To the Shimer Community:

We all want to protect Shimer College. We want to see Shimer survive and thrive in whatever legal form best suits the modern world, be it as an independent college or as a subsidiary of a larger institution. Yet we should never allow the essence and autonomy of our community to be quietly traded away.

It is a cornerstone of our academic program that nothing is presented to us with conclusions already drawn. We must review the evidence presented and draw conclusions for ourselves. Last Wednesday every conclusion as to our financial condition, our future enrollment, and the resources needed for independent survival were presented to the student body as forgone conclusions.

Our Board of Trustees has gone down a road not uncommon for groups tasked with representing communities. They speculate as to the desires of our community, or worse, they make determinations about what our community ought to desire and use this as a basis for their decision-making. External determinations as to the desires of any community, even if made with the best of intentions, are wrong. The community must decide for itself. We are now of the conviction that the Assembly must vote on the proposed merger with North Central College. The students, faculty, staff, and trustees must decide for themselves as equal members of our governing body what action will best preserve the essence of Shimer College.

The argument will be put forth that the Assembly does not have the ultimate legal right to dictate the actions of the college. It is wrong to say on account of this that we have no power. Six years ago the Assembly effected the removal of Shimer College's president; ten years ago the Assembly effected the move from Waukegan to Chicago. The role and power of the Assembly is woven into our culture. As the history of our college shows, the ultimate power of the Assembly is defined by the actions of its members. It would be both foolish and wrong to abandon support for the Assembly simply because it lacks legal authority.

Our students, faculty, and staff all put substantial academic, financial, and emotional investments into our institution. We are all indentured to Shimer College both by choice and circumstance. At the same time, Shimer College is indentured to us. This relationship is the basis of the Assembly's “moral suasion.” Our rights as members of the Assembly and members of this community are not legal but moral.

No vote of the Assembly can be reasonable if uninformed, but if we must vote uniformed, we will. We can accept some answers regarding the proposed merger are simply unknown or must be withheld due to contractual arrangements. We are willing to wait until the terms are finalized and the Assembly is able to present us with the final negotiated deal.

It is critical we are given sufficient information to draw our own conclusions as to the best course of action. This means we must see both Shimer's internal data (to accurately assess the risks of continued independence) *and* full and accurate information as to our position post-merger (this would include agreements regarding the transfer of our accreditation and the representations of or agreements with NCC regarding our post-merger level of autonomy).

It should be the prerogative of those in favor of this merger – including those at North Central College – to present a deal to the Assembly favorable to independent operation, and it will be the prerogative of the Assembly to accurately and prudently assess the risks and returns of all our options.

Within the context of the merger we hope our Assembly will value the preservation of our independent identity and autonomy. If we leave our independence unprotected, there is the risk that Shimer College will eventually erode into something entirely different from the institution we know and love. We have been told the North Central College of today wants everything that is Shimer College. They want our unique academic program, our intellectual culture, and our offbeat reputation. Fine. But we are concerned not with the North Central of today, but with the North Central of tomorrow. The essence of Shimer College must be protected when the political winds eventually shift, and when new presidents and administrators make new strategic plans which do not include a quirky Great Books college. If the North Central College of today truly believes in the essence of Shimer College, they should have no qualms about adequately ensuring its long-term protection. We hope that some form of protection for our autonomy – be it though financial control or some other method – is included in any deal presented to the Assembly.

As a community we have the right to accurate and honest information as to our options. We have the right to determine our college's destiny as an equal collective body. Anything less is an insult not only to our intelligence and abilities, but an insult to the Shimer spirit the Board claims they are preserving. It is our obligation to ensure the will of the community is heard.

Again, we do not ask for much: only that the Assembly be allowed to vote. Whether the vote is informed or uninformed depends on how much information the Board gives us, but we will – *we must* – vote regardless. We cannot sit back and “wait and see.” We cannot, in good faith, assume that we are powerless in the face of such a vital and paradigm-shifting decision. Indeed, in the face of such an event, our right to vote is elevated to a duty. ***The Assembly must vote!***

Sincerely,
Some Concerned Shimerians