

*May 10, 2010*

Last Friday, I saw the drama of a Houghton education re-enacted in the living room of the President's House. As we have done for the past three years, we began the festivities of graduation weekend by hosting a gathering of the seniors who had successfully completed major honors work along with their parents and major advisors to celebrate the graduates' accomplishments.

Seven seniors told about their projects and how the process of doing this research had shaped their Houghton education. Students worked on topics as varied as Virtue (the philosopher), to genetic field research on coyotes (the biologist), to the impact of digital gaming on higher order thinking (the education major) to a behavioral study of habituation in medicinal leeches (the experimental psychologist) to an analysis of Health Care systems (the Intercultural Studies student)--to mention a few of the topics. Students talked about how their projects prepared them for future careers and for graduate school, how they provoked their personal and spiritual development, and how they strengthened their capacity for independent research and life-long learning.

As I listened that day, I wished I could have bottled that hour of reflection to share with those who wonder about the meaning and value of a Christian liberal arts education. As I listened, I was struck by several thoughts; first, how very much each student had grown and developed as an independent and individuated human being during his or her time at Houghton. Each graduate was more himself or herself as a result of submitting to the rigor and the richness of this educational environment; second, in the very midst of their individuality were the common marks of a Houghton education--the ability to communicate well, to make connections across disciplines, to apply learning to life, and to relate learning and their faith in ways that enrich both learning and their theological and spiritual grounding; third, each of the graduates had that commitment to excellence, coupled with the desire to make a difference for good in the world that I have come to identify with Houghton students.

I left with a deepened conviction about the calling of Houghton College in this time and an eager anticipation to see how God plans to use this amazing Class of 2010 in the coming decades. For these were only seven among 282 graduates who walked across the stage last Saturday headed for places far and wide--to graduate schools like University of Chicago, University of Notre Dame, and University of Wisconsin, to service opportunities in the new Wesley ServiceCorps, to various ministry opportunities, to professional schools and to the workplace. They are truly prepared to achieve--and motivated to serve.

What a privilege to watch their stories unfold!

Shirley A. Mullen, Class of 1976  
President