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A View from Melrose

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Access is key to future

When I first arrived at Linfield, Pioneer Hall's resident American historian, Professor Peter Buckingham, told me about the college's traditions and past. "Linfield was the poor man's college," I remember him saying. He meant that as a compliment; Linfield was (and is) a place where many first-generation college students from families of modest means attend and thrive.

As one who grew up on a farm and was the first in his family to attend college, I understood and appreciated Professor Buckingham's remark. At Linfield, I am proud to say, we still enroll and transform the lives of such students. But many of them no longer look like me.

When I was a freshman, women made up just over 40 percent of college students; now they account for nearly 60 percent. Enrollments nationwide have changed in terms of race, ethnicity and age. I am proud to say that Linfield College is changing with the times. For example, 33 percent of this year's freshmen are Americans of color. Linfield has become a college of choice for students of color, especially Hispanic students. Our nursing program has received regional and national recognition for graduating a high percentage of Hispanic nurses. We are also attracting an increasing number of students over the age of 25 in our School of Nursing and in the Adult Degree Program. We welcome students from 20 different countries to our campuses.

In some respects, this marks a dramatic change for Linfield College. But in many ways it makes sense. We remain a college that welcomes students regardless of any difference in backgrounds. We know that nationally first-generation college students, especially those from historically underrepresented groups, have a lower graduation rate than those of majority populations. But research shows that first-generation college students are much more likely to succeed in a supportive academic community where classes are small and instruction is personalized. That is the case at Linfield.

Our challenge is to remain true to our traditions and core values – to remain "the poor man's college" – while balancing the books. Our form of education is more personalized and thus more expensive than at larger universities, and we must continue to make it accessible to new students. Financial aid is already a large portion of Linfield's annual budget, and this will continue to be true so long as we educate our diverse student body. Thus you will hear me speak again and again about the importance of securing gifts to fund scholarships for these wonderful new students who are joining the Linfield community.

At Linfield, we want to ensure that all students have the same opportunities as previous generations – an education that will not only prepare them for a job, but also prepare them for life in an ever-changing world. 🍷

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– Thomas L. Hellie, President