Welcome to a new year, colleagues!

With a new semester, the promise of change is in the air.

Yet there are constants. Only three weeks into the semester and papers already cover my desk like the snow drifts cover the ground.

A new president. The anticipation of change has nearly worn us thin.

We are mid-transition in Scott Scarborough’s development of a strategic plan for The University of Akron. Talk of his plans has been cryptic, as if he’s been thinking out loud. We don’t yet know the strategic direction of the university much less the role of the School of Communication in the new Vision 2020.

But we may now have some insight into the president’s vision. Strategically employing the many communication media available to him, President Scarborough now provides us with the most public sharing, to date, of his aspirations for the university.

Following the practice of recent years, the university has purchased regional advertising spots during the Super Bowl, and it will debut four ads. The vignettes of UA alumni depict how their education at The University of Akron enabled them to achieve success. The four ads -- http://www.uakron.edu/ -- show how the university’s distinctive approach to higher education launched these Zip alumni on their diverse paths to success.

This semester, the School of Communication is defining its own distinctive qualities. While other universities in the region – Youngstown, Cleveland State, Case Western, and of course, Kent State -- instruct their majors in one aspect of communication or another, our school houses the rich spectrum of our field. Sustaining a unique and diverse program requires resources and constant maintenance. This semester, we’ll discuss key strategies for maintaining our distinctive qualities as we move toward the promise of a new vision.

President Scarborough has been developing a shared vocabulary in this new environment, and he has promised to articulate his vision later this semester. It’s perhaps fitting that the president has asked to speak with the faculty of the College of Arts & Sciences on President’s Day. To move him closer to the goal of defining a new strategic direction for the university, on President’s Day,
The president wants share the interpretations he’s drawn from his first six months on our campus.

Meanwhile, we watch. We listen. We hear how alumni attain the American Dream. To critically assess the dream as it’s articulated in the Super Bowl ads is to participate in the university’s new strategic direction.

We watch. We listen. What role will the School of Communication play in the new Vision 2020? We don’t yet have a firm answer, but we are already helping the president articulate his vision. Hear the voice of Communication as she narrates the American Dream.

Happy New Year,
Terry

**Diversity at Heart of Classroom Instruction**

As educators, we understand that not every student learns the same. Many factors can affect a student’s ability to learn. The ethnic, cultural and economic diversity in today’s classroom can have a dynamic impact on how students learn, and consequently, how we teach. Do we recognize diversity issues in our classrooms? How do we deal with these issues when they arise?

*Rethinking Race: Black, White, and Beyond* is a program sponsored by the Office of Inclusion and Equity along with the University Libraries. The series, which will be held from January 30 to February 13, will explore race relations and strive to address issues that may enhance the learning experience for students and faculty alike.

This program can have a positive influence in the educational process, according to one faculty member. Carole Savery, an associate lecturer who is teaching Interpersonal Communication this semester, is someone who has had experience in dealing with diversity issues in her classroom.

“I had a student who felt he was experiencing racism in some of his other classes, and he thought about dropping out,” Savery said. The student was from another country and felt isolated and disconnected, especially when he was engaged in group work. “The student felt like he was never selected to participate in a group,” she said, “and he interpreted this as exclusion.” She helped the student seek out various campus resources such as the Multicultural Center, and even referred him to Lee Gill, Chief Diversity Officer. “Lee was an excellent resource, even taking time to speak with the student one-on-one,” she said.

That is why Savery feels *Rethinking Race* is so important. “As teachers, we have a responsibility to make students aware that they
are part of the process,” she said. “They need to be aware of the diversity in their classroom. I like to call it ‘mindfulness,’ or being mindful of others. After all, their classroom is a mirror of the issues discussed in this series.” Savery has recommended the series to her students and has posted the dates and events on Springboard. “Rethinking Race should motivate them to begin the dialogue on race and diversity,” she said.

The Keynote Speakers Series kicks off on Monday, February 2 at 7:30 p.m. with writer, professor and television host Melissa Harris-Perry at the E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall. Other events throughout the week include theatrical performances, discussions, and a Rethinking Race film series. For a complete schedule of events, please visit www.uakron.edu/race.

ZIP SPOTLIGHT: DAVID SWIRSKY

Many educators hope that the students they teach will have a positive impact on the world after they graduate. A brief message to David Swirsky’s professors: You don’t have to wait that long.

Swirsky, after all, submitted a proposal on behalf of the Akron League of Creative Interventionists that has been selected as one of the top seven Akron-area finalists in the recent Knight Foundation competition.

According to the grant proposal, which hopes to garner a share of the $5 million grant, it aims to establish “a space for the creative community to hold meetings, workshops and programs, and brainstorm interventions designed to break down barriers between diverse populations.” Swirsky became involved with the League of Creative Interventionists after being invited to hear Hunter Franks, founder of the organization, speak. This organization appealed to his sense of civic duty.

A native of Akron’s west side, Swirsky credits his parents, Rich and Rebecca, with instilling that quality in him. “My dad worked for Ohio Citizens Action doing grass-roots advocacy for environmental issues. He’s currently the 1st Ward City Councilman here in Akron,” Swirsky said. His mother works for a law firm that deals with immigration law, and she works closely with immigrant families.

A graduate of Akron Firestone High School, Swirsky is currently a senior pursuing his degree in communication. His focus in business and organizational communication is serving him well in the campus activities he is involved with. Swirsky serves as president of Environmental Akron and he is the treasurer of Holistic Leaders. Swirsky is also involved with the Big Love Fest, which he helped organize with local singer and songwriter Zach Friedhof. The
event, is in its second year and is a collaborative effort among the Akron League of Creative Interventionists, the Akron Peace Project and other organizations. According to Swirsky, the goal of the event is to celebrate the spirit of the Akron community.

He combines his artistic side with his communication interest and his passion for civic involvement. “You can communicate in an artful way. It shows the power of expression,” he said. To see an example of what Swirsky calls “building community through creativity,” watch “Gratitude” by clicking here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKPasGKUBjk

Meet the News & PR Team

Several communication students are working with the school this semester to report the news and to create promotional materials. Graduate assistant Leyna Chovan and Bob Vaia, radio-TV, are on the news team. Both of them have already posted news stories on the School of Communication homepage. With Communication Student Named Knight Foundation Finalist, Leyna covered the Knight Foundation Grant submission by communication student David Swirsky, which was selected as an Akron-area finalist. In Forensics Coach Recognized for Outstanding Contributions, Bob reported on an unexpected faculty honor. Bob has also written the lead news features for this first issue of the year, and he will continue to write and help edit the newsletter this semester.

On the PR side of the team, graduate assistant Megan Vorndran will be working closely with David Ritchey, assistant director and senior PR faculty, to create and update the school’s promotional materials. Building on the work of David’s PR Writing students, Megan designed the triptych on display in the school office.

Leyna Chovan
Bob Vaia
Megan Vorndran
Announcements & Reminders

- Points of Pride Reminder: Let Brenda Reichert know of your former students who are working at the university, so she can add a “point of pride” to our campus map. While your thoughts are on alumni and you fondly recall others, please make her aware of them as well, even if they’re no longer on campus!

- The Speak Off will be held April 14 and the Speech Contest will be April 22 at the Quaker Square Grand Ballroom. The prizes will be: $1,000 for first place, $750 for Second, $500 for Third, $250 for Fourth, and $250 for Fifth. Those working the event will have an opportunity to win a gift card.

Spring 2015 Calendar

Jan. 30: Noon faculty meeting
Feb. 6: Discover Diversity Day
Feb. 16: A to Zip
Feb. 17: College Faculty Strategic Planning Meeting with President Scarborough, Noon-2 p.m., Student Union Theater
Feb. 17: President’s Day Observed – Classes canceled
Feb. 27: Noon faculty meeting
March 1: Graduation applications due for Graduate students
March 2: Last day for course withdrawals
March 13: Senior Day A to Zip
March 16: Preliminary Master’s theses due to Graduate School for Spring 2015 graduation
March 20: Noon faculty meeting
March 23-29: Spring Semester 2015 recess
April 1: Undergraduate graduation applications due for Summer 2015.
April 6: Final submission of theses to graduate school for Spring 2015 graduation
April 18: Spring Visit Day
May 1: Noon faculty meeting
May 4-10: Final exams
May 8-10: Spring 2015 Commencement

Faculty Matters Submissions

After making a presentation, faculty should submit the presenter name/s, the title of the presentation and the venue at which it was presented. After a manuscript has been published, faculty should submit a copy of the article along with the bibliographic citation.

Corrections for the current issue along with new information intended for publication in future issues of Faculty Matters, should be emailed to Bob Vaia at rv38@zips.uakron.edu. After Faculty Matters is circulated to full-time faculty it is posted on the School of Communication’s website.

The interim director takes full responsibility for any errors or omissions in this e-newsletter.