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Circling the Public Square

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Around the Lake

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ASCENDANT

The women's golf team is looking to its history to determine its future. That future may exceed the team's prior glories.



Circling the Public Square

Universities are at their best when their work shapes our common good.

BY ELIZABETH DAVIS

I've been thinking a lot about hope these days. In particular the hope people reserve for *alma mater*. It's not altogether different from familial hopes, those beliefs we harbor for what our university was and is, and our aspirations for what it might become. Those ambitions have been expressed in myriad ways as I've traveled and met with alumni, parents, and friends these past few months, and in my conversations with faculty, staff, and

students. Your hopes have been a source of guidance and inspiration.

In March, at my inauguration, Furman explored the theme of "public engagement" and its place within institutions of higher education. The faculty led a series of events exploring four areas of interaction with the broader world that often characterize public engagement: research, teaching, community service, and institutional partnerships. And

"WHEN I CONSIDER THE SPECTRUM OF MINDS AT WORK AT FURMAN, I THINK WE FALL SHORT IF WE FAIL TO CREATE AVENUES BY WHICH OUR INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL CAN BE APPLIED TO SOLVE OUR COMMON BURDENS."

my colleague and friend Nancy Cantor, chancellor of Rutgers University-Newark and a national leader on the roles and obligations of universities in their communities, gave a keynote speech on the topic.

I am proud of the faculty for leading this discussion because I believe public engagement is, indeed, an expression of hope. In an era in which intellectual currency is as vital as ever for our understanding of the complex forces shaping our economy, politics, and culture, public engagement by universities fosters solutions that can tangibly improve the lives of our communities. Perhaps most importantly, the commitment to our neighbors and to the world at large models for our students an engagement that transcends the classroom and provides a sense of purpose beyond self.

When I consider the spectrum of minds at work at Furman—faculty and students from the humanities to the sciences, business to the arts—I think we miss the mark if we do not tap the richness of their expertise, insight, and dedication. We fall short if we fail to create avenues by which our intellectual capital can be applied to solve our common burdens.

Accepting that public engagement is a fundamental role and asset the university proffers, we must be committed to it on a meaningful level, willing to dig deep into issues that matter, and to examine them in nuanced ways, unfettered by fads and the fears that breed shallow thinking.

What you're holding in your hands is one manifestation of this engagement. Furman's magazine is about reaching as deeply as possible into subjects and perspectives that advance our awareness and commitment to the world around us, and in the process demonstrating the relevancy higher education holds in those discoveries.

From hopeful responsibilities come hopeful discoveries—ones shaped by an objective, judicious, and compassionate response to the human condition, the needs of our communities, and the educational goals we have for our students. This, I believe, is an appropriate response to Furman's present moment... and its moments to come. **F**

Warmly,

Elizabeth Davis