Roots and Branches

"If you bring the warmth of the sun to them,
they will open and bring forth form, color, perfume to you,
If you become the aliment and the wet,
they will become flowers, fruit, tall branches, and trees."

--Walt Whitman, "Roots and Leaves Themselves Alone"

For me, strategic planning begins with poetry; I need a guiding image to inspire my passion so that my right brain rational planner can get fully engaged.

And so, our new plan, Roots and Branches: A Strategic Direction for Austin College 2010-2014, begins by citing the lovely words of Walt Whitman. To me, they capture just what we want for our College. We want it to be the fertile atmosphere that nourishes our students (and our faculty, staff, and alumni too) so they may blossom and bloom.

You’ll find our plan reproduced in these pages and I encourage you to read it closely and view it lovingly as you engage your vision of our plans. I hope you find the places where the plan speaks to you and your passions for Austin College.

The plan was developed during a six-month period of intensive study and reflection involving students, faculty, staff, trustees, and alumni. In addition to the plan itself, we built a rolling five-year budget model to undergird it and have created (or are in the midst of creating) detailed implementation plans for each of the plan’s planks. Our strategic plan isn’t meant to reside in a file drawer. It will be front and center in our thinking, serving as our “to do” list during the upcoming months and years. You will see regular updates on our progress and our challenges.

This is a season for making resolutions and I’ll share mine with you. In 2011, I’ll be looking to make room for more “haiku moments.” That is the phrase Haiku poets use to describe the revelatory aha of spirited awareness that inspires their work. A Haiku poem is the linguistic record of this fleeting moment of deep knowing. As with any state of grace, that moment can’t be willed or commanded. But, certain life practices create an opening for its arrival: cultivating gratitude, paying attention, slowing down, savoring the present, talking with God. So my promise to myself in the upcoming months is to remember to practice those disciplines. It will be the perfect counterpoint to the flurry of activity inspired by our strategic plan and the ambitious goals we have set for Austin College.

I would love to hear about your resolutions and your hopes for Austin College in the upcoming year. Join the conversation on our Austin College Facebook page, send me a note, come for a visit. We would love to hear from you.

And by the way, our tree planting has not been purely metaphorical. Thanks to generous gifts from the Jordan family, Betsy Forster, and Todd and Abby Williams, we have a new North Mall connecting the Forster Arts Complex, the Jordan Family Language House, and the site of our new residential Village on Grand to the campus. The mall has been planted with 75 new trees. We will pray for the warmth of the sun to shine upon them so they may, as Whitman reminds us, bring forth form, color, and perfume.

Larry, Jessica, and Cameron (and Biscuit) join me in wishing every blessing to our Austin College friends and family.

Gratefully,

Marjorie Hass, President
Austin College