Office of the President

Monday, February 8, 2016

Dear Fuller Alums,

We are so grateful for your support and engagement with Fuller and in these exciting and challenging times, we covet your prayers even more. Fuller is facing a season of remarkable opportunities to serve and influence the global church, but to step fully into this calling we must strengthen our organizational and financial health. In light of this, I have made decisions in consultation with the President’s Council to reduce operational expenses, make personnel cuts, restructure some programs and services and resource strategic opportunities.

Announcing Fuller’s New Korean Center

After months of planning since August 2015, Fuller is delighted to officially launch the new Korean Studies Center on March 25, 2016!

Fuller is more committed than ever to serving the church in Korea and our Korean community. We are very grateful for our strong history in partnering with the Korean church and in the significant number of alumni who have studied at Fuller in Korean, English, and even Spanish. Yet we are also aware of the significant changes in Korean churches in recent years and of the need to reengineer our programs to address the new challenges facing Korean churches.

As seminary education has changed and also experienced challenging times, Fuller has had to adjust and shift to respond as well. We have seen a dramatic increase in the development of competing programs, delivery platforms, and online degrees. As a result, we have witnessed a dramatic decline in our enrollment of Korean students. We need to make changes in order to make Fuller a more viable and affordable option for Korean students. We have also heard from our alumni that Fuller needs to respond as a unified seminary to the challenges faced by Korean society.

We are very grateful for what has been accomplished over the years by the offices of Korean Studies in the Schools of Intercultural Studies (KSIS) and School of Theology Korean Doctor of Ministry Program (KDMIN). Many have played very important roles in the growth of these programs throughout the years, for which we are very grateful. Those who will lead Fuller’s new Korean Center to its next stage provide us with great vision and hope to extend our reach. We are convinced that Fuller has a
crucial role to play as Korean pastors and leaders look toward the future of the churches in the Korean speaking world, both on the peninsula and beyond.

As a result of an in-depth review, we are restructuring our programs to address the current financial concerns and to address the new opportunities and challenges in Korea and for Korean pastors and leaders. As we launch the new center we ask for your prayers so that it will faithfully serve as Fuller’s next chapter in preparing leaders for the Korean churches and Korean leaders for the world.

We are also pleased to announce that Dr. Keon-Sang An has been appointed the first executive director of the Korean Center. Dr. An has mission experience as a professor teaching at Kale Hiwot Bible School in Eritrea and at Evangelical Theological College in Ethiopia. He has been teaching in both the Korean and English programs at Fuller. His academic specialty is integrating intercultural studies and theology and this will bring a unique and important skill to the Korean Center as it works with programs in the School of Intercultural Studies and School of Theology.

More details will be forthcoming regarding the Center’s future as we approach March 25. Although there will be structural changes in this transition, all current programs (MA, ThM, DMin GM, KDMin, DMiss) will continue being offered under the new Korean Center. Fuller is committed to serving current and future Korean students so they are able to continue and complete their degrees as seamlessly as possible. The Center will report to the Office of the Provost.

Korea has had a very important place in Fuller’s history and ministry around the world. We have more alumni serving in Korea than in any other country in the world, apart from the United States. We are very excited about this next stage in Fuller’s service to the Korean-speaking world!

We ask for your prayers and support as we develop Fuller’s new Korean Studies Center and continue to strengthen our commitment to programs and centers serving our students and communities of diversity.

Regional Campuses

Fuller Theological Seminary is in the midst of restructuring its educational and distributed learning models, due in large part to unprecedented changes in the landscape of seminary education. Part of this restructuring is to examine the role of regional campuses, and specifically to take a serious look at each campus in light of enrollment patterns and operating costs. As a result, difficult restructure decisions have been made, and the President’s Council and Trustees have decided that a change to two of our seven regional campuses is needed. The affected campuses are Sacramento and Colorado Springs, effective June 30, 2016.

Although academic quality and student satisfaction levels have remained strong at
the Sacramento and Colorado regional campuses, migration to online programs makes full regional campuses at these locations unsustainable. In light of this, Fuller will be closing the Sacramento campus and will repurpose the Colorado campus for cohort courses, such as courses for the MAGL and DMiss programs. The two campuses will prepare a “teach-out” plan, giving students currently enrolled in the programs the opportunity to complete their Fuller certificate and degrees. We are committed to providing students with quality education and will seek ways to make the remaining courses as convenient as possible during this phase. We intend to have a teach-out plan in place by June 30, 2016.

All of Fuller's programs offered at the regional campuses are accredited and we are in good standing with our accreditors. Fuller intends to continue to meet the needs of the students affected by the changes in accordance with the degree programs in which the students are currently enrolled. Advisors are available to respond to student questions and will work with students to facilitate timely completion of their certificate and degree programs.

The Sacramento campus will be closed effective June 30, 2016 and will no longer offer courses nor have its current location at 2250 Del Paso Road, Suite B., Sacramento, CA, 95834. The Colorado Springs campus at 540 N. Cascade Ave., Colorado Springs, CO 80903 will remain the administrative center for the MAGL, DMiss, and Fuller partnership programs (e.g. Young Life), and will be repurposed to offer cohort courses for MAGL, DMiss and partnership programs.

The Fuller community is praying for all those affected by the closure of the Sacramento campus and restructure to the Colorado campus. We are very grateful to all of those who have served these campuses and invested in the lives of our students and alumni. Thank you for your patience, understanding, and prayers as we navigate these challenging times and transitions.

Alumni - Strategy Development & Restructure

Bill Clark, Executive Vice President & Chief of Strategy at Fuller, has asked Bert Jacklitch (Director of Alumni Engagement) and Rob Bethke (Director of Alumni Engagement & Vocation Formation Communications) to participate in a working group with key leaders from across the seminary to develop an integrated strategy to better serve and engage alumni. This working group will also partner with the Alumni Council in the development of strategic offerings that are relevant for Alumni.

Since we will not be filling the Vice President of Alumni position and in order to consolidate our database management across the seminary, we have eliminated the Administrative Assistant and Database Manager positions currently filled by Holly Earle and Jay Cook. Holly and Jay will be leaving Fuller on March 1st. We are truly grateful for their diligence and care for Alumni and ask that you pray for them in this transition.
Task Force on Educational Business Model

Fuller, like all seminaries, is facing historic changes to the landscape of theological education. Students are pursuing studies over an extended period of time and have a growing interest in online classes. In addition to this, there is a greater need to bring education and formation to churches and communities as fewer organizations are choosing to send their leaders to seminary. This has resulted in financial challenges for all seminaries, including Fuller, and will require us to reduce the overall cost structure.

In light of these historic changes, Fuller is gathering experts from various fields to assist in the development of an educational business model that maximizes our global impact and ensures long-term financial health in the pursuit of our mission. Please pray for this task force as it meets over the next 6 months.

Fuller’s Future

As we reposition our seminary to respond to a changing environment, there are many indicators that give us hope and encouragement. Our focused efforts to form global leaders for Kingdom vocations has led to an invigorating formation process that is already drawn interest from other seminaries and graduate schools across the country, and the support and interest from foundations committed to excellence and formation in theological education. Over $7 million dollars has been donated to support the seminary in the transition to this transformational approach to leadership formation.

In the past 18 months, over 2000 students have taken part in Vocation and Formation groups led by 90 different trained professional group leaders within the Integrated Studies courses. 60 professors have completed a four-week Integrated Studies Training Course in which they were trained by pedagogical experts to design classroom experiences that combine high-impact teaching methods with compelling spiritual formation practices. Over 200 students have begun relationships with discipleship mentors and the Vocation and Formation curriculum and opportunities are now offered in residential, hybrid, and online classes in English, Spanish and Korean.

A reorganization last year in field education and academic advising enabled us to launch the Call Discernment department with a high-tech, high-touch approach to vocational advising that is already showing results only six months into the new structure. Student advising loads dropped from 1100 students per one advisor to 250-1, and each student now has ONE advisor through the entire process including apprenticeships and placement. Retention-risk students are now identified within five weeks of being absent for a quarter (down from one year), and advisors make personal contact to support students in their academic and vocational progress.
Global awareness of Fuller’s academic programs and prospective student interest are at their highest level in ten years, our admissions applications have increased by nearly 15% in five years, and an intentional retention strategy has led to an increase in returning students in Winter Quarter 2016, the first increase in retention in six years. Nationally reported seminary market share analytics reflect Fuller’s growth among seminaries due in large part to our redesigned MDiv program with its strong, new emphasis on vocation and formation emphasis.

Questions

We understand there is much information here to follow and we will do our best to keep you informed as further plans are formed and announced. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to Tod Bolsinger, Vice President of Vocation and Formation. Tod is a member of the President’s Council and provides direct leadership for the alumni team so he can field any questions that you might have. You can email Tod at bolsinger@fuller.edu or call him at 626-584-5200.

Prayer

God is with us, each and all, in this process and the Lord hears our prayers for one another and our common ministry here at Fuller. I can say with confidence that the Trustees, President’s Council, and I are resolutely committed to doing all that is necessary to lead Fuller to faithfully and fruitfully serve the mission of Jesus Christ By God’s grace and with God’s help, we will accomplish this together.

Please join us in praying for those who are impacted by these decisions, for our work and life together as a community, and for the mission that God has entrusted to us.

Prayerfully yours,

Mark Labberton