From the President

Committed to Community

Universities play many roles in today’s society, but perhaps the least understood is their role in evoking and sustaining values, both in individuals and communities of learners. Historically, however, it is one of the principal reasons that they came to exist. Before the American Civil War, most colleges and universities were founded and supported by religious groups to provide education to the clergy and lay people.

Since the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act of 1862, American universities have become more professionally oriented, providing for an educated and enlightened workforce. I believe that the emphasis on values has been diminished as a result and that it is especially complicated to attempt to return to it in an age of secularism.

Nevertheless, I believe that in these times we are increasingly in need of values to sustain us, values based on a shared sense of communal standards. What better place to emphasize those values than at the University of Hartford, a university characterized by its diversity in religion, ethnicity, and race.

In the fall of 2008 I charged a group of faculty, students, and staff, led by Jane Horvath, a professor of economics and associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, to develop a values statement for the University—a statement of values that both reflects our community as it is and provides us with goals for the future.

That committee designed and led an exercise last year to discover what people liked about the University’s values and what they felt we were lacking. More than a thousand students, faculty, and staff participated in this extended conversation. Based on the discussions and surveys conducted, the committee then designed and tested a statement that was ultimately approved last May by the University’s board of regents.

Here it is:

“At the University of Hartford we are committed to community. We are an academic community that values integrity, curiosity, creativity, excellence, responsibility, and accomplishment. Enriched by our diversity and our engagement with one another, we take pride in our shared traditions and experiences. We are dedicated to building a culture that respects all of its members and celebrates their contributions as we work together to strengthen our community.”

This fall, under Jane’s direction, we kicked off a values initiative aimed at educating not only our students but our faculty and staff as well.

The new values statement has provided a basis for action within our campus community. During the fall semester, for instance, several student groups came together to organize an Adopt an Area campaign to pick up trash in student areas over the weekends. Sounds simple, but when you think about it, this activity represents just the sort of change in behavior and values that I think is necessary.

One student described her experience with the Adopt an Area campaign this way: “When we first started cleaning up on Saturday mornings, students began looking at us oddly. Finally, one said, ‘What did you do to deserve this?’ I explained. Maybe someday he will think twice before he throws trash on the ground on a Friday night. This is really about teaching students to respect our campus environment.”

Our dining services also began a practice—one that we hope will become a tradition—of having staff and faculty volunteers serve a pre-Thanksgiving dinner to our students. It was a great event, and I think we all enjoyed the experience of community it provided.

To communicate the importance of this campaign on campus, we have provided T-shirts for students and coffee mugs for faculty and staff with the motto “Committed to Community.” While we cannot send each of you a T-shirt or coffee mug, I hope we can count on you for your support of this initiative.

After all, values don’t begin and end with a campus experience. We are all part of the University of Hartford community, and we welcome your support.

Walter Harrison