

State of the Guild Report

Julie Thomas, Director

Lately there has been a lot of talk about Change.

Regardless of whether you approve or oppose the changes taking place in our world, nation, workplaces, congregations or homes – change affects us all. Some say that rapid change is becoming the “new normal”.

Valparaiso University is not immune to change. Demographics of students have changed. Among our students we see older faces, we hear different languages, and we recognize that Valparaiso University benefits from more than the traditional 18 – 22 year old residential student.

This year enrollment was at its highest level since 1993 – with the mix including 2,892 undergraduate, 599 law, & 579 graduates. It is encouraging for a private university to experience growth.

Events of the past year have changed our university. Achieving the prestigious milestone of being in business 150 years made us not only reflect on the past but also define ourselves in the present. It also brought forth a visioning process initiated by our new president, Mark Heckler. He asked us to think “beyond the data” to consider what Valparaiso University will be in 2030. This will allow Valparaiso University to implement positive changes in a thoughtful (rather than reactive) manner.

An example of how this was the opening of the Harre Union. Decades ago a vision was put forth that would bring faith to the heart of new campus. We will celebrate this decision next weekend with a Festival Worship to commemorate 50 year of the Chapel of the Resurrection.

It was also decided to bring faith, learning, and life all to the center of Valparaiso University as a symbol of our commitment to higher education. So, the Christopher Center opened five years ago and the Harre Union opened in January of this year to make Valparaiso University’s commitment obvious – to the campus community and the casual passersby on Hwy 30.

The university completed its largest fundraising campaign – one that we all contributed to by our donations to the Guild Endowment Fund and the Guild’s gift to fund a stage area in the main campus dining room (located in the Harre Union).

Certainly all of this change consequently creates more change. When we step back we can see the big picture. All of this change is positively transforming how we see Valpo and how Valpo sees itself.

The Guild knows something about transformational change. We are just settling into the new routine caused by the change members approved three and a ½ years ago. *Settle* isn’t the right word as this change granted us flexibility to adapt to what is taking place around us and allowed us the agility to never exactly “settle” again.

We are in the midst of seeing the Guild transform from an organization with silos (each chapter working independently) to one that is more open where members are encouraged to work together. Members will work together not only in the geographical pockets but also more virtually.

This is how younger generations have learned to work. “Let’s make the greatest impact in the least amount of time”. Valpo’s current students are included in this mindset. That is why the

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Guild's network can now be found on social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn.

This year, more than in the recent past, the Guild has launched new student outreach initiatives to help students see and experience the Guild's impact on their lives.

What I am most excited about and something that I hope you will help the Guild create are new Life Skills Workshops. The current generation of students needs to build soft skills that will help them be successful post-graduation. Targeting undergrads, the Guild will host brief, informative workshops on topics such as conflict resolution, budgeting, cooking for one, relationships, workplace behavior and much more.

Guild members can be involved by lending their expertise – either serving as a speaker, developing case study scenarios or connecting the Guild with other resources.

We hosted “Keeping the Peace” on Wednesday [September 16]. The topic was conflict resolution. The workshop defined conflict, described potential outcomes of a conflict, provided a checklist of what to do or consider before having a difficult conversation and what to avoid.

We didn't know what to expect and we were thrilled to have a packed and energetic room of 65 freshmen. These 65 students now have had their student experience directly enhanced by the VU Guild.

More workshops will be presented this year. The Guild will utilize the talents of its members and partner with campus departments to provide a variety of meaningful workshops.

We are also hosting “Guild Week” in November to raise awareness about the Guild. Students will be encouraged to stop by a table on their

way to lunch (everyone eats in the Harre Union) to learn more about how the Guild has served them. The Guild's interns have a different activity planned for each day of the week.

Making students aware of how we serve them is something we need to commit to each year – as the student population changes each year. By having the students better understand our support when they are students, we anticipate they will be more likely to support the Guild as graduates.

Change. It is happening wherever we look. At Valparaiso University with the Guild, with our students and within ourselves. Change is the one constant. Taking each change one-by-one would be looking at the trees when we can look at our transformational forest.

This is what I ask of Guild members: Please pay attention to how our university is transforming to focus itself on 2030. Pay attention to how the Guild is transforming itself to be compelling to all who seek and support students moving forward.

Thank you for being a part of this time at Valpo and the Guild. It is our moment in time to take part in enhancing the student experience for future generations.