

Joseph Norio Uemura gave the keynote address for the Sharon Walker Faculty Excellence Awards banquet held in December. Uemura taught at Morningside from 1959-1966, and he was awarded an honorary doctorate from Morningside in 2000. He was a philosophy professor for a total of 42 years before he retired in 1994, and he is now the Paul Robert and Jean Shuman Hanna Professor of



Philosophy, Emeritus, at Hamline University in St. Paul, Minn. Uemura holds a doctorate in philosophy from Columbia University in New York City, and he is an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church. This is a shortened version of his keynote address.

The gods charged Prometheus and Epimetheus with the task of equipping (all mortal creatures), allotting them powers suitable to their survival. Epimetheus said to Prometheus, 'Let me distribute and you inspect.' So, Epimetheus distributed to all creatures whatever might provide for their preservation... And when he had distributed everything he had... he had yet to come to humanity and was terribly perplexed...

When Prometheus came to see what Epimetheus had done, and thinking about what might preserve a wretched and dying humanity, he decided to steal the fire and the arts of Hephaestus and the knowledge and wisdom of Athena and give them to humanity...

Zeus condemned Prometheus because he was kind and compassionate to a wretched and dying humanity... Zeus punished Prometheus by chaining him to a Caucasian rock, and each day sent an eagle to devour his liver (his soul), which each night grew back to its full size because it was immortal.

-Plato, Hesiod and Aeschylus

Academic

Epimetheus did provide all with plenty to eat, adequate shelter, feasting and merrymaking. Most utopian programs – socialism, communism and even democratic capitalism – have never been able to complete this Epimethean ideal.

Nevertheless, Prometheus was not pleased with these simple amenities alone. Humans are born with Epimethean needs, but human needs are “higher” as well. We are all born physically unformed and undeveloped, politically and legally unsocialized, educationally and intellectually untrained and, perhaps, spiritually uninspired. Prometheus needed a far more intense program than mere survival.

Seeking a Higher Truth

Prometheans want the deep and tough questions to solve. They want solutions that will stand the tests of time, so they can face the future with courage, justice and wisdom and have real and true answers for the giant agonies of the world and the great tragedies of history. They want ideals, meanings and destinies that inspire humanity and fulfill our highest hopes.

For example, in Plato’s “Crito,” the character Crito suggests that Socrates take some “small change,” bribe his way out of prison and escape to Athens, where he could live and teach in peace until he was 100. But Socrates says, “My dear Crito, I would have to commit several ethical offenses to do so.” We must remember, “It is not life that matters, but the good life.” Or, as Socrates points out in “Phaedrus,” “It is noble to pursue noble things, no matter what happens to us.”

Professor Allan Bloom said in his influential book, “The Closing of the American Mind,” the three dominant words found in the contemporary collegiate vocabulary are skepticism, relativism and hedonism. If one keeps one’s ear to the ground, one almost universally hears “nobody knows anything for sure,” “nobody tells the truth” and “in fact, no one knows the truth anyway.”

Many say, like Democritus, “I know that I know nothing,” or they say, “Everyone is entitled to their own opinion.” In art, “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” and “when I’m in Rome, I do as the Romans do” because “everything is situational.”

This means that, on the American campus, the crucial questions of life are freely uttered in skeptical clichés. No truth, no goodness, no beauty, no reality and absolutely nothing to believe in.

Bloom went to his grave knowing that skepticism, relativism and blatant hedonism so dominated the American college that he could see no glimmer of hope for a return to an “open mind, a liberal culture or an objective search for the truth.”

What bothered Professor Bloom about American higher education? Or to put it bluntly, what’s really “higher” about American higher education? Is higher education in America any different from any other institution in American society? What does four years of college do that can’t be done better by Microsoft, Starbucks or Barnes and Noble?

Andrew Delbanco, in the “New York Times Magazine,” said the academic business is a business. For example, why do colleges and universities still call themselves eleemosynary institutions when they



Excellence: In Defense of Prometheus



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cost so much and act on the selfish rules of the marketplace? The single chart of 1,000 U.S. patents and trademarks held by 10 huge universities is frightening enough to prove that higher education is a marketplace, not a place for the simple search for truth, beauty and goodness.

Living the “Good Life”

Prometheus wanted to rescue a wretched and dying humanity. He knew Epimetheus had left nothing with which to help. In his compassion for humanity, Prometheus decided to take fire and the arts from Hephaestus and knowledge and wisdom from Athena. With careful forethought, he reasoned that humanity could survive and possibly thrive with such assistance.

Prometheus, like most great teachers, possessed a “natural compassion” for humanity. He looked beyond the mere survival of all. With total foresight, he addressed the complete needs of humanity. In other words, he looked to the total culture and civilization of the world. That is why the mind or soul had to be completely involved. And that is

why fire, art, science, knowledge and wisdom were all involved.

The myth of Prometheus is also analogous to great teachers we have all known because of the “natural benevolence” we have enjoyed in their presence. The inclusive sharing of the light, art and truth is not mere life, but the “good life.” Beyond the personal happiness we desire, we also need a society of benevolence, not just for ourselves, but also for everyone we have loved. Teachers have a way of doing this better than anyone.

Promethean teachers we have known have also been surprisingly self-sacrificial. In the history of ethics, there are three important values: personal happiness, social benevolence and self-sacrifice for the greater good.

Prometheus was well aware that he would be punished by Zeus. Zeus, after all, was Power Immortalized, and Prometheus was only rationality incarnate. One does not “play God” without consequences. Prometheus knew he would pay: chained eternally to a Caucasian rock, with an avenging eagle to devour his soul.

But Prometheus also knew that the highest of ethical acts is vicarious suffering, self-sacrifice in behalf of the greater good. Thus, Prometheus culminated his devotion to humanity with precisely such an act. Promethean professors I have known have done the same.

Morningside College presented the 2007 Sharon Walker Faculty Excellence Awards to **Sam Clovis Jr.**, professor and chair of business administration and economics; **Bruce Forbes 1970**, professor and chair of religious studies; and **Leslie Werden**, assistant professor of composition and rhetoric.

The awards, presented for the first time in 2003, are funded by a generous gift from Morningside alumni **Jim and Sharon Walker 1970**, of Wayzata, Minn. Outside evaluators selected the recipients, and criteria for selection included teaching excellence, effective advising, scholarship and service to Morningside College during the previous academic year. As part of the award, recipients were asked to write essays responding to the keynote address given by Joseph Uemura during the awards banquet in December. A shortened version of the keynote address appears on pages 26 and 27, and the faculty essays appear on the next three pages.

Sam Clovis Jr.

Sam Clovis Jr. joined the Morningside College faculty in 2005 as professor and chair of business administration and economics. He received a Sharon Walker Faculty Excellence Award for an outstanding year of teaching, advising, scholarship and service.



As one student wrote in a letter to the awards committee, "I saw students from all academic levels open up and participate." This professor "inspired students not by asking little of them and hoping they would finish it, but by challenging them." He achieved high marks from students despite teaching an overload last year.

Clovis had a good – if busy – year in advising. He was responsible for more than 40 formal advisees, and he found time to work with two departmental student groups, a college-wide student group and a dormitory floor.

He also contributed a large amount of time to service. He developed new curriculum for his department, appeared on television some 15 times, gave presentations on campus and to several service organizations, including the Morningside Rotary International and the Masons of Sioux City.

As far as scholarship is concerned, what Clovis accomplished is nothing short of incredible. Not only did he finish a dissertation, but he had two articles published, presented a paper at a national meeting and produced four papers for the Department of Homeland Security.

Clovis has a doctorate in public administration from the University of Alabama.

Bruce Forbes

Bruce Forbes 1970, professor and chair of religious studies, has taught at Morningside since 1978. He received a Sharon Walker Faculty Excellence Award because of his positive impact on students, the college and the surrounding community.



Students and colleagues cite this professor's ability to ignite a passion for life-long learning. His class discussions have a reputation for liveliness, so his courses always fill quickly.

"Students seek this instructor out" for advice on academic matters and many other issues. His door is always open – often into the night. He seems to have an amazing "ability to find time and show concern for advisees, despite having so many of them!" As a group advisor, he recently played a critical role in reviving an important student organization.

Forbes is a presence on campus, genuinely enjoying being at a range of student events. Through extensive public speaking and interviews in the surrounding community, he also has played a major role in projecting an exemplary public image of Morningside College.

A nationally-known scholar who has authored numerous articles, book chapters and papers, Forbes capped "an exceptional year among many excellent ones" by writing "Christmas: A Candid History," a book published by the University of California Press.

Forbes has a doctorate in the history of American Christianity from Princeton (N.J.) Theological Seminary, and he is an ordained minister in the United Methodist Church.

Leslie Werden

Leslie Werden, assistant professor of composition and rhetoric, joined the Morningside College faculty in 2006. She received a Sharon Walker Faculty Excellence Award for her efforts to enhance student learning at Morningside.



Colleagues said Werden motivates students to do more than they thought they could. Student evaluations and letters reflected this high praise. Over and over again, the awards committee read and heard of her energy in the classroom, deep engagement with students and passion and dedication to improving teaching at all times.

Passion and dedication mark her advising efforts as well. Despite being new to Morningside, she took on 20 first-year students. She also assisted in the creation of one new student group and revitalized the activities of Morningside's speech team.

As director of first-year studies, Werden conducted research and attended two professional conferences, all to facilitate the preparation of faculty development workshops, which presented best practices in the teaching of writing. These workshops provided benefits to faculty that stretched far beyond their teaching in first-year courses.

All of this activity in itself constitutes meritorious and exemplary service to Morningside, but this faculty member took on even more – serving on one of the task forces that helped shape the college's strategic plan. She also represented Morningside as keynote speaker for last year's "Best of the Class" ceremony in Sioux City. Werden has a doctorate in English from the University of North Dakota.

Build a Foundation *Sam Clovis Jr.*

Joseph Uemura said people who are Prometheans “want the deep and tough questions to solve. They want solutions that will stand the tests of time.” What deep and tough question do you feel students need to solve while they are at Morningside College?

Those of us who are members of the Morningside College faculty must contend with the day-to-day aspects of providing the best possible educational experience for our students. Often, however, I think we place the emphasis too strongly on our specific discipline and miss out on what might be most important to our students. To address this misplaced emphasis, we might ask ourselves what questions students most need to answer while they are in our charge.

If I might offer a suggestion, I would propose we help students answer, “Am I prepared to lead a principled life?” Students may or may not be able to answer this question by the time they graduate, but our goal should be to help them in this noble quest. I submit there are few questions more compelling, particularly if we have fulfilled our obligations to our students as professors, mentors and role models.

In order to answer the question, our students need particular attributes. The first attribute is intellectual curiosity. Students need to seek the truth in all matters, and when the truth is elusive, they need to have the persistence to at least gain perspective. Our students will face a multitude of “wicked problems” in the course of their lives. Without intellectual curiosity, our students will drift, or worse, bend to emotion, false influence or baseless pronouncements that relieve immediate tensions but inhibit positive formulation of solutions.

The second attribute we need to provide our students is one of open-mindedness. Only through education and experience can an individual gain more depth and breadth in perspective. People are different as are circumstances, which provide context for behaviors. Being exposed to, or better, experiencing those circumstances will allow students to restructure their frames of reference. If our students are able to embrace “difference,” then they will be well on their way to constructively contributing to a better world.

A third attribute is an internal locus of control. Our students must have the confidence imparted by gaining knowledge and the courage of conviction to demonstrate inner strength when immersed in a sea of

chaos. Our students must want to influence events – instead of being influenced by them and then wondering what happened. Our students who have courage, confidence and humanity will do just fine.

We owe our students the opportunity to gain these attributes. Their time at Morningside, in which we have great influence, should be focused on building a moral and intellectual foundation upon which to build strength and character. There is no greater calling, nor any greater reward, than seeing our students prepare to lead principled lives.



Get a Life

Bruce David Forbes 1970

Joseph Uemura said, “Prometheus looked beyond the mere survival of all. With total foresight, he addressed the complete needs of humanity.” How do you look beyond “the mere survival of all” to address the complete needs of your students at Morningside College?

One of my favorite aphorisms is that “the purpose of college is not just to get a job but also to enhance your life.” Put another way, “college not only prepares people to make a living but to have a life.”

Neither of these slogans originated with me, but they guide my approach to higher education.

I believe in the kind of education that Morningside offers. We used to refer to this as liberal arts education, but some people apparently are confused about what the phrase means. “Liberal” does not refer to liberal versus conservative agendas, as in today’s politics, and “arts” does not imply a focus only on fine arts like music and painting. Rather, the liberal arts tradition, going back to classical times, is a broad general education, ranging from math and sciences to creative expression of many kinds to studies of humanity through fields like history, philosophy and religion. It is an education that addresses the whole person.

As we all know, higher education often is viewed today as the path toward a better job. I was concerned about such matters when my son was in college, but that was not what mattered *most* to me. More than anything else, I cared, and still care, about what kind of person my son is and the kind of person he is becoming. I suspect that virtually every parent feels the same way. It’s not just about a job.

Morningside offers an environment that helps students clarify their values and goals and also widens their world, all in a quest for genuine happiness and fulfillment. When general education requirements encourage students to enroll in courses they might not be inclined to take otherwise, it leads to unexpected encounters with people, information and perspectives that literally can change their lives.

I think of my colleague **Tom Gilbert 1962**, who entered Morningside as a student interested in music, changed to a pre-med program and also encountered philosophy courses taught by Joseph Uemura along the way. The eventual result has been Tom’s long, successful career teaching philosophy at Morningside, a vocation he loves.

For others, college enhanced their lives through the discovery of personal interests: the accountant who loves to attend symphony

concerts or the physician who is a Civil War history buff. Other classes unexpectedly provide skills that are helpful in parenting, leading a church youth group, being an interesting conversationalist at social gatherings or serving people in need.

Personally, an unexpected encounter with Francis of Assisi had a far-reaching effect on my life. As a young student at Morningside I thought I hated history, but I took a “required” Western Civilization course and in the process wrote a paper on Francis.

With my Protestant background, I started out knowing only his name and that he was associated with birdbaths. But I learned that Francis was more than just a religious Dr. Doolittle, and I have been fascinated with him ever since. His emphasis on joy, even in the worst circumstances, inspires me.

His advocacy of voluntary poverty and simplicity constantly pushes me to wrestle with the materialism of American culture. His appreciation for the natural world came long before the Sierra Club and Earth Day, and it is rooted in spirituality.

Lo and behold, when I eventually sought a doctorate in religious studies, what did I choose as my specialty? The history of Christianity.

History?! It hardly seems possible, but it happened, thanks in part to Morningside College and Francis of Assisi.



Photo by Doug Burg, Burg Studios.

Leslie Werden *Fill Your Cup*

Joseph Uemura said, “The single chart of 1,000 U.S. patents and trademarks held by 10 huge universities is frightening enough to prove that higher education is a marketplace, not a place for the simple search for the truth, beauty and goodness.” So how would you answer his question, “What does four years of college do that can’t be done better by Microsoft, Starbucks or Barnes and Noble?”

Several years ago, I had the great pleasure of eavesdropping on the following employee conversation while waiting in line at Starbucks:

“So did you see that movie?”
“Yeah.”
“Did you like it?”
“No.”
“Why not?”
“Cuz.”

“Cuz why?”
“Cuz it sucked.”
“Why did it suck?”
“It just sucked.”
“But why?”

Darn; my half-caf, half-decaf, sugar-free caramel skinny latte was done, so I wasn’t able to continue listening in on that delightful repartee between co-workers. Here’s what I think was happening: one employee was seeking another opinion, pressing for answers, and asking for clarification; the other was simply satisfied to be dissatisfied. For the latter, what kind of discussion was that? Boring. Seriously boring. One employee repeatedly asked,

“Why?” Why does the movie “suck”? Someone? Anyone? Can anyone locate the truths behind the implication of the word “suck”? Can anyone explain the beauty in the film (or the “suckiness”)?

What if these young people were in a college classroom? What if the film had a historical background and the students were in a history class, learning about the Tudor Dynasty in England? Would these students have more to say than “it sucked”? We want people to enter life’s conversations; spending time making discoveries in college is essential to their intellectual growth and self-discovery.

Freshmen in my Passport section this fall acknowledged their youth and inexperience but then demanded the opportunity to search for answers that would help them grow, gain experience, become prepared, be informed and gain knowledge so they have the tools to make wise decisions. These students understand their lives are malleable at this point, and they are not willing to, as one student wrote, “settle for something when I can have something better [that] I find more fulfilling.” They look for examples of “truth,” “beauty” and “goodness” so they have a basis for designing their own set of ideals and goals. They long to be fulfilled.

People who spend four years working at “Microsoft, Starbucks or Barnes and Noble” will have the experience of earning money and on-the-job training. But will they know what they were looking for in the first place? Will they understand what led them to that choice and feel satisfied with their decision? Perhaps. But there are students who will not accept the limitation of a single or solitary job. One Passport student wrote, “I refuse to be stuck at a mind-numbing desk job. Doing the same thing every day does not appeal to me.” It is this student who will benefit from the exploratory opportunities college provides.

Four years in higher education opens the door to variety. One freshman explained her goals for college by saying, “I want my life to be well-rounded, and I think I need to experience different things to be able to have this.” Another wrote, “Change is inevitable at this point in my life and I need to embrace it before I make an important life decision. I’d rather look at all of my options for now instead of making a rash decision and feeling stuck with that mistake.” Finding a career, a relationship and a life plan are immensely difficult tasks, and our students will not undertake those tasks lightly. They will not tolerate dissatisfaction. They expect to find answers through a variety of places. They plan to be prepared. And we will help them.



Photo by Doug Burg, Burg Studios.