

**The Future of Augustana College**  
Faculty forum comments by Craig Spencer  
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This is not a polished document, but rather some notes that I use to give my presentations.

Before looking toward the future though, I'd like to look at the past for a moment. I came here in 1991, and soon discovered that the college was facing some challenges - budget and enrollment issues, not unlike the current situation.

A number of interesting ideas were put forth at that time, to deal with the situation. I will mention 3.

First, there were passionate pleas made to add graduate programs to help solve budget and enrollment concerns. The faculty approved new masters programs in Nursing, as well as Business, (MBA) although the latter was not pursued.

Second, the college considered the purchase of Kilean Community College, with the idea that since our classrooms were pretty empty at night, why not try to fill them with junior college students in the evening.

Third, some of you may recall filling out a survey with some interesting questions. Would you be willing to teach your classes on the week-end?, at night, and my favorite, would you be willing to teach your classes at the Mall?

As a new faculty member at the time, listening to these proposals, I found myself wondering, what does the future hold for Augustana College? Did I come to the right place?

THANKFULLY, we seem to be heading in other directions now.

The directions pursued more recently seem to point more towards building on our long standing strengths, rather than making radical changes that would have us moving towards places more like the vo tech or USDSU.

Like many of you, I have rather strong feelings that as we plan for the future, we should lean in the opposite direction, towards trying to be as *different* as we can from the state schools and the Colorado Techs.

So what to build on for the future? What are some of these long-standing strengths that make us somewhat distinctive? In previous forums this year, colleagues have discussed the liberal arts in an undergraduate setting, and our church relatedness. I feel these two facets are extremely important to the future vitality of the college. These are right up at the top of the list. Since these topics have been covered in a number of other forums this year, I want to focus on some other areas that haven't received as much attention, some that Jane touched on.

John Clementson talked about faculty inspiration - his giants. Mary Jane talked about sense of community, people that work here source of support, Loren as well importance quiet folks drop by say something nice just when you need it.

For me, I value those things, but the best part of my job is the students. They keep me going. And the most rewarding part of working with students is when I engage them in things beyond the straight-lecture format class - some of those outside the box experiences that Jane alluded to. William Yeats said, "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire". When I was a kid, during the summer kids in the neighborhood had a club called the Fire every night club. Honest! We weren't destructive, we just liked building campfires. TODAY, I still get a kick out of trying to light fires, but now the excitement is watching students catch the flame, To me the future at Augustana is about finding ways to light more fires in students. I know that in departments around the campus students are being engaged by faculty, and fires are being kindled. You know who and where these things are happening in your part of the college. The actual range of fire lighting activities are many, hard to define exactly... In my neck of the woods in GSC, I have found that two of the best ways for ME to engage students..... FIRST: field activities, be it snorkeling in the Florida Keys during Interim to studying insulating properties of snow while winter camping in an igloo, to our annual week-end field trip to Lake Okoboji with my ecology class to give them a taste of a field research station. These things come naturally to me because I am a field ecologist, and that's what I love doing. The experiences would be different in other disciplines, ex. when Ivan takes students to the Guthrie, or Sandra Looney's poetry trips to British Isles. There are many others.

The SECOND way for me to light fires in students through hands-on research projects, ... students take some ownership and responsibility, often one on one with faculty, get involved in the process of science, not just from listening to me, or reading the book or following a cookbook lab.

In my area, students begin doing inquiry-based research projects as freshman, and a number of them move on to full blown independent research as juniors and seniors. A lot of this activity takes place during the summer. My summer lab as many of you know is based at the University of Montana field station on Flathead Lake. Over the years, a number of students have worked with me out there. What an exciting environment for them and ME!

A number of us just got back from SD Acad. Science meetings in Rapid City. How rewarding to sit quietly in the back of the room and watch our students present their research findings to fellow scientists from the region!

What a JOY to light a fire, plant a seed and watch these students blossom.

Don't get me wrong, I am not discounting quality teaching and lectures in the classroom. I know there are different approaches for engaging students in academics. I'm talking about approaches that I have experienced. It's hard to define exactly what I am talking

about beside lighting fires in students. I think I know it when I see it. You probably see it to. I hear about it from students that are engaged with other professors.. Some of you could probably better describe what I'm trying to say. I think Jane talked about it in the type of professors we should be trying to hire and the expectations of those professor. Maybe another way to describe it is in the words of Karl Menninger. "What a teacher is, is more important that what he or she teaches." Here I think we're talking about being role models for our students, in the classroom AND outside of the classroom.

To me the future of Augustana College, if we are to be a vibrant place and attract quality students down the road, I look at three things to define our niche: the two I started with today - liberal arts in an undergraduate setting, and church relatedness, and third, my main point for today, intense engagement in academic pursuits, faculty and students together.

Maybe there are some of you that will take issue with what I have said up until this point, I encourage discussion, but what I want to get into next are some related challenges, and issues that I REALLY think we need to talk about as we think about the future..

#1 Burnout. As many of you know, the things I was talking about above, the type of teaching, engagement of students beyond the classroom, being a role model,.....takes a tremendous amount of initiative, energy, and time commitment on the part of faculty. Grants, summers, research, trips away from home. . Often unpaid, not part of load, extra things on top of all the other STUFF we are doing. Today, as I stand before you, I gotta tell you, I'm feeling some burnout. Last week, I'm scrambling to help my research students get ready for their presentation, we leave early Friday for the meetings in Rapid, get back late on Saturday. Sunday, I'm speaking at the biology honor student (BBB) initiation banquet, Monday afternoon is dept. seminar and really cool workshop on teaching methods, that ends at 7PM. Thursday is my faculty forum (here and now), I've got a ton of dept. chair stuff piling up on my desk, advising appointments start next week for my 25 advisees, a breath of fresh air in chapel and little choir thing that I enjoy, and oh yes, my classes, I've got a four hour lab this afternoon. I'm trying to be a good dad at home. But I'm feeling tired right now. At times, I feel like I'm not doing a very good job at any of this. I know I'm kind of rambling right now. Can you relate to what I'm talking about here? I know I've talked with some of you about this.

I think we need to talk and wrestle with this issue of burnout and do a better job of supporting, encouraging and PROTECTING those faculty that are engaged in all of this. I don't have a specific solution, maybe you do. It probably starts with department chairs, division chairs, and the dean. Not easy, I am getting a taste of this other side, as a dept. chair myself. At times it seems like there is a group of faculty engaged in lots and lots of things around the campus, both inside and outside the classroom. So maybe as chairs and deans, to address the burnout concern we should work on adjusting the teaching and advising loads, committee assignments accordingly, to strike a better balance the load amongst all of faculty.

I am thankful for sabbatical and Interim leaves which are very helpful with regard to the concerns lined above.

The burnout issue gets exacerbated during these financial squeezes. First reason is pretty obvious. When faculty positions are cut, increases the load and burnout risk on those that remain. This impact hits hardest in those areas that took cuts.. The second impact of financial squeeze, less obvious, but probably more pervasive across all areas of the campus. When cuts are looming and budgets are tight, natural tendency is to defend ones own turf, make it clear how much YOUR unit is doing. Then, what little support system we had concerning burnout tends to get weakened when folks are worried about defending their turf.

The other issue with burnout, .....it can take its toll on faculty leadership on campus. I think this has been a problem at Augustana, at least in the years that I have been here. A lot of time the leadership doesn't seem to be there. I've seen young untenured faculty get pressured into being dept. chairs, and other leadership positions, way too early, because nobody else wants to do it.

In a similar vein I think we need to find ways to better protect and support our young faculty in the future. They REALLY have a hard time saying no. We have lost some good ones in recent years. Could we have kept some of these?? With the spate of faculty retirements looming across the country it's probably not going to get any easier to attract and retain good young faculty.

A lot of this boils down to how we prioritize the use of our resources in the future. We aren't rich. Likely never will be. It behooves us to make the best use of our money, time and talents. Does it seem to any of you that more time and effort going into activities that seem to have less and less to do with lighting fires in students.

I'll give one illustration of what I see is misguided use of resources and then wrap up my comments. . Look at our Bush faculty development grants over the last ten years. Maybe I'm wrong, but I think we have blown a lot of it. I recall writing a Bush grant a few years ago, I got \$500 salary and money for equipment..For this I:

1. Wrote a proposal
2. Before submitting I met several times with assessment coordinator to design an assessment plan and questionnaire.
3. After receiving the proposal, I began the work and then paused to wrote a progress report
4. I wrote a final report
5. I gave a talk at a Bush lunch
6. Put on a dog and pony show for an outside site visit team of Bush Evaluators.

The \$500 was more than consumed in these activities, with none left over for the actual work proposed in the grant!!

I recently applied for another bush proposal, the maximum faculty pay was \$50/day.. This is hardly minimum wage! It would be better use of MY time to just dot he work, and

not spend some much time jumping through all of the hoops required to get the small grant.

Another standard practice. We got more proposals than we have money, to be nice, we often fund them all, but cut the budgets of all of them! More work, less money. My preference, be selective, fund the best ones tot he full extent.

This last illustration points to the fact that we are doing some of this to OURSELVES. The net result is less time to work with students and increased risk of burnout.

In closing, I've taught in several other geographic areas, to the east and to the west--- by and large I feel fortunate to be surrounded by our students, they tend to be hard working and good solid citizens . I look forward to working together with you to keep lighting fires in these young people.