



7-24-2009

Examining Our Roots: How Over 100 Years of Religion Yielded a Secular Liberal Arts Program at Ursinus College

Karen Boedecker

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/rel_sum



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Religious Education Commons](#)

[Click here to let us know how access to this document benefits you.](#)

**Examining Our Roots:
How Over 100 Years of Religion Yielded a Secular Liberal Arts Program at Ursinus College**

**Karen Boedecker
Summer Fellows 2009
Mentor: Dr. Nathan Rein
July 24, 2009**

<http://ursinusianaproject.blogspot.com>

Earlier this summer I spoke with a prospective student whom I was interviewing in Admissions. I related my own personal experiences at Ursinus and, as I usually do, zeroed in on what is commonly referred to as “the freshman experience.” I explained the way the freshman dorms were set up, the orientation process, and what I believe to be the core of an Ursinus education – the Common Intellectual Experience. As I rattled on about these things and why they are important I began to consider how far I’ve come in the last three years and what exactly brought me to where I am today.

The first week of school freshman year I recall talking with some of my hall mates about various things that concern eighteen year olds. Our discussion mostly revolved around what we knew we all had in common since we’d only been acquainted for a few days. We started with complaining about the summer reading, went on to who was going to go try to find a party that weekend, and then finally to why we all chose Ursinus. One person had turned down Penn, another Harvard, and yet another a full ride at the Ohio State University. A few hadn’t considered other schools and some just came for the bio and pre-med programs. I loved the fact that all of us came from the widest range of backgrounds imaginable and that we were all planning to go into an even more varied range of fields, but what I found to be absolutely mind-blowing was that a place like Ursinus College could bring us all together that night through something as simple as an ancient Mesopotamian epic. The whole concept of a course like the Common Intellectual Experience is unique in and of itself, but bringing together ten years’ worth of Ursinus students through a common appreciation for the liberal arts has created an unparalleled sense of community.

I’d never really thought too much about Ursinus’ roots beyond the basics that all freshmen learn during the academic convocation at orientation. However, my father is one of those academic types who will read up on anything and everything he encounters in his daily life. Once I decided to attend, Ursinus was no exception. His readings on the German Protestant Reformation shed a lot of light on why things are the way they are here at Ursinus. I learned a good amount of pre-history (everything from who Ulrich Zwingli and Zacharias Baer were to why it is that the College doesn’t have big fancy buildings or any of the other bells and whistles commonly associated with academic institutions) and brushed up a bit on the founding of the school itself. What I was left with was a lot of what my friends refer to as my “fun facts” but, I see now, just as little perspective as I began with.

When I first approached Dr. Nathan Rein about the possibility of doing a Summer Fellows project about the religious history of Ursinus and how our former affiliation with the Reformed Church has impacted the identity of the school he reminded me that I had

overlooked something very important. In all of my excitement about finding out what the implications of the Heidelberg Catechism had on the whole concept of a liberal arts education I managed to forget that there was once a time during which Ursinus was affiliated with the German Reformed Church (now the UCC), that we are no longer affiliated with them, and that something happened during the last 140 years that changed that. When I left Dr. Rein's office that afternoon I had a whole new crop of questions swimming around in my head, but the subject that came to the forefront was that of *change*. Within that broad subject came such foci as what I began this summer researching – that is, when was compulsory chapel abolished and what repercussions came of it?

When I began working in the Ursinusiana archives in June I sifted through a lot of Ursinus Weeklies, faculty minutes, course catalogues, and other old Ursinus documents. At that point I didn't really know how anything was going to turn out and all I had to guide me was my original question about chapel at Ursinus. At the request of Dr. Rein I began to organize a journal of sorts to organize my research and to keep track of my thoughts about each document I came across. As I gleaned various dates and such from the archives I realized that my project wasn't going to go anywhere if I didn't figure out a way to make my research accessible to the rest of the Ursinus community. All we have in the archives is what people send in and all I had was my personal analyses of these documents. What if I were to somehow get my friends, professors, and even alumni involved with the project? Not only would I be able to share my findings with them but they would be able to open new doors to me through their own observations and, in the case of alumni, memories of Ursinus back in the 1960s.

This resolution led to my beginning a blog entitled "Ursinusiana Project." While blogs are still new and somewhat untraditional in the academic world, I can't imagine any tool that would have been more helpful to me and my progress in the archives this summer. Getting feedback from professors, alumni, my peers, and even my parents has taken me on an extremely unpredictable journey through my research but, at the same time, has yielded a newer, better, more exciting path as I prepare to begin the next stage of my Fellows project as I pursue honors.

Wednesday, June 10, 2009

Hello world!

If all goes as planned I will be using this blog as a tool to track my progress during Summer Fellows and my honors project. For the next few weeks I will be documenting in this blog the things that I find in the Ursinusiana Archives, located on the second floor of the Myrin Library here at Ursinus College in Collegeville, PA. Below, please find a brief description of my Summer Fellows research project, as presented this morning to a few of my "fellow Fellows" and their faculty mentors:

" Although Ursinus College is a fairly young institution, there have been many modifications that have occurred throughout its history. While we as students might be tempted to fixate on the changes that we find most relatable such as the price of an Ursinus education (it was \$188 a year in 1885) or the clubs and organizations in which one could choose to be involved (in the 1880s the only options were the Zwinglian, Schaff, Ebrard, and Olevian literary societies which flourished here), the overall character of the College was most heavily influenced by the presence and eventual absence of religion.

Despite always being a non-sectarian college, Ursinus was founded in the wake of a religious upheaval in the German Reform Church which, at the time of its founding, had a particular theological character. The College is said to have been founded "in prayer and in debt," and only recently has it become the wholly secular institution that we know today. This summer I plan to explore the Ursinusiana archives in the library as a precursor to an honors paper in which I will address some of the implications of the College's shift.

My foci for the summer will primarily concern the religious character of the College in its early years and the eventual abolition of compulsory chapel in the late 1960s. So far I have read most of the College Bulletins from the first 20 years of the College's existence (several of which have included editorials about the place of religion in higher education) as well as a few sermons by Reverend Bomberger. I will continue to utilize College publications as well as other materials, such as faculty minutes and private letters that are contained within the archives. In addition to what I find in the archives I intend to interview people affiliated with the College who can fill in

any gaps that I might come across in the archive materials and provide me with personal insight about the changes.

Other areas I am interested in that I will look into if time permits include the changes in the curriculum and the attitude of the College towards the concept of a liberal arts education, the shift in administration and their policies, the function of the Bomberger chapel, the role of religion in student life, and, if possible, the dramatic change in what career paths Ursinus graduates choose to take (clergy to graduate school)."

Labels: archives, presentation, research methods, summer fellows

Comments:

"Aviva" said...

What a terrific idea for a project! I've heard alumni talk about the rules for behavior and dress that were enforced as recently as the 1970's. The place has sure changed.

(June 10, 2009 10:24 PM)

"jessabella104" said...

Karen, I've really enjoyed reading your research and the observations you've drawn from it so far. The topic is really fascinating and I can't wait to read more updates from you. :)

(June 19, 2009 10:26 AM)

Thursday, June 11, 2009

Suitable Devotions

As detailed in my presentation yesterday, the main focus of my project is shaping up to be compulsory chapel each morning (or, more accurately, the elimination of the tradition, the people, events, etc. that surrounded the decision, and the implications in the College's history and identity). At this point in my research I've looked through a bunch of college publications from the first 30 or so years of Ursinus' existence, including a good amount of Ursinus College Bulletins and one course catalogue. The catalogue that I had the privilege of looking through actually had an entire section dedicated to religion and pretty well spelled out the expectations

of the faculty and students:

" In proper harmony with the principles of Evangelical Christianity upon which this Institution is founded, and to the service of which it is consecrated, the Faculty will regard it as their highest duty to give faithful attention to the religious interests of the students under their care, and to labor for their spiritual welfare. This will be done in no sectarian spirit, but in full accordance with an enlarged charity which recognizes the claims of all branches of the Evangelical Protestant Church, as the only legitimate representative of Christian Catholicity. **The scholastic duties of each day will be opened and closed with suitable devotions, which every student will be required to attend. All the students will be required, also, to attend worship on the Lord's day, whether in the Chapel of the College, or in some adjacent church.**"

("Religion," page 11 of the Third Annual Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Ursinus College, for the Academic Year of 1870-71)

Obviously, what is most relevant to my project is the bit about how students are required to attend "suitable devotions" each morning. The key word here is *suitable*, especially if we are to consider the circumstances in which Bomberger found it appropriate to even consider founding a school such as Ursinus.

Those who are familiar with Ursinus' founding will recall that while it was founded by J.H.A. Bomberger and several of his supporters when they deemed the Church's other two educational institutions, the Seminary at Mercersberg and Franklin and Marshall College, to be too far out of line for the possibility of any sort of reconciliation with what they believed to be the "right" way of the Reformed Church. The last straw was when word got out that students and faculty members at F&M were increasingly interested in (and converting to) Roman Catholicism.

Although I have not come across any documents in the archives that give any sort of detailed account of what chapel was like in 1870, Calvin D. Yost includes in his book *Ursinus College: A History of its First Hundred Years* a description of a normal day at Ursinus College in 1872 penned by Bomberger himself. Pieces of these writings from Bomberger allow us to form some sort of idea of what "suitable devotions" were:

" At 8:45 A.M. the large bell again rings, summoning Professors and students to the large recitation room (not yet used as a chapel) for morning-prayer and roll-call. After calling the roll, a chapter is read from the Bible, a hymn sung, and prayer offered. These devotions are conducted in strict accordance with the simple usage of the Reformed Church. Any requisite statements or announcements are then made by Faculty" (Bomberger in Yost 18).

Granted, Ursinus is much bigger than it was back in the day and yes, the students who enrolled there were all Christian, but I can't imagine what would come of gathering all 1,800 of the current Ursinians together to recite all of our names, read Bible passages, and sing hymns! It's hard enough to get some students to go to their regular classes...

Labels: 1870, 1872, Bomberger, chapel, college catalogue, founding, Franklin and Marshall, Reformed Church, Roman Catholicism, Yost

Comments:

"mrbenmannix" said...

It is interesting and hard to believe the extent to which Ursinus was such a Christian college. I imagine campus life was a lot different then. Wouldn't it be interesting to run a comparison in the school paper between the daily life of an Ursinus student during those first 30 years compared to now? I don't know how interested in the idea you are, but you could run a whole series. I would bet that you could compare the average student too- I assume majors have changed, as well as basic characteristics like gender. Interesting topic choice, as it pretains well to your major here at Ursinus.

June 15, 2009 7:25 AM

Monday, June 15, 2009

What did the students think? (Part 1)

One of the things that I've been thinking about a lot in regards to compulsory chapel is how students reacted to the policy. I've come across two sources from different time periods (approximately 80 years apart) and, as one might imagine, they suggest that, at best, student attitudes towards chapel changed dramatically over the years or, at worst, the earlier of the

two sources wasn't actually written by a student. I will begin this two-part post with an editorial type of report that was published in the Ursinus College Bulletin in April 1889. Bear in mind that this piece is entitled "College Sundays" and as such does not include weekday chapel although attendance was still required.

" At eight o'clock in the morning a general Bible-class, composed of resident students, and any others who choose to attend, is held in the College chapel. Prof. Ruby conducts it. The selections of Scripture studied are those of the International Series. **This service has an interested attendance. All the resident students are required to be present, it is true. But that must not be taken in the harsh peremptory sense. The compliance is cheerful, virtually voluntary, and evasions or excuses are rare occurrences. The *must* is assented to as a bird consents to fly with its wings, or a man to work with his hands.** Next comes the privilege of attending public worship in some adjacent church. There are several churches in the three villages contiguous to each other with the college in the central one. One is located immediately opposite the college grounds. The others are within east and, in fair weather, pleasant walking distance. Each student may select the one he prefers regularly to attend. **All are required, in this case again, to make a selection and to be in their place. But the rule seems to set so softly upon them that it is not felt to be a chafing yoke. It may be that one or another wisely makes a pleasure or necessity, - but as practice makes virtue easy, so compliance with the law soon kindles love for it...**

Once a month, or oftener, if other engagements allow, at half past three o'clock in the afternoon, the Vice-President, Rev. Dr. Super, and Prof. J.S. Weinberger give the students Bible-Talks on special topics, which have proved attractive and profitable...Attendance upon this is, of course, voluntary, but a large proportion of the young men of the college find pleasure in being there...

These facts suggest that their own inferences, and most assuredly none of these will be that a Christian Sunday at college need be a day of gloomy asceticism, or of puritanic pietistic severity (such as anti-religious papers often caricature), but a season of purest pleasure and most salutary rest and recreation" (Ursinus College Bulletin, Vol V, No. 7, April 1889, "College Sundays," 117-118).

As alluded to above, I'm not entirely sure who wrote this article because rarely (if ever) were names included with things that were published in the early Bulletins. All I know is that the Bulletin was edited by AW Bomberger, though I doubt he wrote everything that was published in the newsletter. I have yet to decide how important this information gap is.

Moving on to the substance of the piece. Students who gathered in the Bible study class/seminar are purportedly cheerful and (dare I suggest it?) excited to attend these meetings with professors and administrators on Sundays. Furthermore, students rarely skip the class or furnish excuses for their absence. The person writing the article implies with his comparison to birds and the rest of mankind that these classes are inexplicably a part of the Ursinus experience (at least for resident students) and the Ursinus education would not be complete without weekly attendance at these Bible classes.

I find this claim to be extremely important not just in gauging the popularity of required prayer but in tracking the attitude of Ursinus towards what we consider a quality education. What immediately comes to mind as I read and re-read that sentence and consider that concept the more and more I think about our required CIE classes. When I think about required Bible classes shaping a good, reputable Christian education in the late nineteenth century in relation to a required seminar in which we gain a solid foundation for a reputable liberal arts education in the twenty-first century...well, the two just don't seem quite as far off from one another.

As for the required attendance at local churches on Sundays, it seems that the writer of this article needs to strain a little harder to keep from coming off as if the practice was forced too hard upon the students. Still, though, the assertion that "compliance with the law soon kindles love for it" doesn't suggest that the requirement was met with as much enthusiasm as the Sunday morning Bible class.

Before passing too much judgment about the writer's sugarcoating of the attitudes of the students, it is important to consider the position he or she was in. The Bulletin was not meant as a student paper distributed exclusively at the College - on the contrary, from what I've gathered it was provided to the students but meant for alumni and "friends" of Ursinus who were in a position to give money (remember that the College was in extreme debt for many, many years). Additionally, a common practice at the time was for colleges to send one another

their publications as a method of showing off. Any editor worth his or her salt (AW Bomberger included, I'm sure) would never allow any sort of article or editorial that would put the associated institution in a position to fall into disfavor with donors, alumni, and other places of higher learning.

So, I think that until I am able to gather more information about the feelings of the student body towards required religious activities it is safe to assume that while some parts of the Sunday religious ritual were received better than others, the students did not feel strongly enough (or didn't react strongly enough) to warrant a formal note about the whole thing...but perhaps faculty minutes and informal documents will prove otherwise.

Labels: 1889, Bible class, CIE, local churches, required attendance, Ruby, student reactions, students, Sunday, Super, Ursinus College Bulletin, Weinberger

Thursday, June 16, 2009

What did the students [and faculty/administration] think? (Part 2)

Fast forward to about 80 years after the article in the Bulletin concerning Sundays on campus. The year is 1968 - Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated, the Green Bay Packers win Superbowl II, and the war (my 8th grade social studies teacher would have a heart attack if she knew I was calling it a war) is raging in Vietnam. Here in Collegeville, PA there is an editorial published in the Ursinus Weekly about changes that are in store for the next academic year...including the elimination of chapel (or, as they were calling it at this point, "assembly") each morning. Although the announcement is fairly brief and doesn't pay too much mind to the fact, this is a major turning point in the College's history. Not only will Ursinus shed a large part of her identity as a Christian college, but there will no longer be a regularly scheduled time during which all students come together. Consider:

"Next year there will be no more assembly. Chapel, as it was called up until this year, has passed into oblivion. Its fate has been marked, however, for years. Two years ago chapel was bi-weekly; last year, it diminished to once a week; this year, the name chapel was dropped.

Until this year, the service was a quasi-religious, seldom inspiring service. Assembly dropped

the religious format, but the degree of inspiration and dullness remained about the same. In general, chapel's passing is not mourned. But one feature of this chapel-assembly program will have no replacement. Notably on at least one occasion this year, a student has had an opinion to express, and the assembly proved to be his excellent airing ground.

The case in point occurred first semester when Janet Houska spoke in favor of changes women's rules. It must be noted that after her excellent plea, no student was permitted to arrange with a professor to speak during his chapel time. Such a restriction again proves the futility of assembly. As a result of this talk, actual changes have been made in women's rules, i.e. smoking is now permitted in the reception rooms, Wilkinson Lounge is now open at specified hours, and next year, girls will be permitted to wear slacks in the reception rooms. For those of us who favor having open men's dorms, this change may not seem so revolutionary. But, we must admit that a change for the better has taken place.

No matter how few of these student-oriented programs were possible under the framework of chapel, this feature is one of the few losses we will feel... (Judy Schneider, page 2, The Ursinus Weekly, Vol LXVII, No. 14, May 23, 1968)

So students weren't big fans of chapel as a religious program. Here Judy Schneider has provided a general commentary on the loss of chapel/assembly as a forum for students who with to express thoughts and opinions to the rest of the College community, but aside from that there isn't too much mention of the general sentiments of the student body. I will infer from this lack of reaction (there isn't any further word from students in later papers either) that the students didn't care too much about chapel/assembly. Although the weekly meetings weren't as frequent as they had been in previous years and were by no means as religious as they once were, the whole concept of chapel represents something that we might recognize today - feelings of camaraderie and community. As noted in yesterdays post, I feel that the current generation of Ursinus students is able to get from CIE what was once meant to come through chapel services. Although Judy Schneider seemed to fear the loss of a general public gathering at the college, chapel/assembly was replaced by "forums" the following year. The announcement concerning this arrangement follows:

" In conjunction with a proposal made by the Student Government Association and approved

by both the Faculty and the Board of Directors, required Assemblies have been replaced by a Forum Program that will address ethical, moral, and aesthetic topics. All students will be required to attend at least two of the six programs scheduled for the Fall semester.

There will be attendance-takers assigned to each forum, and classes will be cancelled during the meetings of the four daytime forums.

Dr. Creager, chaplain of the college, has said that the new program reflects the administrative feeling that religion on the campus should be oriented toward education. He says that the United Church of Christ is more interested in being associated with a first-rate liberal arts college rather than one where religion is forced. Dr. Creager added that there will be a voluntary religious program in the upper room of the library on Friday afternoons at 12:30pm" (Forums Replace Required Chapel, page 4, The Ursinus Weekly, Volume LXVIII, No. 1, October 3, 1968)

These forums actually appear to resemble CIE even more than the chapel services/assemblies did. Although the restructuring of the program helped move Ursinus along to a more secular place, the UCC appears to have still been consulted before a definitive change was made, and perhaps that's why it took so many years to phase out the old chapel/assembly program. It looks to me as if the overhaul of the old system and Dr. Creager's denouncement of "forced religion" was a major part in the process of Ursinus' break from her distinctly religious identity.

I still have some interviews to do, but rumor has it that not only were the students not terribly fazed by the decision to get rid of chapel, the faculty and administration were also okay with it. My guess is that since religious sentiments in the US were in a general state of decline the whole thing had just turned into a pain-in-the-neck gathering regarded as a waste of time that was totally devoid of any sort of spirituality.

Labels: 1968, announcement, assembly, chapel, CIE, Dr. Creager, editorial, faculty and administration, forum, required attendance, student reactions, students, UCC, Ursinus Weekly

Comments:

"Ruairi" said...

I wonder if there was ever a time when chapel was something someone looked forward to, or when someone felt they gained something from it. It seems to be taken as a given that the services here couldn't be expected to effect any kind of blossoming of the heart. Was it always so?

--Ryan C.

June 19, 2009 11:24 AM

"Karen B." said...

Ryan! From what I've read so far I think that chapel was taken more seriously and people viewed it as a spiritual experience in the early early days. Perhaps it was simply because the type of student at Ursinus was more religious to begin with and thus more open to the tradition?

June 19, 2009 8:09 PM

Tuesday, June 16, 2009

Just for fun!

One of the consequences of getting rid of chapel...

"Pranks seem to have declined in recent years. Why? Perhaps because the students so rarely get together as a group any longer, thus reducing the incentive to be imaginative. For it is an undeniable fact that some of the best pranks of the past were performed in that one place where the students were required to meet: chapel.

Many ingenious methods were invented by Ursinus students to keep chapel from being too outrageously dull. One of the best was the "three alarm caper," recounted for the Weekly by Dr. Helferrich. One fine day, a group of students hid three alarm clocks in the chapel, each set to go off about five or six minutes apart. All of a sudden: Bringggggggg! By the time the commotion from the first alarm had settled down, the second alarm would explode. And when the third alarm went off, the service was destroyed for good!

Other great chapel disrupters that are still vivid in the minds of some of our distinguished faculty members, Dr. Donald Baker and Dr. Robert Howard. Incidents such as:

- the time two mangled chickens were discovered in the Bomberger chapel piano by Dr. William Philip.
- the time a headless turtle was hung from the ceiling of Bomberger and caused a great deal of disturbance to chapel-goers.
- the time students loosened all the screws on the chapel seats and the assembly had to be cancelled because religion was unsafe that day.
- the day the dignified picture of Dr. Bomberger was given a new feature – a can of Budweiser imposed over his hand.
- Or the day Dr. Carolyn Doan, who had the habit of analyzing a hymn line by line whenever she was the speaker found the hymnals removed from the pews. Embarrassment!!!”

(Many of the Greatest Pranks Took Place in Chapel, By Michael Micolic, Janet Stemmler, and Georgette Griffith, page 4, Ursinus Weekly, Volume LXVIII, No. 6, December 19, 1968)

Labels: 1968, Bomberger, chapel, consequences, Helfferich, pranks, students, Ursinus Weekly

Comments:

“Aviva” said...

Those animal abuse 'pranks' are both gross and cruel. What kind of values was the College imparting? Or what kind of students was Ursinus admitting? Not only those who came up with the idea of harming animals, but those who might have been amused by it, should have been embarrassed and censured.

Now the alarm clocks -- we executed a modern version of that on April Fool's day a couple of years ago: we hid cell phones in someone's office, and as soon as he found one, the next started ringing. THAT was funny!

June 16, 2009 9:15 PM

“mrbenmannix” said...

I loved today's post! It goes to show you that there are quite a few interesting stories in the Weekly. I'll have to tag along to the archives one of these days and look for some more of these fun topics. Also, I hate to make myself a suspect, but Ursinus College should be prepared for similar pranks before the year is over. All for the sake of nostalgia.

June 17, 2009 7:23 AM

Wednesday, June 17, 2009

Update

It appears that although the announcement about the change in the chapel/assembly program weren't met with too much of a reaction from the students, there was a lot of discussion going on ahead of time. I'm currently in the archives looking through the Ursinus Weekly from 1966 and there are plenty of letters to the editor and other similar pieces that suggest that compulsory chapel (and what was to become of it) really was a hot topic.

I have my work cut out for me right now as I slog through the rest of the 66-67 Weeklies, but hopefully I'll begin posting bits and pieces (along with some analysis of said bits and pieces) tomorrow afternoon or evening.

Monday, June 22, 2009

The Refractory

I must admit that I underestimated the college community after noticing the lack of response post-abolition of chapel. Because of the nature of working in the archives and the inevitable information gap (we only have in the archives what people have sent) I expect that this will not be the last time I make a terribly off-base assumption. So, without further ado, I present one of the most spirited Letters to the Editor that I have come across so far:

"Dear Editor,

Compulsory chapel is taken pretty much as a matter of course at Ursinus. **"Chapel"; the word has religious overtones, which cannot illegitimize it, for Ursinus remains part of the UCC. However, with the heterogeneity of beliefs present, proselytizing would be quite**

unforgivable. The expounding of a more lived man's views on ethical and relational problems may be well worth while, and even thought provoking. Indeed, an advertisement for some humanitarian organization is more than acceptable. But on the other end of the spectrum lies an area of concern quite as fatuous as a fire and brimstone revival meeting at 9 o'clock on a Monday morning in Bomberger chapel.

Last Monday's speech by Dr. Creager was undisguised propaganda for all of the conservative traits in the school that chapel stands for. What is worse, it was so poorly reasoned, almost insulting, especially considering the good grace with which it was accepted.

In a previous speech Dr. Creager quoted the rules and regulations for Mt. Holyoke College from some generations back saying that we weren't so badly off after all. **This week he decides that our rules and regulations are a product of trial (and error?) suited to our needs in our future life. Is it impermissible then that we live now, that we begin the empirical process of self dependence before we are launched into the cold cruel world? Granted, of course, that complete independence from, after dependence on an artificial system becomes chaotic; nevertheless there must be something wrong with this smugly self-reighteous I-told-you-so-ist attitude, if enforced chapel services like this one are necessary to quell an unthought of rebellion against this, the best of all possible environments.**

And when we of the synthetic environment are unprepared to face a synthetic definition of pure study, a contradiction results that looks like the last step in a reductio ad absurdum.

Right?

So, as Buggsy might say, we have two choices left; to apply to New College with thirty demerits for skipping chapel, or to rest our weary heads on those soft hymn-books, and dream of freedom.

At last a "service" that was less than soporific! Professor Ferguson has wakened the indolent in chapel...but not by disserting on how to be good, or even thrifty, but by refuting the existence of God.

To forestall any attempts at censorship by the environment makers, I would like to propose the formation of a student board to pass on the chapel homily topics as to whether they are acceptable or not, coupled with a suggestion box to find what would be of interest to the students of this, our College.

Signed,

The Refractory

(Chapel Examined, In the Mail, page 2, The Ursinus Weekly, Vol LXVI, No. 3, November 10, 1966)

To sum this one up I would say that we have students simply posing the question of "what's the point?" The mid 1960s was a big time for the Ursinus Weekly - students were getting much more comfortable with expressing their opinions about not only Ursinus issues but world issues. I don't believe that it's too much of a stretch to suggest that the students were desperately trying to come to terms with the happenings in the rest of the world while they were sitting (somewhat) comfortably back in Collegeville, PA. In some instances the feelings experienced were restlessness (remedied by trips to Vietnam protests in DC) and in others anger and a need for action (protests at Ursinus itself when the sheriff from Selma, AL was brought to the school as a guest speaker to share his side of the Civil Rights story). We also have the phenomenon of students listening closely to what authority figures present to them and then going ahead and deconstructing the formal words in order to understand what is really being said.

"The Refractory" doesn't seem to be terribly insulted by chapel itself but by what chapel time is being used for. As acknowledged in the opening of the letter, Ursinus is still affiliated with the UCC at this time even though the Ursinus community is made up of people from greatly varying backgrounds. What is upsetting to this group of students (I will assume that it is made up of students although there is no concrete indication) is that the school is *conservative*. What's more is that Dr. Creager (campus chaplain for those who are unaware) was talking down to the students about why conservatism is the right way during the chapel talk in question. From what I gather the students have no objection to listening to a speaker discuss the importance of moral or ethical living, but rather to being told how to live. If I am understanding the letter correctly then it appears to me that the students are much more inclined to have "real"

experiences at Ursinus so that they will be prepared for the "real" world.

Keep in mind, too, that this was also a time when students were fined for walking across the lawn, women were not permitted to wear pants to class, there was to be no visiting of the opposite sex's dormitories, and there was a strict curfew for the women's houses. The conservatism being protested comes in the rules, and students just generally don't like rules. Ever.

I'm still working through this letter and will most definitely return to it at some point during the project. I'm planning to review faculty minutes and other such sources as I move forward and hopefully those will help me put all of this in perspective since I suspect that there's more here than just frustration with campus rules and such.

Labels: 1966, chapel, Dr. Creager, letter to the editor, rules, student reactions, UCC

Tuesday, June 23, 2009

"a waste of education"

This letter to the editor of the Weekly is much more civil than the one in yesterday's post:

"Dear Editor,

It has been quite some time since anyone has commented on Chapel. Here is a suggestion.

If Chapel is to remain compulsory for students, would it not be more advantageous to hear from a wider variety of speakers? For the College to present any program to the students that utilizes such a small portion of the potential available is a **compromise and a waste of education for both faculty and students.** Chapel time should be used to present a variety of ideas in many disciplines. **Students should have an equal opportunity to participate.**

Some of the talks have become rather stagnant. **If Chapel is considered worthwhile, and it could be, let the students of Ursinus hear something worthwhile.**

Signed,
 Barry Feierman (1967)
 Charlotte Frost (1968)

(In the Mail, page 3, Ursinus Weekly, VOI LXVI, No. 6, February 15, 1967)

What I find interesting here is that Feierman and Frost's letter echoes the sentiments of the letter from "the Refractory." However, this pair had a much more effective tone and was able to express positive ideas for change in the chapel program. Many of the ideas expressed in this letter were actually implemented a few years after publication with the weekly forum program.

It is also worth noting that in the same issue of the Weekly this announcement was published:

"Thomas Dean, President of the Men's Student Government Association, and Diana Van Dam, President of the Women's Student Government Association, announced jointly that following this spring vacation there will be a new form in the chapel programs.

The required attendance regulation will be continued on Mondays of each week for freshmen and sophomores and on Tuesdays for Juniors and Seniors.

There will be a voluntary worship service on Wednesdays at the customary chapel hour in a place yet to be selected.

The Councils' presidents stated that the new plan is the result of a period of serious study by several members of the faculty and by both formal and informal groups of students."

(Chapel Changes, page 1, Ursinus Weekly, VOI LXVI, No. 6, February 15, 1967)

Although no major overhauls are alluded to or announced here, it is clear that in addition to reducing the number of days students were required to be in chapel, the major change here is a total secularization of the chapel proceedings. Although I'm sure that the faculty and staff of the College had something in mind for the slated changes that were to come about post-vacation time, is it possible that Feierman and Frost's letter had a hand in encouraging the higher-ups to try to use chapel time as tool for education? Once again I am relying on the

faculty minutes and (possibly) some interviews to clear this one up for me.

Fun Fact: Charlotte Frost and Barry Feierman ended up getting married. Oh Ursinus...

Labels: 1967, announcement, chapel, education, forum, fun fact, letter to the editor, required attendance, student reactions, student suggestions, Ursinus Weekly, voluntary worship

Thursday, June 25, 2009

Compromise

So here is the official announcement that chapel would become assembly (which was later to become forum). Clearly it is written with sensitivity towards the college faculty and staff as well as the UCC, but also as piece that makes it clear to any member of the community that Ursinus is in period of permanent change.

“‘For at least a decade there have been groups evaluating chapel at both a student and faculty level,’ explained Dr. Hinkle to a Weekly reporter. “At times the administration has appointed groups to evaluate it. **The groups usually divided themselves into one part that felt chapel had a historic and contemporary value and that some form of worship went hand in hand with campus education. The other group felt that a student can be required to sit but not to worship.**”

Not only Ursinus but sister United Church of Christ colleges have been contending with the same controversies and compromises have resulted. Ursinus has also made a compromise. A variety of ideas were considered but the result of the administrative compromise was to require the UC students to attend chapel once a week with one day set aside for voluntary worship. **The required service which will be known as assembly one and two will hold a cultural and universal appeal.** The voluntary service will be for those who want to reflect religious beliefs and spend fifteen minutes in devotion. No one will be required to be offended.

More Speakers Possible

The new system might also result in a greater number of different speakers since **chapel will**

not be designated as strictly religious or cultural. Rev. Creager makes it an effort to get a broad representation of the faculty but perhaps the ordained minister feels most comfortable in chapel and this speaks more frequently.

The question of why Ursinus has chapel service has been asked. A belief held on the Ursinus campus is that the United Church of Christ grants funds on this stipulation. This is entirely untrue. Ursinus wants to express a church relatedness. This is something all colleges do for themselves. A chapel service is a very good way to do so. The decrease in required chapel services is not an indication that chapel is to be abolished but that a compromise for quite some time was being called for and an effective one was made."

(Hinkle Calls Chapel Cutdown "Compromise"; Promises Cultural Emphasis in Future, by Loretta Wagner, page 4, Ursinus Weekly, Vol LXVI, No. 7, March 2, 1967)

Dr. Hinkle, a professor in the Philosophy department (and also a reverend!), raises a fascinating point about where Ursinians tended to fall on the topic of compulsory chapel. He does not, however, seem to consider those who believed that a regular gathering of the community would be beneficial to all involved even if it did not require any sort of religiousness (similar to the positions that Feerman and Frost took in their letter to the editor). This issue resolves itself as the piece acknowledges that compromises must be made.

Also worthy of note is the bit about how the assemblies will hold "cultural and universal appeal" and that "no one will be required to be offended." Perhaps the changes to the program made the regular gatherings *more* culturally relevant and *less* offensive, but, as with any administrative change, there were certainly some unhappy students left over after the new program went into effect. I would find it hard to take seriously those students who dismissed the little (and in some cases big) changes that were made to the Ursinus program as too little too late. Although the nature of the College is to be ever-changing with every generation of students that comes through, it is hard to ignore that there are some things that must be worked into (or out of) any program slowly in order to avoid a mutiny from one campus group or another.

Now we come to the part about the rumors that surround chapel. At such a small institution there are always rumors about funding and where it comes from, but this is a particularly

fascinating one. The question I initially had when I read it wasn't whether or not it was true but who it came from and which side it was meant to work for. There are good arguments for its origin on all sides of the debate (I do believe that it would be wrong to assume that there were only two), but I don't think it was the doing of a group that had any sort of strong belief in the issue one way or the other. I strongly suspect that it had more to do with students who were routinely kept in the dark as the administration and a very select number of students hashed out what was really going on...so really it was no different than the rumors we hear around campus today about various administrative things.

The last bit of the article – the very, very last sentence – appears to be put in place to appease those who feared the total secularization of the school and an eventual disaffiliation with the UCC. Although the changes to chapel were called a compromise, I wonder if any member of the community really thought that the gradual whittling away at the tradition would yield any sliver of hope for the survival of the program.

Labels: 1967, announcement, assembly, chapel, compromise, editorial, faculty and administration, rumors, students, UCC, Ursinus Weekly

Comments:

“Aviva” said...

I like the way you are analyzing the various points of view, and how you are relating them to administrative and student-group behavior through the ages -- including 2009!

June 25, 2009 10:26 PM

Monday, June 29, 2009

“free and open thought”

What makes a Christian college a Christian college? What detracts from the Christian-ness of the institution? What would give a college a Christian character? A religious character of any other type? If there's anything that I've taken away from my religion classes here at Ursinus it's that if a person were to try to come to grips with such loaded questions and give them concrete answers then she would dig herself into a frustratingly deep hole. To try to define 'religion,'

'Christian,' etc. is a futile task at worst and, at best, an exercise in identifying deeply personal beliefs and convictions about what these things ought to be. Here we have a bit from a regular contributor to the Weekly with his comments and feelings on Ursinus' identity as a Christian institution and its rituals.

"Can a college have compulsory chapel and still be called a Christian college? I think not, and evidently from all reports available, some of the members of the Board of Directors have been asking the same question of themselves and have been coming up with many of the same answers.

The point of the whole situation is, **can a Christian by definition, force another man to attend what is basically a church service contrary to another man's belief.** The answer, in my mind at least, is very clear. **Chapel should not be compulsory** two or three times a week, or even two or three times a semester; if it should be at all, **it should be on a purely voluntary daily basis.**

Naturally it can be argued that we accepted the ground rules, including compulsory chapel, when we came to Ursinus. In an academic institution, however, **thought concerning the ground rules of everything, is supposed to be stimulated – free and open thought – without fear of punishment or threats.** And, it seems to me, **the powers that be, should take into consideration the thoughts of the students about chapel more than they say they are doing.**

Granted, some of the ideas "we the students" come up with may irritate the smooth polish of the traditional system, but this kind of thought is what most colleges are looking for. **Progress comes only when the new crosses the old and creates a hybrid, so to speak."**

(Comments & Reviews, Peek Around the Campus, Chapel, by Carl Peek, page 2, Ursinus Weekly, Vol. LXIII, No. 3, October 21, 1963)

Although Peek begins his piece by posing the bigger questions about religious identity and definition, as I read this editorial the can of worms he opens up has less to do with which religion dominates and more to do with general questions of human spirituality and conscience - specifically, can a man really force another man to participate in a ritual he doesn't identify with or believe in in order to earn the respect and good favor of the first man? Obviously this isn't what the founders of the College or the administrators intended, although Peek does point

out that each and every UC student did sign on to the program knowing full well what was required of them.

This is the earliest editorial I have run across thus far, and it appears that Peek's opinion and plea is almost identical to those that I've reported on from later years. While it seems shocking, radical, etc to write about chapel the way Peek does, all he really asks is that College personnel consider the beliefs and wishes of the students as they review chapel and its aims. Similar to Barry and Charlotte in their letter, Peek is simply acknowledging that there is a flaw in the system and that the students would appreciate the opportunity to help mend it so that it favors "free and open thought" and doesn't alienate any member of the community.

All in all, Peek's editorial and call for creating a hybrid is one of the most effective I've read. While most make suggestions that are worth consideration and some even go as far as to invoke a hostile tone (I'm [again] looking back at the letter from 'the Refractory'), this is one of the only ones that is short, to the point, and sensitive to the established traditions.

Now, if only I knew where these reports of the Board of Directors could be found...anyone have any ideas? I don't think that they're in the archives.

Labels: 1963, Board of Directors, chapel, Christianity, compromise, editorial, identity, required attendance, student suggestions, Ursinus Weekly, voluntary worship

Comments:

"Aviva" said...

Board minutes are part of corporate governance, and frequently kept by the President/CEO's office. You might try finding out who keeps the record of current board -- maybe they have all the old records too, or know where they are.

June 29, 2009 4:08 PM

Wednesday, July 1, 2009

"Chapel services will be discontinued on Fridays."

This notice isn't terribly exciting to me and I can't tell if it's just a boring announcement or if it will become more interesting as I get deeper into my research.

" Certain changes in Chapel procedure will become effective in the 1964 Spring semester. Chapel services will be discontinued on Fridays. Freshmen and Sophomores will attend Chapel services on Monday and Wednesday at the usual time. Juniors and Seniors will attend on Tuesday and Thursday. Four cuts and four make-ups will be allowed per semester, an addition of one each.

This action has come about as a result of the MSGA Report submitted to the Faculty, Administration, and Board of Directors of the College last spring. The report asked that some change be made in the procedures used in the compulsory Chapel program.

These changes are the first results of the Report and although they may be viewed with some hesitation by a few members of the student body, particularly juniors and seniors, they are reportedly only the first steps in renovating the Chapel system.

The faculty committee on Chapel is still meeting so further changes may be forthcoming."
(Chapel Changes Announced, page 1, Ursinus Weekly, Vol. LXIII, No. 11, January 13, 1964)

What we have here is just an author-less announcement that was published in the Weekly. If I had to guess I would say that not many people got the news from the announcement itself but rather through word of mouth on campus. In fact, it sort of reminds me of one of those all-campus e-mails that we usually just delete without even skimming. So what's the point of putting this up if it's so terribly mundane? Well, I could say that it marks the beginning of the end of the chapel program, or I could try to speculate about the smallest of details...but really I'm just interested in holding onto this as a sort of place marker so that I can try to dig up more on the Men's Student Government Association Report and their involvement in the decision to alter one of Ursinus' oldest traditions.

Labels: 1964, announcement, chapel, MSGA, rules, Ursinus Weekly

Thursday, July 2, 2009

Where I am right now.

So the faculty minutes aren't quite what I had hoped they would be. After a few days of looking through them I'm pretty frustrated with how terribly boring it all is compared to, say, the Weeklies. I suppose that I was bound to come upon some less than thrilling documents sooner or later though, right? For now I'm just going to keep working through the relevant years and hope that something pertinent comes up. I'm also hoping to re-visit some of the articles I found in the Weeklies and have not yet written about on here sometime in the near future, but perhaps I'll wait until the holiday weekend is over...

Fun fact: the original proposed site for the new library (Myrin) was in between Wismer and the tennis courts. I like the current location better - it's much more central to the rest of campus.

Labels: faculty minutes, fun fact, research methods

Comments:

"Ruairi" said...

It's hard to imagine Ursinus even 20 years ago; so much has been erected recently.

July 7, 2009 6:07 AM

Wednesday, July 8, 2009

Bad Reporting

I know there hasn't been much here this past week or so, but those faculty minutes are EXTREMELY boring and have very little to do with my project. As consolation I am posting here for you a quick anecdote about chapel that I heard from Dr. Donald Zucker, Professor of Political Science, Emeritus. Dr. Zucker volunteers on a weekly basis in the archives and although he is away for the summer I look forward to speaking with him further about the chapel program and how it was perceived by faculty of the College.

Dr. Creager, the chaplain of Ursinus, would regularly call on the faculty of Ursinus to lead chapel each morning. Although he continuously "stressed the opportunity Chapel offers to members

to give utterance to whatever is on their minds" (Ursinus College Faculty Meeting, Regular Meeting, October 6, 1965), Dr. Zucker didn't often feel compelled to get up in front of the school to share his thoughts. However, there was one semester (he couldn't recall which during our conversation) when his interactions with a few students moved him to do so. At the time class sizes were beginning to grow and political and social tensions throughout the country (as well as on campus) were increasing exponentially. Dr. Zucker, wanting to make sure that none of the students at Ursinus "fell through the cracks," volunteered to lead chapel in order to communicate this message:

"I don't have much to say up here this morning, but just know that we [the faculty and staff of the College] are here for you. If you ever need anything - extra attention in your class or just someone to talk to - then please come and take advantage of this. Your classmates won't think you're a brownie and we want to help anyone who needs it."

Well, Dr. Zucker's words were very well received by the student body - so much so that his address was written up in the Weekly (again, he doesn't remember when so I haven't been able to find it) by a particularly inspired student. The one problem with the write up was that this student took the liberty of changing "brownie" to "brown-noser."

Since the Weekly was regularly distributed to the campus community as well as alumni, friends of the College, etc., it wasn't just this aspiring journalist's peers (who had been present at the original chapel service) that were reading the summary of Dr. Zucker's address and, as the story goes, some of the Weeklie's more *seasoned* clientele were not pleased with a professor using phrases such as "brown-noser" during chapel. The Dean, William Pettit (he later became president of the college before he was ousted by what has been described to me as a faculty coup), was enraged by the situation and called Dr. Zucker in to speak with him.

The way Dr. Zucker tells it I imagine the poor professor walking into the Dean's office to find an angry, red faced man wielding a copy of the latest Weekly. Regardless, Dean Pettit demanded to know what Dr. Zucker was getting at by using such "foul, army lingo" in chapel. Dr. Zucker told me that he tried to calm down the Dean as he explained that he was misquoted in the paper and that it happened all the time with student publications. Supposedly Dean Pettit wasn't having any of it and Dr. Zucker decided to simply lay low for awhile and stay off of the

chapel schedule.

Although it's difficult for me to determine how much of this really happened, how much was exaggerated, etc., it does explain why some faculty members were scheduled to lead chapel more often than others, like Dr. Zucker. Here's a question though...wasn't the Dean at chapel that morning that Dr. Zucker spoke? If he was then there wouldn't really have been a problem and he would have understood that there was an error in the reporting. If he wasn't there then where was he? I understand that not all of the College's personnel would have been present every morning but I would assume that an administrator with such a high profile on campus would have made it a point to set an example for the students. Hmmm...

Labels: 1965, archives, chapel, consequences, Dean Pettit, Dr. Creager, Dr. Zucker, faculty and administration, faculty minutes, story and/or interview, students, Ursinus Weekly

Comments:

"Professor B" said...

You find reading faculty meeting minutes boring? Try sitting through an actual faculty meeting. At least when you're reviewing minutes you can fast forward by quickly skimming, or skip sections altogether.

Reading faculty meeting minutes strikes me as a rather severe form of penance, but suffering through an actual meeting is more akin to time in purgatory.

July 8, 2009 5:47 PM

Thursday, July 9, 2009

"Chapel...has passed into oblivion."

I've already written about this piece that was published in the Weekly, but I feel that it's necessary to revisit it now.

Interestingly, this editorial about how chapel would not be continued the following academic year reads like an obituary despite the underlying "good riddance" message:

“ Next year there will be no more assembly. **Chapel**, as it was called up until this year, **has passed into oblivion**. Its fate has been marked, however, for years. Two years ago chapel was bi-weekly; last year, it diminished to once a week; this year, the name chapel was dropped.

Until this year, the service was a quasi-religious, seldom inspiring service. Assembly dropped the religious format, but the degree of inspiration and dullness remained about the same. **In general, chapel’s passing is not mourned. But one feature of this chapel-assembly program will have no replacement. Notably on at least one occasion this year, a student has had an opinion to express, and the assembly proved to be his excellent airing ground.**

The case in point occurred first semester when Janet Houska spoke in favor of changes women’s rules. It must be noted that after her excellent plea, no student was permitted to arrange with a professor to speak during his chapel time. Such a restriction again proves the futility of assembly. As a result of this talk, actual changes have been made in women’s rules, i.e. smoking is now permitted in the reception rooms, Wilkinson Lounge is now open at specified hours, and next year, girls will be permitted to wear slacks in the reception rooms. For those of us who favor having open men’s dorms, this change may not seem so revolutionary. But, we must admit that **a change for the better has taken place.**

No matter how few of these student-oriented programs were possible under the framework of chapel, this feature is one of the few losses we will feel.

A natural replacement for such expression (it shouldn’t be considered only as a replacement!) **is of course, the Weekly.** Our aim is far from presenting only the news. This has never been the only goal we have; **student and faculty opinion is always welcomed...**”

(Editorial, by Judy Schneider, page 2, Ursinus Weekly, Vol LXVII, No. 14, May 23, 1968)

Perhaps it’s the contrast between the tone of the article and the actual message that’s throwing me off, but I haven’t really been able to figure this one out. As I mentioned above, it has a semi-mournful tone even though it simultaneously slams the “quasi-religious, seldom inspiring service” and the conclusion is that “chapel’s passing is not mourned.”

Obviously Judy Schneider's opinion couldn't have been relevant to the entire student body (although I have no doubt in my mind that it represented a large portion of the student's opinions on the matter), but what really comes through in the end of the editorial is the need for Ursinus to have an outlet for students to express themselves and grapple with community issues together. The suggested replacement for the forum that chapel provided is the Weekly, but somewhere along the line that mode of expression fell out of favor with the student body. Not only do students overlook the newer incarnation of the Weekly (the Grizzly) but the paper generally doesn't draw many contributors and rarely addressed the goings-on on campus. Essentially, there was a void left behind when chapel was abolished and the Weekly/Grizzly wasn't enough to fill it.

I know I'm jumping the gun here – this has more to do with my honors project than my Summer Fellows topic – but I'm going to go for it anyways:

CIE eventually became the successful replacement for the chapel program.

I invite all of you who are remotely familiar with the CIE or chapel programs to share your input with me on this. So...thoughts?

Labels: 1968, announcement, assembly, chapel, CIE, editorial, forum, honors project, replacement, student reactions, students, the Grizzly, Ursinus Weekly

Comments:

"Anonymous" said...

Hey Kare,

I feel like I'm stating the obvious after all the Wednesday lunches, but from what you told me about the benefits and ideas behind chapel and then my personal experience with CIE, the two had/have different but comparable goals and benefits. While it seems like the aim of chapel was for the college to honor a religious duty by making all its students go to chapel, the aim of CIE seems to be the college honoring an academic or intellectual duty by making all of its students read some of the most influential and thought-provoking books available. But in both cases, the college was/is taking steps to make us good functioning students and future world

citizens by making mandates out of "what matters": back then it was religious piety, nowadays it's seeing the world through different perspectives and questioning (or at least investigating) the status quo because of them. (On that note, however, I can't see the college disregarding the former back in the chapel days: I guess religion overshadowed it.)

At least from my experience with CIE, I don't think it has the open forum side benefits that chapel apparently had. It definitely does provide a framework for investigating different intellectual ideas, but a big part of chapel seemed to be the social concerns it allowed to be addressed, not scholarly ones. You definitely hear about some outrageous statement or concern either Prof. or student X expressed in their CIE class, but it doesn't really go beyond Wisner gossip; it doesn't become the concern of the student body that might be addressed at some meeting or other today, unlike what chapel apparently was. Maybe there being one service for the whole student body had something to do with that as opposed to multiple classrooms, maybe people just cared more back then, not sure. I think at the end of the day people consider it just another class to get through, and treat it as such.

Overall I agree with you (from what I know about it) that CIE did become chapel's replacement, but I think the differences of material and subsequent execution caused some pretty distinct differences.

...alright, I'll get off my soapbox now. Hope your project's going well. :-)

July 13, 2009 7:08 PM

Tuesday, July 14, 2009

I'm Famous!

Check out this article

(http://www.philly.com/philly/education/20090714_Undergraduate_research_growing_in_popularity.html) about the rising popularity of undergraduate research in Philadelphia area colleges and universities. Kelly, Roger, and I are featured in it along with comments from President Strassburger, Dr. Weight, and my advisor Nathan Rein.

Labels: summer fellows

Tuesday, July 14, 2009

By the way...

By the way, the official title for my summer project is "Examining Our Roots: How Over 100 Years of Religion Yielded a Secular Liberal Arts Program at Ursinus College." It's long but I think it effectively conveys what I'm focusing on in my project.

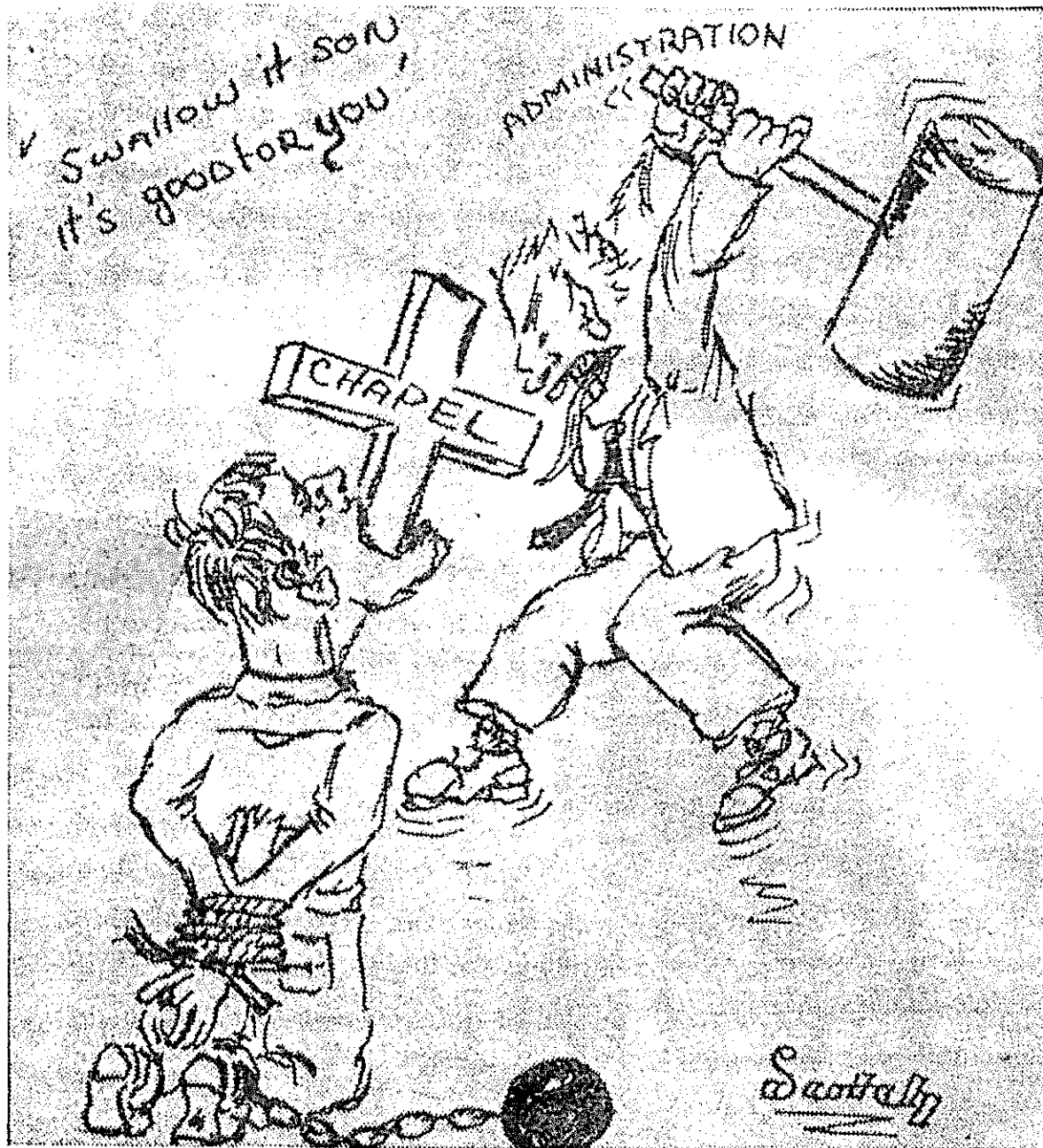
Right now I'm tentatively scheduled to present my project at the Summer Fellows Symposium on July 24 at 11am here at Ursinus.

Labels: summer fellows

Tuesday, July 21, 2009

"Swallow it son, it's good for you!"

The summer is winding down and this will be the last of the new and exciting Ursinusiana discoveries for awhile...and this sure is an exciting one! This editorial cartoon was published in the Weekly at the end of the 1963-63 academic year and I don't think it needs much more of an introduction than that.



The Ursinus Weekly

Published a minimum of twenty-two times each academic year
by the students of Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pennsylvania
Sixty-second year of publication

(Ursinus Weekly, Vol LXIII, No 23, May 11, 1964, page 2)

It's interesting to me that this was published when it was because it was at the very end of the first semester during which the school began to trim the chapel schedule. The student who drew it (and I wish I knew who the student was - I haven't been able to decipher the name well enough to locate the artist in any directories) must have had some sort of personal issue with the tradition as s/he would only have been required to attend chapel twice a week. The only possibility that I can fathom is that a student (or group of students) were beginning a campaign of sorts in order to sway the Board of Directors and the faculty committee appointed to review the tradition because the announcement about the beginning of the end of compulsory chapel did include a bit about how "The faculty committee on Chapel is still meeting so further changes may be forthcoming" (Chapel Changes Announced, page 1, Ursinus Weekly, Vol. LXIII, No. 11, January 13, 1964).

The identity of the cartoonist and what their angle was shall remain a mystery for now as I conclude this last of the summer posts with the same sort of wishful thinking I have for the past 8 weeks...

Perhaps I'll figure it out and have more perspective as I get further into my research.

Labels: 1964, announcement, chapel, editorial, faculty and administration, required attendance, students, Ursinus Weekly

If being an Ursinus student has taught me anything it's that if the final product of a research project answers the same question you started out with then you've done something wrong. I certainly take comfort in the fact that as I write this I'm totally off base from the research topic I started with. As interesting as the implications of the abolition of compulsory chapel at Ursinus are to me, the similarities between chapel and CIE have caught my attention and throughout the summer really taken over as a primary concern in my project. What I have found is that when Ursinus College opted to slowly phase out the chapel program the sense of community dwindled. For thirty years Ursinus students who came in as biology and pre-med majors had little reason to mingle with the philosophy and English majors in any sort of organized or academic setting. As I reflected on those discussions I had during my first week of freshman year that revolved around the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and tried to make them fit into the feedback I'd gotten on my blog about the old chapel program, it became very clear to me; as I mentioned in the blog, CIE has filled the community void left behind by chapel. I have yet to go into much more detail since this is a recent revelation, but I look forward to pursuing this hypothesis of mine as I continue my research for honors this coming year.

Right now my plans for the continuation of this project include gaining an even better understanding of the chapel program by tracking down such documents as minutes from the meetings of the Men's Student Government Association, the Board of Directors, and faculty committees on chapel. I also hope to find former President Donald Helfferich's personal letters, papers, and other documents that we are missing in the Ursinusiana archives as well as conduct interviews with alumni, former professors, and other people affiliated with the College during the 1960s. I feel that having gone through two semesters of CIE I have a fairly detailed understanding of how it works, but I am also hoping to review documents concerning the program (such as Middle States reports) and speak with some of the faculty who assisted in implementing the program in the first. At this point, though, I'm open to any new direction or approach that comes my way.