

## Achieving North Park's Thriving Future: APRE Update

As a dynamic part of our strategic planning through North Park Next, the Academic Program Review and Enhancement committee (APRE) has been reviewing the University's entire academic portfolio to ensure that our curriculum is true to mission, compelling to prospective students, relevant to employers, and financially sustainable.

Applying the deepest data analysis in the University's history, this academic program review has been conducted by our own academics – deans and faculty representatives from every academic unit, led by Provost Craig Johnson, Professor Mark Gavoor, and our expert consultant, former North Parker Dr. Melissa Morriss-Olson, Distinguished Professor of Higher Education Leadership and Provost Emerita at Bay Path University.

We have provided regular updates as the work of North Park Next has advanced, and we are pleased to continue communicating the latest updates and next steps.

### Background

We know the challenges facing all of higher education. These include demographic shifts and a decline in the number of high school graduates over the next decade; increased competition from alternatives to the traditional college campus experience; the pandemic's impact on students and families already concerned about college affordability; and barriers to graduation. Any one of these factors would be a significant challenge. We are navigating them all at once.

For tuition-dependent universities like North Park, merely surviving in this environment is not enough. It endangers long-term viability. The harsh reality is that, since 2016, according to Education Dive, 66 public and private non-profit colleges and universities have closed, merged, or been acquired. **We are not going that way.**

Instead, prior to the pandemic in early 2020, we began working through North Park Next to advance the university we love from surviving ... to *thriving*. We are doing this work in order to dramatically improve the North Park experience and student success, and secure a strong financial future -- and the healthy margin we need to invest in our mission, reward innovation, and improve compensation and support for our community.

In addition to the APRE, we are also evaluating our administrative operating structures, our co-curricular programs, our buildings and grounds – and conducting a broad-based strategic planning process with our planning partner Credo – a process that seeks to engage everyone in our community. This work is aimed at advancing the mission of North Park, living into our distinctives, and creating our thriving future together.

### What's happening now

Academic program recommendations developed by our APRE deans and faculty representatives are being shared on campus with academic units that would be impacted by proposed changes. Tomorrow, May 14, the recommendations will be shared with the Deans Council and the Faculty Senate for timely consultation. The President will also engage in timely consultation with the Provost on Monday, May 17. Provost Johnson will receive written feedback through May 19. This timeline honors the process outlined in MAPP.

Given the potential impact for individuals within our community (including students, faculty and staff) as well as the fact that these recommendations are not considered final until approved by the North Park Board of Trustees later this month, the specifics of this work remain confidential for now. We can share that the proposed changes include both recommendations for compelling new academic programs and strategic restructuring of existing programs.

### **Proposed new programs**

Seven exciting new academic programs are being considered, each with a “champion” leading a team in a rigorous feasibility study. Based on the data we have collected with Gray Associates – data on student interest, employer interest and degree of competition from other schools -- we are excited about the potential of these programs to attract more students, to inspire our donors, and to earn the attention of employers.

### **Recommendations for strategic restructuring**

The APRE recommendations also include strategic restructuring of some programs and majors, including those that have been consistently under-enrolled or that duplicate programs in other divisions. We will prioritize students currently enrolled in any restructured programs to make sure that the promise of their completed degree in their program is fulfilled.

All of the recommendations are based on data, and what is best for strengthening North Park University, now and into the future.

Importantly, these are recommendations, not decisions -- the Board of Trustees reviewed draft recommendations at its spring meeting and will receive the final recommendations on May 25, along with the results of timely consultation with the Deans Council, Faculty Senate and the President. Once final decisions are made, the campus community will be fully informed.

### **Looking forward**

As we pursue our aim to become a singularly compelling model of Christian higher education in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America by living into our three distinctives – Christian, city-centered and intercultural – the APRE work has followed a thoughtful, strategic, collaborative, and data informed process. That strategy and process will continue during this next phase of developing final recommendations.

This is hard work. It is understandable that for some, the prospect of change can feel unsettling -- even the positive change we will ultimately achieve as we create our future together through North Park Next.

Yet the evidence of God’s provision throughout our history, our trustworthy process and future vision give us confidence that new ideas and necessary changes can work together for our students’ success and North Park’s long-term viability.

Of course, some things about North Park will *never* change. We are deeply rooted in our Christian faith. We will seek God’s wisdom and direction, use every resource available to us, and we will wisely and strategically advance the Christian mission of North Park on behalf of our students. We will teach at the intersection of the liberal arts, professional studies, and

theology, and we will educate and prepare our wonderfully diverse student population for lives of significance and service.

This is a pivotal and promising moment in North Park's 130-year history. In addition to our continued APRE work, we await final word on our reaccreditation after initial positive feedback from the Higher Learning Commission. And we look forward to celebrating 16 long-serving faculty members who will retire from North Park this summer. With such significant initiatives underway, we rely on God's provision, presence and sustaining power.

Achieving a thriving future for North Park University is the central purpose of North Park Next. Please stay tuned for additional messages as we keep you updated, and watch for an FAQ to be posted on the [North Park Next web site](#).

Thank you for walking with us in purpose and prayer.

With gratitude and respect,

Mary K. Surridge  
President

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