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## A View from Melrose

Marvin Henberg  
*Linfield College*

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# Engaging students in education

In education there are no shortcuts. Virtual reality may provide asynchronous access to learning, but learning itself takes place in real time according to tried-and-true methods of inquiry, dialogue, practice, mistake and correction. In short, quality education engages students directly and intensively. Because Linfield recently participated for the first time in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), allow me to share some early reflections on our results.

The 2004-05 NSSE was administered to over 660,000 students at 520 colleges and universities nationwide. It was targeted at first-year students and seniors. In Linfield's sample, 289 first-year students and 151 seniors responded. All data were collected and processed by independent survey administrators, then compared to national norms.

The report must be read with caution, for effect size differences were small to moderate. With this reservation in mind, Linfield students appear to be more engaged in tutoring or voluntarily teaching others than were respondents at our selected private peer colleges and at other bachelor-level colleges nationwide. In addition, Linfield students communicated with their teachers more by e-mail and talked more intensively about career plans with their faculty than did peer students elsewhere.

With respect to the co-curriculum, Linfield students were more likely to participate in physical fitness activities than either their selected or national peers. The same holds for participating in campus organizations, publications, student government, etc. Clearly, Linfield students learn and live in a community supportive of many good choices.

Most notably, Linfield stands out among national baccalaureate col-

leges with respect to seniors who have participated in study abroad. The college lives up in student word as in institutional deed to our mission statement's clear commitment to honor "... the rich texture of diverse cultures and varied ways of understanding." We shall not slack in promoting this clear area of excellence at Linfield College.

What of the challenges posed by the NSSE results? Happily, negative effect sizes are all small, save for one that is moderate (as well as statistically significant). The data suggest that our students are less likely than students at selected peer private colleges to attend an art exhibit, dance or theatre performance.

I relish the challenge of addressing this result. The creation of the Arts Quadrangle on the Keck Campus is helping us elevate the intellectual life of the campus. The Nicholson Library, coupled with the Marshall Theatre, the James F. Miller

Fine Arts Center and the new music facility now under construction, are helping to bring the college together to fully appreciate our outstanding music, theatre and art programs, as well as the wonderful readings sponsored by the library.

A liberal arts education prepares people to be flexible in mind, heart and soul, and become lifelong learners in order to meet the challenges they will face in the future. The arts and the library are at the center of education. With our outstanding faculty members and quality student performers in the arts, improving student attendance at such events begins with spreading the word. I know from firsthand experience that the arts are as lively at Linfield as our better-appreciated programs in international study. We will promote both opportunities with equal vigor.

*Marvin Henberg  
Interim President*



Marvin Henberg, interim president, talks with, from left, Katie Dolph '08 and Branden Sharp '07 during the student activities fair held in conjunction with orientation.