

How Small Colleges Are Finding Ways to Survive

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SMALL LIBERAL-ARTS COLLEGES face some of the hardest financial and enrollment challenges in higher education. While the Great Recession may be over, such colleges find themselves operating in a tougher marketplace than that of 10 years ago, with some merging with other institutions or closing altogether. Their size, their cost, and even their traditional pitches about the value of liberal education all work against them now, and they're discovering that they have to be more nimble and collaborative.

So how are leaders and other top administrators at these institutions preparing for an uncertain future? Which choices are helping them survive economic hardships? How can they best appeal to students for whom finding a job after graduation is the top priority? Here are some case studies, tips, and ideas we've collected from news articles and first-person accounts by small-college presidents published in recent years.

Survival at Stake

In the aftermath of the recession, small colleges adapt to a new market

By LAWRENCE BIEMILLER

SHERMAN, TEX.

THE PLEIADES—seven sisters lofted into the night sky by Zeus—shine crisply through the eyepiece of a handsome new telescope that Austin College bought to top off its two-year-old science building. David Whelan, an assistant professor of physics, describes the star cluster’s astronomical significance after Amy Anderson, who is double-majoring in physics and theater, has given visitors some background on the sisters—daughters of Atlas and a sea nymph who were pursued by the lusty Orion till Zeus put them eternally out of his reach. It’s a perfect liberal-arts-college moment—professor and student, science and the humanities—playing out under a dome open to the cosmos.

What it’s not is a moment that comes cheap. The telescope cost about \$1-million all told—a lot of money for this 1,300-student college an hour north of Dallas. Mr. Whelan, who was hired last fall, says the instrument is equally valuable for research and teaching. Working alongside a professor, “it’s within a student’s reach to observe a small subset of stars, perform the data reduction, and present results at the end of a semester,” he says.

Coincidentally, the instrument also serves another purpose. From its perch on the roof of the \$40-million science building, the telescope overlooks a campus quadrangle that every admissions tour crosses. So even during the day, the telescope and its dome make an important statement about the kind of college Austin is.

The science building and two student-housing projects are the biggest of several bets Austin College made during the recent recession, the most serious since the 1930s. The bets were important because the college’s administrators say that to achieve long-term financial stability, it needs to expand its enrollment, attracting more students even as competition from other colleges and universities increases. It’s a challenge many of the smallest liberal-arts colleges face.

The recession may be over, but with middle-class incomes remaining stagnant and politicians talking endlessly about the needs of the work force, liberal-arts colleges like this one find themselves operating in a marketplace much different from that of 10 years ago. Their small size, their comparatively high cost, and sometimes even their traditional pitches about the lifelong value of a liberal-arts education work against them now, making their situation even more precarious than that of many larger institutions. Small colleges are discovering—some faster than others—that they have to be acutely sensitive to the evolving whims of students and the concerns of parents, as well as nimble enough to meet the marketplace on its terms.

“Since 2008 the economic landscape has changed and become more difficult for small colleges,” says Carol Ann Mooney, president of St. Mary’s College, in Indiana, a women’s college with an enrollment of 1,500. “In general the economy is feeling very volatile. In higher ed I see a much less predictable future.”

Some small colleges, such as St. Mary’s, are expanding nontraditional offerings like graduate

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Some colleges are making investments to expand enrollment, while others are paring back or revamping their curricula.

programs and online courses. Others, such as Austin and Randolph-Macon College, are bolstering old strengths—particularly the personal attention students get from professors—and marketing them with new vigor. A few colleges—among them Agnes Scott College—are making radical changes in their curricula and identities. And almost all are searching for ways to make bring in extra revenue from housing, summer programs, and the like.

It's still too early to say which approaches will work, in part because each college's circumstances are different. Nonetheless, small-college leaders are united in saying their institutions, as a group, face bigger challenges than ever before. "I was lucky enough to start my presidency in 2004," says Ms. Mooney, of St. Mary's. While her college has been more fortunate than some, she says, "those early years seem like a picnic now."

Austin College had survived rough patches before the recent recession. Founded in 1849 in Huntsville, Tex., the college moved here to Sherman in 1876. Then, in 1913, a fire destroyed the rambling main building; the residents of Sherman contributed to a Greek Revival classroom building in yellow brick that is today one of the campus's oldest structures.

The recession didn't hit Austin harder than other colleges, but the timing was especially awkward: The stock market crumbled after the Board of Trustees had hired a new president, Marjorie Hass, but before her first day in office, July 1, 2009. She came to Austin from Muhlenberg College, in Pennsylvania, where she had been provost, and on arriving she found that the value of the endowment was dropping—the recession eventually cost it about \$27-million—salaries had been frozen, and benefits had been cut.

"There were a number of things we had to look at very quickly," she said. "Like any liberal-arts college, there were vulnerabilities. You have a model that is very tuition dependent and dependent on contributions and endowment, and the downturn affected all three."

She consulted the board. As she describes it, the question boiled down to, "Would we pull back and hunker down and balance the budget through cuts, or would we make some investments that we believed would enhance revenue over time?"

"There wasn't much fat in the budget," she says, "so we'd be cutting into the lean—and then what we would be offering would be of less value."

"We ultimately did decide on a somewhat aggressive strategy"—in part, she thinks, because the board included "some guys in oil and gas" who had more of an appetite for risk than businesspeople back in Pennsylvania did. "They're used to a regular cycle of ups and downs in their investments," Ms. Hass says.

The most visible element of the revenue plan involved building a new residence hall for underclassmen and a series of handsome duplex cottages for seniors—a total of nearly 200 beds, completed in about 12 months. Enterprising donors came up with a plan to help the college avoid the tight credit market by creating a company just to finance and build the new housing and turn it over to the college. Now the additional beds bring in "about half a million a year" in revenue that would otherwise have gone to off-campus landlords, according to Ms. Hass.

Not everything went smoothly, however. "There were positions we didn't renew," she says, and 60 students staged a sit-in when the college decided it couldn't afford to fill a position in classics. Another challenge was "making clear to the faculty why we could spend money on buildings"—including the \$40-million science center—while the salary pool wasn't growing." She ended up offering "Budget 101" sessions to faculty and staff members because "they had to feel they could stand behind the integrity of the changes." Conversations about money have been "painful at times," she says, but "the faculty is now really well versed in the college's finances."

Although the college's situation has improved significantly since, Ms. Hass is still worried about deferred maintenance—she says has a list of \$15-million or \$20-million of projects that could use attention—as well as about creating "a sustainable plan for faculty and staff salaries."

RANDOLPH-MACON COLLEGE, in Ashland, Va., also hopes to grow—even though its current enrollment of 1,400 is its largest ever. Robert R. Lindgren, the president, says during a chilly golf-cart tour of the campus that the institution's strategic plan calls for adding another 100 students, though that would put the college "at the edge of some tipping points."

“Scale is so important,” he says. “The proportion of students who want a school as small as this is shrinking. Students want a little more commotion.” A bigger enrollment means more members for teams and clubs and spreads more widely the cost of “what our provost likes to call ‘the one-offs’—the football coach, the president,” and the like. Perhaps most significantly, he says, more students means more choices in the dining hall. “Food is the toughest thing about our scale,” he says. “My long-term view is that places like ours need to be in the 2,000s. If you do that right, you won’t lose the connections.” But he’s quick to say he doesn’t have a precise study backing up his opinion.

What Randolph-Macon does have, though, is what it calls “The Edge,” a cleverly named advising and career-planning program carrying out the strategic plan’s recommendation that the college focus on student outcomes. The program was inspired by a Wake Forest University career-development effort that Mr. Lindgren read about in this newspaper in 2010, prompting a visit to Wake Forest’s vice president for career development, Andy Chan. Afterward, Randolph-Macon ramped up faculty advising and added new career-oriented elements, including a “boot camp” weekend in which sophomores retreat to a nearby hotel to polish their personal narratives, get advice from alumni, and attend a dinner designed help them with etiquette.

“We took advantage of a lot of things we were doing anyway, but we talk about them in a ‘brand’ way,” says Mr. Lindgren, adding that the goal is to “convey to students and their parents that we care about what happens when they leave here.” Apparently it’s working: “I’ve had parents stop me and say, ‘That’s a game changer,’” he says.

Indeed, many small institutions see little hope of prospering if they continue to offer just what they always have. “Being known as a fine women’s liberal-arts college in the South didn’t cut it,” says Elizabeth Kiss, president of Agnes Scott College, in Atlanta (her last name is pronounced “quiche”). She says the college needs to add at least 200 students to its current enrollment of 900.

Doing that, though, requires persuading high-school women who aren’t considering women’s colleges—Ms. Kiss calls them “the over-my-dead-body group”—to see something that makes Agnes Scott worth applying to. After working with consultants who tested several ideas in a series of “simulated modeling decision” interviews with high-school students, the college settled on repositioning itself around global learning and leadership, and also around connecting students with careers.

The college calls its new approach “Summit,” adding the tag line “Leading Everywhere,” and it’s set to start this coming fall with the goal of “preparing every student to be an effective change agent in a global society.” As soon as they arrive on the campus, Ms. Kiss says, students will spend three days in a leadership program before starting one of 10 new first-year courses, each of which includes a weeklong trip during the spring semester. Every student will also assemble her own board of advisers, with a faculty member, a staff member, a career mentor (often an alumna), and a peer. The student’s progress will be captured in a digital portfolio, which the president describes as a way of “getting students to do that where-am-I-heading work.”

“It’s really exciting, and it’s a gamble,” says Ms. Kiss. “And it’s energized our campus.” That’s a good thing, because the shift requires the trustees to approve significant expenditures, the faculty to make big changes in the curriculum, and the admissions office to market a program that’s still

“Scale is so important. ... The proportion of students who want a school as small as this is shrinking. Students want a little more commotion.”

being designed. “It’s looking really promising,” she says. “We’re well ahead on enrolled students.”

Not every small college feels compelled to roll out a game changer, of course—some are comfortable. Whittier College, in California, has grown from 1,250 students in 2005 to nearly 1,700. “We’re trying to march it back a little,” says Sharon D. Herzberger, the president. She gives some of the credit for the growth to the same recession that caused problems for other colleges, because appropriations cutbacks forced California’s big state universities to trim their offerings, meaning it took some students extra time get into courses they needed to graduate.

“That helped us. Parents would say that four years of Whittier was not that much more than five and a half years of the UC down the road,” she says. Even so, “we’re trying to be creative in helping people in our area keep costs down.” Among other approaches is encouraging students to earn credits elsewhere before enrolling at Whittier.

Even colleges that don’t have big financial worries keep a close eye on their markets as well as on national trends. “Scripps is in good shape, but I do see the tension with access,” says Lori Bettison-Varga, president of Scripps College, a California women’s college that is part of the Claremont Colleges consortium. “The challenge for us is the broad socioeconomic range—we’re fighting the barbell,” she says, meaning that while poor and rich students are fairly easy to enroll, “our institutions are very much out of reach to the middle class.”

AUSTIN has a \$136-million endowment—bigger than those of many colleges its size, but not so big that it doesn’t depend heavily on tuition revenue. The latest strategic plan calls for adding 150 students, for a total enrollment of 1,450, says Ms. Hass, but “we may want to grow larger than that.” The campus could accommodate 1,500 without major changes, she says, though it would have to use classrooms and other spaces more efficiently.

But where will those additional students come from? Austin mostly recruits here in Texas, where the public universities have both world-class reputations and big-time football programs that are magnets for students. And in a region with few liberal-arts institutions, many students and their families have only a limited idea of what a liberal-arts education is, and even less understanding of why it should cost more than attending a university with 300-student courses. What’s more, consultants are now telling colleges from states with less-healthy demographics to try recruiting in Texas—which is “very bad advice,” Ms. Hass jokes.

“We focus a great deal on outcomes for our students,” she tells a crowd of potential applicants and their parents in a campus auditorium during one of the college’s admissions events. She says Austin students almost all finish their degrees in four years—rather than linger on campus on their parents’ dime—thanks to Austin’s small classes and professors who know students’ names. “At big universities,” she says, gesturing with her reading glasses as she paces the stage, “faculty members have other responsibilities, and undergraduate teaching is kind of an afterthought.”

As it strives to remain competitive, Austin has beefed up its marketing efforts—most recently adding a student-staffed call center, which the admissions and development offices share. And, like many other colleges, Austin considered a “price reset”—cutting its \$48,000 sticker price to some slightly-less-daunting number and then reducing aid accordingly—but administrators didn’t see that it would improve the bottom line.

“We do have some students from families of significant means,” Ms. Hass says, and there didn’t seem to be any point to charging them less when even at the current rate they’re not paying the full cost of their education (gifts and endowment income make up the balance). Plus, she says, many families take pride in the size of the aid package offered to their son or daughter.

Still, she says, “there will be dads with tears in their eyes who say, ‘I know this is the right place for my daughter,’ and there are times we have to say, ‘You’re right, there’s no way our aid will stretch that far.’”

Her real concern, though, is long term: She sees the American middle class becoming ever weaker, and she worries that the implications could be drastic for small colleges devoted to giving students from ordinary families a lifelong set of intellectual skills and to broadening their horizons.

“Schools like ours have essentially been middle-class operations,” Ms. Hass says, and if those families disappear, many small liberal-arts colleges could disappear with them. “It’s the middle class,” she says, “that has these aspirations.”

March 2, 2015

<http://chronicle.com/article/With-Survival-at-Stake-Small/190491/>

Down With Downsizing the Liberal Arts

Smaller won't be better.
Smaller will be worse.

By ROBERT WEISBUCH

TONIGHT in this village of 2,300 people, the theater troupe is debuting a work by a local writer while, in a nearby building, a visiting physicist is explaining competing ideas about gaps in our understanding of gravity. An Oscar-winning foreign film is playing at the student union, the Irish ambassador to the United Nations is speaking on his country's recent history, choral singers are rehearsing, and a soccer match is under way.

And that's not even half of what is going on here on a single early-spring evening. You might expect such a list for a medium-sized city, but for a village of 2,300? Such a place must be unique.

But of course it is not. I have taken this list from the calendar of events at a strong but not renowned small liberal-arts college. And the very next morning, the villagers will be engaged in myriad science labs, writing groups, and classroom discussions.

All of which shows why we must not simply save our liberal-arts institutions but extend them beyond their campus oases to inform national life and create a 21st-century renaissance. We need to enlarge them, not pare them, because, while a college campus is not a perfect place—for instance, some late-night parties in the village encourage binge drinking and other troubling behavior—it is still about the best community that humanity can create.

We need to expand these villages in two senses: their enrollment and their social influence. Today private liberal-arts colleges and small universities enroll a shockingly small proportion of students—well under 5 percent of B.A. recipients. Why would we ever wish them to enroll even fewer? I want to suggest how we can achieve this growth, and I mean to include the liberal-arts wings of large research universities as well.

A plea and a plan for growth sound an odd note, I recognize, at a time when public discussions of higher education are dominated by jeremiads, by accusations from outside and a sense of crisis within. Many liberal-arts institutions now advocate downsizing, so as not to hang themselves, like the farmer in *Macbeth*, on the expectation of plenty. But the very cause of complaints is a disappointed idealism: They testify to the conviction that college should be utopian, the chief instrument of civilization, the embodiment of the deep human qualities of curiosity and interest, and the guarantor of the social justice that lets people improve their lot by merit.

Can college be that again, and can it be more than it has ever been? Can academe be not just

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Despite pressures to scale back, liberal-arts colleges should try to increase enrollment and expand their influence beyond the campus.

an illustration of what a great society should be but an active instigator of that reality in the greater world?

Not unless we can disrupt the current conversation. I began with an account of a routine evening at a liberal-arts college because I fear that, while we educators seek to sell our colleges and universities to potential applicants and their parents, we sometimes fail to remind ourselves of their value and of our amazing luck to have such a variety of institutions in every region.

But downsizing and cutting expenses are the panacea du jour for private colleges and small universities. Like any hallucinogen, the diet drug has an allure. In an academic era when CFOs have usurped the proper roles of many college and university presidents and Moody's determines the campus mood, when demographic projections appear scary and tuition seems out of control, it's natural for financially challenged institutions to wish to cut expenses and, thus, people and resources. Lose some staff, fail to replace retired professors, leave a spare dorm or class building unused, become more selective in admitting students (though that is wishful thinking, as these cuts will make a college less attractive to applicants).

The philosophy of shrinkage is natural but deeply unwise, for wisdom seldom arises out of a sense of panic, just as improved learning cannot occur when the primary energies of a learning community are diverted to amateurish cost-cutting. The surgery will very likely be fatal, because the greatest college costs, human and material, are fixed. A reduction in enrollment may improve an abstract figure like endowment dollars per student, but it also means fewer tuition dollars balancing fixed costs. Meanwhile, morale suffers. The resultant loss of quality will lead to further decline and possibly even demise.

Smaller won't be better. Smaller will be worse, and then smaller won't be at all.

THE REAL HOPE for private institutions with endowments of less than gazillions exists in the creativity of the community: increasing revenues and raising quality via new and renewed practices of the best traditions.

The other alternative, the status quo, may be even riskier than downsizing, because the status quo disguises itself as safe. But outside of the richest 1 percent of colleges and universities, the status quo has already proved disastrous. Or haven't you noticed the crisis in enrollments and faculty positions?

Still, growth is distrusted on many small campuses because, it's said, even mild growth of numbers or programs will disrupt and disfigure the particular character of a college. But that will happen only if the institution's identity is faint to begin with. I attended Wesleyan University, in Connecticut, as one of 1,200 students, all men. Four decades later, my daughter attended a Wesleyan of 2,800 students, both men and women. Yet it was strikingly clear to both of us that the university we each attended was the same Wesleyan, permanently and delightfully levitated.

Now, a column like this one usually proceeds with a self-aggrandizing narrative of personal and institutional success that illustrates the general advice. Not this time. When I was a university president, I knew the institution I was leading needed to grow, but I gravely underestimated the tasks involved in making growth happen. I am hardly alone in having made that error; and the very number of institutions that have stumbled on the path of hope has added to the furor for focusing on cutbacks. That's because expenses are the one thing you can control, while revenue is always speculative.

Even so, getting smaller is small-minded, the wrong lesson to have learned. Cutting expenses will lead most often to a reduction of revenue, which will lead only to the next cut in expenses, further loss of revenue, and so on. The death throes, as the faculty watches its privileges as

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well as its numbers dwindle, will be still more painful than the actual death, which will come as something of a relief. My mistake was in not ensuring that we had the programs to make growth natural and pleasurable.

In fact, the real lessons are more complex and have chiefly to do with the revenue/creativity side. Instead of the spurious claim of spending less for more, we can make our campus village as intellectually and socially exciting as possible, in the process indeed reducing some costs, but reinvesting the savings. The difference I propose is the distance between sour necessity and the joy of discovery.

But first we need to discover a program for growth that doesn't make matters worse by planning for an increase that never happens. Here is a preview of measures that would take months, not years, to put in place.

We're going to flip the faculty. It doesn't help to tell 17-year-olds about all the great opportunities that await them four years ahead. Instead we're going to focus on particular student interests from the start rather than to say to them, "We're nice, you're nice, join us." And we are going to choose an incoming class by judging the distance a student has traveled rather than relying on standardized tests, which are, as President Obama has said, anything but standard.

We're going to be aware that the new B.A. is an M.A. and, more broadly, that the divide between liberal and professional education is a gaping wound that we can heal. We're going to move from dumb competition to smart collaboration. At the beginning of the college experience, that includes revolutionary collaborations with high schools. We're going to maximize creativity and timeliness by a shared-governance process that is not, as it so often is now, snared governance. And once the institution can pass a rigorous growth test, we're going to discover a means to improve our material campus that doesn't bankrupt our values or our endowments.

This ought to be fun.

Robert Weisbuch is a professor emeritus of English literature at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and a senior adviser to the American Historical Association. He is former president of Drew University and a former president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.

June 9, 2014

<http://chronicle.com/article/Down-With-Downsizing-the/146915/>

Tough Times Push More Small Colleges to Join Forces

By SCOTT CARLSON

MAYBE it was providence that put two well-respected liberal-arts colleges together in a town of 20,000 people in rural Minnesota. Maybe it was luck. Either way, it's an opportunity too good to pass up, say Steven G. Poskanzer and David R. Anderson, the presidents of Carleton College and St. Olaf College, respectively. Soon after Mr. Poskanzer arrived at Carleton in 2010, the presidents began talking about how these two colleges could work together more closely in areas like the library, the colleges' technology infrastructure, human resources and payroll, and, ultimately, their academic programs.

"We immediately started addressing the question of how you enhance the quality of what you do, while controlling the costs of what you do, in a world of constrained resources," Mr. Poskanzer says.

That question is one for the times. Carleton and St. Olaf's effort, supported with a new \$50,000 planning grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, fits with a growing chorus of people who say that fierce competition among colleges may not be best for the sector as a whole. Last month, for example, a paper published by the Center for American Progress suggested that institutions could form leagues to help them meet common admissions goals.

Others say there could be more cooperation, with a greater emphasis on academics. Eugene Tobin, the program officer for the liberal-arts-colleges program at the Mellon foundation, says that collaborations among liberal-arts institutions, and even research universities, are "the future of higher education."

"Liberal-arts colleges in particular understand competition, and they compete for students, faculty, prestige, and visibility, but their organizational cultures tend to focus inward, and I think that needs to change," he says.

Close, but Not Enough

Historically, says Mr. Poskanzer, there have been barriers between Carleton and St. Olaf, aside from the Cannon River that runs between their campuses in little Northfield, Minn. St. Olaf has been more conservative, still connected to the Lutheran church, educating lots of top Minnesota students; Carleton is secular and has been more politically liberal, drawing students from across the country.

Even beyond their cultures, the two colleges face hurdles to collaborating. Academically, they are on different calendars—Carleton is on trimesters, while St. Olaf is on a 4-1-4 term calendar.

THE TAKEAWAY

Colleges can work together to share the costs of their technology infrastructures, human resources, and even academic programs.

And there are areas where the colleges still plan to compete: When this collaboration effort was just getting started, both colleges happened to be searching for directors of their career centers. But they decided not to merge those offices.

“There are going to be places where Carls and Oles are literally competing for the same job,” or the same slots in graduate schools, Mr. Poskanzer says. Merging the offices “felt a little too rife with conflict of interest.”

But in the future, each time one of the colleges has an opening, administrators say they may ask if it is something that the two institutions can do better together. The goal is to share strengths. “Neither of our institutions has entered this with the primary and specific goal of reducing the size of the work force,” Mr. Anderson says.

The academic side, however, will be one of the most difficult areas to mesh, both presidents acknowledge. Mr. Anderson is reluctant to name specific departments that might be candidates for collaboration, because faculty members in those departments would “regard themselves as people with targets on their backs.” One area he does mention is education: Aspiring teachers have to take a long list of courses to become certified to teach in Minnesota public schools.

“Maybe our two institutions can do a better job together of offering a richer range of courses that can help students get certified,” he says. Once the colleges sort out their plans in areas like these, they will go back to the Mellon foundation with a pitch for a larger grant.

A History of Sharing

Higher education has some famous collaborations—perhaps the best-known among them are the Claremont Colleges, where seven institutions, each with a different emphasis, occupy roughly a square mile in Claremont, Calif. The colleges share library services, some academic programs and student-activity programs, and various administrative functions, like mail services, maintenance, and human resources.

There are other well-known partnerships, like the Five Colleges of Massachusetts, comprising Amherst, Hampshire, Mount Holyoke, and Smith Colleges, and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, or the consortium that embraces Bryn Mawr, Haverford, and Swarthmore Colleges. And colleges of all kinds form consortia for purchasing essentials like paper products, technology, or health care. The Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities has helped its members save about \$50-million on supplies and services in the past five years.

But in academics and course offerings, colleges have traditionally been reluctant to work together for fear of diluting their particular academic identities. Amid financial pressures and popular skepticism about the value of liberal-arts education, however, some colleges have little choice.

“It takes a lot of thoughtfulness, patience, and time, because collaboration is incredibly hard work,” Mr. Tobin says. “It is structurally complicated, and it can be politically fractious. But when it works, faculty members have new colleagues who create a larger academic community, and students have access to a richer variety of courses.”

The Mellon foundation is talking to various colleges that are considering partnerships for academic programs—among them, some of Pennsylvania’s liberal-arts colleges. Presidents at Get-

“When [collaboration] works, faculty members have new colleagues who create a larger academic community, and students have access to a richer variety of courses.”

tysburg, Juniata, Muhlenberg, Ursinus, and Washington & Jefferson Colleges are just starting a conversation about what their institutions might gain if they combine forces on specialized and underenrolled programs. (Savings collaborations in back-office functions, library services, and other programs are part of that conversation as well.)

A Washington & Jefferson student in, say, advanced Chinese could go to a special room in the library and get connected through a screen to students and an instructor at the other colleges. The individual colleges would save money, and the students would get a richer experience, says Tori Haring-Smith, president of Washington & Jefferson. She compares the idea to Sunoikisis, a collaborative classics program started by the Associated Colleges of the South in the mid-1990s for many of the same reasons.

“Even as we share, this will force us to sharpen our individual identities, to define what our individual campuses as residential colleges have to offer,” she says.

Separate but Equals

That balance between collaboration and individual identity is one that the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University, in north-central Minnesota, have grappled with for a long time. Academically, the two institutions are totally merged, and many administrative functions are combined—the two colleges have one provost, one vice president of enrollment and financial aid, one library director, a single Phi Beta Kappa chapter, and so on.

MaryAnn Baenninger, president of the College of Saint Benedict, says the two colleges save perhaps 50 percent of what they would have spent if they were maintaining totally separate administrations. More important, she says, they have been able to benefit from a larger and more diverse faculty roster than they would as two institutions.

But the colleges, only six miles apart, have maintained distinct cultures since they began hammering out collaboration agreements 50 years ago. That may be made easier by the fact that they are gender-specific institutions—Saint John’s enrolls only men, while Saint Ben’s serves women. But it’s more than that, and maintaining that culture has to be attended to all the time, Ms. Baenninger says.

“Culture ultimately resides in the things that you don’t think it resides in,” she says. It’s in different kinds of meals that are served on each campus, or even things as small as whether the college uses paper towels or air dryers in the bathrooms, she says.

In a quest to be more efficient, Saint John’s and Saint Ben’s are now starting to “peck away at a lot of these nonacademic areas where a lot of the culture resides.” Ms. Baenninger says preserving the colleges’ cultures at the same time is one of the most interesting and difficult conundrums of her career.

Lately, she has advised half a dozen presidents who are considering collaborations. But it takes a courageous president and board of trustees to even entertain the possibility.

“When you contemplate a partnership conversation, you automatically contemplate a merger conversation, and that is the threat,” Ms. Baenninger says. “What merger generally means is that one institution loses its identity. There is a fear that the conversation is a slippery slope.”

But the alternative, in some cases, is also dire. More than one president contacted for this article mentioned the fate of Dana College, in Nebraska. Dana had been pushed by a major donor to work with—even to merge with—another small, struggling Lutheran college nearby. The colleges resisted, and Dana closed in 2010.

In these tough times, collaboration may preserve not just individual institutions but the diversity of higher education as a whole. Mr. Poskanzer recited an old Benjamin Franklin quip to make the point: “Either we all hang together, or we all hang separately.”

February 11, 2013

<http://chronicle.com/article/Tough-Times-Push-More-Small/137229/>

Now, Everything Has a Learning Outcome

By DAN BERRETT

ROCK ISLAND, ILL.

A COLLEGE EDUCATION has become a widespread expectation. Three in four high-school students say they will go to college, where they'll mark the familiar milestones: declaring a major, joining a club or two, then hoping their degree pays off in a job. But many of them have little idea of why they're really there.

Two recent critiques of higher education have faulted students for their lack of purpose, though the descriptions could hardly be more different. One worries that students are blithely coasting while the other sees them as reflexively busy overachievers.

The aimless ones study little and spend too much time socializing, Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa write in *Aspiring Adults Adrift: Tentative Transitions of College Graduates*. Colleges cater to their whims, with less concern for academic rigor. And new graduates sputter, often living at home and struggling to find meaningful work.

The world-beaters at elite colleges, meanwhile, have another problem, according to William Deresiewicz. In his book *Excellent Sheep: The Miseducation of the American Elite and the Way to a Meaningful Life*, he laments how students at places like Yale University, where he taught for a decade, commit to a passel of extra-curricular activities and dutifully plow through their assignments, but do so, he thinks, almost slavishly and without much passion beyond the desire to excel.

Colleges have abandoned their historical role in shaping students' character. That's a root cause of the ills the books identify. Institutions used to render normative judgments about what students should know, what sort of upstanding citizens they should become. Fast-forward a few decades, and the raw clay colleges once sought to sculpt is now a consumer base they strive to please.

As a result, too many students squander those formative years. If they manage to make sense of what their education adds up to, they do so by accident or on their own. But educators uncomfortable with that reality are trying to shift it. While colleges won't return to dictating moral development, some are now guiding students with a firmer hand. They are bolstering advising, trying to connect what students do in and outside of class, and explicitly identifying the learning that happens in various corners of campus. In sum, treating a college education as a holistic, cohesive experience.

Those conversations have taken particular hold at Augustana College, here on the Illinois bank

THE TAKEAWAY

To better demonstrate their value, colleges can develop learning outcomes for everything students touch: courses, clubs, teams, residence halls.

of the Mississippi River. College leaders realized during a strategic-planning process that they needed to play a more active role in shaping their students' education, says Steven C. Bahls, the college's president. "There was too much stumbling through."

A well-regarded college that isn't at the top of the prestige pyramid, Augustana also knew it needed to make a better case that it was worth its nearly \$50,000 cost of attendance. The merits of an intensive residential experience could no longer be accepted on faith in an era of accountability and return on investment. Value had to be articulated and made plain.

Instead of widening its market by starting graduate or adult-education programs, the 2,500-student college is casting itself as a shaper of traditional students. "The goal is a true coming-of-age experience," says Mr. Bahls, "in which we walk with the students side-by-side."

What matters in this vision of college is how well students put together and make sense of the pieces of their education. To that end, colleges must curate that experience. Augustana has identified nine learning outcomes—like critical thinking and quantitative literacy—that apply to everything students touch: courses, clubs, teams, residence halls.

But curation can also obscure differences between academic pursuits and intellectual stimulation. The approach assumes that learning is ever-present and portable, with lessons ripe for the plucking. An upper-level seminar, then, is just one more educational opportunity, not so different from a debate in the dining hall. If a college declares that learning can happen anywhere, where does that leave the classroom, the professor, and the institution itself?

Serendipity may also suffer. If students must wring cognitive meaning from the homecoming committee, if even the cooking and anime clubs must serve some explicit purpose, that might sap the traditionally unpredictable, life-changing power of college. Does a more-curated approach leave room for an experience where students discover passions they never knew they had, altering them in unexpected ways?

FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS here use the word "intentional" a lot these days. Their goal is to bring learning in its many forms to students' consciousness so they can reflect on those lessons and make them their own.

"Learning happens all the time," says Pareena G. Lawrence, Augustana's provost. It's a matter of being aware of and putting a name to it. Ms. Lawrence has overseen the recent effort to create the campuswide learning outcomes. The goals will be attached to almost anywhere and anything a student goes and does.

Residence halls, for example, help achieve intercultural competency and communication competency by requiring roommates to work out their differences and negotiate privacy. Sports can help develop collaborative leadership and ethical citizenship. Running the campus's organic farm can develop collaborative leadership; dealing with vendors and handling invoices might foster quantitative literacy.

The proliferation of learning outcomes beyond courses is an increasingly common phenomenon, says Jillian Kinzie, a senior scholar at the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment. Institutions of all sizes and types—from California State University at Fullerton in the West to New York University in the East—are applying learning outcomes to things like advising, student-affairs departments, and extracurricular activities. The idea is to increase opportunities for learning and to assess and improve them. At the very least, it gives the experiences a label.

The growth in extracurricular learning outcomes parallels a similar emphasis in the curriculum, says Ms. Kinzie. Taking those goals outside the classroom, colleges are trying to show specifically how nonacademic experiences contribute to learning.

There are other benefits. Documenting learning supports part of Augustana's value proposition as a small, expensive liberal-arts college with a high-touch residential experience and low student-faculty ratio. Its model looks out of fashion at a time when some expect colleges to disaggregate what they offer. Instead of producing traditional classes, they should offer other institutions' massive open online courses. Rather than charge hefty fees to live on campus for four years, they should encourage students, from anywhere, to proceed at their own pace.

"How do you aggregate where the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts?" Mr. Bahls

asks. “We need to demonstrate clear value to students and their families.”

Many institutions are building that case, including Augustana, which is still working to attach outcomes to the many facets of campus life.

The learning outcomes for, say, the Martini Swingers, have yet to be established. Student-affairs officials see that the club’s robust following reflects leaders’ skill at promoting swing dancing. They are developing their skills in collaborative leadership and communication competency.

But even Ms. Lawrence wonders about the effects of using such explicit labels. “Am I squeezing the fun out of everything?” she asks. “It could be.”

The men’s soccer team, for one, is still sorting out how to apply its outcomes consistently, says Eric C. Stewart, an associate professor of religion and assistant coach of the team.

“We haven’t talked about this stuff this fall as much as we should have,” Mr. Stewart says. The desire to win often takes over. Still, he says, the team’s ethical citizenship can be seen in how it plays—and treats the other team, the referees, and its fans.

For now, deliberate curation and reflection takes place most consistently in interactions between students and their academic advisers.

During a recent advising session here, Kimberly A. Murphy, an assistant professor of biology, asked Cassie Saufley, a senior, to reflect on how her coursework, captainship of the softball team, and a recent trip of preveterinary students to Nicaragua all tied together.

Being captain, Ms. Saufley said, has taught her a lot about leadership. The two chatted easily and warmly, a rapport built over the years. Ms. Murphy described how she had observed Ms. Saufley in several different contexts, including the trip to a Nicaraguan village, where students vaccinated cattle, castrated pigs, and spayed and neutered dogs.

The students quickly ran out of supplies like vaccines and penlights. At one point, Ms. Saufley and her classmates faced a procession of ornery dogs waiting to be fixed. They had muzzles for the dogs but no gauze. So they got resourceful. To stanch the bleeding, they used maxi pads. That, Ms. Saufley said, was creative thinking.

The process of students’ articulating what they’ve learned and tying lessons together makes for an important learning opportunity in its own right, says Janet K. Schulenberg, associate director for advising technology and curriculum at Pennsylvania State University.

“What students often don’t realize is they’re learning things through their cocurricular environment that are part of what higher education offers,” she says. “Until you make them say it out loud and prompt them to reflect on it, they may not make that connection at all.”

In the advising session here, other facets of Ms. Saufley’s college life were less obviously meaningful. Like her job at Dick’s Sporting Goods.

Once you’re making connections, though, you’re tempted to continue. The part-time job off campus, Ms. Murphy said, might fit learning outcomes like communication skills and intercultural competency.

“Angry customers—that’s usually what I get,” Ms. Saufley said with a smile.

“Sometimes you have to call on creative thinking, because the person wants this kind of product that we don’t have,” the student said, such as when a customer came in looking for kneepads to use for dancing.

“I told him I could show him our basketball and volleyball kneepads,” Ms. Saufley said.

Her professor affirmed the learning outcome and jokingly added a new one: “Creative thinking—and creative selling.”

COLLEGES have made the return on investment one of their chief selling points, and it has become something of a trap in a tough economy. The expectation is that everything will help make students marketable.

Some colleges are coming to grips with what, beyond the platitudes, career preparation really means, says Charlie L. Nutt, executive director of the National Association for Academic Advising and an assistant professor of education at Kansas State University. “Campuses have to do more than say, This course is going to help you in the job market in this major,” he says. “It’s how does your whole college experience make you a better citizen, and a bet-

ter employee, and help get you where you want to be in the future?" In many cases, he says, it falls to advisers to help students pull together their college experience into an integrated whole.

But how much integration is too much? Advisers shouldn't force students to fit their experiences into a neat package, and they should promote some degree of exploration.

"We don't want to create a straight line," says Mr. Bahls. "Faculty, frankly, are the check."

The faculty members who double as academic advisers at Augustana have to negotiate the tension between guiding students toward a cohesive experience and on-time graduation while also encouraging them to take risks along college's intellectual byways. Those roles can pull them in opposite directions.

During a recent meeting, Brian P. Katz, an assistant professor of mathematics, toggled back and forth. First he tried to help Ben Groselak, a freshman in his calculus class whom he advises, consider how his education might broaden the way he thinks. That allowed Mr. Katz to emphasize why the young man had come to a place like Augustana.

The root of a liberal-arts education is that it frees the mind, the professor said. Augustana requires students to take courses in disciplines like art, history, and natural science for a reason. "One of the assumptions I wanted to make before we talk about courses," he said, "is the goal of exposing yourself to multiple ways of knowing."

He also helped his student follow the straight line.

They discussed how Mr. Groselak's being on the golf team contributed to learning outcomes like ethics and leadership. Mr. Katz asked him to think about other activities that might help him achieve his goals. "It's totally fine to do the ones you find fun," he said, "but we want to be strategic as well."

They looked at Mr. Groselak's schedule. The freshman intends to declare as a math-education major as soon as he can. Another calculus course next quarter was a sure bet. Mr. Groselak said he might also take a history course, "From Ellis Island to Post 9/11."

"Does it connect with any of your goals?" Mr. Katz asked. "Or do you see this coming from somewhere in particular?"

The professor suggested that the course might tell him something about binary worldviews that seem to be arising increasingly in political discourse.

The freshman was also interested in a psychology course. "That'll definitely help me in my teaching career," he said, "because I'll know how my students think and why they think the way they do."

A political-science course appealed to him, he said, because it could give him insight into teachers' unions and the way government works.

"These seem like great choices and good reasons," Mr. Katz said, though they were also very focused on the career he envisioned. The professor introduced a note of caution. Maybe Mr. Groselak was a bit too focused on his major and career at this early stage. "Next time we talk about this," he said, "I'm going to push you beyond, 'I see how this might relate to my job.'"

THE COLLEGE MAJOR exerts a gravitational pull. It can impose order on the curriculum, form the basis of an academic identity, and point the way toward a future career.

It is also a category on which much of higher education's value is judged. Studies that link majors with earnings have emerged, and the Obama administration has considered them for its proposed college-rating system.

The choice of a major can be a vexing one. Even at a traditional liberal-arts college like Augustana, students flock toward practical majors like business and education that sound like they lead directly to jobs.

That laser focus runs counter to both the philosophy and the experience of many administrators here at Augustana who champion its curated approach. "There is no one career path," says Mark Salisbury, director of institutional research and assessment. "Everything we're doing is helping students prepare to launch, but then have the nimbleness to react and respond. That really requires teaching students a way of thinking about what they're doing in college."

Mr. Salisbury's evidence of the long-term value of an Augustana education is being drawn from

a large-scale study of thousands of the college's alumni. The study's title, "The Winding Path," characterizes the lives of decades of graduates. They have gone down blind alleys, gotten stuck at dead ends, and adapted.

President Bahls's own path meandered a bit. He was trained as a lawyer and worked for a corporate firm in Milwaukee before realizing he was dissatisfied. Similarly, Mr. Salisbury performed music and, later, stand-up comedy before becoming a higher-education researcher.

Still, a recent advising session at Augustana suggested how much looming pressure the choice of a major can pose.

Alyssa Hernandez, a sophomore who had transferred to Augustana from the College of Lake County, walked in to see her adviser, Liesl A. Fowler, the registrar and assistant dean.

Ms. Fowler's office was designed to soothe, with muted green walls, harp music playing in the background, incense burning, and three lamps casting a glow. She managed to be both warm and businesslike at the same time.

The soft-spoken Ms. Hernandez said she planned to double major in public health and communications. The first subject clearly kindled her interest: She had joined an extracurricular club for public-health majors and attended programs on related topics.

Her interest in communications was less evident. She hadn't taken any courses in the subject and had yet to visit the department office. Still, Ms. Fowler started filling in the blanks of a major-declaration sheet, nudging Ms. Hernandez toward the double major. The student watched her adviser with a steady gaze.

Just before zipping up her backpack, Ms. Hernandez admitted to something. "I wish I was majoring in sociology," she said, adding that she felt particularly close to one of her instructors.

Ms. Fowler stopped. "Don't run away from that, especially if you're feeling a connection," she said. "Think about that a little bit. Don't close that door."

At the same time, she handed Ms. Hernandez the sheet to declare her double major in public health and communications.

One of the more provocative arguments being formed at Augustana is that a major is not all it's cracked up to be. It's just a fraction of an education, along with general-education courses, extracurricular clubs and experiences, dorm life, an internship, or study abroad, and maybe a sport. What matters is how students assemble the pieces.

"We know it's not what a student studies," says Ned S. Laff, director of advising at the college. "It's how they go about constructing an undergraduate education."

Mr. Laff likes to cite the work of Gerald Graff and his theory of hidden intellectualism, which holds that students often have abiding interests that remain dormant because professors fail to tap into them. The challenge, says Mr. Laff, is to help students find what truly animates them. That's rarely Chaucer or Kant, or even the job they think they want when they graduate. It's often something nonacademic, yet it can still serve as the linchpin of their studies.

Once students identify that, they start to understand why they came to college. Mr. Laff had stories at the ready. The business major who cared little for the discipline but found ways to connect it to his real passion, baseball. The medieval- and Renaissance-studies major who loved video games and found an internship to gain experience doing what fascinated her.

Once a student makes that connection, Mr. Laff says, their education truly becomes theirs. The goal at a place like Augustana is not to scrutinize which choices students make. What matters most of all, it seems, is how they make them.

November 10, 2014

<http://chronicle.com/article/Now-Everything-Has-a-Learning/149897/>

What You Should Get Out of College

Everything students do at Augustana College, whether in or outside of class, is now supposed to serve at least one of the following nine learning outcomes. That's whether it's calculus, soccer, or the heavy-metal club.

DISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE

Demonstrate a deep knowledge of at least one specific discipline and its connections to the liberal arts, reflected in the ability to address issues or challenges and contribute to the field.

CRITICAL THINKING & INFORMATION LITERACY

Critique and construct arguments. This requires the ability to raise vital questions; formulate well-defined problems; recognize underlying assumptions; gather evidence in an efficient, ethical, and legal manner; suspend judgment while gathering evidence; evaluate the integrity and utility of potential evidence; critique and incorporate other plausible perspectives; and determine a reasonable conclusion based on the available evidence.

QUANTITATIVE LITERACY

Interpret, represent, and summarize information in a variety of modes presented in mathematical and statistical models; use mathematical and statistical methods to solve problems; and recognize the limitations of those methods.

COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

Collaborate and innovate, build and sustain productive relationships, exercise good judgment based on the information at hand when making decisions, and act for the good of the community.

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY

Demonstrate an awareness of similarity and difference across cultural groups, exhibit sensitivity to the implications of real and imaginary similarities and differences, employ diverse perspectives in understanding issues and interacting with others, and appreciate diverse cultural values.

COMMUNICATION COMPETENCY

Read and listen carefully, and express ideas through written or spoken means in a manner most appropriate and effective to the audience and context.

CREATIVE THINKING

Synthesize existing ideas and images, expressing them in original, imaginative ways to solve problems and challenge current understandings.

ETHICAL CITIZENSHIP

Examine and embrace strengths, gifts, passions, and values. Behave responsibly toward self, others, and the world; develop ethical convictions and act upon them; show concern for issues that transcend one's own interests; and participate effectively in civic life.

INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY

Cultivate a lifelong engagement in intellectual growth, take responsibility for learning, and exhibit intellectual honesty.

Inspector Bucket's Plan for Student Recruitment

To tell 17-year-olds that they might have a chance to do something interesting—in four years— isn't very persuasive

By ROBERT WEISBUCH

IN A JUNE COLUMN, I focused on the downsizing trend at small liberal-arts colleges and universities, and argued in favor of growing, not shrinking, them.

Instead of the frightened rhetoric of cutbacks, I suggested we seek a 21st-century renaissance at those campuses, because we believe in what we do and, well, to hell with defeat.

But if we're going to expand the liberal-arts college, we need to attract students—to many of whom it would be news that excellent institutions (after perhaps the first tier) are all too desperate for them. And yet the attempts we make to attract students are often lame: mailings that go immediately in the trash, campus tours that are exhausting and hackneyed, claims for uniqueness that all sound the same.

Let's stow all that and make three new connections. The first is to the great Inspector Bucket of Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*, in consideration of the particularity of individual students. Bucket, like so many Dickens characters, has a verbal tic, but his is a knowing and brilliant one. "I know who you are," he says, and then goes on (unless he is unmasking a culprit) to reflect back a strongly admiring and specific description of his interlocutor.

"I know you. You're a man of the world," he tells the unworldly innocent George. "You're a model, that's what you are," he more forthrightly tells the virtuous heroine Esther. "Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, you are a gentleman, ... and a gentleman can bear a shock," he tells the aristocrat, at once reminding him of his best self and preparing him for the shock that his beloved wife may be a murderer.

Sometimes merely reflecting a person's reality, sometimes exaggerating it into being, Bucket behaves stealthily yet ethically and gets what he wants. As can we, if we approach prospective students with Bucket's specificity.

Most colleges tend to say, "You're a swell kid, we're a swell place, come join us." What if, instead, we were to say, "We know who you are and what particularly interests you, and we have an opportunity for you, starting as soon as you get here."?

That approach bears some relation to the trend of designing first-year courses with students' interests in mind, as reported in *The Chronicle* recently, "A Curriculum for the Selfie Generation." But there are two crucial differences. The model I have in mind treats prospective students as engaged intellectuals in the world, not as pampered narcissists, and it goes well beyond a sin-

THE TAKEAWAY

Ditch the generic appeals and personalize the pitch to the individual interests of prospective students.

gle course toward an ambitious set of programs.

I have seen this approach, and it works several kinds of wonder.

First, it mightily attracts students. When I was at Drew University, my colleague Amy Koritz became the head of our new Center for Civic Engagement. It didn't have much funding, but Amy made the second connection, which usually is not made: She connected the curriculum to financial aid. Recirculating tuition revenue as aid is where every college is actually rich, but we tend to use the money dully, at best tying honorific and meaningless names to the awards.

Instead, Drew began a Civic Scholars program, which involved a first-year seminar of considering experiential learning, practicing it, and reflecting upon it. Students take a first-year seminar and a few credits of increasingly ambitious workshops; they also pledge to spend 100 hours annually in applied learning projects. Those accepted into the program received a relatively small addition of merit aid. The money—\$5,000—was less a scholarship than a contract that obligated students to interest others in their projects.

The cost was minimal: less than 2 percent of the financial-aid budget, a one-page flier, a website page, an additional few faculty assignments, and a staff member.

The results have been startling. Yield typically has been triple the overall figure, and retention has been well above the usual. Even students who applied but could not be accommodated in the program enrolled at the university at a much higher rate than the norm. Many of those students have testified that they would otherwise not have considered Drew or even heard about it. And, of course, they were exactly the kind of students one wishes to attract, not only academically strong but also socially and intellectually inspiring, the kind of catalyst students who don't just join clubs in high school but start them.

“We know who you are and what particularly interests you, and we have an opportunity for you, starting as soon as you get here.”

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT may not be the Inspector Bucket identifier for every student, or even most of them. To devise other approaches, you can make a connection that often goes neglected—between admissions-staff members, who understand what 17-year-olds are thinking about, and faculty members, who are in charge of the curriculum.

So, in addition to Civic Scholars, an institution might create three or four other special-interest programs, paying less attention to disciplines than to the always interdisciplinary life issues that matter to prospective students. A college might consider a first-year program in peace studies, entrepreneurship, environmental sustainability, performance, conflict resolution, health, or “great books,” which might constitute an honors program. (That was the other new program at Drew where yield and retention were especially strong.) Pick emphases that come naturally out of existing faculty interests, and perhaps choose some high schools and make awards in the name of your institution to the juniors who already best exemplify these interests: say, a \$25 book certificate.

You can create those special-interest programs in time for the very next admissions cycle. And, again, the cost will be astonishingly low.

It will take one faculty member's full workload to lead and teach in each program, a few additional course assignments, a one-page promotional piece for each program widely distributed to high-school counselors, some one-time summer stipends for group planning, a continuing

assessment plan, and a small percent of the existing financial-aid budget to award some extra money to admittees in each program. That sum can be compensated for by a negligible reduction in the rest of available aid, just as the course assignments will be compensated for by eliminating less attractive first-year offerings. For which you may well have leveraged a new heaven and a new earth for the institution.

Granted, any number of students, including some very interesting ones, are loose fish. They will want to swim free of a special interest at the beginning of their college careers. But if just half of the prospective students are drawn to one or another of the four or five Bucket programs that imply “we know who you are,” your yield and retention rates will create an entirely different and far happier financial situation for the college. The intellectual life of the campus and its overall spirit will improve. You will attract more self-starting students, who will serve as exemplars to others. And faculty members will themselves be making new connections without leaving behind their expertise and interests.

In fact, we will have accomplished three additional changes that will serve our colleges well. And here, I would urge the Bucket strategy equally upon liberal-arts colleges of large universities, where a larger number of such programs (though they may not be needed to recruit students) may improve the learning experience of new undergraduates by making it more intimate. (When I was on the faculty at the University of Michigan, I would advise prospective students to attach themselves to one or another special program, even ones that were not stellar, for this would be far more enjoyable and rewarding than swimming around aimlessly in a huge fish-bowl.)

Now for the changes: First, we will have flipped the faculty—that is, we will have made the teaching of first-years more compelling for many of our best scholar-teachers.

Second, we will have flipped the curriculum. We now almost always save the best for last, keeping any special opportunities confined to juniors and seniors. We’ve already seen the successful results when some colleges offer study abroad to incoming students rather than making them wait until much later. The Bucket programs do the same. To tell 17-year-olds living in the Now that they might have a chance to do something interesting in four years isn’t very persuasive. In fact, it is downright discouraging. How much better to have something as ready for them as they are for it, just on the other side of summer.

And finally, we will have employed the extraordinary strengths of disciplinary expertise while avoiding their imprisoning aspects. The crucial human issues do not come in neat packages labeled English, political science, or physics. A near-contemporary of Inspector Bucket, Huck Finn, complains about how, at the Widow’s, “everything was cooked by itself. In a barrel of odds and ends it is different; things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better.”

With Bucket, as with barrel, things will go better for us as well.

Robert Weisbuch is a professor emeritus of English literature at the University of Michigan and a project adviser to the American Historical Association. He is a former president of Drew University and a former president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.

July 23, 2014

<http://chronicle.com/article/Inspector-Buckets-Plan-for/147819/>

A Small College Strides Hopefully Into Tough Times

By SCOTT CARLSON

ELKINS, W.VA.

A CHRONICLE STORY on a small college is usually a snapshot in time. We drop in, record the personalities and events around some daunting challenge, then write an article that strives to transfix or inspire readers—or at least convey something useful. And then, aside from an update or two in a blog item, we move on. There are some 4,000 colleges to cover, just in the United States. We almost never go back.

In 2009, I wrote about Davis & Elkins College, a tiny, troubled private institution in West Virginia that had a new president—G.T. (Buck) Smith, a 74-year-old turnaround artist. He planned to resurrect the institution with some conservative financial stewardship, but also with a romantic, almost idealistic strategy: to build an environment that valued relationships, integrity, and compassion, emphasizing the power a small college could bring to the lives of students who either grew up or landed here, deep in Appalachia. I watched as Mr. Smith made himself the personification of that ideal: He walked around campus, stooping to pick up litter, then stopping a passing student, staff member, or stranger to engage them and make them feel important, interesting, loved.

The story was tremendously popular, but also struck some as a bit preposterous. One self-proclaimed “jaded” letter writer—a former president of the Appalachian College Association, no less—suggested that no college could turn things around on such a flimsy strategy. She recommended focusing our attention on colleges facing closure, as Davis & Elkins might be one of them.

Given the pressures on little colleges, decline and closure are a constant threat. But for now, the jaded view seems to have been dead wrong. Mr. Smith’s strategy worked. Fall enrollments are up 50 percent since he took over in 2008, to about 800 students, and net attrition has dropped from more than 30 percent to 19 percent. Students—and even some new faculty members attracted from larger, more prestigious institutions—say they came and stayed because of the sense of belonging. Programs that had been decimated, like fine arts, have been restarted. Trustees and wealthy alumni, who sat on the sidelines for years as the college floundered, are now writing six- and seven-figure checks.

D&E, as the college is known, has raised more than \$30-million in the past five years. It has put \$10-million into repairing the grand but dilapidated structures on its historic mountain-side campus, established in 1904. And while the college was borrowing money and raiding its \$21.8-million endowment five years ago to stay afloat, today, with an endowment of \$29-million,

THE TAKEAWAY

After a successful turnaround, a college needs to make sure the changes stick and don’t depend solely on the president.

it is one of the few American colleges that can say it has no external debt.

"I thought he was going to wing it—you can't know how to turn a place like this around," Joseph M. Roidt, a longtime faculty member who is now vice president for academic affairs, says of the early days with Mr. Smith. "He knew what he was doing. He had a plan. It was about lifting spirits and letting people know this place had a future and we were going to grow and we were going to change. But it was about the power of leadership. He was everywhere."

Now, Davis & Elkins is at another critical moment: Mr. Smith stepped down from the presidency on June 30, to become an adviser and fund raiser for the college. He passed the top job to Michael P. Mihalyo Jr., who came here in 2011 as provost.

Although everyone expresses confidence in Mr. Mihalyo, most people interviewed for this article have pondered whether Buck Smith's magic (or luck) can be passed along. Mr. Roidt, a sociologist, said that Mr. Smith's tenure was an "object lesson in leadership"—particularly in Max Weber's theories about charismatic leaders, electrifying personalities who are able to inspire others. "The scary part of charismatic leadership, Weber said, is that as soon as you try to institutionalize it, it dies," Mr. Roidt points out. "It's connected to the power of the individual personality."

And no matter who is sitting in the president's chair, Davis & Elkins faces all the challenges faced by other small, rural, non-elite private colleges in charting a path forward.

"I don't want to claim that we have arrived, or that we are safe or secure," Mr. Smith told me recently during dinner on the campus. "For those of us with less than \$50-million or \$100-million endowments, there is no margin for error." A public-relations disaster or a bad investment could flush everything away. Mr. Smith has seen it before, and he now sees other small colleges borrowing tens of millions for buildings, severing church ties, and emphasizing athletics, all to bring some pizzazz.

"I think that's a shaky plan," he says. "But none of us knows whether we have the right plan."

FOR SOMEONE who works some 15 hours a day, Mr. Smith, now 77, seems as energetic as he was four years ago, and he's still eager to connect with a visitor or charm a student. Just before dinner at the college's Graceland Inn, he meets two motorcyclists, a retired cop and a former Marine, who rode 400 miles from Philadelphia for a lark. When Mr. Smith learns that they are gun enthusiasts, he offers to meet them the next day to show them the college's collection of historic rifles and powder horns.

Later, a student from Belington, W.Va., approaches Mr. Smith, asking if he found the butterscotch pie she left anonymously at his office. He regales her with a story about taking the pie to a 91-year-old alumna in Baltimore, who loves butterscotch pies, and who shared a piece with Mr. Smith before he left.

"If you ever want to go to Baltimore to meet her, we will arrange that for you," he says. "It would be the thrill of her life." The student is delighted.

Much of Mr. Smith's talent lies in focusing his attention intensely on someone, making him or her feel important, appreciated, and listened to. It's a disposition that served him well in the fund-raising world, where he spent a career developing donor-cultivation techniques still used by development officers. His style, as he describes it, is indirect. In one case, he first approached a prospective donor—a successful Baltimore businessman—for help in connecting the elderly, pie-loving alumna with a new financial manager. Later Mr. Smith asked the businessman about the logistics of setting up a new turf field, the sort of project he had supported elsewhere in the past. Eventually, a major gift for the field turned up.

"I haven't gone around asking people for money," Mr. Smith says. "I just tell them our story and ask their opinions of things—and I am serious when I ask their opinions, because I don't know the answers."

June Myles, whose family has a major lumber business in Elkins, is another donor who has been charmed by Mr. Smith. She joined the college's Board of Trustees 12 years ago—she felt obligated, having grown up here. "Elkins, and Randolph County, would be a different place without Davis & Elkins College," she says. But in years past, she gave only a little money for a scholarship fund and a running track. "I thought I was done," she says, miming wiping her hands. "I thought

I had met my trustee obligations, so to speak.”

But since Mr. Smith took over, she has given more than \$4-million to support renovations in the arts center, an auditorium, and an athletics facility; to create a new gateway to the campus; and to support an endowed chair, among other projects. Her new generosity came in part because she saw that the college was back on track and debt free—she would not be throwing her money away.

But there was something else—a joy in giving, which she attributes to the atmosphere at the college. “I’m not sure I can explain it,” she says, thinking back to the first time she met Mr. Smith. “I remember one thing he said, because my daddy always said it: It is amazing what you can accomplish if you don’t mind who gets the credit. ... He has a way of saying, ‘You’re great.’ If someone tells you that you’re really wonderful, it’s hard not to respond positively to that.”

IN A WAY, this generous, hopeful ethos pervades the college now—and has served as a major attraction for students and new faculty members. Carol Carter left a position as a tenured professor at Louisiana State University to become an associate professor of business and the chair of the business department at Davis & Elkins—much to the surprise of her colleagues in Baton Rouge. “They thought I was crazy,” she says.

When she was offered the job, her dean at LSU started putting together a counteroffer. “That night I got an e-mail from Buck”—which talked about how much the college wanted and valued her—“and the next day I went in and said, ‘I made up my mind—I’m going.’”

She misses the resources she had at a big research institution, but there are a number of things she doesn’t miss: the politics, the backbiting. In her new job, “students are actually considered,” she says. “A lot of times at a research university, students are considered a necessary evil.”

Certainly, teaching this population requires more work in some ways. Bryan Wagoner, an assistant professor of religious studies and philosophy, came from Harvard University. He says he “got tired of the minutiae” in an intensely academic environment and was looking for a small college—particularly near the region where he grew up, in western North Carolina—where he could grapple with philosophy and religion more broadly. But going from an Ivy to a relatively unknown college in West Virginia has been “a rough year of adjustment,” he admits.

“In the past, I had worked with students who were incredibly motivated,” he says, but at D&E, he has had to work harder to engage, inspire, and help students make connections. So he has tried introducing criminology students to Jeremy Bentham and his panopticon; education majors to John Dewey and pragmatism; and science majors to David Hume and his notions of induction and causation.

Nonetheless, he says, “I revel in the ability to work with and challenge some students who come from profoundly disadvantaged backgrounds, and who don’t have the sense of entitlement that other students I’ve worked with in the past have had.”

Students pick up on this. Ellis C. Wyatt graduated from high school with 15 other kids in Harman, W.Va. He was one of the Highlands Scholars—students from West Virginia hollows who can attend Davis & Elkins for about the same price as West Virginia University, one of the many

**“He had a plan.
It was about lifting
spirits and letting
people know this
place had a future.”**

strategies D&E employed in its resurrection. Mr. Wyatt, who is dyslexic, says his schoolteachers told him he would never make it in college. “I got much more support up at Davis & Elkins than I got in high school,” he says. In May, he walked across the stage at graduation as the class salutatorian, and this fall he will start graduate school at West Virginia University, with the hope of becoming a trauma counselor.

Mark Lanham spent 25 years as a Marine infantryman, but now, thanks to the Post-9/11 GI Bill, he studies sustainability, environmental studies, and biology at Davis & Elkins. He is an Elkins native—he used to play in some of the college’s historic mansions that were boarded up in the 1970s—but he could have enrolled at lots of other colleges.

“The camaraderie from the military that I was missing in my life I found here,” he says. “Everyone knows everybody. Everyone helps. When I checked out other schools, I was a number. They didn’t really care. They wanted the government money. Here they actually care.”

Offering hope, encouragement, and care—it all sounds kind of squishy. But it may be more important than people realize. I shared the story of Davis & Elkins with Brandon Busteded, executive director of Gallup Education, a division of the polling and public-research company. Mr. Busteded studies what Gallup’s data can tell us about learning, job satisfaction, and well-being, and he says that the D&E story “brought to life” some of the trends he finds in the research.

Hope and care might sound like “soft” attributes, but they are some of the most important elements that people value in education and the workplace. Gallup has asked 18- to 35-year-olds what quality defined their best instructor, Mr. Busteded says, and “care” always rises to the top.

“One of the more fascinating finds of that study is that people who said they had teachers who cared about them personally were more likely to be exposed to 21st-century skill development in school,” he says, “and that in turn was predictive of greater work success later in life.” Hope—defined by Gallup as seeing a pathway to achieving one’s goals—is actually a stronger predictor of college success than standardized-test scores and high-school grades, Mr. Busteded says.

In fact, hope and care are often the very qualities that colleges are selling in their viewbooks and marketing materials—it’s implied in all of the talk about small classes and personalized attention, in the glossy pictures of professors and students sitting closely together, poring over texts.

The problem, says Mr. Busteded, is that hope and care are not nearly as prevalent in college as they should be. In polls, 23 percent of respondents say that high-school teachers care about their problems and feelings, while 16 percent say that their college instructors care. Eighteen percent of respondents say that high-school teachers know their hopes and dreams, while only 11 percent say that’s true of college instructors.

“Hope is a malleable construct—it can be boosted or lowered, and it is contagious,” Mr. Busteded says. “When you think about the link between caring teachers and hopeful students, it’s one thing to say ‘I care,’ and it’s another thing to actually express that—to say ‘I care,’ to ask someone how they’re doing, and to actually pause to listen.”

IF D&E’s resurrection is at least partly based on Mr. Smith’s fund-raising prowess and “lifting spirits,” as Mr. Roidt put it, the question is how much the college’s health depends on Mr. Smith at the helm.

The president knew years ago that his time in office was limited. In 2009, he said he would serve only as long as he and his wife, Joni, were healthy. In the years since, his wife’s health has declined, and he has had some health scares of his own: Four years ago, he referred to the buzzing BlackBerry in his breast pocket as his “Pacemaker”—students called him at all hours to ask about enrolling at the college or getting someone to fix a dorm-room toilet. Now, after collapsing in his home in the summer of 2011, he has a real Pacemaker lodged in his chest.

Mr. Smith has tried setting up successors in the past, with mixed results. At Bethany College, another West Virginia institution where he led a turnaround from 2004 to 2007, the successor he was grooming dropped out after a family crisis, Mr. Smith says; the college conducted a search to hire Scott D. Miller, who is still there. At Chapman University, where Mr. Smith led a turnaround in the 1980s, the board initially passed over Mr. Smith’s suggested successor to hire

Emerson College's Allen E. Koenig, who developed an acrimonious relationship with Chapman professors. "He nearly wrecked the place in two years," Mr. Smith says, and Mr. Koenig resigned in 1991. Chapman hired Mr. Smith's choice, James L. Doti, who has run the college ever since. Mr. Koenig, who died last year, spent the next two decades as a presidential search consultant.

Mr. Smith is skeptical of the typical presidential-search process: For big bucks to a consultant, he says, you get a list of names, most of them left over from past searches. The candidates' main ambitions are to be president of a college. "Anywhere, they don't care where it is," Mr. Smith says. "What does that say about commitment to your institution? Nothing." In time, the trustees vote on someone most at the college have seen for only a few hours.

"Does that make any sense?" Mr. Smith says. "Imagine finding a life partner this way. This is a marriage."

Rita Bornstein, a former president of Rollins College who has written extensively about college leadership, calls the search process "a pig in a poke."

"It takes a lot of time and costs a lot of money, and it often doesn't produce anything that is a lot of good," she says.

Sometimes colleges have to go outside to pick a new leader, especially if they are trying to shake things up. But in most cases, Ms. Bornstein advocates grooming and promoting a president from within, someone who knows the culture and won't miss a beat. "You know what you're getting, the good and bad, and there are no surprises," she says. "The problem with the internal candidates is that they are probably too well known, and they are not charismatic anymore to their colleagues." That is why less than 30 percent of presidents are appointed from within, she says.

In looking for someone to take over, Mr. Smith had a breakthrough in 2011, as the college was looking for a provost. Faculty members attended a teaching workshop through the Appalachian College Association led by Mr. Mihalyo, who was chairman of fine arts at Brevard College, in North Carolina, and who had worked with Mr. Smith at Bethany, where Mr. Mihalyo was provost. The professors liked Mr. Mihalyo and persuaded him to apply for D&E's provost job. He was hired.

Last year, the college came up with an unusual working arrangement for the two men. Mr. Smith remained president and the college's primary fund raiser, but he spent more of his time at his home 2,600 miles away in Ashland, Ore., while Mr. Mihalyo got a title of chancellor and took on the daily running of the college. When Mr. Smith decided to retire, he asked the board members whether they wanted to keep cruising down the road they were on, or take a detour by hiring some unknown quantity. The choice was clear.

Mr. Mihalyo is very different from Mr. Smith. He is quieter and more careful. He doesn't seem to have the jokey, folksy ease that Mr. Smith has in front of crowds of alumni or students. But faculty and board members here express confidence that he will nurture the environment cultivated by Mr. Smith.

While he doesn't face the sorts of problems that gave Mr. Smith sleepless nights for five years, he faces stark challenges in sustaining the college nonetheless. Davis & Elkins is remote—a two- to four-hour drive separates it from population centers like Washington, Pittsburgh, and Columbus, Ohio. Students say that Elkins's small size is the college's main downside. The college has great "bones" in beautiful old buildings that climb up the hillside campus, but it's clear that repairs are due on a stairway or stonework here, a roof or plaza there. It carries a \$33,570 sticker price in a state where the median household income is \$39,550. While attrition dropped from 16 percent to 6 percent from the fall to spring semesters this past year, it remains stubbornly around 14 percent from spring to fall over the past few years—exit interviews indicate that's mainly because of the financial burdens. And any small college now has to grapple with a pervasive attitude, trumpeted in magazines and op-eds, that an education at a little college is quaint but not worth the money. In West Virginia, those pressures may be even more profound.

But Mr. Mihalyo has ideas. Given the college's location and its experts and special collections in Appalachian artifacts and history, he plans to strengthen Davis & Elkins's association with mountain culture and arts. The new emphasis has attracted a student who is a star fiddler from

Washington State, and another who is a banjo sensation from Canada.

The college, he says, is also streamlining its curriculum and trying to strengthen its academics. The business program will focus more on entrepreneurship, while education will carve a niche in early-childhood programs.

Mr. Mihalyo added little rituals to the graduation ceremonies, like having each student's favorite instructor bestow a baccalaureate hood on that student. That ritual dramatically increased the popularity of the baccalaureate ceremony—all but two of the 119 graduates showed up this year, versus about two dozen in 2007—and it reinforced the academic spirit of the college.

And Mr. Mihalyo talks about preserving some of the elements that have buoyed the college at its toughest times: hope, optimism, a generosity of spirit.

Asked if he is nervous about taking the helm of a small college at such a precarious time in higher education, he shrugs. "Most of the places that I have worked have had challenges, some more significant than others. If you can help people, the challenge is well worth it." And then he laughs. "You certainly don't want to mess it up."

August 12, 2013

<http://chronicle.com/article/A-Small-College-Strides/141037/>

Armed With Data, a Women's College Tries a Transformation

By LAWRENCE BIEMILLER

CHAMBERSBURG, PA.

Can Wilson College be saved? The answer you get depends on whom you ask. Its trustees say yes, even though Wilson's numbers look fairly bleak right now, like those of many small liberal-arts colleges. Wilson started the fall semester with only 695 students, expects to run a \$3-million deficit on a \$20-million budget this year, and has \$10-million worth of deferred maintenance.

But on January 13, its trustees approved a series of ambitious recommendations from its president, Barbara K. Mistick, and a commission of faculty and staff members, trustees, alumnae, and students who spent thousands of hours last summer and fall researching ways to secure the college's financial future. Among other changes, the board approved cutting tuition by \$5,000, starting a high-profile loan-buyback program, creating new offerings in the health sciences and other career-oriented disciplines, and consolidating some existing programs. The goal: 1,500 students and a deficit-free budget by 2020.

Some alumnae and students, however, insist that the Wilson they love will die unless the trustees rescind a vote approving the most controversial of the commission's recommendations: that the 144-year-old college admit men as full-time undergraduates. Although Wilson has welcomed men to its adult-degree and graduate programs for years, the decision to make the undergraduate college coed has provoked howls of protest and vigils outside of board meetings. "Better Dead Than Coed" signs have even been spotted on the campus.

In part, Wilson's need to reposition itself is a consequence of its own unusual circumstances. It's an outlier even among the 45 or so remaining women's colleges: The others, if they don't have close ties to nearby coed colleges, are either in or near big cities or attract students seeking a conservative, religious culture.

But the changes are also attempts to respond to trends buffeting liberal-arts colleges everywhere. A weak job market has led students and their families to seek career guarantees, and advocates of the liberal arts have had trouble making the case that their institutions prepare graduates for a lifetime's worth of different jobs and assignments. And while colleges' costs continue to rise, families' incomes are largely stagnant, and students are less willing to make up the difference with loans that will leave them cash-strapped for years.

In an unusually public process, Wilson's administrators and trustees have tried hard to make a solid, data-driven case for changes they say are absolutely essential to the college's fiscal future.

THE TAKEAWAY

To make the case for big changes, college leaders can use data to help persuade skeptical alumni.

What they have discovered, however, is that almost no policy discussion nowadays can avoid the kind of name-calling and mistrust that have become staples of Congressional debate, the 24-hour cable-news cycle, and online flame wars.

'Wild Wilson Women'

"When people feel they aren't being treated right, they get loud," a young alumna named Theresa Retz wrote on the college's Facebook page, posting as Taela Dragonfox, an alter ego she uses as an artist. "All of my fellow alums that I have spoken to are outraged at this decision."

The long Facebook thread to which she contributed was itself an indication of how divisive the situation has become—it had more than 80 comments on Wilson's decision to delete a series of earlier Facebook posts because some backers of coeducation found them threatening. Meanwhile, a 1,400-member Facebook group calling itself Wild Wilson Women blocked nonmembers from its page soon after participants began strategizing about how to force the trustees to reverse course and whether to stage a protest during graduation.

That said, the college has no plans to poll either its students or its 8,000 or so alumnae on the coeducation question, and it's unclear how many of either actually oppose it. Mary Ann Naso, vice president for enrollment, cites a telling statistic: Only about one applicant a year is the daughter of an alumna.

Nor do the trustees intend to revisit any of the planned changes. "A number of alums are saying, 'Do what you need to do,'" says Leslie Durgin, a trustee who served as chairwoman of the Commission on Shaping the Future of Wilson College. But Ms. Durgin, a former mayor of Boulder, Colo., who is now a senior vice president at Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains, says she didn't anticipate "the extent of the feedback" on admitting men.

"I think we gave everyone an opportunity to be engaged," President Mistick says, "though I know some may not like the outcome. This is really about all of us, and there's going to be some noise about that."

Wilson's modest campus, with its mix of Victorian and Collegiate Gothic buildings, has seen turmoil and change before. In 1979 the trustees voted to close the college, which they thought had no viable future, and students and alumnae sued to keep it open. Wilson subsequently added the coed adult-degree program and also an innovative program that lets single mothers attend and live on campus with their children. But enrollment remained flat, and the college mostly lacked the money to renovate or repair buildings.

Wilson's one big capital improvement, the 2009 science center, represents a bet that the college lost: Before the economy collapsed in 2008, the trustees were persuaded to invest money donated for the \$25-million building and to take out a loan to pay for it, rather than paying the contractors directly. In the lively prerecession financial market, that sounded like a smart idea, but by the time the building opened, the investments had been largely wiped out and only the loan remained, casting a growing shadow over each successive year's budget. The college is now paying only interest on the debt, but in 2019 it must start making payments of about \$1-million a year on the principal.

An Open Process

The debate over coeducation had been building for several months, online as well as in a series of open meetings scheduled by the commission to keep the college community apprised of its progress and to solicit suggestions. As laid out by Ms. Mistick, the commission process was meant not only to take advantage of many of Wilson's best minds but also to bring alumnae and students along for what were clearly going to be tough decisions—especially since the college kept its deteriorating financial situation largely hidden from alumnae until Ms. Mistick became president in July 2011.

She said from the start that everything was on the table, including coeducation—which, once it was an option, may well have been inevitable. Wilson hasn't met its 400-student target for its undergraduate program since 1973, and this year the program began with just 316 students.

Still, everyone involved was mindful of protests that erupted in 2011 when Peace College's trustees, with no warning, announced that the North Carolina liberal-arts college would go coed and change its name to William Peace University.

In meetings that were streamed online for Wilson alumnae who couldn't make it to Chambersburg, commission members outlined the challenges Wilson faces as a small-town, tuition-driven college with far too many empty dorm rooms, a library shuttered because of steam leaks, and a field house unimproved since 1966. They talked frankly about data compiled by a consulting firm, Stevens Strategy, that showed where the college's programs do and don't match potential students' interests and how much students would be willing to pay for various offerings.

As the number of hours that commission members spent in meetings ran into the hundreds, PowerPoint slide after PowerPoint slide emerged suggesting that if the college did not go coed, no combination of other changes could keep it solvent.

Without admitting men, the annual deficit in 2020 would be \$2.5-million even if the college added appealing programs, improved facilities, and beefed up marketing, said Michael G. Cornelius, the associate professor of English who led the commission's marketing subcommittee, at an open meeting in November. Too few young women—only 2 to 3 percent—will consider attending a single-sex college, the survey data showed, whereas going coed would actually attract more women to the college than men. Based on the experience of other women's colleges that have admitted men, such as Wells and Hood Colleges, Mr. Cornelius predicted that in 10 years, Wilson would have a healthy enrollment that would be only 30 percent male.

All fall, alumnae and students peppered commission members with ideas, questions, and opinions, but mostly they argued against admitting men. At the November meeting, Maggie Sipps, a senior, read aloud a particularly memorable statement while she choked back tears. "We are comfortable in our classes because we are the majority," she said, while going coed would send a message "that we cannot stand on our own, that we are inferior and incompetent." There are "some things that analyzing data cannot measure," she concluded, to applause.

A solid majority of trustees approved the recommendations last month, however, after a six-week delay so that the president and the commission could supply some additional information. "There are certainly good things to say about single sex-institutions, but we had to look at it from the perspective of what's the best for the financial viability of this institution," says the board chairman, John W. Gibb. A former Sallie Mae executive who is now a managing director at Jones Lang LaSalle, a commercial-real-estate company, Mr. Gibb describes the bottom line for the college simply: "The market changes, and you have to change with it."

Ms. Durgin, the commission's chairwoman, says Wilson's student population has indeed changed significantly since she was an undergraduate herself. "In 65, when I entered, it was with a lot of students who had wanted to go to Smith or Mount Holyoke," she says. Now, the majority of Wilson students are the first members of their families to attend college, and they and their families are struggling to pay the bills. Tuition and fees for a full-time undergraduate living on campus come in just under \$40,000 this year, but the majority of students receive some kind of scholarship, and on average, students pay about \$10,000 less.

Advocates of the liberal arts have had trouble making the case that their institutions prepare graduates for a lifetime's worth of different jobs and assignments.

“The other major piece now is that parents and students are saying college should lead to a job,” Ms. Durgin says. “We’re already a hybrid college, with both a vocational aspect and the liberal arts.” She adds that the dean, Mary Hendrickson, “was terrific in saying that we embed the liberal arts in everything we do.”

The debate over coeducation has threatened to drown out discussion about the other commission recommendations that won approval from the trustees, even though some of those, too, represent significant changes in Wilson’s traditions.

The most unusual is the loan-buyback program, the details of which remain to be set. But the general idea is that if a student completes the undergraduate curriculum in an allotted amount of time, Wilson will buy back up to \$10,000 of that student’s federal Stafford loans. Not only is the idea unusual enough to help the admissions office market Wilson, but it should also help improve the college’s loan-default rates and its retention statistics, which Mr. Cornelius described in November as “minimally 15 to 20 percent lower than they need to be.”

The other cost-related change is the \$5,000 decrease in the sticker price of tuition, which is \$28,745 this year. The plan is to reduce discounting more, so that net revenue will increase. William K. Shoemaker, an assistant professor of education who led the commission’s subcommittee on pricing, says his group thought the current sticker price made the college look like a poor value relative to competing institutions, like nearby Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania.

The trustees also committed to raising spending on facilities, including a renovation of the shuttered 1925 library and improvements in athletic facilities. A late-breaking priority item on the to-do list is a student center, since the temporary library now occupies a favorite student hangout, Sarah’s Coffeehouse. Ms. Mistick says students’ comments to the commission highlighted the importance of a student center, which “was not on my radar screen.”

The other big recommendation was that the college create a suite of Web- and classroom-based health-science offerings, since students planning to go to college rank the health sciences at the top of their career choices. Wilson already has strong science and veterinary-medical-technology majors, and the commission suggested complementing them with an online nursing program and on-campus programs in nutrition, speech pathology, and physical therapy.

Also on the list of possible offerings are a low-residency Master of Fine Arts in choreography, an online associate degree in business, a bachelor’s degree in graphic design, and an addition to the education certificates that are already offered. The commission also suggested, and the trustees approved, making it easier for students to transfer to Wilson, spending more on marketing, and hiring an administrator to develop and support nontraditional programs, whether online or on-campus.

“The most daunting challenge will be implementing programs, from the point of view of resources and time,” says Mr. Shoemaker. But he says the programs “give us a good shot at thriving,” much to the relief of faculty and staff members.

The Size Challenge

Indeed, the recommendations have united almost all of the faculty behind Ms. Mistick, who got a standing ovation at a faculty meeting in December—an event that several professors said was unusual in light of the faculty’s history of tense relations with Ms. Mistick’s predecessor. “There was more transparency and clarity about the state of the college during the commission process than during the entire decade preceding,” says Larry Shillock, an associate professor of English.

For faculty members, he says, a big concern now “is that the college not grow in ways that compromise engagement with faculty.” Wilson’s current size has drawbacks, of course—particularly because many students leave on weekends—but faculty members can offer students individual attention. “We need to move efficiently from being a too-small college to being a small college,” says Mr. Shillock.

He’s not the only professor worried about managing growth. Julie Rauli, an associate professor of sociology who directs the women’s-studies program, says that with so few students, “You

end up going to art openings and dance performances—we see students more fully.”

“That makes a difference—showing an interest in your students, not just in what they’re doing in the classroom,” she says. On the other hand, she looks forward to a larger enrollment that will enliven on-campus life.

As for admitting men, “We’re going to lose something,” Ms. Rauli says. “I can’t put my finger on it—I think this change is going to be very difficult.” But she adds, “Men can be feminists too.”

That’s the hope here, certainly—that Wilson can deftly incorporate male students into the classroom and campus cultures that generations of female students have helped create. Mr. Cornelius, the English professor who wrote the commission’s report, says he’s read widely about women-centered education in an attempt to define how it differs from education centered on men. The latter he describes as “competitive, self-centered, and self-focused—it’s designed only to improve the self, it’s focused on success, and it’s conformative.”

“Women-centered education is something that really rejects those values,” he says. “It has three pillars. The first is security—everyone can feel safe to explore their identity as individuals, every individual is respected for who they are. The second is service—your education is not just about you and improving your station in life, but about making sure you extend that privilege to others. The third is success, but not really in the sense of accruing material possessions—it’s moral success, ethical success. That old happiness factor.”

Mr. Cornelius and other faculty members, male and female alike, say they’re fairly sure Wilson can maintain its commitment to those values. “If being women-centered just means we don’t let men live in the residence halls, we’re really not doing anything,” he says, “as opposed to ensuring that our culture respects every individual.”

“The paradox is that women-centered classrooms are also good for men,” says Mr. Shillock. “Men like it here—that’s what they tell us.”

As for the complaints from opponents of coeducation, Mr. Cornelius says commission members “wanted to be driven by data and do an enormous amount of study”—and by enormous, he means he contributed at least 650 hours to the effort, including meetings, research, and writing.

From that, he says, “You have to let the narrative unfold as it has to. You’re never going to make everyone happy, and that’s OK.”

Ms. Mistick, whom some alumnae critics have taken to calling “President Mistake,” has her own take on the issue: She says that being a college president is not for the thin-skinned.

“The issues for the college are very real. There are deadlines we have to meet out in the future.” Deferring the coeducation decision for a couple of years to see whether the other changes would suffice on their own, as some alumnae have asked her to do, “doesn’t meet that requirement.”

And she knows that the college has, at this point, taken only the first steps toward sustainability—a lot of difficult work lies ahead, and chances are good that not everything will go smoothly.

Still, she says, “I feel very firmly that this was the right process for us. It was messy, though. When you have change you have to deal with the mess at one point or another.”

February 4, 2013

<http://chronicle.com/article/A-Womens-College-Tries-a/136969/>

Staying Small and Getting Large

Liberal-arts colleges need
to embrace partnerships
with other entities in a big way

By ROBERT WEISBUCH

COLLEGES TALK a lot about the ideal of a diverse community, but they tend to be narrow-minded about creating that community with other institutions. Like meets only with like, and even then the competitive juices flow.

I've been writing about the challenges facing liberal-arts colleges and urging them to be audacious, not risk-averse, from my new semi-removal of semi-retirement. In my first two columns, I've argued against downsizing at liberal-arts colleges, and offered a curricular proposal aimed at attracting new students. Liberal-arts colleges, I've contended, provide a set of academic practices and social outcomes so positive and so vital that we should be obsessed not with cutting but with sensibly growing their size and influence.

But there's another kind of smallness that we need to take arms against: the entrenched practice of colleges standing small, separate, and solitary. Eugene Tobin has a contrastingly large perspective as a senior program officer at the Andrew Mellon Foundation. In his key essay, "The Future of Liberal Arts Colleges Begins with Collaboration" (published in the 2013 edited volume, *Remaking College: Innovation and the Liberal-Arts College*), he quotes another big-perspective educator, Stanford University's Ray Bacchetti, on the effects of colleges' pride in their (supposedly) distinctive cultures: They imagine, Tobin writes, "all institutional problems are local and all the resources needed to solve them are, by definition, close at hand." He further summarizes, "Little energy or thought is given to the experience of others ...; rarely do colleges and universities build on the work of their peers, and seldom do they engage in comparative study, except when they are benchmarking their progress against one another."

We educators have gotten set in some bad ways. What we require is an era of unprecedented collaboration, not only among small colleges themselves but also between those colleges and research universities, K-12 schools, community organizations, hospitals, businesses—in short, every possible connection. We need to both stay small and become large.

Of course there is an important value to the model of college campus as self-contained village, a place that encourages reflection and discovery. It is the analog to the notion of the thinker whose solitude and separateness is essential to insight. The ringing of the bells from the clock

THE TAKEAWAY

A new 'era of unprecedented collaborations' with research universities, high schools, and businesses is required for the future.

tower of a campus is a blessed sound of thought-filled silence. It's damned near holy. It really is. I miss it.

But does *every* such campus require its own gymnasium and research-science building and instruction in every abstruse but necessary discipline and language? Aside from the enormous and perhaps unsustainable costs as our campuses become gated communities, is it spiritually and educationally healthy for our students and their faculty members to insulate themselves quite so fully?

Probably the most heartening development in our understanding of the liberal arts at present is the recognition that they are not entirely limited to reflection or self-understanding but have real power to move back and forth between the pastoral campus and the city of urgencies—that our learning can contribute to the world and not just critique it.

That is a most fragile and incomplete awakening to a more experiential education. We still find defense after defense of the humanities based on an idea of opposition between deep learning and worldliness, as if one can either contemplate the self or interact with one's surroundings but not both. Similarly we are coming to realize that it is vastly insufficient for us to make the claim, true as it is, that a liberal education prepares its graduate for everything. It should not be beneath us, it is in fact our responsibility, to provide some guidance on how an intellectual interest can issue in a career, for, as Dewey instructs, “to find out what one is fitted to do, and to secure an opportunity to do it, is the key to happiness.”

We have allowed the half-truth of an opposition between learning and the world of practical affairs to be mirrored in our ideal of the stand-alone campus. Now we must complement that with the other half of the truth—the ways in which experience and learning depend upon each other—to reconceive our campuses as participants in a larger community.

There's another kind of smallness that we need to take arms against: the entrenched practice of colleges standing small, separate, and solitary.

HEREWITH, four possible kinds of new networks that will allow small colleges to stay small and become large simultaneously.

1. Among liberal-arts colleges. Small institutions need to move from small-minded competition to collaboration. An obvious model: The Five College Consortium of Amherst, Hampshire, UMass, Mount Holyoke, and Smith allows for cross-registration of students, shared curricula, greatly enhanced library resources, shared faculty appointments, and joint purchasing of materials and health insurance. As Carol Christ, president of Smith, notes in her essay about partnerships, “The College Without Walls,” the sharing makes each institution small and large at once, greatly expanding elective possibilities without in any way threatening the very different identities of the campuses.

But what if colleges tied to each other by various regional associations or athletic conferences are not in such geographic proximity?

Sure, that makes collaboration more challenging, but the growing practice of cooperation among libraries provides a model for other areas, even for curriculum. Imagine a blended Internet set of offerings where the instructor would meet students on a regular schedule in a virtual classroom and then travel among the colleges to make three in-person appearances at each in a semester.

Should we oppose such efforts because it will make those scarce full-time faculty positions still more endangered? But they will become fewer still if we allow the present models of ignorant autonomy to persist. We have been watching it happen for decades now. Expanding the student populations and reach of these colleges is our best hope for reversing that terrible trend. The real question is this: Once small colleges work to help each other, where else might they look for partners?

2. With research universities. This potential form of collaboration goes wanting today, for the most part. Tobin notes “even less formal interaction between liberal arts colleges and research universities, and this deeply engrained mutual disregard, bordering on denial, speaks volumes about the organizational limitations of our highly compartmentalized higher-education system.”

While the number of five-year M.A. programs on the books is impressive, the weakness of such programs is depressing. They would be a prime place to start strengthening college-university partnerships.

It is simple to imagine the benefits to small colleges of more access to the research labs and expanded curricula of a university. Some may find it harder to imagine the benefits for the research university side of partnering with a small college. But note that one of the members of the Five Colleges Consortium is the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

There is also the example of Kalamazoo and Oberlin Colleges’ sending faculty to the University of Michigan in exchange for those colleges’ training graduate students and employing its Ph.D.’s for a year or two as undergraduate instructors. The weakest two aspects of most doctoral programs are their pedagogical training and their failure to offer Ph.D.’s a true diversity of career possibilities. Small colleges can offer exactly that valuable teaching experience and provide an example of faculty life at a teaching-oriented campus.

Further, the glut of Ph.D.’s in some disciplines makes a postdoc experience at a small college tremendously valuable. Offered a place in two comparable doctoral programs, what top candidate wouldn’t choose the one that featured a valuable internship at a small college in partnership with the university?

3. Between academe and the outside world. Speaking of internships, a third kind of collaboration we need more of is with government, nonprofits, business, and public schools. Carol Christ emphasizes the possibility of connecting internships and classroom work more closely, “linking the academic, the practical, and the professional.” Here, much more conversation is vital between faculty members and the people in both the development office and alumni relations. Alumni enjoy nothing so much as mentoring current students and proffering a helping hand. Take it!

The connections don’t have to just be curricular. There are also ties to the community and the region that can be developed, whereby a college helps in confronting a local or regional problem facing a nonacademic entity. Rick Cherwitz’s brilliant intellectual entrepreneurship program at the University of Texas can be adapted to small institutions as well. In addition, organizations like Imagining America provide examples of how disciplines in the humanities and arts can be just as efficacious in their own forms of tech transfer as the social and bench sciences. And speaking of the sciences, if we need to build that most expensive of all facilities, might a hospital or a health research company wish to join with our campus and help to finance construction costs?

4. With community colleges and high schools. To return closer to home, small colleges can easily create stronger links with two-year colleges, the fastest growing kind of institution, and high schools. Who knows better than a great high-school teacher how to teach first-year composition to students who were his or hers four months earlier? And why not renew the intellectual excitement of a high-school teacher with a work/study semester or summer spent at a liberal-arts college? As for facilities, sharing lab and gym resources would seem a no-brainer.

A small college can ensure a pipeline of students by partnering with a community college. Furthermore, community-college facilities can be amazing. When I was at Drew University, we talked a lot about doing more with media studies, but the expense of creating facilities was daunt-

ing. Yet at nearby Morris County Community College, those facilities already existed and were impressive. Collaborating with two-year colleges is an enactment of the new liberal-arts dictum that merges the reflective and the actual.

These four types of partnerships constitute a huge challenge but are eminently doable. They will require a set of people at a college who devote themselves to imagining and then seeking out those connections; they won't get done in anyone's spare time. I invite readers to nominate other forms of partnership or provide different examples of each of these in the comments below.

More often than not, because true and lasting collaboration depends on mutual advantage, negotiations will prove fruitless. But that one time in 10 that a new connection is made could eventually become five in 50, or 10 in 100, and by then everything could become vastly different and better—for institutions and students alike.

Robert Weisbuch is professor emeritus of English literature at the University of Michigan and a project adviser to the American Historical Association. He is former president of Drew University and a former president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.

October 29, 2014

<http://chronicle.com/article/Staying-SmallGetting/149667/>

Resources

The leaders at small liberal-arts colleges must deal with a variety of new pressures as their institutions try to recover from the Great Recession. Here are a few resources on how to rethink that work and how other top administrators view the challenges of the future.

Remaking College: Innovation and the Liberal Arts College,

edited by Rebecca Chopp, et al., 2013,
Johns Hopkins University Press

<http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9781421411354>

Liberal Arts at the Brink,

by Victor E. Ferrall Jr., 2011,
Harvard University Press

<http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674049727>

“A Study of Presidents of Independent Colleges and Universities,”

2012, Council of Independent Colleges

<http://www.cic.edu/Research-and-Data/Research-Studies/Pages/Study-of-Presidents.aspx>

“Doing a Lot With a Little: Making Digital Humanities Work at a Small College,”

by Deborah Vanderbilt, 2014, The CEA Critic

http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/cea_critic/v076/76.3.vanderbilt.html

Old Main: Small Colleges in Twenty-First Century America,

by Samuel Schuman, 2005,
Johns Hopkins University Press

<http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9780801896828>