 gathering. James VandenBosch. 4:04 p.m., 3rd floor Hekman Library
- Faculty Senate meeting. 4:30 p.m., Hoogenboom 280

**Wednesday, October 10**
- Chapel. Jazz Prayers with Jazz Combo. 10:00 a.m., Chapel

**Thursday, October 11**
- Chapel. Sounds of Korean worship with Heh Jin Lee. 10:00 a.m., Chapel
- CALL Noontime Lecture series. Bing Goei, “Why has Immigration Become So Controversial?” 12:00 noon, Chapel

**Friday, October 12**
- Chapel. Student worship team. 10:00 a.m., Chapel
- Live2Lead, 9:00 a.m., Covenant Fine Arts Center Auditorium