



WILLIAM J. CRAFT

A TRANSFORMATIONAL PRESIDENCY

BY KELLY HEYER

Upon entering President William Craft's office, one of the first things you may notice is the many books that line his shelves. These books serve as tools to build connection and community. It's not uncommon to leave his office with a list of book and author recommendations he thinks you will enjoy. It is this love of reading and sharing of stories that led **Dr. William Craft** to his life's calling as an educator.

From an early age, he understood the value of education and its ability to transform lives. Growing up in New Wilmington, Pa., home to Westminster College, he was surrounded by a community and family that valued education and teaching. Books and stories were a part of his everyday life and followed him through college, where he studied English. It is in

that same small town that Bill met his wife, **Anne**, who shared in his passion for education and studied to become an English teacher. Together, the two set off on a life of learning, teaching, and reshaping the undergraduate college experience.

After college, the Crafts moved to Chapel Hill, where Bill earned his doctorate at the University of North Carolina. This path led them to Gettysburg, Pa., where Anne worked as an educational administrator and editor and taught high school English. Bill taught English at nearby Mount St. Mary's University in Maryland and joined other young faculty in leading the transformation of the common curriculum there, earning national recognition for the Mount and major grant funding.

Hearts Together

In 2000, the Crafts experienced life in the Midwest for the first time when they moved to Decorah, Iowa, where Dr. Craft served as the dean and vice president of academic affairs of Luther College, having been recruited by Luther's president, **Dr. Richard Torgerson**, a 1964 Concordia graduate. When the presidential opening came at Concordia, Torgerson encouraged Dr. Craft to consider applying. The Crafts' meetings with several Concordia alumni and faculty also greatly influenced their decision to pursue the opportunity.

"I knew of the work the faculty was doing at the college and the difference they were making in the lives of students," Dr. Craft says. "I remember thinking to myself, if the people that I have met are representative of the faculty of this college, then this is a place where I think I could be really happy and could do good work."

During Bill's campus interview as a presidential finalist at Concordia, what really stood out to the Crafts were the students and the community of Concordia. After a long day of travel and interviews, Dr. Craft walked into a room full of Concordia students.

"I remember praying that I could stay alert for these students after a busy travel schedule that left

little time for sleep," he recalls. "I was so taken by those students. I was captivated by their curiosity, perceptiveness, and earnestness. Their thought-provoking questions filled me with hope and energy."

The heart of everything the Crafts do is the students and, in turn, they have captured students' hearts. On move-in day each fall, you will likely find Dr. Craft carrying boxes from cars to dorm rooms as students make Concordia their home. During Orientation, the Crafts welcome hundreds of first-year students into their home for a reception. Throughout the year, the Crafts can often be found enjoying the musical talents of students at concerts or cheering on the Cobbers at sporting events. As an academic counselor, Anne has helped countless students navigate the challenges of college and celebrates their successes. Their commitment to being active participants in the campus community and the lives of students defines their lives and exemplifies what it means to be a Cobber.

"The Crafts have made an impact on my education through their unrelenting support for the arts. Their adoration, knowledge, and devotion to the arts and music at Concordia never goes unnoticed," **Zoey Zachek '23** says. "Attending a college where I can pursue my greatest passion and know that it doesn't go unnoticed by the president has enhanced my college experience like nothing else. I am incredibly thankful for this support."





A Transformational Learning Experience

One of Dr. Craft's proudest achievements shared with the faculty and staff is Concordia's emphasis on experiential learning and applying academic discoveries in the world beyond the classroom. With a goal to provide an irreplaceable learning experience for every student, he has worked with faculty and staff to expand hands-on learning opportunities both in and outside of the classroom. The PEAK program, Pivotal Experience in Applied Knowledge, was developed as a part of that initiative. Not only does PEAK help prepare students for a career after college, but it also provides valuable life experience, encouraging students to step outside their comfort zone, take chances, and discover new interests.

"President Craft understood early in his presidency the importance of the college exploring new educational options. His vision led to a summer New Ventures working group followed by a yearlong task force that completed a deep dive into possible new ventures for the college," says **Dr. Cynthia Carver '74**, professor of communication studies. "Under President Craft's leadership, we saw expanded graduate education opportunities, new undergraduate programs, a commitment to a transfer-friendly campus, and more."

In 2019, Dr. Craft commissioned a college-wide committee that worked with faculty, staff, students, graduates, and regents to create a new strategic plan, *Concordia Leads: The Plan for 2030* – a bold plan to educate 21st century learners and equip them to become accomplished professionals, courageous citizens, and transformational leaders who build a world more joyful and just.

The plan expanded on Dr. Craft's vision for integrative work-learning experiences, for excellence through diversity, community well-being, and a strong financial foundation for Concordia College.

The plan's commitment to diversity arises from Concordia's identity as a liberal arts college of the Lutheran Church and from the knowledge that, as Dr. Craft says, "our students learn more deeply in diverse environments."

"There is and always will be more work to be done, but I am thankful for the progress we have made," he says. "In the past 12 years, the number of students of color has increased, our international student population has grown, and we have more students from different faith traditions."

Concordia's student body is made up of individuals from more than 60 countries, 22 different religious and thought traditions, and 125 international students from around the world.

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He also worked with leadership in the Concordia Board of Regents to increase diversity there, helping to assure the variety of experiences, backgrounds, and dispositions that are needed to tackle the challenges that surround higher education today. Dr. Craft has recognized the necessity of growth in diversity and the range of gifts within each Concordia student.

"Again and again, I am amazed in the ways in which no Concordia student is ever just one thing: the undergraduate science researcher who plays in the string section of the orchestra, the student making music videos and managing the student investment fund in the Offutt School, the humanities major working on the Just Futures Initiative on the lives of Native Americans, the student ministry leader who becomes a teacher in Europe, on and on," Dr. Craft says. "In a culture that wants to put people in little boxes, the Concordia community calls us into the fullness of our lives."

Likewise, Dr. Craft values the longstanding commitment of Concordia to the liberal arts and to professional preparation for work in the world.

“President Craft understands and actively promotes professional programs grounded in the liberal arts,” Carver says. “He believes passionately that our teachers, business leaders, nurses, doctors, etc., are best prepared when they experience the synergy of professional education grounded in the liberal arts.”

Commitment to Environmental Sustainability

Dr. Craft’s commitment to advancing sustainability at Concordia has transformed the college. Under his leadership, sustainability became a core feature of the college, culminating in the adoption of Concordia’s first Climate Action Plan. In April 2017, Dr. Craft signed the Integrated Climate Commitment and, in doing so, Concordia committed to reduce carbon emissions and work with local partners to increase the community’s ability to adapt and flourish in the face of climate change. Concordia is also the only school in the Fargo-Moorhead area with a sustainability coordinator and designated Sustainability Office.

“President Craft proved to be an inspired leader in the area of environmental sustainability,” says **Dr. Ken Foster**, chair of the President’s Sustainability Council. “He consistently reminded us that everything we do to become more sustainable must also directly contribute to the fulfillment of our educational mission. As a result, sustainability successes can be seen across all areas of the college, with a Climate Action Plan set to guide us to greater heights in the coming years.”

A Campus Transformed

Under Dr. Craft’s stewardship, Concordia completed the most ambitious, comprehensive fundraising campaign in the college’s history. The Concordia endowment has more than doubled over the last decade, increasing support for scholarships and academic programs.

Throughout Dr. Craft’s tenure, Concordia has experienced a renewal of the college’s teaching, learning,

and recreational facilities with new construction and the renovation of Grant Center for the Offutt School of Business, the Integrated Science Center, Jake Christiansen Athletic Complex, the Normandy for the Center for Student Success and, most recently, the Heimarck Center for the Sanford Heimarck School of Health Professions (opening Fall 2023).

Called to Serve

Perhaps the Crafts’ greatest legacy will be in their deep commitment to Concordia’s mission and for leading students to become responsibly engaged in the world.

“We are deeply grateful for Dr. Craft’s service and for the ways in which Bill and Anne have together devoted themselves to the mission of Concordia,” says **Mary S. Ranum ’78**, chair of the Board of Regents. “Dr. Craft’s invaluable, far-sighted contributions have positioned Concordia to thrive in the decades to come, educating new generations of students to influence the affairs of our world.”

For the first time in nearly their entire lives, the Crafts will be leaving behind college life. While they settle on what’s next, they’ll be spending time at their lake home and with their two children and six grandchildren. They look forward to volunteering, being involved in their local church, singing in a choir, and finding ways to live out their calling wherever they may land. In addition, Dr. Craft will stay busy with plans to read and write more, continue engagement with higher education associations, and bike at least 5,000 miles a year.

When the Crafts say goodbye this summer, they will leave behind a legacy of a renewed campus, innovative ideas, and deep relationships – but they will take with them memories of a community they called home.

“Anne and I will always be from Concordia, of Concordia, for Concordia,” he says.



Favorite Memories

Attending chapel in 2011 for the first time after I was named as the new president with people so joyful and kind in welcoming us

Memorable campus visitors including Rep. John Lewis, David Brooks, Bill Gates, **Clint Hill '54**, **Miquette Denie McMahon '06**, Walter Mondale, and Louise Erdrich

The increase of women in leadership roles at Concordia and having more women as head coaches than any other school in Minnesota, public or private

The joy everyone felt on returning to a full May commencement after the ravages of COVID on our lives and work

Every Homecoming, graduation, concert and theatre performances we've attended

Traveling to China to the United International College where I received the first honorary degree awarded to a Westerner

Meeting alumni from around the world and hearing their stories of Concordia

The September 2022 board meeting in which leaders from the Fargo-Moorhead community spoke of how vital Concordia is to our region and of how well prepared our students are for life and work after college

International Days at Concordia Language Villages

Meeting King Harald of Norway in Oslo

Every conversation with our students about their studies, their lives, their longing to influence the affairs of the world

Standing outside Bishop Whipple Hall at our 125th anniversary and hearing Professor Emeritus **Olin Storvick** offer a toast to "the Concordia that is yet to be"

