

# Colby



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## Student Life

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## 'Back On the Rhodes Map'

Will Polkinghorn '99 becomes Colby's sixth Rhodes scholar

By Kevin Cool

The first thing you might want to know about Will Polkinghorn is that he wasn't always a great student. Until he was diagnosed with and treated for Attention Deficit Disorder at age 16, he was, in his words, "no student at all."

Six years later he is a Rhodes scholar.



Will Polkinghorn '99

Polkinghorn is the sixth Colby student to earn the most prestigious of scholarships, following Harold Soule '04, Abbott E. Smith '26, John G. Rideout '36, William C. Carter '38 and Jennifer Barber '78. He will spend two years at Oxford University.

His Rhodes selection is the crowning achievement of a nearly incredible academic turnaround for Polkinghorn, a native of Santa Monica, Calif. He was getting C's and D's as a sophomore in high school, he says, when doctors diagnosed him with ADD, a neurological condition marked by an inability to concentrate and usually treated with Ritalin or other psychostimulants. Soon after going on the medication, Polkinghorn recalled, "a light switch came on." Gradually, as he developed study skills and began to harness his

long-dormant abilities, Polkinghorn's grades improved. After a year of postgraduate study at The Taft School to strengthen his academic skills, he came to Colby prepared to "hopefully do well enough to get into medical school," Polkinghorn said.

He has had no grade lower than an A since.

James McIntyre, associate professor of German and Russian, quipped that Polkinghorn—whose grade point average is 4.19—"is the only student I know whose G.P.A. goes down when he gets an A."

Polkinghorn says he had given "no thought whatsoever" to pursuing a Rhodes Scholarship until McIntyre proposed it. "Not in my wildest dreams did I imagine that I could be a Rhodes scholar," he said. "Until very recently being a good student was a novelty to me."

McIntyre, who for 18 years has led candidates through the maze of requirements, essays and interviews associated with nationally competitive scholarships, was thrilled with Polkinghorn's selection. "I am phenomenally pleased that we're back on the Rhodes map," he said.

"Will has demonstrated that

character and perseverance, combined with one's natural gifts, can produce a powerful result," said President Bill Cotter. "We are extremely proud of him."

Perhaps nobody on campus was prouder of Polkinghorn than Associate Professor of Religious Studies Nikki-Guninder Singh. Singh was one of the first of many Colby faculty who nurtured his blossoming talent. "I recognized right away that Will was a special person," Singh said. "I found him to be extremely bright and open to new ideas, and he had a wonderful refreshing quality about him. He is so very personable in addition to being a brilliant student."

"The papers that he wrote for me on different aspects of Eastern thought and literature always reflected boundless energy and sophisticated analysis," Singh said. "I was amazed how Will could intimately connect with temporally and spatially distant texts, and bring them to life for himself and for his classmates. He had a wonderful way of raising provocative issues in class, gently opening his peers towards new insights." Singh was so impressed with Polkinghorn that she literally pulled him from

her office to the Registrar's Office during his first semester at Colby to declare religious studies as his major.

Chemistry professor Brad Mundy was similarly influential, kindling an interest that did not exist before Polkinghorn arrived at Colby. Eventually, having taken several courses in chemistry and religious studies, Polkinghorn decided to major in both. The rather curious academic combination probably set him apart from some other candidates, McIntyre said, and inspired a proposal that clearly impressed Rhodes judges.

Polkinghorn says that from his first day at Colby, faculty have been sources of inspiration. "Barbara Nelson [associate professor of Spanish] was my very first teacher at Colby and she was tough—she made me work very, very hard," he said. "In a way, she set the tone for everything that came later."

"I really give the credit for this to the people of Colby," he said. "When I came here I was at a point in my life when I needed the intimacy that Colby provides and the confidence that the people here have given me."

And he might not even have come to Colby had it not been for a meeting with Parker Beverage, dean of admissions and financial aid. It was Beverage, Polkinghorn says, who "won me over" at a college fair in California.

Polkinghorn, who aspires to be an M.D./Ph.D., will study the "PPP" course at Oxford, an interdisciplinary program in physiology, psychology and philosophy that deals with the complexities of the human mind. ♦

### Twice As Good

Though clearly thrilled with Polkinghorn's selection as a Rhodes scholar, Colby faculty were almost equally excited about the College's other Rhodes finalist, Jennie Oberzan '99 of Saco, Maine. Oberzan, along with Polkinghorn, was chosen from 11 Maine candidates to represent the state in the regional Rhodes competition. Only two students from each of the six states in the region are chosen to advance to the final rounds, said Grossman Professor of Economics Jan Hogendorn, a member of the Rhodes selection committee. "Jennie was outstanding in her own right," Hogendorn said.

## Beam Us In Scotty

It's technology that Captain Kirk might take for granted. On a cold December night on Mayflower Hill, a student approaches the locked exterior door to her residence hall, her arms full of books and notebooks. She turns to pass her backpack past a metal box by the door, the lock clicks open, and the student enters the warm lobby without even taking off her mittens.

That's just one of the nifty applications of the new ColbyCard that replaced old credit-card style IDs for students, faculty and staff this year. The new cards feature an arsenal of information technology and capabilities that previous generations of students might have expected to see on *Star Trek*.

The card employs a new "proximity technology": the sensor by the door sends out radio waves that activate a transmitter in the card's metal core. When activated, the card returns a discrete code that trips the lock mechanism. Since the signals work through fabric or leather, students don't have to take their IDs out of their wallets or backpacks.

In addition, the cards have a one-kilobyte (1K) microprocessor laminated onto the front, two magnetic strips on the back and a bar code on each side.

Initially the cards were used as building keys, meal cards, library cards and telephone charge-cards and to replace the magnetic VendaCards® that operate photocopy machines on campus. Then when this year's Wellness Program got under way, ColbyCard project manager and Assistant Director of Security Joe Poole set up a portable sensor to record who attended. Instead of keeping a paper list and entering wellness credits into the computer by hand, the Registrar's Of-

vice got an electronic record the next morning. (After the first wellness lecture students were required to scan in and scan out, since the requirement is to attend wellness lectures, not just to show up, wave your card and leave.)

With the multiple storage media on the cards, the College is considering further roles for the ColbyCards, including a debit-card system that will run washers and dryers on campus, ending the need to find a couple of dollars worth of quarters. "We were thinking ATM; the students were thinking laundry machines," said Ruben Rivera, Colby's controller and the initial project manager for the new one-card system. "We said ATM and they said, 'Nope—

already got one that comes right off mom and dad's account."

Colby spent \$650,000 to get the system installed in all residence halls. To expand the system to academic and administration buildings will put the project over \$1 million. Rivera says Colby got a relative bargain by timing their conversion, since better and less expensive technology became available in recent years. Colby is the first college to combine the proximity technology with the data-storage capabilities, he said.

Besides convenience, the new cards afford better security, since residence halls are now locked 24 hours a day. The system will monitor fire alarms, sprinkler systems and building security alarms, so response time to any type of emergency should improve, Rivera says. ♦



Beanie babies, 1957.

## You're Kidding, Right?

A weekly opinion poll conducted by the Student Government Association offered an unusual question on its "ballot" during the first week of school. Should first-year students be required to wear beanies?

The tradition requiring freshmen to wear silly little hats—ostensibly so upperclassmen could "recognize" them—was abandoned in the early 1960s, and there is no organized effort to resurrect it.

More than a third of students who voted (36 percent) said, "yes," freshmen should wear beanies. Fifty-eight percent voted "no."