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From the Interim President: Our Fundamental Mission

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From the
Interim
President



Our Fundamental Mission

As the magazine was going to press, we learned that Rod Smolla had decided to step down for personal reasons as Furman's president, effective June 30, and that Carl Kohrt '65 had been elected interim president by the board of trustees. Kohrt is a successful business executive, accomplished academic and longtime member of the board. His comments follow.

I know that the many readers of *Furman*, in either its digital or print form, look forward to the thoughtful, often provocative "From the President" message as the springboard for enjoying the many features of each publication. I know I always do.

Imagine my surprise — and perhaps yours — to find that I, a kid from rural Illinois who came to a seemingly far-off place at the base of Paris Mountain more than 50 years ago to play football but who left a chemist, would be introducing this issue as the interim president of our beloved Furman University. I do so with a personal enthusiasm for and a deep appreciation of the enormously positive impact that Furman's distinctive approach to liberal arts education has had on our family and on me throughout a lifetime of international business, community service, athletics, and academic endeavors.

Those whom you will encounter in the following pages will reaffirm, often in a dramatic fashion, that Furman has successfully adapted to a changing world throughout its long history by understanding the future needs of its students and the needs of society. As President Smolla wrote in the winter issue, technology continues to foster dramatic changes in where, when, and how information and communications are used — the digital age is changing industries from journalism to imaging, banking to health care, in unexpected ways. The question for parents, students, faculty and policy makers is how, not whether, it will change higher education.

Today's entering freshmen are true digital natives whose educational experiences differ markedly from those of most of the faculty whom they will encounter as undergraduates. The opportunity for Furman, in my opinion, lies in the creative adoption of new technologies as tools to enhance and extend, rather than replace, the fundamental mission of Furman.

That mission is to attract the most talented students and to mold them into lifetime "hunters" of relevant understanding, not mere "gatherers" of information as the authors of the recent book *Generation on a Tightrope* describe. This quest for relevant understanding is rooted in three basic tenets of a true liberal arts education: critical thinking, creativity and continual learning. Each of these is a uniquely human endeavor best accomplished through direct interactions with peers, scholars and the external world, be it in the classroom, on the athletic fields or within the community.

The enduring assets of Furman — its faculty and staff — are dedicated to engaging students day in and day out, often at an individual level, to help them integrate knowledge across disciplines in ways that are relevant to the contemporary world. I, therefore, do not believe that Furman's consistent dedication to its core mission over its more than 180 years of existence will relegate it to irrelevance in the future. Rather, by seizing new opportunities to improve and change, Furman will educate and graduate students who will continue to confirm the fundamental value of a Furman education as they make their mark on our world.

Finally, it is a tenet of societal progress that one builds upon the discoveries and understandings of others, i.e., "We stand on the shoulders of those who came before," as someone once remarked. I, too, begin my tenure on the "shoulders" of the work and initiatives begun under Rod Smolla's leadership. It is an honor for me to be entrusted with Furman's continuing journey as a liberal arts institution of distinction that attracts and graduates students of character, resolve, spirituality, talent and exceptional ability.

Go Paladins!

— CARL KOHRT

