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A View from Melrose

Thomas L. Hellie
Linfield College

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Planning for the future

At a meeting of college presidents a few years ago, a speaker asked us to raise our hands if we could name one teacher or professor who had changed our lives. Every president raised a hand. In a recent survey of Linfield alumni, we asked, “Name one person who had a special impact on your experience as a student. Please also provide a brief description of the relationship.” We received nearly 1,500 responses. And the vast majority of our alumni named professors: Elkinton,

Terrell and Frazee; Hansen, Rutschman '54 and Hare; Seidman, Richardson and DeVore Marshall – the list went on and on. These individuals, and others, influenced the lives of countless students with their humor, humanity and gifted teaching.

At Linfield, great teaching – great professing – transforms the lives of students. This is the underlying principle of our college’s existence, and thus it is our most precious responsibility. If our students are to succeed, they must have great professors, and those professors in turn must be recruited, developed and supported.

This past August, a team of our science faculty held a special pre-orientation hands-on science program for new freshmen. I talked to the students at the end of their intensive week, and they were beaming with pride. “I couldn’t believe it, we were already doing real research,” one student exclaimed. Another told me that this was exactly what she had hoped for when she selected Linfield – the chance to work closely with professors in the subjects she loves.

At many universities, professors are too busy to advise students. At Linfield our students are advised by full-time faculty. At many universities, professors conduct their research with advanced graduate students; at Linfield our professors collaborate with undergraduate students on real research questions – sometimes in the laboratory but often outside it and even beyond the borders of the campus. The fall theatre production, for example, marks the world premiere of *Kickin’ Sand and Tellin’ Lies*, written by Professor Jackson Miller and Christopher Forrer '13. Not only does this exemplify a creative collaboration, it also represents hundreds of hours of student and faculty research over the course of two years on the history of the dory fleet in Pacific City, Oregon.

Great faculty – those who can influence students just as Miller, Terrell, Hansen and Seidman have – will come to Linfield because we have bright, inquisitive and motivated students. They will remain at Linfield if we offer them competitive salaries, contemporary facilities, time with students, and scholarship opportunities to remain engaged with their academic fields.

Our new strategic plan calls for significant investment in our faculty to maintain and improve the quality of their work. This will be possible with increased gift support from alumni and others who care deeply about Linfield. As the world changes and technology evolves our faculty must remain a top priority, so that in years to come, when we ask future alumni the question, they too will enthusiastically name the professors who challenged them, supported them and transformed their lives. 🍷

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Thomas L. Hellie, President