



## **The President's Monthly Perspective**

October 2006

Autumn is a time of great transition. Inevitably I experience both melancholy and inspiration. This year those feelings are magnified as I am engaged in one of the most profound transitions of my life. I am a place-based, community-oriented person, deeply immersed in the faces and landscapes of home and work. For thirty years I lived in one home, on a landscape of great beauty and solace, at an institution that was inextricably linked to my personal identity.

Now I have a son in Tasmania, a daughter in Seattle, and my wife commutes between New Hampshire and Maine. My son (Jake) called me after Sunday night's Mets victory (12-5 over the Cardinals), telling me that it's lonely being a Mets fan in Hobart, Tasmania. But he's doing well, enrolled at the University of Tasmania, studying in their art, nature, and wilderness program, and looking for apartments with his girl friend. My daughter Jess called from Seattle, excited about her forthcoming student teaching internship, finishing her Masters degree in Education at Antioch University, delighted to continue with her explorations of all that Seattle has to offer. Cindy is caught between two worlds, preparing for her sabbatical, thinking long and hard about the environmental education book she wishes to write.

We spent the weekend exploring this beautiful corner of Maine, roaming the hills on foot and bicycle, taking in those last glorious days of autumn sunshine, invigorated by crispy mornings, and basking in the golden afternoon warmth. I am still striving to find a routine, to balance hard work and play, to get accustomed to life in this amazing landscape, at this fine college, during this time of great opportunity and enthusiasm. I wander from melancholy to inspiration, from day to day, hour to hour, and minute to minute. There are moments when I feel that I am in a waking dream, wondering how I got here and how quickly life patterns change. The kids are grown. I've taken a new job. All of this has happened deliberately, and it has depths of meaning that I can't begin to fathom. Just when I begin to think too much and retreat into a series of unending questions, spurred by memory, dwelling on an entire lifetime, subjecting everything to review and introspection, Cindy reminds me to live in the present, to wake up and experience the gratitude of the present moment.

One has no choice as a college president! My spiritual practice now is clearly oriented around the ubiquitous challenge of living in the moment. And when I do so, I realize the great opportunities that lie in front of us, the emerging future of Unity College, the great necessity of promoting sustainability and ecological awareness, the joy and challenge of working with students who are our next generation of environmental leaders, the utter

urgency of building a great environmental college. Then the balance swings from melancholy to inspiration. The place comes alive. I look at the Unity College campus and I see vitality, authenticity, spirit, and engagement. I think about what the college will be like one year from now, and then in three years, and then in five, or in ten and I feel a motivation beyond inspiration, a remarkable challenge and a great depth of commitment.

Yet still my view of space and time remains confusing. I read my notes from a month ago and I review what I've accomplished and what remains incomplete. Some things move faster than you expect and some much slower. New projects emerge. Once again, I am reminded of how important it is to walk a middle path between the agenda you set for yourself and the agenda that is set up by the momentum of an institution. I continue to strive to balance those agendas as seamlessly as I might, and at the same time to balance my own interpretation of what needs to be done with the best thinking of the students, staff and faculty. I strive to balance good listening with firm action, tenderness with boldness, deliberation with decisiveness. I realize, too, that I am trying to move the college forward at a reasonable pace, so as to create a sense that we are all moving forward, but that we are doing so in a way that is measured and sustainable. Hence some projects rush forward, but others slow down, or gradually slide down the list and wait patiently for their moment of urgency.

This last month was also a time to balance time away with time on campus. I spent four days in Connecticut, guided by irrepressible board member and Unity College '78 alum, Beau Doherty. I spent two days on Campobello Island, meeting with Presidents of Maine and Eastern Canadian Colleges and Universities. I attended the College of the Atlantic inauguration of President David Hales, and I had my weekly meetings with board members. This is another important aspect of a college presidency. It's crucial that I am on the road, meeting as many people as possible, spreading the word about the college, spinning orbits and partnerships, with the hope of enriching the college's opportunities and finances.

I'll start with the highlights of those travels and then move back to what I've been up to while on campus. We'll start in Connecticut.

### **President's Alumni Council**

Beau and I also traveled to Stamford, Connecticut where we met with Chuck Johnson, the Vice-President of Human Resources at Pitney-Bowes. Chuck is a very early alumnus, class of '73. We spoke at great length with Chuck about establishing a President's Alumni Council, a group of alums who would meet once a year, and become "special friends" of the college. This kind of council is long overdue and could work in tandem with our revitalized Alumni Organization. We are not yet sure exactly what shape such a "council" will take but it can have a very helpful role in our capital campaign efforts. Martha Nordstrom and I will work on this during the course of the year. The most important process to note is that our alumni efforts have an unstinting momentum. There is a good feeling emerging. It's time for all Unity College alumni to "come home." In the months to come, I will continue to travel around New England (as time permits) to meet with alums who can bring a special relationship to the college.

### **Eastern Canadian & Maine Presidents**

Spurred by the leadership of Gail Dinter-Gottlieb, the President and Vice-Chancellor of Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, a group of eight college presidents from Eastern Canadian and Maine colleges and universities met at Campobello Island on October 5th - 6th. Our purpose was to facilitate exchanges, cooperation, and common initiatives. This was an excellent meeting. We emphasized the importance of student exchanges. One intended outcome is to build a series of sustainability partnerships, launched by a meeting of student leaders (at Campobello) as early as the summer of 2007. As with many such initiatives, much will depend on this project having champions. I think this is a great idea for Unity College. Establishing relationships with Eastern Canadian partners is a terrific way to expand the scope of our offerings. I will stay involved with this initiative and try to exercise some leadership to keep it linked to sustainability and student exchange. And by the way, Campobello Island is a very interesting place to explore!

As I mentioned, an important aspect of my job is “spinning orbits.” Here are a few that you might wish to know about.

### **The Biodiversity Initiative**

Peter Alexander, a former student of mine, is now the Executive Director of The Biodiversity Project ([www.bidiversityproject.org](http://www.bidiversityproject.org) [<http://www.bidiversityproject.org>](http://www.bidiversityproject.org) ). This is a fine organization that organizes public awareness communication campaigns. It had a particularly successful Great Lakes Initiative. Their board met at the Sebasco Resort on October 4th. I attended the meeting as it was oriented around launching a similar initiative in Maine. This is a great opportunity for Unity College and I will stay involved.

### **Acadia Partners**

In August, Mick Womersley and I traveled to Schoodic Point to meet with Bill Zoellick and Denny O'Brien of Acadia Partners ([www.acadiapartners.org](http://www.acadiapartners.org) [<http://www.acadiapartners.org>](http://www.acadiapartners.org) ). Aimee Phillippi conducted a research project there this summer with two Unity College students. If you haven't been there, it's an old naval base that is being retrofitted for environmental science research, environmental interpretation, and environmental education. It holds all kinds of exciting possibilities and Unity College ought to be involved, On November 17th I will be traveling back there with Cindy Thomashow to have dinner with Bill and to discuss some of our ideas for an experimental global environmental change, science-based high school.

### **Public Speaking**

Finally, I will be doing quite a bit of public speaking in late October and early November. I have a “stock” talk that is the basis of an improvisational lecture on global environmental change, loosely organized around the material in Bringing the Biosphere Home. Over the next month I will be speaking at the annual meeting of The Nashua

River Watershed Association, and then giving talks at Williams College, Sterling College, and Temple Beth El in Augusta, Maine.

### **The Unity Centre for the Performing Arts and the Field of Dreams**

The Board of Trustees has approved the transfer of these “properties” to Unity College. There is still some legal work to be completed, including negotiations with the Clifford Foundation, and negotiations with the town of Unity. Nevertheless, all is on track for the transfer to be completed by December 31st.

Both of these facilities present us with wonderful opportunities to promote the arts, to host intellectual gatherings, to hold seminars, to host fundraising events, perhaps to build a small music studio, and to expand our recreational facilities.

In my view they are both places that should spark imagination and creativity. In that spirit, we will put some committees together to plan for their use, and to encourage their full integration with the campus. I’d like to put a small group together in the next few weeks, to serve with the Director of the Centre John Sullivan as an advisory council, and then widen the “creative process” early next year when the transaction is complete. Please do let me know if you’d like to be involved in helping us think through the use of these facilities.

The prospect of a “downtown” campus has revitalized our interest in getting the bridge complete. I’ve begun looking into ways that we might facilitate this process. It’s currently held-up in the DOT bureaucracy and we will exercise whatever leverage we can to exercise political pressure.

## **CAMPUS ACTIVITIES**

### **The Vice President for Academic Affairs Search**

The first meeting of the committee, chaired by Amy Arnett met on Monday, October 17. This is an excellent committee, including Alisa Christopher, Nicole Caruso, Emma Creaser, Will Hafford, Holly Hein, Mark Tardif, and Tim Peabody. We will do all we can to make this a deliberative, consultative process. The search is also a great public relations opportunity, a chance to promote Unity College as a unique environmental college. We have placed an ad in the Chronicle of Higher Education, we listed the job with CEDD (Council of Environmental Deans and Directors), I sent the notice to over fifty of my closest colleagues and contacts, and we will also place the listing with other appropriate list serves.

I decided (after full consultation with the President’s Council) to change the name of the position as indicated. I think it more accurately serves the important academic function of the job and it dovetails neatly with a new VP for Enrollment Management and Marketing.

### **Enrollment Management & Marketing**

There are so many enrollment management issues that are crucial to the future of the college. As I mentioned last month, some of these issues are linked to our capacity. Alisa Gray has initiated a year-long capacity study. We need to carefully think through our optimum size, whether we should expand, and if we are to do so whether that should be in the form of more traditional undergraduate students, or perhaps with summer-based, limited residency Masters Programs. I am particularly intrigued by that approach as it enables us to serve a national (or even international audience), and it enables us to operate as a twelve-month college. At any rate, there is much to contemplate. I remain open-minded about all prospects.

There is also much for us to consider about tuition, discount rates, scholarships, recruitment, etc. All of this will be greatly helped with the creation of the new VP position.

I have waited to initiate a search for a Vice-President for Enrollment Management and Marketing for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, I wish to phase these searches so that we can do them thoroughly and thoughtfully. I'd like to make sure that the VP for Academic Affairs search is well under way before we start a second important VP search. Also, I need more time to fully consult with the most important players here so that we are clear as to what we are looking for. I anticipate launching this search sometime in November.

### **Publications & Web Management**

We are putting the final touches on the advertisement and job description for an Associate Director of Publications and Website Management. This person will coordinate all Unity publications, including design initiatives. The primary focus will be to work on brand management and design issues, and to coordinate all publication with admissions, advancement, and PR. This will include web site development. The person will work collaboratively on all aspects of content development but will not be in charge of "storyline" development per se.

### **The Website**

It's great to see the first few pages of the new Unity College website. It's very attractive and reflects the spirit of the college. Now of course we are striving to get the entire website pages coordinated with this new look.

This will take place in several phases, with the work divided into several areas of responsibility. We have signed another contract with STAMATS to provide more templates and architecture for the remainder of the site. This will include authorship of an additional 300 web pages. This work will be completed no later than April, 2007.

Bill Morgan is busily integrating a content management system so that we can get as many "old pages" as possible into the new format.

John Zavodny has taken responsibility for creating a protocol and a sequence for determining which pages are most crucial. Together, Bill and John are providing additional training as necessary.

They have promised to deliver a flexible schedule, linked to phases, so that the entire campus has a good idea of what to expect and when to expect it. This will be available by the end of October.

I urge all of you to prepare material that you would like to see put on the web, to revise your pages, so that when the time comes, you are ready! There is no better recruitment tool for the college. Don't mistake the seemingly slow progress for any lack of commitment, It takes hours of behind the scenes work to make all of this happen. By the end of this year we are going to have a superb website and it will make a big difference for the college in numerous respects.

### **The Unity College Sustainability Initiative**

The initiative is launched. We have two excellent committees, a Sustainability Policy Committee (chaired by Mick Womersley) and a Sustainability Programs Committee (chaired by Nancy Ross). The policy committee has wide infrastructure participation so as to insure that all aspects of campus life are considered as we proceed. The programs committee is doing research on what kind of programs we are most suited to initiate and how our programs might respond to national needs. Both committees have already met once. We will provide you with a more comprehensive report on their progress later in the semester.

I am delighted that Jason Reynolds is our part-time sustainability coordinator. This enables us to get a lot of things done that were previously just on a long list of things we'd like to do. Among other tasks, Jason (with much help from others) was instrumental in creating our prize-winning exhibit at the Common Ground fair. More recently he drove the Jimmy Carter solar panels to Georgia. He is in the process of reinvigorating our campus composting. And finally he is coordinating a signage strategy for communicating more widely about campus sustainability initiatives. I've asked Jason to begin working on Unity College food systems this spring. Also at that time we can hire next year's coordinator, hopefully drawn from a graduating senior, who can then train with Jason and hit the ground running.

### **Strategic Planning, Cost Accounting & the Budget Process**

This is one of those important areas where I have not devoted as much time as necessary. I've asked Mick Womersley to initiate a three year budget revision process, developed in three annual phases, oriented around more inclusive, innovative, and incentive-driven approaches. We will do this in a measured and deliberate way, with the ultimate goal of developing a process that is transparent, clear, and accountable, with all the necessary controls in place. Our ultimate goal is to link budget, cost accounting, and strategic

planning, so everyone knows what to expect and how to plan for the future.

Alas, the time has come for me to fully immerse myself in the budget. I'm devoting all of my mornings next week to engage in a crash course in fully understanding the Unity College budget. This will make it easier for me to implement the strategic plan, and in general to be more conversant as to how we make decisions about new initiatives.

### **Board Relationships & Trusteeship**

Last month I described my series of weekly board interviews. This has been an enlightening and extremely helpful process. I'm learning much about the relative strengths and weaknesses of our board. I've been spending a lot of time during these meetings working with board members to identify friends, networks, and colleagues who might be interested in contributing to the college.

Additionally, I've been meeting with the trusteeship committee of the board to identify future board members. Our board is an interesting time in its history. Over the next couple of years we have an opportunity to add as many as 10-12 new board members. This will substantially strengthen our board. This is a great opportunity! We are also thinking about forming an advisory board, a group of friends of the college who would gather once a year for special functions.

Over the next few months I will be on the phone constantly in an effort to both promote the college and scope out potential board members. I have encouraged all board members (not just the trusteeship committee) to help with this process.

At the February board retreat, we will be spending time on two major processes. First we are bringing in a consultant to train board members to become more skilled fundraisers. Second we will hold discussion as to the purpose and function of the board. Richard Chait, in his excellent book, Leadership as Governance, suggests that board fulfill three functions: fiduciary (financial oversight), strategic (helping us get from here to there), and generative (thinking creatively and deeply about crucial issues). However, most Boards spend way too much time in the fiduciary and strategic realms and not enough in the generative; I agree and I know that our board does too. So we will work together so that we have more of a generative board.

I'm really excited by these prospects. All of my individual conversations with board members suggest that they are delighted to move in that direction.

### **Koons Hall & Master Planning**

Under Jerry Cinnamon's fine leadership, we developed a solid plan for a Koons Hall expansion, to be constructed during the summer of 2007. This was to be phase one of a two phase plan which would involve construction of a second wing at some future time. However, more recently, there has been some discussion of abandoning the second wing, and instead proceeding with both the proposed first wing and a substantial renovation to

the rear end of Koons Hall. This would enable us to “clean up” once and for all the chemistry lab, relocate our geology lab, establish a GIS lab, enhance the existing biology labs, and add faculty office space.

This has “opened up” the planning process. In effect, things have gotten messier (planning for space always does that!) but more deliberative; we still need to stick within a reasonable budget. I want to make sure, though, that as we plan this building we do so in such a way that we are taking care of both short and long term needs and that we are guided by our emerging master plan criteria. I’ve asked the Koons Hall planning group to expand their charge accordingly. Nevertheless, we are still on a fast track to get this finished by February in time for a pending approval at the Board of Trustees meeting. This would necessarily give us time to consult with several architects, to open the building project up for competitive bidding, to insure that it is truly a green building, and to make sure that its exterior conforms to our long range aesthetic interests for Unity College.

Is this too much to accomplish by February? Perhaps. If it is, then we will assess the status of the planning, hold back, and initiate construction during the summer of 2008. I don’t want to be rushed into anything we will regret. However, I want us to work as hard as possible to move this process forward so that we have a good chance to begin construction during the summer of 2007. The work needs to get done anyway, so let’s see what we can accomplish.

### **Diversity**

Libbey Seigars and I met with Noel Bonam of the State Office of Multicultural Affairs. We had an excellent meeting to discuss diversity initiatives. Noel served as a wonderful consultant, gently revealing to Libbey and myself the depths of our naiveté, but also giving us some constructive advice as to how to proceed. In one of my future “monthly perspectives” I’ll deal with these issues at much greater length.

For now, let me say that diversity initiatives are crucial for Unity College and that I will launch a series of these initiatives in due time, as the collective workload of the college allows us to do this in a way that will be deep and long-lasting.

Thanks for reading this far! I know it’s a long note but I’d rather err on the side of thoroughness. As usual, I’m sure much has happened that I’ve neglected to mention, but next month I’ll try again!

Mitchell Thomashow  
President, Unity College