Create Opportunity!
Providing financial aid to students
It’s thrilling to observe the progress on our new Gehl-Mulva Science Center, as excavation gives way to construction and the building begins to take shape.

As you know, the science center is one of the priorities of Campaign St. Norbert: Full Ahead — but it is by no means the only one. So while we watch with satisfaction as this transformational facility comes to life, we also turn our attention to the campaign’s other goals: to support our faculty, to enhance our student programming, and, critically, to provide more opportunities for financial aid for deserving students.

Our campaign goal for financial aid is ambitious — $20 million — but well-founded: The families of our students are increasingly struggling to meet the burden of a college education. Jeff Zahn, our director of financial aid, surveys the landscape in this newsletter.

Fortunately for the college and our students, there are many in the St. Norbert community who recognize the challenges students face, and feel called to help. John Tobin is one such champion of St. Norbert students in need; I think you’ll find it interesting to learn why he gives so faithfully.

It’s easy, sometimes, to think of financial aid as benefiting “students” in the abstract. But every recipient is a unique story unto himself or herself. Zephyr Ciesar is one, joyfully gaining much — and giving much — during her time on campus. Keep in mind as you read her story that there are hundreds more unfolding on our campus every day.

With the help of caring people like you, Campaign St. Norbert: Full Ahead has started strong. As we shift our focus to the remaining campaign priorities, I look forward to moments when we can feel the same sense of excitement for their progress as we do today for the Gehl-Mulva Science Center.

Cheers!

Phil Oswald
Vice President of College Advancement

This year’s incoming class — the Class of 2017 — is the most diverse in St. Norbert history. In addition, fully 20% of the class are the first in their families ever to attend college.
Making College Accessible & Affordable

Thanks to the generosity of donors who understand the value of a Norbertine, Catholic, liberal-arts education, the dream of earning a degree from St. Norbert College is alive and well for students across the economic spectrum.

St. Norbert students received $54.4 million in financial aid last year from federal, state and other sources, with the college contributing nearly 58 percent of that total. Average financial aid packages — including all grants and loans — covered approximately 65 percent of the $40,000 average cost for tuition, room and board.

“The college is providing the lion’s share of that financial aid package, and we’re able to do that thanks to the support of our donors,” states Jeff Zahn (Financial Aid). “Without that support, fewer students would have access to a St. Norbert education. Students are coming here not only because of the federal and state support, but also because of the amount of money the college provides that makes it possible.”

Nearly one in four members of the 2013-14 freshman class (23 percent) is a Pell Grant recipient. The federal government’s largest grant program benefits students on the lower end of the financial spectrum, with family incomes of $35,000 or less.

Somewhat surprisingly, a full 20 percent of St. Norbert students are first-generation college students. Many come from small towns and rural areas in the region, appreciative of the campus setting and its relative proximity to home.

“We want to continue providing access and choice to these types of students,” Zahn says. “It’s what St. Norbert is all about; we’re not an exclusive college. It’s a value we cherish here.”

With a well-funded financial aid program, St. Norbert can achieve several goals: We can attract highly accomplished young men and women; we can provide opportunity to those who might not otherwise have it; we can make college affordable for those of limited means; and we can instill in aid recipients the giving spirit of our Norbertine heritage.

In students like Zephyr Ciesar ’16, we see all of those goals realized.

Zephyr is the first in her family to attend college. As a Native American (she is part Osage), she joins a student body that is increasingly and refreshingly diverse; our incoming class of 2017 includes more students of color than any in our history.

Zephyr earned diversity leadership, presidential and music scholarships, without which a St. Norbert College education might be beyond her grasp.

Our college would be poorer for her absence. As a high school student, Zephyr had already distinguished herself as a performer, being named 2011 Door County Idol, as well as 2012 Miss Door County. Entering St. Norbert as a vocal-performance major, she made an immediate impact on the college’s arts scene: auditioning for the college’s production of Les Misérables on a whim, she landed not just a part in the musical, but a leading role. This year, as a sophomore, she has earned a place in the college’s esteemed Knights on Broadway vocal troupe, and is now a music theatre major with a minor in business administration. She will be representing the theatre department in January at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival, and traveling to South Africa in the spring with the music department.

Off the stage, she is also making her mark. Already, she has embraced the Norbertine ideal of commanio, giving back to her school and her peers by working as a mentor on the STAR team, a group designed to help multicultural first-year students adapt and succeed at St. Norbert. With the singular distinction of being chosen to work this year in the office of President Tom Kunkel. She will be representing the administration. She will be representing...

Financial aid helps bring students like Zephyr to St. Norbert, where they can grow and flourish, enriching the entire community in the process. As such, it rightly belongs among the priorities of Campaign St. Norbert: Full Ahead.
John Tobin has a special appreciation for the challenges of paying for college — and a deep commitment to help.

John Tobin ’78 was used to finding creative ways to finance his education before ever setting foot on the St. Norbert College campus. He and his four siblings already were paying their own way by sophomore year at their Catholic high school.

“The deal my parents made was they would pay for our freshman year, and we would have to pay for the remaining three years of high school tuition and any college,” Tobin recalls. “I worked at Burger King for a couple of years, a hobby shop that sold items such as model car kits, and ad hoc jobs such as helping out on landscaping crews.”

Tobin knew if he wanted to join a group of his high-school friends at St. Norbert, he would need to apply the same creative financing strategies to make his goal a reality. With no grant options available, student employment, part-time jobs and summer work would have to be his ticket.

Introduction to life as a campus employee began almost immediately. Tobin landed a job at the Knight Klub, a bar and grill in the lower level of the Sensenbrenner Union. (These were the days of Wisconsin’s 18-year-old legal drinking age.)

“I remember being put to work the second or third day on campus, because they were having Dime Day where beers were just a dime,” he says. “We had a food stand outside the Union. While everybody else was enjoying Dime Day, I had to work. But it was a great way to meet people.

“I knew (funding college) was going to be on me. I didn’t get a scholarship per se, but I was able to get that job at the Knight Klub, where I cooked in the grill area and waited on people at the bar. That was my job for two years to supplement student loans and my other earnings to pay for college.”

Tobin then moved to the campus print shop, where he produced signs for the college. He also worked at the Irish Pub just off campus, and made time to participate in track and field, where he was a three-time letterman.

Work didn’t end with the completion of the academic year. A family friend secured him a job in maintenance at a tool and die factory in Illinois during the summers and over holiday breaks. Sharing off-campus apartments with other students his final two years reduced housing expenses to as little as $25 per month.

“I learned a mechanical aptitude at the factory, because we had to trouble-shoot the punch press equipment,” he says. “And out of survival, I learned how to do my own car repairs and cooked for myself.”

Understanding the challenges of financing college, Tobin has given to the St. Norbert Fund since shortly after graduation. His first donations were a modest $20 as he worked to pay off student loans of almost $100 per month. Now senior director of customer development for iconic toy maker Lego Systems, Inc., he continues to support the fund annually, making a difference for today’s students as they complete their higher education journeys.

“I know how hard it was for me to work and get through school,” Tobin says. “I couldn’t have done it without getting those part-time jobs and student loans. Donating is a nice way to give back and help somebody else. I knew $20 wouldn’t go a long way back then, but I was able to increase my giving as time went by.”