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A View from Melrose

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Education key to future

Since 2008, our financial ground has shifted, the result of an economic earthquake whose aftershocks continue. For three years, increased unemployment and underemployment have afflicted the United States and much of the world. In fact there are those who contend that still more turmoil will occur in the coming year as European economies – and governments – struggle to build a new economic foundation.

Because I am not an economist, I am unqualified to provide a close analysis of another stimulus package or to prescribe solutions that solve financial deficits. But I read and think about the economy a lot – and I wonder about its impact on our society, our college and our students.

Although unemployment is high in many parts of today's world, there remains a shortage of skilled and talented workers, according to the respected journal, *The Economist*. Indeed, the Public Policy Institute of California predicts that despite the current unemployment numbers, California's economy will be one million short of college-educated workers by 2025. Obviously there's a disconnect between what we see in the unemployment rolls and what is being reported by these experts. But when we dig further, there are several important lessons.

First, education and training are more important than ever. The good jobs – maybe most jobs – will require talent, preparation and creativity. What's more, jobs and professions will continue to change at a faster pace. Lynda Gratton of the London Business School has stated that graduates will need “serial mastery” of techniques and information in our changing world – she says that success will depend on continuous learning. Such learning must also include adaptation to our ongoing technological change.

Second, it is clear that careers will be truly multicultural, with people and companies from all nations and backgrounds, not only competing with each other but also working side by side. Unlike the 1970s, when I graduated from college, our students will compete not only with each other for tomorrow's jobs, but also with graduates from universities in China, India, Poland, Germany, Egypt, Brazil and Mexico – the global economy has created a global job market. What does that mean for today's American college students? What does it mean for Linfield's students?

For Linfield that means an education that prepares our students to learn how to learn, that acquaints them with a variety of technologies and approaches, that provides multicultural fluency and collaboration, and that offers opportunities to master and integrate new skills as our society and world require them. We cannot be complacent; just as society changes, so must we. But as I think about the future, I am convinced that a liberal arts education is more important than ever. 🍷

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– Thomas L. Hellie
President