

COMING FULL CIRCLE



For Dr. Douglas M. North '58, being appointed as the new Head of School of The Albany Academies this past summer brought with it a feeling of coming full circle. After spending 13 years at The Albany Academy as a student, Dr. North embarked on a journey that would ultimately lead him to discover his passion for teaching and a garden model of education where students are valued for their unique gifts – lessons learned during his time at the Academy.

A successful college and university president for the past 20 years, Dr. North has led two remarkable turnarounds – both in enrollment and finances – for Prescott College in Prescott, AZ and most recently at Alaska Pacific University (APU) in Anchorage, AK. He has served as the President of APU, a small liberal arts college that emphasizes experiential and active learning, since 1995.

We had the opportunity to sit down with Dr. North recently to discuss his excitement about being selected as Head of School; his goals for the position and plans for the Academies; and the skills that students will need for success in the 21st century.

What is your reaction to being named Head of School of the Academies?

Being selected as the new Head of School of the Academies has great personal significance to me because this school was my home for 13 years. My parents were hard

working people who wanted to provide me with the chance for real success in life. When I was four years old, they approached the Academy about me attending the school. I received a scholarship to the Academy that made it financially feasible to attend.

My parents wanted the best for me, and I am forever grateful to them for sending me to the Academy. As a college president, you realize that people are truly shaped and brought forward at the K-12 level. Those years are so important. Coming from a feeling of fulfillment as I return to this school that set me on my path, I am reminded of T.S. Eliot's lines from *Four Quartets*:

*"We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."*

So, I find myself rooted in the past with my head in the future. That's a good place to be.

What do you believe makes the Academies such a special place?

For almost 200 years, Albany Academy for Girls & The Albany Academy have practiced single-gender education with great distinction. We know, as the rest of the country is coming to understand, that boys and girls learn more and rise to self-confidence and leadership more readily in this format.

However, the student-centeredness of the Academies is also of great importance. During the process of applying for this position, I realized that for much of my life I had been on a mission to make colleges and universities more like the Academy. Universities can be a very cold and impersonal place where students sit in chairs a lot and listen to people talking at them. That is not how it was at the Academy; I was brought along continuously for 13 years in a place where the teachers really knew and appreciated every student.

I was delighted to come back and find the Academies still practicing the same student-centered approach to education that existed when I attended the school. At the Academies, students find and develop their talents and strengths with a committed faculty. Our commitment to parents is still to help students find their unique gifts and build upon them while also providing a well-rounded education with high standards.

With your history in higher education, how do you feel this will assist you in your new position?

I return to the Academies with the unique perspective of having both attended this school and served as the head of a variety of higher education institutions. That allows me to have a real understanding of the Academies and its many traditions as well as a clear view of what college admissions officers really want in students and the skills necessary for success in the 21st century global marketplace. The colleges of today want to see a resume as well as a transcript – evidence of capability and motivation. It's not enough to do well on standardized tests.

What are your goals as Head of School?

My overall mission is to make the quality of education at the Academies better known and better understood by our constituents – both internally and externally. I will also be working with our talented educators to create an academic program geared for the 21st century. We're entering into an extremely dynamic time in the history of the

world where change is accelerating rapidly; even the rate of acceleration is increasing rapidly.

Today's students need to be able to do their own work at a high level: to make a plan, carry out and evaluate that plan, change the plan based on evaluation, and come up with an end product to present. These are the modern skills vital to organizations everywhere that are trying to manage change. There will be less emphasis on detailed memorization of facts for the purpose of taking an exam. The citizens of the next century can't and shouldn't hold all of the facts in their head because they are at their fingertips. They need a conceptual understanding that allows them to put readily available facts into a framework that guides their life and an understanding of their profession.

You are a proponent of the "stand and deliver" form of education. What do you feel are the benefits of this method?

I have a report card from the second grade at the Academy. At the bottom of the report card, the teacher, Ms. Shaw, wrote that "Doug is speaking a little more this year." What I gather from that comment is that I was shy and introverted. I remember from an early age at the Academy that I had to "stand up" and speak on a variety of topics. That culminated when I gave my valedictory speech. This process of meeting a challenge has carried through my whole life. We learn the most when we are teaching others or stretching our capabilities and going for it. Whenever responsibility is thrust upon students, their inner character and motivation kicks in and they will drive themselves harder than any teacher ever could. To stand and deliver in the classroom, in the arts or on the playing field brings students along as confident people who are also comfortable with leadership and responsibility.



When did you learn that you wanted to enter the administrative side of education?

I taught my first college class in September 1962 at Syracuse University as a graduate student and was responsible for managing a classroom of 70 students. After receiving my Ph.D. in English Literature, I received a great appointment at Wesleyan University in Middletown, CT as an Assistant Professor of English. I hadn't been there for all that long before I realized that my fellow members of the English Department ate and breathed literature all day long. It quickly dawned on me that literature in and of itself wasn't my true passion. I was good at it, but it wasn't my calling.

It was quite an identity crisis after having received three degrees in literature and putting myself on that life course. I resigned my position and eventually ended up teaching a very advanced adult education component of Goddard College in Vermont. I came to understand that part of the educational process is to enable students to understand themselves better, to identify their strengths, and find out what they really want to do.

I re-entered the teaching profession on my own terms and made the transition to administration. I discovered at Goddard that my true calling was that of an educational architect, designing innovative educational programs that work and are cost effective. Now, I am back at the place that started it all. I hope to bring my experience to work with the faculty to shape and design the model of education for the 21st century. I believe that the garden model of education exists at the Academies, for the school has always grown good people. There is a sacred contract between the Academies and every student that walks through the door to provide her or him with the future skills necessary for finding the passionate path and achieving success in college and beyond. The world needs models of education that truly take advantage of the information revolution.

Prior to his position at the helm of Alaska Pacific University, Dr. Douglas M. North served as President of Prescott College – an independent liberal arts college – from 1989-1994. Dr. North has a doctorate degree from the University of Virginia, a master's degree from Syracuse University and a bachelor's degree from Yale University. He has been married for 34 years to Dr. Ellen Cole, formally a Professor and Director of the Master of Science in Counseling Psychology Program at APU. Ellen was recently elected President of Division 35, The Society for the Psychology of Women, of the American Psychological Association. They have four children. Dr. North began as Head of School at the Academies full time on December 15, 2009.

