

August Update

“Preparation is everything,” according to the Red Sox legend, Ted Williams. Perhaps it is not “everything,” but it certainly does play a major role in whether our efforts pay off in the end. This is the season of preparation on Houghton’s campus as we look forward to welcoming the class of 2014 and to welcoming back our returning students. Many of our residences have had a face lift this summer. The dining commons definitely has a new look including a new wood burning pizza oven. For those who pine to have a class outdoors, there will be an outdoor patio style classroom of Houghton creek stone, thanks to the generosity of the class of 2010 (and the summer workers who personally carried the stones from Houghton creek to the building site outside Wesley Chapel.)

While the physical preparation of a campus is very hard work, especially when much of the work has to be done between the end of summer conference season and the start of school, it is not the only kind of preparation that goes into being ready for a new learning season.

There is also the intellectual preparation. Here the obvious example is the work of the faculty who are writing or adjusting their syllabi, perhaps adding or subtracting certain readings, changing assignments or pedagogical strategies, etc.

The kind of intellectual preparation to which I want to call attention is the preparation each of us must do if we want to be learners—whether it is as first year college students or as alumni of 50 years! As important as the syllabi are that are given to us, whether they be formal syllabi given to students on the first day of class or whether they be metaphorical syllabi that come to us as we take on a new task, they are not nearly as critical to our learning as the syllabi we bring with us to each learning opportunity. For if we rely only on the syllabi of others, our learning is much less likely to connect with our lives. The learning situation is less likely to contribute to the true questions that we are walking with in any particular season. When we fail to write our own syllabi, we are less likely to be truly transformed by a learning experience even while we may gain some credentials with flying colors!

For lifelong learners, we are coming up on the New Year, far more important than January 1. I hope that you will join me in preparing a syllabus for your own learning this year. What are the questions you want to understand better at the end of this year? What books do you want to read? What assignments do you want to give yourself? How do you want to ensure that you are a faithful steward of the curiosity, the questions and the invitations to grow that daily present themselves on our doorstep?

May you go into the year prepared with the agendas that others have for you and with a clear sense of your own hopes and aspirations.

Shirley A. Mullen, Class of 1976
President