

April 2023

A view from Melrose

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Recommended Citation

Davis, Miles K. (2023) "A view from Melrose," *Linfield Magazine*: Vol. 17: No. 1, Article 3.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine/vol17/iss1/3

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New era demands a new Linfield

Adapting to serve changing student needs is key to our collective future

We're still too close to the story of the past 18 months to be able to put it into historical perspective. I'll leave that to others. What is clear already, however, is the personal and institutional toll the pandemic era has taken on Linfield. Members of our community lost loved ones to disease, lost homes to wildfires and ice storms, lost an entire academic year to a haze of social distancing, mask wearing and nasal swabbing.

As we emerge from our pandemic cocoon and prepare for what we hope will be a more normal fall semester, I want to thank everyone who worked so hard to grind through the difficulties we faced. Alumni who reconnected with their alma mater, donors who stepped up to help students in distress and employees who utterly reinvented themselves to help students succeed during an unprecedented moment of stress and anxiety.

Speaking of reinvention, Linfield University is in a rare moment of transformational change. Sixty-seven non-profit colleges in the United States have closed their doors in the last five years alone, including several in Oregon. Linfield saw its enrollment decline seven years in a row, between 2011 and 2018. In a fiercely competitive higher education environment created by shifting demographics and fast-changing expectations on the part of students and their families, we have no choice except to make the tough decisions necessary to ensure Linfield's viability and success into the future. Not evolving is not an option.

We need to put students' needs first and support the entire teaching and learning community as it adapts to a culture that is increasingly flexible and dynamic. We need, in short, to preserve the very best of Linfield's history and heritage, while growing additional areas of opportunity.

For the new generation of students, we will strive to help each achieve their personal, academic and career-preparedness goals. We will educate the whole person by, as our mission statement demands of us, connecting learning, life and community in the service of creating innovators and leaders. We will spark intellectual curiosity, exploration and discovery through new programs, new approaches and a growing diversity of experience and ideas.

To do all that, we must create a community that not only values and celebrates our increasing dissimilarities, but one where we each feel confident to express our views and to be challenged in a thoughtful and mutually respectful way. We must ensure a safe and supportive learning environment, which is absolutely vital to academic success, self-exploration and personal growth.

I am committed to helping the community have the important conversations necessary to work toward this vision. Our responsibility is first to our students, but it's more than that. With 32% of our students now the first in their families to attend college and 60% representing "the new majority," we know a Linfield education can uplift families and entire communities. We owe it to them to clearly demonstrate the value of a Linfield degree and to have the structures and supports in place to ensure they are able to realize that value.

Our alumni, employees, students, parents, donors and friends all play a key role in this effort. Only by working together – all of us pulling in the same direction – can we make Linfield the place we all truly aspire it to be.

– Miles K. Davis, president

