“A story is a way to say something that can’t be said any other way.”
— Flannery O’Connor
Over the past decade, I’ve become convinced that one of a university president’s most important roles is that of storyteller. I enjoy opportunities to hear alumni talk about their Aurora College and George Williams College experiences. And I take special pleasure in recounting such stories to others. Stories connect us to the past and to each other. They also impart valuable lessons. As author Flannery O’Connor observed, “A story is a way to say something that can’t be said any other way.”

Several years ago, an Aurora College alum told me the following story that illustrates this point.

“After a cross country bus trip, a young freshman arrived in Aurora and made his way to the campus, only to find the place deserted. He roamed the buildings and grounds. Finally he found a lone man unloading boxes of cans in Davis Hall. (That’s where the dining hall was located in those days.) Soon the two were working together tossing cans across the empty room. They made quick work of the project. When the last can was stacked neatly on the pantry shelf, the man introduced himself. ‘I’m T. P. Stephens,’ he said. ‘Come home with me for dinner.’”

What an amazing way for a freshman to meet the president of his college! And what a revealing story about Theodore Pierson Stephens and the leadership that he provided to Aurora College from 1933 to 1962.

Similar stories of dedication, humility and generosity abound in our collective history. Alums often tell me about breathless dashes up the stairs at the old shoe factory for appointments with Professor Arthur Steinhaus or share memories of conversations with Dean Mark Trumbo. Through the interactive storytelling process, we bond with one another and develop common understandings of the distinctive characteristics, values and traditions that define Aurora University today. We celebrate the achievements of our predecessors and claim their mission as our own.

So settle deep into a comfortable chair in anticipation of a different kind of President’s Report. The 2008–2009 academic year was a very good one at Aurora University. Our academic programs earned positive reviews from external accrediting bodies and our campuses continued to develop. We realized all of our enrollment and fundraising goals and ended the year with a healthy operating surplus. AU faculty and students presented their scholarly findings in two successful research conferences. Our first cohort of honors students graduated and the Spartans won a number of conference championships.

All of these achievements are noteworthy. Usually they are the stuff of our annual President’s Report. But this year’s document is about storytelling . . . and the people, traditions, mission and values that make our university special.
Toward the end of the 2003–2004 academic year, after a Town Hall meeting, Provost Andrew Manion invited faculty interested in starting an honors program to discuss it. Twenty-five or so faculty did just that. The result was a series of deliberations, meetings and reviews over the next year that culminated in a new Honors Program. Among those most excited about the program was Daniel Hipp, Associate Professor of English and English Program Chair, who became its first director. He believed that high-achieving students coming to AU would welcome the additional challenge of an honors curriculum as well as more leadership opportunities.

Fast-forward to August 2005. Scott Zinzer was among the first group of freshmen entering the program. “The honors seminars were fantastic educational opportunities,” said Zinzer. “Rather than taking generic general education courses, I had the opportunity to take classes in highly specialized topics, many of which were interdisciplinary in nature. For example, one of my honors seminars was titled Literature and Psychology. In my opinion, the honors seminars are some of the greatest things that the program offers students.”

Fast-forward again to May 2009 when the first group of 22 graduates from the Honors Program received their diplomas. Reflecting on the initial years of the program, Dr. Hipp remarked that there were many exciting curricular developments. Honors sections of general education courses allowed faculty to try out innovative ideas. Zinzer summarized it when he said, “Highly motivated students have the opportunity to interact with equally motivated instructors, and the result is something quite spectacular for the teaching and learning process.” A fellow honors graduate, David Blancas, recalls his honors classes as “most intriguing and stimulating. The professors were great.”
According to Zinzer, who is now enrolled in the doctoral program in mathematics at Arizona State University, the honors project was the most challenging for students. "The completion of the senior honors project was perhaps the most rewarding experience of my undergraduate career," he said. Zinzer focused his study on the philosophy of mathematics, while Blancas studied after-school programs and how to make them effective. Blancas recalls that his research project set him apart from the rest of the students. This reflects the remarkable variety of topics selected by this first group of Honors Program graduates. As Zinzer remarked, "The Honors Program is the greatest opportunity to start on the path of true lifelong learning."

She Was Honored to Participate

Today she is studying for a master’s degree in clinical mental health counseling at Valparaiso University. She loves the program and feels right at home on the close-knit university campus. During her second week of classes, she was asked to lead a class discussion. It was a familiar situation for Heather Skeen, AU ’09, who had led many discussions in her honors classes at AU.

This AU alumna graduated with a plan: earn her master’s degree, work for a few years and then complete her Ph.D. in clinical psychology. She’s come a long way since leaving her home state of Colorado and settling in at Aurora University just four years ago. Once on campus, she joined the Honors Program and the women’s soccer team.

Heather’s studies at AU coincided with the inauguration of the new Honors Program in 2005. She watched the program evolve over the next four years. “It was very satisfying to be able to contribute our ideas for the program and have some influence over it in its formative stages,” offered Heather. And the rewards were rich.

Participating in community service projects as part of the Honors Program brought Heather into contact with preschool and elementary students, as well as adolescents with disabilities. Heather’s honors project required her to gather and analyze data and develop her interpersonal skills. As her interest in psychology deepened, she decided to pursue graduate study. She has no doubt that the opportunities afforded by the Honors Program have been a significant influence on her career choice.

Research Has Its Rewards

When honors student Dina Andriopoulos was encouraged by her sociology professor, Dr. Barbara Strassberg, to submit a paper for the Undergraduate Research Conference, she was very excited, yet a bit overwhelmed. Presenting at a formal conference would be a new experience for her, and she knew a lot of preparation would be involved.

However, as a double major in sociology and psychology, Dina had a passion for research. Knowing she would have Dr. Strassberg as a mentor for her research project, Dina embraced the challenge.

Dina joined approximately 150 students who presented at the fifth annual Undergraduate Research Conference. In preparation, she began her research the summer prior to the 2008 fall semester. In late spring, she presented her empirical study, “Examining Religiosity in the Contexts of Life Satisfaction and Suicidal Ideation.” She credits Dr. Strassberg for building her confidence. “She prepared me for what to expect, provided suggestions for sources and helped formulate my research questions. Her input was invaluable,” noted Dina.

The conference provided Dina with the opportunity to delve into a topic that melded both of her disciplines and contribute to the body of research of sociologists and psychologists. It also demonstrated that AU students are doing great independent research — fine work that deserves to be shared and appreciated outside of the classroom.
One phone call to Tom Hammond, Vice President of Administration, launched the start of one of the biggest construction undertakings at Aurora University. He received word that a generous donation was given to AU for the construction of a new football and soccer field on the Aurora campus. Immediately, he called for meetings, and plans were put in place to ensure the field’s completion for the start of the 2008 fall sports season.

Tom knew there was a need for a new football and soccer complex. Rarely a day would go by without coaches or student-athletes expressing their wishes for an improved playing field. After all, the teams were practicing on an on-campus field of only 80 yards and on fields off campus.

However, there was much work to be done in preparation — more than anyone anticipated. Soon Tom was inspecting artificial turf samples from anxious vendors. He learned about the proper way to distribute sand and rubber granules. He sifted through dozens of bid proposals. Stormwater management became the topic of many conversations among engineers, city officials and university representatives. AU personnel visited other institutions to assess fields and determine needs.

Yet the biggest challenge facing Tom and the construction crew was rain. An unusually wet spring and summer disrupted the excavating process several times. Once the base was finally finished, the field literally came together stitch-by-stitch, which was no easy task. Many mornings revealed rips in the turf or sections displaced after evening storms.

Then, on a sunny day in August, student-athletes returned to campus. And at the very moment the last stitches of artificial turf were being sewn together, football players were stepping onto the field for their first practice.

After a year and a half of planning and construction, it was quite a kickoff to the season.
Visionary Vago

The year was 1946 and a young World War II veteran returned to his hometown of Aurora, Illinois, where he would enroll as a freshman at Aurora College. He liked working with numbers, so taking courses that would prepare him for accountancy was a logical choice. He also liked athletics — football in particular.

Even then, Louis Vago knew that playing college football games on a high school field left much to be desired for athletes and fans. He would eventually earn degrees in accounting and law and have a reputable business career. But he would never forget his roots at Aurora University.

“What more can I do?” was the question Louis posed to the university after years of making annual gifts. At the same time, the dream of a new football field was on the minds of many student-athletes, coaches and fans. A lifelong Spartan football booster, Louis had an idea.

Today, Vago Field stands on the northwest side of campus — a state-of-the-art facility that helps attract and retain students from all over the country to a college Louis attended in his hometown six decades ago.

Capturing the Conference

It was a year of firsts for the 2008 Aurora University football team. They played on a new home football field and began membership in the Northern Athletics Conference (NAC). Their season started with its first 2-0 record since 1990. The team was undefeated in the conference, which hadn't happened since 2000. Building on this momentum, the Spartans eventually captured the inaugural NAC football championship.

A number of factors led to the success of the team, beginning with the guidance of Head Coach Rich Duncan, who arrived on campus in 2005. He mentored a young team that became a group of competitors and leaders. He did so by emphasizing the importance of success off the field, too. His message to players: Earn degrees, build lifetime relationships and become respected members of the student body.

The players followed his advice. Duncan recruited hard working and determined student-athletes. He credits these players’ good work ethic to their upbringings. As a first-generation college student himself, he could identify with the backgrounds of many of his players. “You don’t just wake up to success,” he said. “You work for it. Our players know this because they’ve seen their parents work hard, too.”

So when the opportunity arose to be the first Northern Athletics Conference football champions, the Spartans set a goal and worked hard to achieve it — earning a prestigious place in conference history.
A young man, Harry Hartshorne Jr. thought of himself as a New Yorker. He visited the Lake Geneva area with his grandparents, Simeon B. and “Bessie” Chapin, and even recalls attending worship services at George Williams College with them. But he didn’t consider it his home.

Then, in 1944, as a young military pilot, he was flying to the Milwaukee airport to visit his ailing grandmother at one of the four farms in the area owned by his grandfather. Before he could reach the airport, equipment failure caused him to look for a suitable area for a forced landing. He spotted a field next to a schoolhouse and landed the plane. As luck would have it, he was near his grandfather’s farms.

Recalling the visit, Harry said: “My grandfather spoke five words that changed my life. He said, ‘What’s the matter with Wisconsin?’ I said, ‘Nothing, Grandfather.’” Shortly after, Harry left the military and began his life running one of the family farms. Well educated, well read and a strong supporter of the arts, his life experiences make him anything but the stereotypical farmer.

The Chapins were very influential in their grandson’s interest in the arts and community involvement. When Harry was about 10 years old, he received a book as a present inscribed with the words, “To my grandson who loves to read.” Though he doesn’t recall that he particularly cared to read at the time, the book by Rudyard Kipling sparked an interest that still endures. Similarly, his interest in music was fostered by the gift of a piano, and a lifelong love of opera was instilled through frequent nights at the opera with his grandparents.

In 1954, Harry’s ongoing interest in the arts was evident when he became part of the George Williams College Summer Music Association, the supporting organization responsible for the Music by the Lake series that spanned the 1950s and 1960s. He was a vice president of the association for many years. When the concert series was revived almost a decade ago, he became a loyal supporter once again as a Young Artist Underwriter for the Music by the Lake opera each year.

Harry’s quiet leadership is reflected in a variety of community organizations, including those established by his grandfather. In his unassuming way, Harry would probably tell you that’s just the way his grandfather taught him to live his life.
Recalling the Chapin-Campus Connection

Upon the death of his father in 1892, a young Simeon B. Chapin set out to pay off some small debts his father had accumulated in Chicago. A few years later he set up S. B. Chapin and Company, a stock brokerage company. It was very successful, and only a few years later his business expanded to include a New York office. His reputation as an earnest man with great vision was firmly established.

Much as he pursued a good start on the heels of his father’s untimely death, one of Chapin’s lifelong interests was to support efforts to help young people find a positive direction in their lives. His connection with George Williams College was a natural fit.

A member of the George Williams College Board of Trustees from 1901 until his death in 1945, he is perhaps best known at GWC for his development of the golf course. When college officials indicated an interest in building a course, he worked with local farmers to piece together the land to create it in the shadow of Yerkes Observatory. And, as a member of the Executive Committee, he oversaw the construction of the clubhouse, which was dedicated in 1929 and still stands today. His unique vision included a stone wall around the perimeter of the course in the 1930s that remains a feature of the course.

Harry Hartshorne Jr. says his grandfather liked doing things that would improve the communities where he lived. In addition to his role at George Williams College, Simeon founded the private, nonprofit Water Safety Patrol organization in 1920, which is housed at George Williams College. The organization patrols the approximately 5,500 acres of Geneva Lake, the most-used body of water per acre in the state of Wisconsin. His contributions also helped in the development of Lake Geneva’s Horticultural Hall and many other lasting endeavors in the area.

Simeon B. Chapin’s vision and strong community commitment is realized in many ways in the Lake Geneva area. His legacy endures at George Williams College.
We were seated around a large table at Chez Lena et Mimile, enjoying our last night in Paris late into the evening. In May, it’s light until about 10 at night! After we ordered dinner, we started talking about what we liked best about our visit to the French capital. One student volunteered, “The people and the lifestyle.” Another chimed in, “People are more relaxed here.” Someone else added, “I like the museums and the architecture.”

Art was a main focus of conversation. One student remarked, “The Louvre was the most meaningful to me. Seeing the Mona Lisa was surreal.” Another said, “I loved the Musée d’Orsay. There are so many paintings there that I recognized from my Art Appreciation class at AU.” A student added, “Van Gogh, Monet and Manet are my favorites.”

It was time to order dessert. The “prof” explained that the restaurant’s pastry chef for this restaurant was one of the best known in Paris. After he described the various choices, we made our most difficult decision of the evening! When the desserts were served (rose petals and all), we took out our cameras to capture our last Parisian delicacy.

As the sun went down, we asked the professor if he would teach a different course next year so we could enroll again. We explained that he made the subject matter come alive, and we wanted to study more history. As the evening drew to a close, the enthusiasm for next year’s trip began to grow.

Interest in exploring more travel-study opportunities was also expressed by students who spent May Term in Puerto Rico, Luxembourg, China and Spain. We returned with more self-assurance, a better global perspective, and a new appreciation of the arts, world politics and history. It was no surprise all of us thought the trip was too short!
Students Blog From Around the World

May Term 2009 saw the addition of blogging from participants in travel-study courses. What a great way to follow the students’ experiences as they were happening! Students shared comments and photos. Friends back home read about the students’ travels in their very first blog post and then followed along as they excitedly shared day-to-day happenings — seeing that first monument or visiting a gothic cathedral.

Tom, a senior physical education major, blogged about the trip to Colorado to explore the field of applied exercise science. “As the days go on, we keep adding to our knowledge base and this is crucial to us because a majority of us want to go into fields that require a knowledge in the strength and conditioning field,” he wrote. Meanwhile, Adam, a senior history major, reported from Luxembourg and concluded, “It’s interesting just how international the atmosphere is here. … Nearly every sign is in more than one language.”

Cory, who wrote from Puerto Rico, said, “We had the opportunity to visit a local university, Universidad del Sagrado Corazón. It was quite an adventure … We used our Spanish skills to ask some local university students directions … Luckily, they didn’t steer us wrong!” Sandra let us know about her favorite day of the Paris trip — visiting Versailles. “The château was the home of many French kings in the 1600s and 1700s,” she wrote. “The inside of the château is so elegant and beautiful. But what I really enjoyed was the gardens.”

Students’ excitement virtually leapt off the screen as we read the daily postings. They were exploring new subject matters and learning about themselves and how to function in a different culture. For some it was a first plane ride; for others, the adventure of using their Spanish to find a local landmark.

Following the blogs kept us connected and hopefully whetted the appetite of others considering May Term travel.

*To read the May Term blogs, visit [http://aumayterm.blogspot.com/](http://aumayterm.blogspot.com/)*
This is going to be an extra challenging year for me,” commented a junior business major who returned to AU in the fall. “I’m going to be taking upper-level courses that will require a great deal of my attention. Yet, my financial situation may keep me from devoting 100 percent to my studies.”

Unfortunately, many students shared similar stories during the past several months. These hardship situations were demonstrated by a dramatic increase in special circumstance applications seen by counselors within the Aurora University Office of Financial Aid. Reflecting national trends, students faced serious financial aid hardships this year: family homes were foreclosed upon, parents lost their jobs and others filed for bankruptcy. Even those students not dependent on financial aid are experiencing lifestyle changes as they work part-time jobs or choose to commute to save money.

The economy is also placing additional burdens on what used to be stable programs that helped offset the price of higher education for students in need. The Monetary Award Program (MAP), which awards state grants to students, was significantly reduced in this year’s state budget. While it was reinstated for spring semester, the future of MAP remains uncertain. Also, many students missed completing their financial aid applications prior to the unprecedented mid-May deadline.

Despite these obstacles, Aurora University remains dedicated to ensuring that students are able to focus on receiving a quality education. In support of students, faculty and staff continue to lobby to secure MAP funding for the future. The university also introduced two programs to help students in need. Students can apply for the AU Assurance Grant, which is awarded based on MAP eligibility criteria. Students may also be eligible for the Franklin Fund, which was established to provide relief to families struggling with the economy.

Additionally, most AU students can attest firsthand that financial aid resources and additional support are vital to their success in college. “It may be a difficult year ahead,” said the future
accountant cited earlier. “However, I know I can get through this obstacle with the help of the university. And one day, I’ll be applying my business skills to help ensure others receive the same opportunities AU afforded me.”

From Virtue to Action

More than 250 years ago, Benjamin Franklin argued that nothing is more important to the public welfare than “to form and train up youth in wisdom and virtue.” Franklin urged colonial colleges to enroll gifted students from all walks of life and prepare them for meaningful citizenship. This is exactly what is done at Aurora University and reflected in our affordability initiative, the Franklin Fund. The fund further supports our goal of offering an excellent education at an affordable price to all.

Through the Franklin Fund, AU helps families who are struggling because of unexpected strains on budgets. The need is great — and because of our commitment to careful management, cost control and fair pricing, we are able to help students.

Despite the unfortunate economic climate, there is a positive side to this challenging time. More of our families are realizing the importance of higher education. Regardless of their financial struggles, families and students from all backgrounds are doing whatever possible to ensure the pursuit of a quality education at Aurora University. Because students and families are recognizing this value more than ever, the AU community is inspired to renew its commitment to students and their families.
New Undergraduate Enrollment Comparison

*Aurora Campus*

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>261</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>675</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transfers</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>675</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>631</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>376</td>
<td>726</td>
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Total Student Headcount

*Aurora and George Williams College Campuses*

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<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
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<tr>
<td>Transfers</td>
<td>3,326</td>
<td>3,560</td>
<td>3,791</td>
<td>3,946</td>
<td>4,291</td>
<td>4,355</td>
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Legend:
- Freshman
- Transfers
- Total
For the second consecutive year, the Annual Fund surpassed the million-dollar mark. The Annual Fund provides fundraising for scholarships, academic programs, artistic events and the overall operations of the university. In 2009, more than 2,300 donors gave to the Annual Fund.

Projects funded during fiscal year 2009:
- Vago Field
- Pipe Organ Fund — 50th reunion class
- Pollard Servant Leadership
Net Tuition and Fees

Revenue

- Net Student Tuition and Fees: 73%
- Government Grants, Contracts and Appropriations: 13%
- Gifts and Private Grants: 3%
- Endowment and Investment Income: 2%
- Net Auxiliary Enterprises: 2%
- Other: 7%

2004: $27,889,390
2005: $29,180,549
2006: $30,814,648
2007: $33,331,435
2008: $36,063,327
2009: $39,741,903
Expenses

Statement of Financial Position

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<tr>
<th>Assets</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
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<tr>
<td>Cash and Short-Term Investments</td>
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<td>Receivables, Net</td>
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<td>Long-Term Investments, at Market</td>
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<td>Prepaid Expenses and Deferred Charges</td>
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<td>Property, Plant and Equipment</td>
<td>70,344,424</td>
<td>72,622,475</td>
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| Total Assets                        | $120,361,453 | $119,212,831 |

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<th>Liabilities and Net Assets</th>
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<th>2009</th>
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<tr>
<td>Short-Term Liabilities</td>
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<td>Long-Term Liabilities</td>
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<td>Net Assets</td>
<td>78,452,624</td>
<td>73,527,167</td>
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</table>

| Total Liabilities and Net Assets    | $120,361,453 | $119,212,831 |
And Our Story Continues... 

I hope that you enjoyed reading this collection of stories from the 2008–2009 academic year at Aurora University. So often President’s Reports consist of long lists of institutional accomplishments accompanied by charts, graphs, numbers and donor names. Our goal this year was to offer a more human perspective on the contemporary AU experience. After all, our ultimate mission at the university is to change the lives of our students for the better through learning. This is the singular purpose that draws all of us together.

The list of our strengths as a university is long and continues to grow. Still, these are complicated times for colleges and universities. Thanks to the generosity of donors, including many members of the AU faculty and staff, we have been able to soften the impact of the recession for many of our students through the Franklin Fund. Dollars from that source are available to help students whose families experience a serious illness, a home foreclosure or the loss of a job.

At AU, we are committed to careful, conservative management. That’s why our undergraduate tuition is priced well below that of nearby competitors. We are proud of our “value proposition” and know that our university offers an excellent education at an affordable price. We will continue to invest only in those projects that have a direct, tangible educational benefit for our students. In the months ahead, I truly hope that we can count on you to help us provide additional financial assistance to our students.

Please use the enclosed envelope to make your gift to the 2010 AFUND campaign. Our students are counting on your help and so are we.

Sincerely,

Rebecca L. Sherrick, Ph.D.
President