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A Word from the Student Association President

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Author Bio:

Michael Krupka is a senior Political Science and Spanish double major from Rogers, Arkansas. Over the last two years, he has served on the Student Association Council, first as the Treasurer, then as the President. He is passionate about public service, and wants to use his education and abilities to help his community wherever he goes. After graduating, Michael will marry his fiancé, Meredith Holmes, whom he met at Harding. He then plans to attend law school after taking gap year. From there, he and Meredith are looking forward to whatever God has in store for them.

A WORD FROM THE STUDENT ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

By Michael Krupka

They say you don't know what you have until you lose it. With regard to the Harding experience, I never expected that phrase to resonate as greatly in my life as it has recently. As a highly extroverted person and a connoisseur of camaraderie, I have cherished the sense of belonging that being a Harding student has offered. For the last four years, I've preached the virtues of Harding's sense of community. So, I had never expected to gain any sort of new appreciation for this blessing after it had run its course. Then I left my last class in the Ganus Building (my home as a Political Science and Spanish double major) for Spring Break, only to find out that we would not be returning to campus for the remainder of my final semester. Now as dates for when things were supposed to happen on campus-- club functions, Gradfest, etc. -- have passed by, the weight of what I am missing out on has begun to sink in.

Personally, I was in Utah about to get on a ski lift with some of my close friends when I received the news. Immediately, I switched into Student Association mode and began calling the other executive officers and our faculty advisors. We had far too many irons in the fire for the time we already expected to have left in the term; we would need to adjust rapidly to achieve our objectives. For a little while, it seemed that Spring Break had just gotten extended, and that we would just need to work extra diligently upon arriving back on campus.

However, time went on, and each day seemed to bring with it new updates from the government, the news media, and the Harding administration. By the end of the lengthened spring break, it was clear that this problem was much more serious than most of us had given it credit for. Before long, we in the Student Association Council and our advisors agreed that these circumstances called for a reassessment of our priorities. With the representatives no longer on campus, it would be far more difficult for the twelve SA committees to continue pursuing their

Tenor of Our Times

projects and proposals. More importantly, the current circumstances rendered many of our projects temporarily moot. For example, the Technology Committee's push to put printers in the lobbies of dorms is much less relevant if all attention has been devoted to helping students vacate those same dorms. Similarly, getting more recycling bins for on-campus apartments sounds silly when those apartments are empty.

I would be lying if I said that this wasn't disappointing or even frustrating. Projects that we had worked passionately on for months had to be put on hold just when we had been racing to complete them before the transition into a new SA administration. Still, we didn't have much time to grieve these potentially forgotten projects. The worst thing we could do was believe that the student body ceased to have needs just because our plans had changed. In fact, not only did students still have needs, questions, and desires for the SA to facilitate, but they had these in a new and unprecedented way. Likewise, the responsibilities of the SA did not stop when we left campus.

We laid out our new objectives as the following: assisting students (as well as the rest of the Harding community) in this transition and maintaining the most essential SA functions remotely. The first objective required that we focus on current dilemmas. Some examples included working with the Office of Student Life to help students move out of campus residence halls as well as coordinating with the provost to educate the students and faculty about online class etiquette and protocols. Many of us had no experience with online classes, and the students suggested creating some university-wide ground rules. Additionally, we employed virtual means, like social media and email pen pals, to maintain the sense of community and connection that are so important to our student body's culture. While these all dealt with current issues, the scope of our other objective focused more on the future of the Student Association.

In one of my first socially-distant meetings with Dr. James Huff, one of the SA faculty advisors, he emphasized to me that our most fundamental responsibility for the time remaining was conducting a fair

A Word from the Student Association President

and accessible election. All the work that we were doing in the present was beneficial, but it would all be for naught if we did not ensure the next group of Harding student's representation. This feeling of duty in the face of adverse circumstances gave me a new sense of appreciation for this upcoming election. I may have had plans for my legacy as SA President, but this was about something much larger than myself -- our principles of fair representation and peaceful succession. To me, it is apparent that one of the most notable accomplishments of my term will be successfully passing the torch onto the next SA during the era COVID-19. To see this through, we have worked diligently in recent weeks to ensure that the election would continue as unhindered as possible by our current circumstances. We have held interest meetings via Zoom conference, spent hours communicating with all interested students, and updated our intent to file forms and candidacy petitions to Google Forms so that candidates may run for office from all over the world. Fortunately for us, the elections have already taken place on Pipeline for the last several years, so we did not need to change the election itself. As I write this, our election for the SA Council of 2020-2021 is underway, and our advisors have informed me that voter turnout is excellent considering our situation. I am glad to say that the torch is nearly passed, and the Student Association of our great school will outlast this pandemic.

Moving forward, we will continue doing what we can to support the students and administration during this challenging season. Until the end of our term, we will carry on the types of tasks I already mentioned, and we will almost certainly gain some more. Fortunately for us, we live in the best time period ever to face a crisis such as this one. The Lord has blessed us with advanced medical science, food security unlike any time before, and technology that allows us to sustain social and academic connections from the safety of our own homes. Another positive is this: everyone wants to help. A class of Public Relations students has actually dedicated the rest of their semester to helping us keep the student body connected via social media, and I have seen other remarkable acts of

Tenor of Our Times

kindness and generosity done by people at Harding and in the worldwide community in response to this virus.

Is there still cause to be upset? Of course. People all over the world are experiencing the effects of this virus on their health and their pocketbooks. Students graduating in 2020 are coming into a job market petrified by our attempts to curtail this pandemic. I feel as though I have been robbed of many precious good-byes at the end of my Harding career. The wedding my fiancé and I have been planning for nearly a year may look completely different from everything we had imagined. And yet, I am confident that our Lord did not give us a spirit of fear or pessimism, but rather one of confidence and joy. The SA's theme for this year is Celebrate. We chose this to remind us of Paul's call for us to rejoice continually, and these circumstances do not grant us permission to quit rejoicing. My roommate recently remarked to me that he is so glad that his identity is not based on the success of his plans for the year 2020. Rather, it's rooted in something much more important, his salvation by Jesus Christ and his partnership in the Church. Unlike plans, no virus can take away these facets of his being. Of course, we can still have hope in this world about the communities here that we love. The Student Association will continue to represent the best interest of the student body, regardless of where they may be. And eventually, the sun will rise on a day when the Harding community is reunited on campus or, even better, in Heaven.