

In April of 2000, OUSF held its first joint-scholarship-finalist weekend. The Robertsons were not yet on board, but at the President's Dinner there were finalists for the A.B. Duke, B. N. Duke, Reggie, Trinity, and University scholarships, as well as administrators and faculty who graciously support these programs. Here are some excerpts from the April 2000 President's Dinner talk delivered by Professor Melissa Malouf:

Back in 1998 Bob Thompson, Dean of Trinity College of Arts and Sciences, initiated discussions about how to envision and engender an umbrella organization for our major merit scholarship programs. We started with baby steps, with a tantalizing "what if." There is now something called the Office of Undergraduate Scholars and Fellows that—as it learns to walk, then run—is discovering imaginative and fruitful ways to transform the phrase "critical mass" into a dynamic reality.

As faculty director for OUSF, I'm on every program's "net" e-mail list. Let me give you a sampling of what a pleasure this is:

"Hey y'all," writes one of our New Yorkers, "This is your last chance" to contribute to the American Cancer Society fundraiser. Leave your donation in OUSF."

"Hi everyone. The honor council would like to invite you to a discussion in Soc Psych 126 on Thursday at 7:00."

"I just wanted to tell you all about the world premier of Bill Banfield's new opera, Luyala....Martin (BND) and I are singing in the chorus and as each

rehearsal comes to an end, we leave with a new appreciation of the music....The dancers are phenomenal. I am busy cramming for an exam right now so I can't go into more detail."

"You are all invited to the Red Cross Hunger Banquet."

"For the third year in a row, a Duke team--two of whom are ABDs--achieved OUTSTANDING designation in the Mathematics modeling contest."

"Hello! I wanted to invite you to a piano recital I am giving on Monday. I hope that you can make it."

"On Saturday at 2:45 in Physics 216 or 218 the Duke University Math Union is having a games session. We'll play all sorts of board and card games, and none of them is related to math at all!"

"Hip Hop, Merengue, Salsa, April 7, 10-2, Alumni Lounge. Hope to see you there!"

"Interested in employee-student relations and how you might be able to make a difference? Stop by the Employee Awareness Discussion on Thursday in the front of the Chapel from 3-4."

"The new science museum in Raleigh opens today, it's the largest in the Southeast and they have a free 24-hour event starting at 5:00pm. I'm planning to go over there around 3am or so when the crowds are minimal,

so if you're interested...."

There's a story in these messages about students getting in touch with other students to line them up for tutoring needy kids in Durham; it's about a call for food and supplies on behalf of flood victims who, as migrant farm workers, do not necessarily have safe access to official channels of help; it's about inviting everyone to come listen to a talk given by a medical ethicist, a Hispanic poet, a new-millennial economist, an astrophysicist, a gay activist. It's a story about students asking each other for advice—who should I take for Math 196? and about students asking each other for support—come see me perform tonight (in a play, in a musical, in a recital, in a choir, in a symphony, in a dance, in a poetry reading) and it's about students congratulating each other—way to go on getting the Goldwater award, on that article in the newspaper about your work in Haiti, in Nigeria, in Mississippi, at NIH, PBS, DUKE. Congrats on your post-graduate adventures: your Rhodes scholarship, your Luce scholarship, your Marshall, your Fulbright, your Churchill, your selection as a Young Trustee of Duke University. It's a story about the scholars who populate OUSF.

The plot of these emails entails the desire of these undergraduates to take seriously the word "community"—and trying their best to make it happen. True, the responses for connection, participation, friendship are not always what one hopes for. But what strikes me is the hope: the sense that everything, anything, is possible. And, believe me, that particular kind of hope—for support, for engagement, for kindness—does make things happen at this University.

In his poem called "Church Going," Philip Larkin writes about an agnostic who can't stay away from an old church that's in decline, that's "going," and that he keeps going to: "Once I am sure that nothing's going on/I step inside....Hatless, I take off/My cycle-clips in awkward reverence."

It's the complexity of that awkward reverence that in part compels me to mention this poem, because I suspect that, whatever your beliefs, Larkin's phrase speaks to what it feels like to become a university student, to step inside what is called not church but the ivory tower. Larkin's church and this university—so extraordinarily represented by OUSF scholars—have in common, it seems to me, what Larkin says in the last stanza of this poem:

A serious house on serious earth it is
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognized, and robed as destinies.
And that much can never become obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in....