

The Academic Leadership of O. W. Qualley, by Mary Hull Mohr

Orlando (Pip) Qualley recalled that he had no choice in the decision to enter Luther College. He had expected to stay on the family farm near Ridgeway, but at lunch one August day his parents told him he was entering Luther in the fall on the advice of their pastor. So in 1914 he enrolled in the preparatory department to finish high school. He graduated from the college in 1918. His plan then was to go to seminary, but President C.K. Preus offered him a teaching position in the preparatory department. And so began his 52 years as a teacher at Luther (1918-1970). For twenty of those years he also coached, most notably from 1926-1942 as football line coach with his friend, head coach Hamlet Peterson.

In 1920, when Qualley began teaching in the college, he enrolled in graduate school at the University of Michigan. He alternated his teaching at Luther with his university years, which included an extensive archeological dig in Egypt. He finally received his Ph.D. in 1931. In 1936 Qualley became Luther's first vice-president and in 1946 its first academic dean.

As Luther's dean, Qualley immediately began the task of building the faculty. Using his "old boy" and "old girl" networks, he initiated contacts with people he knew at sister institutions, who could give him names of students or teachers who would be a good "fit" for Luther. He also recruited promising Luther graduates who had gone on to get advanced degrees. He pressed current faculty who had not attained their Ph.D.s to return to school, often providing needed financial assistance. When he resigned his administrative posts upon the coming of President Farwell in 1963, he left a credentialed faculty, including a number of women, who were committed to excellent teaching and the mission of the college.

Qualley modeled excellence in his own classroom. Although he could intimidate students, his concern for their high performance communicated his desire for them to work up to their abilities. Many remember him as their best teacher at Luther. He was rightly proud of the approximately 40 classics majors with Ph.D.s who assumed leadership positions in the church, educational institutions, and in their communities. He continued teaching classics until his retirement in 1970.

Qualley also wished to enhance Luther's reputation in the larger academic community. Having been elected to Phi Beta Kappa at the University of Michigan, he paid special attention to hiring faculty who were PBK members, as a foundation for Luther's application for membership. His efforts were justified when the college was awarded a PBK chapter in 1983.

In 1963 the Board of Regents established the Qualley Chair of Classical Languages, and in 1977 they designated a room in the CFL as the Qualley Lounge. These visible reminders attest to the many contributions that Orlando "Pip" Qualley made to Luther's development as an academic institution.