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A View from Melrose

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Planning for the future

In my “State of the College” address in September 2010, I repeated a piece of dark humor that I’d heard from Harvard’s Richard Chait, a renowned expert on higher education. “There are three serious threats to the survival of a college president,” he said. “The most dangerous is adultery. The most tragic is alcoholism. The most certain is strategic planning.”

In that same speech, I announced that we would begin long-range planning at Linfield. In November 2010 our trustees held informal discussions with faculty and other members of the college community. In spring 2011 we formed strategic planning task groups comprised of faculty, staff, students, alumni, trustees and friends of the college. In fall 2011 those task groups created white papers that led to a first draft of a plan. In April 2012 an executive planning council created a second draft. Relying on what had already been done, I wrote the third draft and presented it to the Board of Trustees. And after a thorough discussion of that draft at our board retreat, the new six-year plan was approved. So far I’ve survived, and in fact I’m very excited and proud of what we’ve accomplished together.

Our new plan does not change the college so much as it improves it. We have agreed that we remain committed to our mission to connect learning, life, and community. We believe in helping each individual student find his or her passion and path. We base our education in the liberal arts while providing high-quality professional preparation in several fields. We know our students learn outside the classroom as well as within it, so we want to take advantage of our location in the Pacific Northwest and on the Pacific Rim. And we are committed to excellence.

The plan emphasizes our need to fund student scholarships. At Linfield we continue to educate students from all income levels, and we must continue to do so. The plan recognizes our need to support the faculty-student experience. Our commitment to personalized education requires special faculty and an enormous amount of time; this is expensive but necessary. The plan calls for us to reinvigorate January Term and study abroad. It urges greater integration of experiential learning with classroom analysis. And finally, the plan calls on us to improve our facilities, especially in the sciences and in nursing. If we are to keep pace with the changes in science and technology, we must make these investments.

I am professionally – and personally – committed to making this plan become reality. You will hear and see me talking about our goals in the coming years because our form of education is more important than ever. For me, at least, this strategic plan has not been a threat; it’s been an inspiration. 🍷

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– Thomas L. Hellie
President