

Physical Plant Department Response to Characteristics of Marianist Universities (CMU) Document

11/6/2002

The 1999 publication “Characteristics of Marianist Universities” described the fundamental sense of the Marianist Character as applied to the educational mission of the university with regards to the basis of curriculum development, relationships between students and faculty, students and student development, enrollment management, fundraising, and the management of university resources.

The Physical Plant Department provides a support function for the university’s primary mission of educating students. The following document attempts to apply the principals and concepts of the Characteristics of Marianist Universities to derive meaning for support staff functions, primarily those of the Physical Plant Department.

As described in the departmental mission statement, the primary function is:

- “To provide excellent service to our community by enabling everyone to be in a relaxed, comfortable, and clean environment”
- “To keep ourselves and our environment safe, strong, and healthy”
- “To have respect for everyone”
- “To educate ourselves through a variety of sources” and “to worship God according to our individual spirituality”

One can recognize that the above mission statement does not specifically mention anything about stewardship of resources, accountability, personal responsibility, development and enforcement of job standards, nor pay increase based on merit, it is understood that these concepts are not only consistent with the Physical Plant Mission statement but also consistent with the challenges of Vision 2006.

The continued dialogue concerning the application of the Physical Plant Mission and Vision, first developed in 1995, to the Vision 2006 and to the Characteristics of Marianist Universities document should continue to develop.

Let’s explore the Characteristics of Marianist Universities document.

The education of the student at the university takes place in the classroom, during student activities, as well as in the residence halls. Interactions with Physical Plant staff and students may provide an excellent behavior model to the student. Students also are employed as work-studies in order to receive valuable experience in the world of work. **Therefore the Physical Plant staff member has a recognized role in the education of the student.**

The relationships between the Physical Plant department and the academic/student development “professionals” can provide examples of true teamwork. Teamwork is not understood with the secular notion of “stars” and “role-players.” In the secular sense,

often used in professional sports, teamwork involves the “star” being supported by the “role-players.” Rather, the Marianists use the notion of community, a gathering of individuals who have different, although essential roles, mutually supporting, respecting, and recognizing each other, and working to build up each other in the community.

Therefore there is none more important than the other. The faculty and staff are accountable for their work, and the university leaders are accountable to those they lead. In the Marianist notion of community, accountability is both up and down the chain of command, with the expectation of virtuous decisions and actions on the part of all.

The participation in the Marianist “way” is an open invitation to each and every member of the university community. By accepting employment, all faculty and staff are provided the invitation. It is assumed that everyone can benefit by this participation and the participation is itself a requirement for employment (or at least a goal to achieve). Although the job descriptions may not address the Marianist Character directly, the departmental mission statements do reflect its meaning.

Marianists Educate for Formation in Faith

For the Physical Plant staff member, (23) tells us that, in addition to the strong vocational (professional) nature of the education (doctor, lawyer, engineer, teacher, researcher, accountant, businessman), there is a strong influence of character building.

For the Physical Plant, we also acknowledge that our emphasis on “educating ourselves through a variety of sources” encourages the development of character, leadership, and ethical action. This we express in our decision-making to “repair or replace,” recognize and remove safety hazards, do our duties well, respect each other and act in a courteous manner, improve internal procedures, achieve quality of work, avoid the spread of damaging gossip, and take personal initiative to learn, appreciate, and be thankful. Character, leadership, and ethical action is also provided by those who participate in the Physical Plant Advisory Committee and the Physical Plant Safety Committee, offering opportunities for leadership and ethical action as representatives of the constituents of their division. In the context of faith, we can all be sons and daughters of the same God, treating each other as siblings.

The Faith and Reason (24) and the dialogue between Faith and Culture (25) appear not to be as significant for Physical Plant as some others. However, the discussion of departmental policies and practices must always take into account the wellness of the whole person; the spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental aspects.

Faith in Service of Others (26) is closely related to the mission of the Physical Plant department’s role as a service organization. Rather than “social awareness that is expressed through service,” service is the primary function of the department. Since the performance of service tasks are acts for which the staff are hired and compensated, the performance of these tasks should be considered fundamental.

However, by its reflection on the idea of service does the department realize its role within the organization. Through reflection, we find and discover the ideals of stewardship of resources, accountability, personal responsibility and the “deeper meaning” to the performance of the minimum standards.

Work standards, reward and recognition systems, and a positive nurturing work environment are provided for those who find it necessary to have the support of these external means. For the staff members who are self-motivated, pure in motive, their internal drive is sufficient.

The above is not meant to diminish the social awareness of the departmental members and the awareness that the traditions of the department tend to promote.

1. Colleague of the Month and Colleague of the Year: an internal recognition for staff who volunteer their time in helping others or who volunteer to improve themselves through participation in professional or vocational training classes on their own time.
2. Volunteer to support university and community service programs with the dedication of personal time, such as Habitat for Humanity, participation in Walks and Bike Trips to raise funds for the community, Neighborhood Clean-Up, support of Marianist programs and facilities outside the university.
3. Volunteer to support each other with activities such as working on each other's vehicles and with various home repairs.
4. As a group, the Physical Plant staff is also recipients of the social awareness of the university community.

Marianists Universities Provide an Excellent Education

The Marianist approach to the education of the whole person (27) is closely related to the Physical Plant concept of “wellness,” the belief that the person has value and should be given an opportunity to develop their physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental aspects.

In the Physical Plant department, we are committed to hiring staff that either possess skills or have a good potential for developing skills. We make a commitment to discover and develop talents.

There are many opportunities for training both on and off of university time.

The department's wellness program has been in effect for many years. Besides the physical exercise program, the emotional wellness provides for shop lunches and celebrations including an annual family picnic. The mental wellness consists of numerous opportunities for training in job skills. The spiritual wellness consists of opening the monthly meeting with a prayer, participation in retreats, and campus ministry functions.

The concern for personal safety is considered foremost. To reduce accidents and avoid the loss of valuable work time, demonstrate responsibility by helping to reduce the cost of insurance, and to decrease personal pain and suffering from having an on-the-job injury, and to avoid the loss of personal income due to injury.

Although the safety program is part of the overall university safety program, the Physical Plant Department were the leaders in the area, developing their program of safety awareness, accident review, and self-inspection through the cooperation of all members.

The concept of diversity (28) in the work force is an important one. In the university, the building community is multifaceted. There is a high degree of interaction between various levels of the department, first line staff, crew leaders, managers, and the administrator. "Conflicting perspectives are joined in a richer more complex search for what is reliable and worthwhile and true." There are several forums for communication within the department. The administrator has an open door policy to hear varying perspectives. The Advisory Committee provides an opportunity for divisional representatives to open the lines of communication from first line staff to the administrator and to share their accomplishments with their peers. The weekly manager meeting is intended to be an open communication between the departmental managers. The departmental monthly meeting (held the third Tuesday) is an opportunity to recognize individuals who are celebrating birthdays, anniversaries of employment, have perfect attendance for the month, receive attendance awards, and the special recognition of members elected to Colleague and Associate of Month. Also, there is an opportunity to brag on each other, to discuss rumors, and share birthday cake. Daily team leader meetings are held with the manager to increase communication, clarify duties, and provide mutual support. Morning team meetings focus individuals on the task at hand that day, to alert to university priorities, and to provide an opportunity to share. The Physical Plant Department Orientation Program for new staff provides monthly sessions on Mission/Vision, Customer Service, Physical Plant Services Guide, Safety, Physical Plant Handbook, Reward and Recognition, Professional Development, Marianist Heritage, and the University Personnel Manual. The Experienced Staff Orientation Program allows the staff already employed to consider, reflect, and discuss similar topics. Monthly Crew Leader Training is provided to a group emerging from the ranks and filling the role of shop, team, or crew leaders. Since it is common for the best workers to surface for this challenge, they often lack the supervisory and management skills. This training provides some background in university policies and procedures for supervisors (management and budgeting).

The **combination and use of technology and the dedication to personal service** are combined much like the use of informational and educational technology in the classroom, with the enhancement of interaction between students and faculty (30). In the Physical Plant department, we use the computerized maintenance management system (CMMS), a computer software developed by TMA (The Management Authority), to provide the necessary documentation and record keeping that is required for customer billing and building and campus maintenance history. We recognize the efficiency in the

use of the technology but do not lose sight of the personal commitment to customer service. This is the belief that every trouble call, every zone cleaning assignment, and every project is an opportunity to fulfill our primary mission to provide a “relaxed, comfortable, and clean environment.”

Technology is also at work providing comfort and energy efficiency within campus buildings by a central heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) energy control and management system (EMCS). The new generation of direct digital control (DDC) technology, upgraded in 1990, has provided a means to access and alter control set points and monitor equipment from a remote location through the use of a personal computer. The central heating and cooling plants that produce the hot and chilled water for the heating and air conditioning of campus buildings works automatically using an algorithm that orchestrates chiller, pumps, and boilers in unison to provide the required heating and cooling in the most efficient manner.

A central fire alarm system, installed in 1991, is a microprocessor based system and provides for the central monitoring and alarming of fire alarm systems in campus buildings.

Both the HVAC EMCS and the central fire alarm systems are connected with a local area (LAN) that was installed and maintained by the Physical Plant Department.

The university telecommunications systems consists of a micro-processor based central switch with a copper cable plant that has proven itself reliable enough to be used by all of the ISDN and distance learning functions on campus.

We realize that each service call requires personal attention. We even made a training video about providing excellent customer service.

Personal attention that requires each work order to be completed, followed-up, closed out by telling the customer that the work is completed, and completing the paperwork accurately with the accounting of time and materials.

The organization requires that our supervisors plan the workload of the shops and determine priorities. In emergencies, staff is trained and empowered to make emergency repairs to utility systems without management intervention.

That all work requests are opportunities for building the self-confidence and personal accomplishment of the members.

Opportunities for increasing the value of the university by working smarter, harder, and doing the task in less time with less resources. By this we participate in increasing the value of the university.

We participate in the team activity, following procedures, and keeping records of time and materials, accounting for resources in a value.

Technology assists us in accomplishing our mission.

The provision for oversight and complementary roles (33) requires that crew leaders, managers, and the administrator collaborate with the first line workers and listen to their suggestions. It is the responsibility of the leadership and management team (managers and administrator) to ensure clarity of mission and fiscal strength. The leadership of the Physical Plant department mirrors the role of the leadership of the university. Just as the “within the university’s purpose and possibilities, faculty, staff and students pursue the work of teaching and learning,” so within the department’s approved budgets, the members of the Physical Plant staff pursue the work of cleaning, repairing, and maintaining the university facilities.

Marianist Universities Educate in Family Spirit

The “sense of a family spirit that accepts each person with loving respect” is a characteristic of the Marianist educational experience. We acknowledge the distinction between the acceptance of the person and the rejection of certain behaviors. The managers of the department must always keep this in mind whenever dealing with delicate issues such as disciplinary actions or coaching/counseling for work performance issues. Acceptance of the person is the acknowledgement that each person has a value because God created him/her in His image and likeness. We accept that each person has different backgrounds, values, and beliefs; and that each person is special. Therefore no criticism is ever meant to be personal but rather always focus on the inappropriate behavior or improperly or inadequately performed task.

At times, judgments about a person’s attitude may be made. Attitude is less concrete than overt action. The criticism of a person’s attitude must include specific exemplifications. Instead of telling a worker they have a bad attitude, they should be told specifically what behavior is unacceptable.

“Members of the Society of Mary do not choose with whom they live, but they believe they are chosen to be together (34).” Membership in the Physical Plant department is quite different. To gain membership as a departmental member, the applicant must fulfill the requirements of the job description. Their application will be screened. Their background will be checked and they will be required to pass a pre-employment physical examination. Applicants are required to demonstrate their competency by answering questions, both verbal and written. When hired, the staff member will be on probation for three months. The membership in this family is quite different that the Membership in a Religious Community. The role of the Physical Plant departmental member is to fulfill their job description and to serve the university in a support capacity.

“Over the long term, these daily habits acknowledge the value and dignity of every member of the community, and create the ground in which genuine friendships can

flourish (36).” These friendships (personal relationships) provide nurturing and enjoyment to the staff member.

It is the friendships and the deeper understanding of the university mission and goals that inspire a person to satisfy their role. Requests such as answering a trouble call or answering a request to move furniture should illicit a response and work quality for everyone with the same sense of care and concern of that of a family member. These relationships improve effort and work quality for all, not only the particular person that is familiar to the staff member.

Just as the Marianist universities emphasize the “communal dimensions of research (37)”, the feeling of teamwork within the Physical Plant department is modeled in the same way. Like in families, there are roles, the breadwinner, the caretaker, the cook, the cleaner, the chauffer, the departmental member realizes and accepts their role in the team. Not taking advantage of the weak member, but helping them to be strong. Not speaking for them but helping them and encouraging them to speak for themselves. Just as in a team there are various roles, in the Physical Plant department we accept roles of varying degrees of profile, yet understanding that all are essential. Realizing that we all share the success of others because we have contributed to their success.

The Marianist document mentions the “vision of community and friendship runs the risk of being romanticized. (38). However, the family is not always perfect, and sometimes operates in dysfunction. Or its membership sometimes acts as “children,” those who may tend to focus on themselves, asking rather than offering, taking rather than giving. In the Physical Plant department, all should strive to fulfill the role of adults with understanding that there is sharing, unselfishness, and hard work, and at times, tolerance. This is how the work gets done.

There are also times that misunderstandings may occur, words may be spoken that could be better stated, or disagreements may arise. It is out of “precisely this mix of joy and sorrow can genuine communities be formed.” We believe that “all of whom sought and seek what it means to believe in the midst of the complexities and ambiguities that are inescapably part of living a faith that respects the achievements of reason. (38)”

When the rush of the moment may cause a staff member to be curt and abrasive, it is the behavior that is corrected with a reminder, the apology is given and accepted, and the personal worth is reaffirmed and not condemned.

“The Marianist educational tradition has long been characterized by shared responsibility for decision-making at all appropriate levels (39)...Effective collaboration requires good communication, clear lines of authority, just policies, and respect for the principal of subsidiary....All these forms of collaboration require, above all, lay faculty and administrators educated in and committed to the vision and mission of the founding religious community.”

The Physical Plant department encourages the input from all levels of the department on matters of concern to its members. The leadership of the department believes that such input is an effective means of participation in the process. The departmental structure contributes to this communication. The Advisory Committee, the Departmental Monthly meeting, monthly meetings in each division, the Open Door Policy of the Facilities Administrator all contribute to the assurance that all in the department are heard, provided they are willing to discuss and resolve issues.

In the process of hiring a departmental manager, the search committee includes a member of the leadership and management team, as well as a member of the division to which the manager is being interviewed. The members of the division are given a chance to interview and provide feedback about the division manager candidate.

The Physical Plant advisory committee is often given the task of developing policy recommendations for the department.

Marianist Universities Educate for Service, Justice, and Peace

“The Marianist universities extend a special concern for the poor and marginalized and promote the dignity, rights, and responsibilities of all peoples.”

The leadership of the department, as well as the university, should be committed to providing a just wage to each and every member of the department. Since Physical Plant staff is some of the lowest paid members of the university community, it is important that the wage and benefit package be competitive for the local area.

The tuition rebate plan, established by the university, provides an excellent means for a staff member to improve the education of themselves but also for their children and spouse. A four-year undergraduate degree from St. Mary’s University should provide an enormous boost in the financial state of the participant.

The opportunities for self-improvement offered by the Physical Plant department are also significant. For the staff member who has the ability and desire, there are opportunities for educational advancement by the tuition plan for trade or vocational school, the opportunity to acquire licenses and certifications in their trade, and the opportunities for advancement through more technically complex work assignments.

On-the-job training in job skills and safety training are also significant.

The “sense of work as mission (40)” has a special meaning for the Physical Plant staff member. For them it is not the intellectual consideration of service, the primary objective of the Physical Plant department is to serve the university community with pride and dignity. As teachers themselves, the Physical Plant staff members instill and give example to the dignity of work to the students and faculty alike.

The commitment to human dignity and the sacredness of human life (41) is seen as the university's just institutional policies. The leadership and management team of the Physical Plant department must also be committed to "insure fairness in the evaluation and compensation of its members, as well as in the assignment of responsibilities, and the resolution of conflicts.

The university attends to the "poor and marginalized" by providing its members with opportunities as described above.

"Personnel policies support the family in all its forms, recognize the special demands of dual-career and single-parent households, and adjusts the time to tenure in view of family needs (43)."

The Physical Plant department has a liberal flextime program that attempts to provide opportunities to adjust work hours whenever possible. The benefits package provides medical, dental, and retirement services and opportunities for the children of staff to attend summer sports programs such as NYSP.

Marianist Universities Educate for Adaptation and Change

"In the midst of rapid social and technological change, Marianist universities readily adapt and change their methods and structures..." should be a wake-up call and rally point for the Physical Plant department.

Although the tendency for long-term staff is to maintain the past, their challenge is take a leadership role in the development and refinement of organizational structures and procedures.

"New times call for new methods (45)," Chaminade often repeated.

St. Mary's University has developed a reputation for "Best Value." It is through increasing its value that the university will remain competitive and thrive. For the university, value is the relationship of services rendered to cost of tuition. In order to increase its value, the services must be improved (increase) while keeping the costs the same. Or the cost must be reduced while keeping the services the same.

This is the challenge to Physical Plant. While the university attempts to educate the students "to understand how to live authentically in a pluralistic society," the Physical Plant department must figure out how to repair and maintain the facilities and provide services with more efficiency and value. The key lies in the personal commitment to increasing work output, working safely and avoiding costly accidents, and becoming good stewards of the university resources.

It also lies in our commitment to leadership in the university. As expressed in the Guidelines for Scooters, our Departmental Safety Program, in our commitment to teach the university to conserve resources, in our commitment to transform the university

campus surroundings to a new level of appearance, and to learn for our commitment to hard work and dedication. Many of our departmental programs are being promoted campus-wide.

While the university encourages the student to develop critical thinking skills, encourage conversations among the academic disciplines, and cooperation among academic departments, the Physical Plant staff members enter into a dialog with themselves, the university community, and the professional maintenance organizations to discover new techniques and methods that will improve personal and communal performance and stewardship.