What is Calvin’s Business?

Last week I participated in a discussion of a University Structure Task Force document. It outlines principles and goals for a new academic structure for Calvin. Faculty Senate recently discussed a document titled “Freedom of Expression at Calvin University.”

The 2010s have been a decade for such discussions. The 1980s were too. Discussions then involved administrative structure, the nature of Christian community, enrollment, and mission and vision.

My point is not to relativize what we are experiencing today. It is that discussions like these are nothing new at Calvin or most any college or university. What changes are the circumstances, challenges, and opportunities.

In January 1980, philosophy professor Nick Wolterstorff spoke to Calvin administrators about “What is Calvin’s Business?” Much of what he said would sound familiar today. But a couple things that he said struck me.

First, repeating his desire to say it humbly, Nick described Calvin as the best of the Christian colleges and universities. I’m not sure how you measure best. U.S. News recently ranked Calvin #3 among regional universities in the Midwest. We have deep, wide-ranging strengths as an institution, in our mission, and in the quality in our faculty and staff. Despite everything. We have something unique and special the University Structure Task Force heard this summer, when it consulted administrators from a variety of Protestant and Catholic schools. We ought not to forget it.

Second, if an “every square inch” vision defines Calvin’s business, the practical thing that Nick pointed to in 1980 was “modeling.” “The community ought itself to reflect the vision,” he said, in all areas of the institution. People are influenced not just by what we say or write, but by what we do. His reflections on this point echo today in our Expanded Statement of Mission, From Every Nation, the recent university structure document, and “Freedom of Expression at Calvin University.”

One of our characteristics is a commitment to engaging diverse points of view in the partisan religious, social, and political conflicts of our day. This requires fortitude. The “Freedom of Expression” document emphasizes “brave spaces” and civility. Civility, modeled rightly, is brave, not craven. At our best, in classrooms and dorms and performance halls, in books and blog posts and scholarly conferences, we do this. We’re stubborn about it, even when we have mixed feelings or don’t model it as well as we’d like. We’re at our best often enough, I think, that we are countercultural. We are hard to pin down in a time of “culture wars” that demand that people and institutions be pinned down. This is one of our strengths. And it’s a challenging time to model it.

Will Katerberg, associate dean for programs and partnerships, interim curator for heritage hall

UnLearn 365 Week 2019: October 7–12

The goals of UnLearn 365 Week, presented by the Multicultural Student Development Office, are to provide a safe campus-wide forum for conversations designed to unlearn stereotypes, biases, and racism, and kick-off UnLearn 365—our year-round program series. Join us as we all work towards becoming agents of renewal in God’s kingdom! View the schedule online.
Update from the University Core Task Force (UCTF)

The University Core Task Force (UCTF) has been working since the beginning of the summer to develop principles and parameters for a new, university-wide core curriculum, which it will bring to Faculty Senate (and subsequently to Faculty Assembly). The task force began by clarifying the core revision process that was approved by Faculty Senate last May and requesting that Faculty Senate approve a revised process to resolve ambiguities and contradictions, amend the suggested timeline, and close potentially endless feedback loops. Since then, the UCTF has reviewed previous core documents, the Educational Framework, and the Vision 2030 Rationale, as well as feedback received from departments and programs. It has discussed the meaning and significance of a Christian liberal arts approach to education and the place of the core curriculum alongside majors and programs within such an approach. It has begun to discuss the problems and shortcomings of previous core models as well as opportunities and constraints that influence a new, university-wide core curriculum. As it continues its work, the UCTF anticipates additional consultations with departments and programs as well as with Faculty Senate. Although the UCTF intends to exercise its authority to extend the suggested deadlines for proposing core purposes and parameters, it anticipates a Faculty Senate vote before Thanksgiving Break and a Faculty Assembly vote before Christmas Break, allowing time for the Resolvers to complete their work (if necessary) by February.

Arthur H. DeKruyter Chair in Communication

The Department of Communication seeks a candidate to serve a three-year term as the Arthur H. DeKruyter Chair in Communication. The chair must be an established scholar and gifted communicator whose work bridges the gap between scholarly research and communication practice. Those wishing to apply should email a curriculum vitae and cover letter indicating interest, fit, and prospective goals to Irene Helmholdt (ih23@calvin.edu), Communication Department administrative assistant, by November 15, 2019. Please go here for more information.

From the Faculty Activity Reports

- **Sam Smartt** (Communication), Art Exhibition: “A Name That I Admire,” University Film and Video Association at Minneapolis College of Art and Design Exhibition, Minneapolis, MN, July 30, 2019

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 7**
- Chapel. Sounds of Latino worship with Carlos Lemagne. 10:00 a.m., Chapel
- **Let’s do Lunch.** 11:00 a.m.—1:00 p.m., Commons Knollcrest Room (CM 302)
- Lecture. Craig DeRoche, “Prison Reform.” 7:00 p.m., Prince Conference Center, Willow Room

**Tuesday, October 8**
- Chapel. Worship in Spanish. 10:00 a.m., Chapel

**Wednesday, October 9**
- Chapel. UnLearn Week. 10:00 a.m., Chapel
• History department colloquium. Stephen Staggs, “Members Only: White Supremacy and the Founding of Erasmus Hall Academy.” 3:30 p.m., Meeter Center Lecture Hall

Thursday, October 10
• Chapel. Jesus Questions with Tanner Smith. 10:00 a.m., Chapel
• Let’s do Lunch. 11:00 a.m.–1:00 p.m., Knollcrest Dining Hall Conference Room (KD 119)
• Chemistry department seminar. Mark Wolf (U. of Georgia), “Computational Chemistry: A 50-Minute Crash Course.” 11:30 a.m., SB 010
• CALL lecture. Muneeba Khan, “Understanding Islam and your Muslim Neighbor.” 3:00 p.m., CFAC Recital Hall

Friday, October 11
• Live2Lead. Register here. 9:00 a.m., CFAC Auditorium
• Chapel. Student worship team. 10:00 a.m., Chapel
• Biology department seminar. Student presentations. 1:30 p.m., SB 010