

Early in the summer as I was reading "*Columns*," the UDub alumni magazine, I was struck by the fact that a research institution, the University of Washington, was making the same claims for undergraduate education that we typically make about the undergraduate experience here at ONU. All the words were there...and, apparently, much of the practice. The writers talked about changes in UDub undergraduate education since the 70s, the 1970s, and emphasized the focus on student learning, as opposed to teaching. That institution has been working at shrinking the size of the University for freshmen and has done that through freshman interest groups (FIGs), clusters of students who take all their courses together in the fall and meet once a week with a student mentor. They have freshman seminars taught by senior faculty; about 24% of the undergraduate students are involved in a major research project before they graduate. Sounds familiar doesn't it? Small groups, courses taught by senior faculty, undergraduate research, internships, service learning were all changes noted in the university environment, not to mention the focus on technology and the emphasis on diversity.

It struck me in reading this, that the uniqueness of Ohio Northern is not simply those things that the University of Washington has been initiating for its undergraduate students; ONU's size, the unique composition of its colleges, the commitment of its founder to education for all, ONU's enduring reality as a church-related institution, its on-going commitment to student learning and student development are integral. ONU uniqueness is all of these, but its uniqueness also lies in those points that our marketing task force identified earlier this year: ONU provides our students the choices of a lifetime and great places to build dreams. It is large enough to challenge, small enough to care. Our alums say that the value never leaves them. Values are learned and strengthened here. Our alums have said all that since 1872, the date of the first grad, and their lives have demonstrated the learning and commitment to social values that informed the educational vision of Henry Solomon Lehr. We can't forget that Lehr's vision was to make learning accessible to all and to improve teaching and learning in the schools. Higher education was both an object and a means. Through learning, he believed, one built and served one's country and world, one's countrymen, God.

As we face the ever increasing complexities in education: using technology to improve learning; providing education to those who need it, at a time they need it, through technology; increasing demands on faculty to keep current with burgeoning knowledge; maintaining scholarship (art works, research, writing, productions, dance, music performance and creation); meeting student needs, becoming more open again to the outside world in partnerships; providing practice opportunities (co-op and internships) with theory; providing service learning opportunities and reflection; initiating new programs; assisting in recruiting students and helping to retain them; providing mentoring and advising, research opportunities for students and participation in professional organizations; dealing with ever-increasing legal complexities and parental and student expectations; we could be overwhelmed.

Our challenges, however, need to be faced in the context of the strengths of the University. And these strengths, to my mind, are those described by George Schertzer (Alumni Secretary 1956-1973) in his 1962 *Brief History of the University*. Schertzer wrote: "To review the history of Ohio Northern gives cause to wonder why it ever survived as it passed from one major crisis to another. It began and flourished during the years of great need for normal schools, but it continued after the others served their narrow geographical need and died. It survived during depression and war years, when the student body used less than 10% of the facilities at hand. It survived when there were no funds to pay the administrators and teachers---and they willingly used their private funds or obtained supplemental employment. Ohio Northern has always been a great and respected institution because there has been a solid chain of great teachers employed by dedicated administrators, and all fired up with the mission of extending an educational opportunity to those who would otherwise have been denied."

Two years ago at the opening session I talked about Henry Solomon Lehr, whose passion for his school eclipsed his own wish for continued involvement with it. Last fall I talked about President Williams who, with the faculty and staff, lived through the ravages of the Depression of 1929 and the start of World War II, and saw the student body decimated, as the predominantly male campus went off to war. With these two men, however, stood the other teachers and staff, men and women (in some cases the two career families, a practice that dates from the 1870s) who built the teaching/learning traditions of ONU. Today I'm going to talk about one of the most difficult periods for the University (apart from 1872, when twelve students were enrolled) and the president, faculty and staff whose faith in Lehr's vision helped moved ONU to its current strength.

Tired out by his struggles to keep the university going during his 14 years as president, and hindered by ill

health, President Robert Williams resigned as president in February 1943, effective June 30, saying the University needed a younger, more vigorous leader. Despite a petition signed by 36 members of the faculty, including four deans (H.E. Huber, John A. Needy, Claude W. Pettit, R. H. Raabe) and the pantheon of famous faculty: C.H. Freeman, William P. Lamale, Clifford Deming, F.L. Berger, W. E. Binkley, Clyde Lamb, Alva Toff, R. A. Dobbins, J.A. Potter and Laurence Freeman who urged that the Board not accept President Williams' resignation, the Board faced the fact of Williams' illness and set about looking for a replacement.

One of these Board members was Robert O. McClure. He had joined the ONU Board of Trustees in October 1941 as the District Superintendent of the West Ohio Conference of the Methodist Church. He served on the Board through 1941 and 42 and had then been elected to a five year term in 1943. As a member of the Board, he was well aware of the University's struggle for continued existence. Named to the Board Committee that was asked to seek a replacement for President Williams, he found himself named acting president of the University, effective June 30, at a Board meeting in April. At the June 30 meeting of the Board, following its review of the financial state of the University and the need for a stable presidency in order to be able to seek funds for the University, the Board elected Dr. McClure fifth president of the University. Most importantly, he agreed to serve.

Robert McClure was born in Henderson County, Kentucky, on August 8, 1887. In its story on the president, the *Northern Review* reported that McClure worked his way through Asbury College, earning the B.A. and M.A. there. He completed post graduate work at Northwestern University and Garrett Biblical Institute in Chicago and had an honorary doctorate from Lincoln Memorial University. McClure was a veteran of World War I, having served overseas as an army chaplain. Following that war he became president of Belle City College in Lake Charles, Louisiana, where he served for five years. In 1930 McClure came to Ohio as a minister named to the Athens District of the Methodist Church by Bishop Edgar Blake. He served as pastor in the Chillicothe area, then at Epworth Church, Toledo, and, finally at First Church, Newark before becoming Lima District Superintendent. In 1943 McClure was only too aware of the precarious situation of the University.

As Mrs. Wilfrid E. Binkley, wife of ONU's well-known historian, states in *The Evolution of Ohio Northern University*:

"President McClure began his duties July 1, 1943, and somehow he kept the university going during his first summer quarter while he sought to ascertain the liquid financial resources of the institution. ...(H)e found these to be practically non-existent outside the trickle of tuition, and, meanwhile, tens of thousands (of dollars) of old unpaid bills poured into his office. He found the physical plant run down and three of the largest buildings needing new roofs. That the new president was not overwhelmed was due to a stubborn determination not to admit defeat. As he saw it, Ohio Northern was a church-related institution destined to minister to the vocational, cultural and religious need of American youth."

She goes on:

"So uncertain did the situation become that on Saturday preceding the opening day of the fall quarter of 1943, he gathered the faculty in a special session, related to them the critical situation, and confronted them with the question of whether to close or continue the operation of Ohio Northern University. (Ed. note: the student body numbered under 200.) The unanimous response of the faculty was an offer to proceed. ...For two years (Ed. note: while he was president of ONU)...he continued the full duties of Superintendent of the Lima District of the Methodist Church. During those two years he accepted no salary as university president."

The president was not alone in not accepting a salary. The same faculty and staff (Pettit, Freeman, Huber, Binkley, Smull among them) that had pledged to continue the University, took outside jobs and used some of their own funds in order to continue teaching students. They initiated new projects, affiliations with the U.S. government to train military students at ONU, development of a Lima branch of ONU. The president sought and received funds from the alumni (the Loyalty Fund), the Ada community, and the Methodist Church. In his first year he collected nearly \$30,000 from these three groups. Schertzer tells us that the "year closed in the black and saw \$10,000 applied to old, unpaid bills."

In his July 1944 report to the Board, President McClure noted the strength and uniqueness of ONU and its value-focussed foundation:

"Since our charter from the State of Ohio grants to us the establishment of four colleges--Arts, Engineering, Law, and Pharmacy--we are in a most unique position among the educational institutions of the state, and, indeed, the nation. The motivation of the founders of this institution must not be overlooked. I believe that the greatest contribution Ohio Northern University can make to the saving of our American way of life is to send out engineers, lawyers, pharmacists, as well as Liberal Arts graduates, who place chief emphasis upon values. An engineer should not only be able to build a great airport, but also to realize something of its contribution to human relationships."

After one year on the job, President McClure's July 1945 report to the Board outlined the needs of the University: accreditation by the North Central Association, dormitories for women, repairs to buildings (Presser Hall was completely closed down for lack of repair; Hill and Dukes both leaked and were being re-roofed), repairs to heating and plumbing. Indebtedness had been reduced from \$170,000 (1942) to \$95,000 and current bills were paid. McClure's plan for short-term action was clear: achieve accreditation, construct a women's dormitory, accumulate a \$1,000,000 endowment. With the ONU faculty and staff he began to move the University forward. Together they looked for new partnerships and ventures. Among the partners in new ventures were the U.S. Government (training programs until the end of the war and obtaining military surplus goods after that) and Lima Senior High School where an ONU Lima Branch Campus was established. And then the war was over.

As Mrs. Binkley notes as she describes post World War II events on campus:

"No sooner had the war ended in the middle of 1945 than ex-servicemen began their return to the campus. At once the university was confronted with the problem of housing, particularly for married men and their families. Gradually, during the year following the close of hostilities, 114 trailers for families were set up in three colonies. For single ex-service men, five federal housing dormitories were erected. New roofs were placed on the buildings that needed them (Ed. note: Presser had not yet been fully repaired) and additional faculty members were obtained. By the fall of 1946, one thousand students were receiving instruction at Ohio Northern University. The seventy-fifth anniversary of the institution came at an auspicious time in its history."

Students and their families were not only housed in the trailer villages; Joe Banks, who had graduated in 1941 returned for additional classes in 1946. He and Thelma and their new baby reopened the Phi Mu Delta house, which had been closed in 1943 because of the war. They lived downstairs. As the brothers moved back, they lived upstairs. Michael Oxley's father was in school at the time. His family lived in a Main Street apartment. The University used the Armory on East Buckeye in Ada as a dormitory for single men. All of the buildings on campus were rather run down. There were buckets to catch leaks in the old buildings after a rain. The campus, administrators, faculty, staff and students joined together for an annual May Day clean-up and a May Queen reigned over this event. The University revitalized the Student Council. There were wives' clubs for the spouses of married students. Families and laundry dotted the campus landscape. Flooding of the trailer areas required boat rescues on occasion; there was no need for mud volleyball with the mud plain in place. Even if the physical plant was not all to be desired, fine teachers were in place and new professors joined the faculty: Bob Hilliard, Karl Roeder, A.C. Smith, Larry Archer, Marv English, Gene Hanson, Jim Klingenger.

In 1947, McClure reported to the Board that ONU was free of debt, that the University was valued at about \$1,250,000, and that there was an endowment of \$250,000. He had succeeded in getting the West Ohio Conference to sponsor a conference-wide campaign for \$500,000 (1948-49); he was asking ONU Board members to contribute \$125,000; alumni were to provide the remaining funds to meet the \$1,000,000 goal. By 1948, McClure's time was still consumed by fundraising. He had not succeeded in getting North Central accreditation, but the State of Ohio had approved all programs; the College of Law had gained provisional accreditation. Fall enrollment was the following: Liberal Arts, 462; Engineering, 304; Pharmacy, 260; Law, 183. Despite the growth in the student body

and the faculty, success in increasing faculty salaries and continued efforts of a broad group of faculty and staff, the pressures of the presidency, the on-going need to raise funds for the university, and ill health took their toll on McClure. He was ill and out of the office much of 1948-1949. When President McIntosh took over as president in 1949, he recalled that Mrs. Wilfrid Binkley was singlehandedly running the president's office (Interview with Dr. Hilliard and Dr. Ron Weber in 1985, 114th commencement). Faculty and staff members kept the University going, president in place or not.

Schertzer describes McClure's decision to step down in 1949:

"Broken in health, Dr. McClure resigned the presidency in April, 1949. The Ada Herald, in making the announcement, likened him to Moses who ---"literally led the University out of the wilderness." The indebtedness of 1943, some \$343,648 had been completely liquidated on a dollar-for-dollar basis; nearly half a million was pledged to the permanent endowment."

As McClure told his Board (reported in the *Northern Review*):

"After six years of arduous and incessant effort, I am glad to return to you the administrative control which you committed to my hands by resolution adopted on June 30, 1943. Much of the authority you granted me has not been used. However, it is with some sense of satisfaction that together we have been able to completely change the outlook for the future of the University so that today, instead of immediate financial crisis, we have a glorious opportunity for the creation of plans for a long range development program.

While I surrender this leadership, I shall keep the heartaches and treasure them. The memory of the shining faces of hundreds of young people who have found on this campus an open door of opportunity during these difficult post-war years is compensation indeed."

McClure, like President Williams before him, like President Smith, like Dr. Lehr, understood that students and student learning are what we are about and they valued that above everything else.

Schertzer was right. Ohio Northern will remain a great and respected institution if there continues to be a solid chain of great teachers employed by dedicated administrators and aided by committed staff, all fired up with the mission to provide an educational opportunity to those who would otherwise have been denied that chance. So let's get on with our task.