

Student-Centered

When Dr. Troy D. VanAken was named president of Thiel College in March, he stated that he is a “student champion” and would focus on the student experience at the College. Since taking office in July of this year, he has spent much of his time making good on that promise.

In fact, it is obvious how much VanAken and his wife, Annette, enjoy being around Thiel students. You can often catch the president eating lunch in the Galleria and talking with students about their day, classes and lives. During Homecoming, our students saw a moment of unbridled enthusiasm from the president—with the Tomcats winning in the final seconds with a field goal—as he stormed the field to congratulate and celebrate with the team. Both VanAken’s were a vital and energetic part of the Halloween celebrations on campus, which included a spooky haunted house in Roth Hall, an evening hayride, a dance, costume competitions and a theme dinner. And these examples are just snapshots of the energy and focus on the students—both current and future—that Thiel’s president has brought to campus.

Also since taking office, the president has been working on the campus itself, including several facility upgrades, such as renovations and new furniture in several residence hall lounges, a new gymnasium floor and roof, and the transformation of the Glen Johnson Community Center into a more functional conference center. Public Safety also relocated to the Howard Miller Student Center.

In recent months, less tangible but perhaps even more important projects have been quietly percolating on campus. Initiatives and projects that shape Thiel’s future and guide its growth for years to come—some you may have heard a bit about already, such as the military initiative and new The Thiel Fund; others are brand-new and full of potential—The Thiel Commitment, Imagining Thiel and the Thiel Innovation Fund.

“These are challenging times for any institution of higher education and Thiel College is no different,” says VanAken.



“However, the dedication, extra effort and genuine desire for Thiel to succeed that I have seen on campus has been uplifting. These new initiatives have the potential to make a real impact on Thiel’s future. I encourage all our alumni and friends to participate fully in these projects, even the smallest contribution—such as an increased gift to the Thiel Fund—provides an immediate impact. I welcome any ideas or ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking for improving Thiel College for our students from our alumni and friends!”

New Programs Focus on Students

Thiel Commitment

The Thiel Commitment is a new initiative that was VanAken’s first order of business when assuming the presidency last summer. This program highlights the existing benefits of a Thiel education—four-year graduation plans, career and academic guidance, and lifetime career services for example—and creates new facets of the Thiel experience, such as new “exploratory” major designations

and a 60 percent tuition discount for Thiel graduates looking to freshen their skills or explore a new career path. Other features of the Thiel Commitment include monthly career discernment seminars that are available to all applicants who have been admitted to the College, co-curricular transcripts and e-Portfolios to showcase achievements outside the classroom, and a commitment to keeping college costs low. The most exciting part of this plan is the new ninth-semester

tuition waiver that will be provided to students who are in good academic, social and financial standing and who need an additional semester to finish their degree. This will allow students to participate in study abroad or internships without the added pressure of still finishing their degrees in four years.

“This program embodies an aspect of Thiel College that many might not realize—that Thiel is for life, and we mean it,” says VanAken.

Imagining Thiel

Since the beginning of the fall semester, Thiel has been involved in a new strategic planning process, called Imagining Thiel. This initiative identifies new ideas, projects and programs that will contribute to the student experience on campus and therefore contribute to the College’s stability. This idea-generation process is designed to become self-perpetuating even after the early initiatives have been put into place, says VanAken. The initial brain-storming session held by the College staff, faculty and administration generated 66 new ideas! Some of these currently being moved through the process include a new youth ministry major, new athletic teams (such as men’s volleyball and women’s lacrosse), a marching band and many more.

Thiel Innovation Fund

The Thiel Innovation Fund is a new internal venture capital fund that will support new and beneficial programs and initiatives, such as those generated from the Imagining Thiel strategic planning process. This fund has a goal of \$2 million dollars for “seed money”; \$620,000 is already committed thanks to several generous donors such as Dr. Carl ’69 and Theresa Hoffman, Joseph ’80 and Nancy Scarpitti, and Gary ’79 and Kate Witosky. Projects funded by the Thiel Innovation Fund will repay the initial investment over time as they generate revenue through increased enrollment and retention while positively impacting the College’s operating budget. As a revolving and self-perpetuating program, the Thiel Innovation Fund has the potential to help fund Thiel’s continual improvement and growth over the years. It enables donors to help the College help itself to improve for years to come.

The Thiel Fund

The Thiel Fund is a natural progression from the former Thiel Annual Fund, says VanAken. This source of annual support from Thiel’s alumni and friends has become more responsive to the wishes of its donors by enabling them to select specific areas to support—annual operations, student/academic programs, scholarships or athletics. With an ambitious new goal of \$1 million, The Thiel Fund is a vital part of Thiel’s success in 2009-2010. For more about The Thiel Fund, see page 2.

Military Programs

Thiel College has a long history of educating men and women of the nation’s armed services. Thanks to the federal Yellow Ribbon G.I. Education Enhancement Program, veterans and other military personnel could potentially attend Thiel College for little or no out-of-pocket expense. Thiel has also entered into an agreement with the Pennsylvania National Guard that not only provides \$5,000 scholarships to guard members attending Thiel, but also offers one full-tuition scholarship each year to a qualified candidate from the National Guard! (For more, see page 3.) In order to meet the needs of this special student population, Thiel has also put several new programs into place, including the no-cost applications, streamlined admissions process and two special programs just for veterans. The Network of Advocates is a team of College personnel, including faculty members with military experience, that provides transitional services such as academic advising and flexible scheduling. The SERV (Supportive Education for the Returning Veteran) program is specially designed for military veterans who want to work through the college experience in the company of other military students.

Thiel also is offering a military students’ lounge and study area, special summer family programs and additional campus orientation. Beginning in January, Thiel is also offering three online courses exclusively to military students, including Interpersonal Communication, U.S. History to 1877 and Word Processing, Spreadsheet and Data Management Applications.

