

RIVER FALLS JOURNAL

"The Value of Inclusiveness"

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April 6, 2007

I was delighted to read in a recent edition of the Journal that Mayor Don Richards and the River Falls City Council took official action for River Falls to be designated as an "Inclusive Community" registered with the National League of Cities. Mayor Richards has been a consistent proponent of actions and attitudes that welcome the rich mosaic of our global community to River Falls.

I and The University of Wisconsin-River Falls heartily endorse this action and join with Mayor Richards, the City Council and our community in embracing inclusiveness as both an enduring value and as an opportunity to intentionally build our future.

The timing of this decision coincides with the completion of the drafting and approval of UW-River Falls' strategic plan. The plan has been developing since the fall of 2005 when we conducted a far-reaching "Visions and Values" survey among students, faculty, staff, alumni and community members. This inquiry sought ideas about the future of the institution, its values, mission and vision, and the plans we would create and pursue to realize the mission. Over 10,000 discrete comments were submitted from over 800 individual responses. One of the emerging themes and values was the active creation of a welcoming environment for all peoples. Inclusiveness is now one of the guiding values of the university as well as one of the four major focuses of the Strategic Plan. In other words, the intention that illuminates inclusiveness is central to our mission.

The university's values and mission are printed on a card given to each member of the university community as a perpetual reminder of what guides us in our work and the roles we fulfill. Under the core value of inclusiveness, we believe that "we create an environment of mutual respect, professional behavior, academic freedom and appreciation of individual differences and rich cultural diversity." This is our goal and declared standard by which we should be both guided and judged. Building inclusive communities is not a destination, but rather a journey undertaken by an entire community. In this case, this is a path we have enthusiastically selected and join with the city and people of our community to explore the full dimensions of what inclusiveness can mean for all of us.

The goal of inclusiveness was one outcome of the diligent efforts by literally hundreds of individuals over many months of meetings, individual discussions and much consideration. It is integrated into the university's guiding document, the strategic plan. We have titled it, "Living the Promise," UW-River Falls 2007-2012. Our Plan's 10 goals and numerous initiatives will frame our efforts and priorities on and off campus for the next five years, with some projects extending further into the future. "Living the Promise" exhorts us to "walk the talk" of our mission, and to continue to create unique and highly effective teaching and learning environments from classroom to community to the world.

Our historic purpose now has a focused expression. "Our mission is to **help students learn** so that they are successful as productive, creative, ethical and engaged citizens and leaders with an informed global perspective." We will pursue this mission guided by our core values of integrity, academic excellence, inclusiveness, community, and continuous improvement. It is within this framework that we now embark on creatively and effectively implementing the plan. In this way, we believe that UW-River Falls is "Living the Promise."

In upcoming "Perspectives" articles, the other goals of the plan will be presented. Since the future of the city and the university are inextricably intertwined, it is essential that our plans be mutually embraced so when we declare success in any area of endeavor, we will know that we did it together.

We, community and university, can frame our future together, and create opportunities and connections so dynamic, that we will be humming the rock tune refrain, "The future's so bright, you gotta wear shades"!

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