

2009 CONVOCATION ADDRESS  
Dr. Michael H. Droge, Interim President  
September 23, 2009

Welcome to the 2009-2010 Academic Year at Park University...our 135<sup>th</sup> year of providing access to great education.

I am honored to address you as the Interim President and I wish to thank the Board of Trustees as well as the rest of the Park University community for the opportunity to serve you.

Faculty and staff members already know the person I'm about to acknowledge, but since we have students here, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce my wife Molly Droge. Molly has been busy volunteering her time and effort to Park, and I wish to thank her publically. We love making our home on campus, and when you see either of us please stop to say hello.

Everyone at Park is proud of the University's history of changing people's lives and of enabling people to make extraordinary contributions in their professional work and in their communities.

Tens of thousands of Park alumni continue to do just that. Would all of the Park alumni who are here please stand to be recognized?

Now I would like to ask all students to please stand...you are the reason we all do what we do. Thank you for attending Park. You've made an excellent choice.

This year marks a transition for Park as I and others begin new leadership roles. It is an exciting time and it is also an opportunity for us working together to make Park an even better place in which to learn, to work, and to build life-long memories and friendships.

Thanks to the tremendous effort of many faculty and staff, much progress has already been accomplished just since last May.

Would all faculty members please stand so we may thank you? Park is fortunate to have such a dedicated faculty.

Would all staff members please stand so we may thank you as well?? We're fortunate today to have the Campus Center Directors from around the country with us for the convocation... Welcome.

It is thanks to staff as well as the faculty that Park is the great University that it is. We are also fortunate to have an excellent Board of Trustees that is engaged with the life of the University.

Some of the many accomplishments that have occurred since last May include:

- In-depth planning of what Park can do, to prepare for the fall 2010 visit from the Higher Learning Commission;

*If you're not familiar with that Commission, it represents the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, which is our institutional accrediting agency.*

I would like to ask everyone who served on one of our five summer 2009 work groups to please stand... so we can ALL thank you.

Those groups included faculty, staff and trustees.

Many other faculty and staff members also provided their input to the groups, directly and via a new faculty/staff portal that was arranged as a communications hub.

- It is time to focus on our priorities based upon current realities. Therefore, building upon that HLC work, a separate task force came together. That effort has resulted in a proposed framework for a new 2 year Action Plan to move Park forward.

That task force includes representation from all HLC work groups, all Schools of the University, all administrative divisions, plus alumni, trustees, and students leaders.

Would those individuals please stand and be recognized?

Having a new two year plan for 2010-2012 is needed but we must also initiate a University-wide conversation about what Park should be and do longer term, so that our success this year and next year will position the University for the future we wish to create beyond 2012.

Peter Drucker said "The best way to predict the future is to create it."

One ongoing priority is enrollment (as well as other revenue generation) and rightfully so, because that is how the University will marshal the resources needed to advance programs and services. Programs that are in demand and that serve the needs of our communities and nations because Park teaches students around the country and world.

It is very good news that the enrollment for this fall is up 5.99% above what was projected.

We now have a balanced budget and many people are working hard to build that enrollment momentum through the rest of the year.

How well we coordinate enrollment management for recruitment across the University, and how well we *all* connect with students to increase retention to graduation is absolutely critical.

That activity drives student success, which is why we're all here, and it creates the additional resources.

Aristotle said that "we *are* what we repeatedly do...so Excellence is not an act, but a habit."

For all of our efforts the key to success is *meaningful, collaborative communication*.

Communication that includes multidirectional, civil discourse, where everyone is also listening.

So what are some of the ways we can effectively communicate?

First... for the students. How can the University best communicate with you?

The best way I can think of is to talk with students in Parkville, in Kansas City, at our campus center and online, all of which we will continue to do.

In addition to the various student organizations in which faculty and staff members meet regularly with students, I will also be communicating directly with students. For example,

- I will have meetings with the PSGA and the World Student Union; the PSGA is scheduled for a discussion at the White House and the WSU will soon be scheduled.
- I met recently with the Stylus Editor and we've agreed to meet frequently during the year.
- Over the next few weeks, I will be meeting with students in Park's KC Area Accelerated Programs to hear from them as a group
- Whenever I travel to campus centers outside Kansas City, I enjoy talking with Park students around the country. Most recently, I was privileged to visit with students at Park's commencement on September 12 in the Washington D.C. area. Many of those students are in the military.
- On the Parkville campus, I'll be having lunch in Thompson Commons occasionally to chat with students. So, when you see me there, please share your ideas.
- As I mentioned, both Molly and I enjoy visiting with students while walking on campus or when we see you in the community.
- I also know that other staff as well as the faculty members communicate with students in a variety of ways which is excellent.
- That Park has a 12:1 student to faculty ratio means the faculty really know the students and they care deeply about your success.

Park is also using technology to share information with students across all campus centers

- As you probably saw in the Stylus, I am twittering. You can go to ParkUPrez and catch my updates, many of which include links to other information
- The University is also using Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter
- Students in several classes are providing their input to help staff create the "perfect student portal"
- We've received many comments from students saying how much they like GoogleApps
- Students can receive emergency notifications and school closing alerts through text messages.

- And, students are receiving University updates, including sports updates via Park's Imprint publication, which is online

What about communications among faculty and staff?

That effort also includes face-to-face and electronic formats.

I'll touch on some, and invite input from the faculty and staff about ways we can improve.

- There will be regular meetings with the leadership of the Faculty Senate and the Federation where, in addition to myself, various VPs and others will join us as needed for the topic
- We will have continued involvement of trustees on various faculty/staff groups and task forces. Many people have expressed their appreciation for having trustees participate in the groups, and the trustees have said that they have found the experience very informative for them, productive for Park, and most enjoyable.
- The Board and I have extended an invitation for faculty representatives to meet with Trustees on the Academic Affairs Committee at EACH of the Board's three meetings during the year. *The Academic Affairs Committee is the group of Trustees that focuses on academic issues for the Board.*
- The Board and I have also extended an invitation for faculty representatives to bring comments to the full assembly of all Trustees at each Board meeting. So not only will faculty have access to the Academic Affairs Committee, they will also be able to address the full Board at each Board meeting.
- So that Park can further benefit from faculty expertise, we'll be inviting faculty members with specialized expertise to serve on one of several internal advisory groups.

One such group will help Rita Weighill, VP for Communications, with ideas regarding marketing and communications, and another group will assist Laurie McCormack, VP University Advancement and her team brainstorm community and alumni relations, including fundraising.

- I've asked to be scheduled to visit each School's faculty meeting to listen. It will take a bit of time to rotate around to all the school meetings, but it will happen.
- I'm also scheduling "walkabouts" so I can wander around campus for informal chats to hear whatever people have on their mind.
- Multiple electronic formats will continue to be used and improved including effective use of portals, emails with links, etc.

The examples I'm sharing for communication among students, faculty and staff all help, but they only represent *opportunities to communicate*.

What comes of that exchange depends upon our collective, collaborative, and constructive spirit...which I know we have.

In *my* new role for the University I will be interacting with many external constituencies, to tell the Park story, to advance the visibility of the University, and to marshal resources.

I pledge to you that I am completely dedicated to doing this and more for Park.

I am also confident that each of you is equally committed to doing everything you can in your roles.

For the students... your work at Park is to expand your own knowledge, and to develop your skills and global understanding as much as you can. While you are students at Park, I also challenge you to become engaged outside the classroom as well, and to help fellow students and others so that when you graduate, you leave Park a better place for students who follow. That is a primary goal for all of us -- to make Park the best University it can be, while we are here and also for the future.

For the rest of us, the faculty, staff, and Board of Trustees, it is a matter of ensuring that students have a safe, supportive, engaging learning environment that is second to none. Students expect and deserve excellence in both programs and services. That means that we must hold ourselves and you the students to high standards. High standards are not easy, but they are why we are all here and why we do what we do.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "That what lies behind us... or what lies in front of us... matters little compared to what lies within us."

At Park's September 12 commencement in the Washington D.C. area, Park conferred an Honorary Doctorate upon Lt. Col. Timothy Maxwell. *He is a former Park adjunct faculty member, and marine who survived a severe brain injury while serving in Iraq. During his recovery...he encouraged the establishment of wounded warrior barracks to facilitate recovery for the thousands of severely wounded soldiers ...*

Lt. Col. Maxwell reminded the Park graduates that they can all do more than they think they can, and that they should be confident in their abilities to overcome adversity. It is an important message for all of us.

I would also ask that we all remember to be thankful along the way. Melody Beattie said that gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

So have faith in yourself, work hard, be thankful and enjoy your time at Park.

Go create an extraordinary year in *your* life, and in the lives of those around you -- it is within you to make it so! And I trust that you will

Thank you!