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A View from Melrose

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Keeping college accessible to students



“...we will continue to reach out to communities that are currently underrepresented at American colleges and universities. This is consistent with our heritage; it is also critical for the future of our society.”

– President Thomas L. Hellie

Dr. James C. Renick, senior vice president of the American Council on Education, recently addressed an issue that is a concern of every college president: “Never before in the history of American higher education have universities and colleges been called upon to provide leadership in responding to so many national challenges, from ensuring that our students acquire higher-order thinking skills to providing solutions for complex global social and economic problems. The pressure to respond is increasing and the perfect storm is brewing: demographic change, erratic state and federal support, and the need for a better educated workforce are forcing us to rethink the ways we conduct our business.”

Dr. Renick’s article was titled “A Call to Action for Promoting Expanded Access.” And I believe that he is right to be alarmed; studies show that a college education is more important and valuable than ever, but for some people it’s become harder to achieve.

When we hear about these problems, of course, we immediately think about the financial costs of higher education. At Linfield, we emphasize a personalized education for our students: the relationship between professor and student is fundamental to our mission and identity. But that kind of education is expensive. Perhaps it’s no surprise that the cost of instruction (i.e., compensation) makes up the largest portion of our operating budget. Small classes and personal attention come at a financial cost, and the cost of a Linfield education can seem daunting to someone who is interested in our college.

But at Linfield our second-highest expenditure is financial aid. Last year, Linfield College provided nearly \$18 million in scholarships. Among our Oregon students, for example, nearly 10 percent came from families with incomes below \$40,000. It has always been our mission to serve students from all walks of life, and that will not change.

So what does that mean for us as a college, and for you as our alumni and friends? First, we must emphasize that Linfield College will provide access to qualified students whenever and however we can. Ninety percent of our students receive financial aid.

It also means that we will continue to reach out to communities that are currently underrepresented at American colleges and universities. This is consistent with our heritage; it is also critical for the future of our society.

And finally, it means that we must continue to raise funds for scholarships at Linfield. If we are to continue with our personalized education, we will have to continue to charge tuition. But tuition income has never covered the full cost at Linfield; we’ve always relied on philanthropy. And future Linfield students will need more scholarship support than ever.

I was the first person in my family to go to college. That is also true for many Linfield alumni. I hope that you will help us make it possible to provide access to tomorrow’s students, and to secure the future both for Linfield and for our society.

– Thomas L. Hellie