

Filling the Big Office

BY KATHLEEN MURRAY

PHOTO BY DAVID J. TURNER

I've been in the President's office many, many times during the five years I have served as Macalester's Provost and Dean of the Faculty, but I never really noticed how big it was until I moved in this fall to begin my semester as Acting President. You could have a decent game of half-court basketball in here (if we raised the ceiling) or I could move in a grand piano and spend my time between meetings getting back in touch with my former life as a music professor.

Of course, the size of the office has symbolic significance. I think I've discussed with Brian Rosenberg virtually every big decision he has made for the college since I arrived here in July 2008, but in the end, the decisions were always *his* to make. That is the most daunting difference between being the President, even the *Acting* President, and being the Provost. The proverbial buck now stops with me.

Last August we conducted a crisis management exercise built around the possibility of a major fire in Doty Hall. It was August, so Brian was still here. But the event we dealt with during the exercise was said to have happened in October, which caused me to begin imagining what my life would be like if something like that *did* happen in October.

I didn't get much sleep that night, but in the days following I reminded myself that we conducted that exercise so our entire leadership team would be prepared to respond to a crisis. I reassured myself the college would have lots of support from a fabulous group of leaders who would help me make good decisions.

The other major difference between the two jobs has to do with the variety of people with whom I interact each day. As Provost and Dean of the Faculty, my main constituency is the faculty. As Acting President I still get plenty of face time with faculty members, but my days—and evenings and weekends—also include students, alumni, trustees, parents, staff members, presidents of other colleges, campus visitors, community groups, and people who recognize me when I'm shopping at Target. The pace is sometimes breathtaking, but it's also exciting and energizing.

In one three-day period in October, I launched our International Roundtable, met with the Parent Council and the Alumni Board (twice each), did a State of the College Q & A with visiting family members, talked with students about their research during our annual poster session, spoke at the M Club Hall of Fame Dinner, and attended a concert, a soccer match, and a football game. I was very happy to spend a quiet Sunday afternoon at home after the last event, but I genuinely enjoyed every interaction and could not have been prouder of the institution I was representing.

It's early November as I am writing this, halfway through my time in the big office. So far (knock on wood, cross your fingers, and rub a rabbit's foot) there have been no major crises, so I recognize that I have experienced all the best of what a college president gets to do.

It has been an extraordinary privilege to serve as Macalester's Acting President this fall. This is a fabulous community. I knew that when I made the decision to join it back in 2008, and I am even more convinced today.

Kathleen Murray, *Provost of Macalester College, spent the fall semester as Acting President while Brian*

Rosenberg was on sabbatical.

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