



## President's reflection on the Mount Mary journey

### ***Operation Refresh: The plan for Mount Mary 2011 – 2016***

Mount Mary has much to celebrate, with many advances on the goals identified in 2007. We all can take pride in the many accomplishments of recent years, and for me this is a welcome moment to thank all members of the Mount Mary community for their dedication and hard work.

Complacency or self-satisfaction, however, would be a mistake. Mount Mary has great momentum. While there assuredly will be strong challenges in the years ahead, I believe we have the people and programs with the potential to convert those challenges into opportunities for new levels of excellence and meaningful growth in line with our mission and values. To that end, we are refreshing Mount Mary's strategic plan for 2011 – 2016. Key drivers are:

- Sharpening the focus in preparation for the Higher Learning Commission visit in the coming two years as well as for a comprehensive campaign
- Determining priority goals that remain unmet and exploring new objectives in line with our five identified initiatives

So I invite you to read on, as I consider where we've been, some of the demographic and economic trends with implications for higher education, and Mount Mary's particular strengths as well as challenges. Finally, I put forward some of the probing questions I believe we must discuss, debate, and ultimately answer. I close with my dreams for our College. Dreaming out loud, I envision a future Mount Mary that fully realizes institutional potential and carries forward the legacy of our School Sisters of Notre Dame in creative and vibrant ways.

## **Our work together**

*Claiming Our Future*, our 2007-2012 strategic plan, resulted from a cross-campus, collaborative planning process over a nine-month period. Key components included a detailed SWOT analysis and dedicated task forces on academic programs, student life, the physical plant, enrollment and retention, advancement and marketing, and technology. The final plan, endorsed by the Board of Trustees and Corporate Members, comprised six primary initiatives and nineteen goals. Over the past three years, our Strategic Planning Committee has tracked progress on those goals.

### ***Progress on strategic initiatives identified to date***

While a detailed accounting of progress on our strategic goals and objectives can be found on MyMountMary, I want to share some highlights of advances in five key areas.

1. Academic excellence
  - a. Established the Radiologic Technology and Diagnostic Medical Sonography majors
  - b. Explored development of Occupational Therapy and Art Therapy professional doctorates; moving forward with Art Therapy professional doctorate
  - c. Expanded the Masters in Counseling to include three concentrations (community, ~~pastoral~~, school counseling)
  - d. Signed new articulation and degree completion agreements

2. Campus renewal
  - a. Completed the Space Utilization Study, with recommendations for an expanded Child Care Center and a Library renovation
  - b. Updated residence hall
3. Student success
  - a. Achieved capacity enrollment in the Midtown program for 2 consecutive years
  - b. Developed management matrix for consistent awarding of financial aid
  - c. Achieved full NCAA Division III status
  - d. Piloted and institutionalized new mid-semester grade reports for first-year students
4. Community impact
  - a. Launched new College website
  - b. Created and disseminated new promotional brochures
  - c. Grew alumnae e-mail data base
  - d. Offered 3 pre-college summer camps
  - e. Created 2 external President's Advisory Councils (22 members)
5. Financial vitality
  - a. Increased endowed scholarship fund by more than \$500,000
  - b. Established reserve fund to help the College withstand financial problems such as a downturn in enrollment

### ***Process to “refresh” the strategic plan***

At roughly the midpoint of this Strategic Plan much has been accomplished. The clear indicators of success in a number of areas and strong momentum make this an ideal time to refresh and renew the Strategic Plan. We can leverage the investment of time and thought in *Claiming Our Future*, making it a roadmap for our work in preparation for both the Higher Learning Commission review and a comprehensive fundraising campaign.

I am committed to an ambitious course of convenings, interviews with key stakeholders, surveys, and e-communication to generate understanding and insights on how best to refresh our strategic plan. These endeavors fit very much with my theme for the year: community. And to reach as broadly into the community as possible, we will open several new “channels” of communication:

1. Campus community convenings – During the week of August 23<sup>rd</sup> we will host conversations around our strategic initiatives: academic excellence, student success, campus renewal, community impact, and financial vitality. A timetable for these “Community Conversation” sessions along with registration information is enclosed.
2. Surveys – To facilitate input from across campus, we are creating a dedicated section of our website, dubbed “Operation Refresh”, with briefings on each of the five initiatives that can be downloaded. The website will provide links to a survey about refreshing our strategic plan that can be completed in 10 minutes and submitted anonymously.
3. Comments and feedback – The Operation Refresh website will include the hyperlink to an e-mail box for additional comments and suggestions. Submissions will be compiled and collated without individual attribution, and I will personally review all input.

## **Our mission and today's realities**

Certainly today's environment is not the world of Mother Caroline. Yet the School Sisters of Notre Dame's vision and mission remain relevant and necessary in the face of the pressures and demands of today's global and interconnected, but too often polarized, world:

- Expanding educational opportunity for all, especially for those who are marginalized and forgotten
- Supporting one another in lives of faith and service to others
- Empowering diverse individuals to transform their lives and to be leaders
- Creating community grounded in inclusion and social justice

An overarching question for Mount Mary is how economic and demographic trends intersect with our teaching and learning community. And – framed by the reality of that intersection – how might we best pursue our strategic initiatives?

First I want to look at some trends. Then I will consider Mount Mary College's assets – as well as our challenges.

### ***Trends: Obstacles or opportunities for higher education?***

Below I outline four clusters of emerging phenomena and ongoing trends with serious, even radical, consequences for private higher education.

Trend cluster #1 –

#### Demographic shifts coupled with the lack of quality preparation for post-secondary learning

- The student body on American college campuses will continue to become more racially diverse, older and more female over the next decade, according to projections from the U.S. Department of Education.
- Many entering students continue to arrive underprepared for college-level coursework. First-generation college students especially are anticipated to need additional academic support.

*How do these trends*

- *Affect the creation of cohesive campus communities?*
- *Impact curriculum and instruction?*
- *Affect access to education, selectivity decisions, and the drive for excellence?*

Trend cluster #2 –

#### Volatile economic environment and financial constraints

- According to the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, average college tuition and fees have risen by 440 percent over the past 25 years – more than 4 times the rate of inflation and almost twice the rate of medical care.
- The recent economic crisis felt all over the world affected higher education. At the same time as students' financial needs have increased, endowment values have declined, and many institutions have had to face uncomfortable budget cuts in personnel and programming to make ends meet.

*How do these trends*

- *Impact recruitment targets and enrollment?*
- *Alter the traditional college business model with heavy dependence on tuition?*

## Trend cluster #3 –

Competition and regulation

- The Career College Association expects that for-profit colleges will be educating a greater percentage of all college students by 2020 (15 percent compared with the 7 percent they educate now).
- Congress and other watchdog groups are stepping up measures to ensure that colleges and universities make good on their promises relative to graduation, placement rates, learning outcomes, student debt load, and board accountability.
- The sustainability movement increasingly will move beyond building design and will be applied to curriculum and all aspects of the institution. The Presidents' Climate Commitment (signed now by nearly 700 colleges) has accelerated the call to action.

*How do these trends*

- *Change our approaches to student recruitment and to marketing in ways that help the public understand how the Mount Mary value proposition differs from for-profits?*
- *Add urgency to establishing a pervasive culture of accountability for the College, with rubrics and metrics for all areas of our operations and programming?*
- *Play into not only how we upgrade facilities but also how we conceptualize curriculum in ways that integrate sustainability issues and solutions?*

## Trend cluster #4 –

Rapid evolution of a technology-driven culture and demand for virtual connectivity 24/7

- Key drivers projected for 2011 to 2016 include cloud-based technologies and decentralized IT support with a sharp rise in collaborative work by students and more cross-campus collaboration among faculty and departments.
- More and more, students want educational access 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and expect on-demand access to research tools, podcasts, online library resources and electronic textbooks. Flexible scheduling alternatives such as satellite locations and weekend/night/online delivery of courses and services will more broadly meet the needs of all students, including those already in the workforce.
- 21<sup>st</sup> century learning competencies require educators to rethink what is taught and how. The very character of knowledge is changing, from where we collect it (from traditional sources to open sources), to when we gather it (always), to how we gather it (in personal, individualized ways).

*How do these trends*

- *Change our approach to curriculum and pedagogy?*
- *Realign space usage and facility needs?*
- *Constrict – or enlarge – our possible market as well as our appeal to diverse students?*

**Strengths and weaknesses**

I feel that Mount Mary is moving into another era of the College's life. This is the first time in a great while that we will be able to dream about who we can be rather than scraping by and making do. Why do I believe this? In part because the College has a strong, positive core to leverage and build out from and in part because we are in a position to identify and address weaknesses while strengthening the positive core.

*Where do we shine?*

Our strengths include the way we live out our mission, especially the way faculty embody mission with extraordinary care and concern devoted to our students and to developing the

whole person. I think students and faculty would join me in pointing to the people of Mount Mary as perhaps our greatest strength.

We are strong academically, perhaps even more so than is recognized by the general public and our peer institutions. Signature academic programs include those in the Art and Design areas, Health areas with Occupational Therapy and Dietetics, and Education. A strong foundation in liberal arts supports the professional programs. Our study abroad programs, with a direct tie to leadership for social justice, draw participation rates above the national average. I see good traction in the campus experience and student success. Key efforts include our Midtown Program, CAP, ARC, and the mid-semester grade reports coupled with counseling. Our enrollment has increased each of the past two years, and I see opportunities for us to sustain this with particular “upside” in the adult student population and our graduate programs near-term. We have added to co-curricular opportunities and broadened competitive athletic options.

While our presence and impact is not well recognized in the larger Milwaukee community, the awareness that already exists is positive. The campus receives compliments as a beautiful space within the urban environment; our graduates have a well-deserved reputation for being well-trained and also good citizens and good human beings; we benefit from the respect and admiration for the School Sisters of Notre Dame and from the public appreciation of our Fashion programs, the Starving Artists Show, and the Women’s Leadership Institute.

*What is missing or where do we miss the mark?*

We have, perhaps, been too humble and self-effacing, willing to accept the College – as others have – as a “hidden gem” rather than considering whether this is a failure to fully exercise our positive influence and share our expertise. From my perspective, we are not as good as other peer institutions at touting our college and its programs. With our more modest size and scale, we certainly cannot produce the volume of graduates seen from the large private universities and the public institutions such as UWM; we can, however, far more actively publicize the achievements of our faculty and students – and the impact on our region – and also identify and pursue creative collaborations and partnerships that leverage the College’s strengths while offsetting areas beyond our scope or core skills.

For many years we have stretched our available resources as far as we can across campus. The resulting constraints – curtailed resources for such things as student advising and counseling, minimal programmatic and faculty development opportunities, deferred facilities maintenance and renewal – cannot be ignored. Our limited resources have also created a culture of scarcity, which has limited our ability to dream big, to insist on excellence, and to focus our energies on a strategic purpose. Our business model is performing well, but we must fully develop and sustain our capacity to raise private philanthropic dollars and to compete successfully for federal and state grants. A diversified portfolio of revenue and philanthropic streams is critical to filling immediate needs and to growing the reserves and the endowment for our long-term vitality.

### **Asking the right questions**

I want to share some of the questions that I believe are key to determining the right course for Mount Mary over the coming five years. I have no doubt that these will spark debate and comment. My hope is that they also will lead us as a community toward consensus and renewed commitment to shared success for Mount Mary.

**What will it mean to support and serve new generations of prospective Mount Mary students?** We need to understand what it means to serve more students who are financially less able to pay and who perhaps are even more challenged by the competing demands of school, family, and work; to serve more students who are underprepared academically; and to serve a more diverse student body.

**How do we balance access with excellence?** We need to explore and identify the right alignment of our commitment to enlarging opportunity for the traditionally underserved who have the desire and drive to obtain college degrees with an institutional drive for excellence in the disciplines that will challenge students and will realize the full potential of our faculty and programmatic strengths.

As a college dedicated to outstanding teaching, we are well positioned to resolve the apparent tension between access and excellence. We are called by our mission as an SSND institution to do so. By offering an intellectually stimulating curriculum through engaging pedagogy to all students, we can ensure that students will be challenged to successfully meet rigorous academic standards. High expectations along with the necessary and appropriate supports have proven successful in helping less well prepared students achieve academic excellence. Ken Bain in *What the Best College Teachers Do* provides convincing research that an intellectually engaging curriculum is much more effective than remediation. However, this is not a simple task. How do we do this?

**Where do our facilities impede our ambitions and true potential for excellence?** We enjoy a prized location and beautiful acreage. Developing and sustaining a renewal plan for our facilities, while challenging, is also necessary. Moreover, our infrastructure is out of sync with the education marketplace. For instance, many campuses, even at the high school level, are fully equipped for wireless and for online or blended learning formats, on-demand curriculum delivery, and flexible scheduling. Faculty and staff too often find themselves creating work-arounds necessitated by outdated or nonexistent technology.

We all, I think, recognize the Milwaukee community perception that Mount Mary College is a quiet, small school; nice, perhaps, but certainly not exciting or cutting edge. Yet we have programs of national eminence, and despite the economic downturn, Mount Mary has continued to grow enrollment and to balance the books. Mount Mary can no longer afford to wear the distinction of being a hidden gem. **How do we need to think about and talk about Mount Mary? Who needs to be introduced to the “real” power of Mount Mary?**

**What is our role in creating community impact?** And how clear are we about what we mean by the term community impact? What opportunities do we see for Mount Mary? Closely examining our neighborhood, city, and regional relationships and exploring how we would most prefer to interact with these communities can focus our efforts in mutually beneficial ways.

Our value proposition is far more honest than the for-profits, but they market aggressively, with large budgets and strong, if sometimes deceptive, come-ons about the ease of obtaining financial aid and achieving a degree. **How do we not only hold but grow our market share? How do we define and refine our target market and bring it within reach year after year?**

## Dreaming Out Loud

When I imagine Mount Mary College 10, 20, or more years in the future – letting go of any fears over risks or “how will we pay for that” – here’s what I envision.

Mount Mary over an extraordinary 10-year period has emerged as a model case study on how a good college becomes a great college. What are the hallmarks of this nationally recognized institution?

- Leadership for social justice is infused throughout the curriculum, co-curriculum, and the Women’s Leadership Institute;
- We have successfully developed a model for integrating access and excellence rather than accepting conventional views of these as polar opposites;
- Fine professional programs, most notably in art and design, in health-related fields, in education, in business, and in counseling, are supported by our strong liberal arts programs;
- Increased student access has been achieved through flexible learning;
- Most classes are taught by full-time faculty with the average class size at 15.

What does the campus look like?

- New residence halls – including graduate housing – create a vibrant, high-energy campus.
- Throughout buildings of all types, technology is state-of-the-art, and the new generation of “day-hops” (commuter students) takes advantage of blended curriculum weaving together online instruction and learning with classroom and study group experiences.
- Athletic facilities – benefiting both students and neighboring communities – offer first-rate competitive and recreational opportunities in softball, soccer, tennis, and more.
- The Art and Design building brings together study, teaching, and work space along with display and collection space that taken together provide a vibrant mix that serves – over and over again – as a catalyst for collaborative and creative work, bringing together the academy, businesses, and the community.

What does it feel like to be part of this Mount Mary community?

- Students praise the caring and supportive faculty, and they learn from a faculty widely recognized for its disciplinary expertise.
- Expectations – and standards of excellence – are higher than ever before for everyone in the campus community.
- This no longer is just a nice, comfortable place to learn and work. It is an exciting, vibrant and forward-looking place that challenges the status quo while sustaining and elevating its steadfast mission of transforming lives in pursuit of social justice.
- We have a national reputation for calling forth the best in underserved populations. Students who desire to learn and strive for excellence come from a broad geographic area to attend Mount Mary because they know they will thrive if they are willing to put forth the effort. They respond to the personal attention and the challenge of being stretched; they are becoming leaders with impact in their communities.

Will this be an easy transformation? No.

Will it be worth it? Yes.