January 2001

The Colby Difference

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Recommended Citation
Boyle, Gerry; MacLeay, Alicia Nemiccolo; Collins, Stephen; and Gillespie, Robert (2001) "The Colby Difference," Colby Magazine: Vol. 90: Iss. 1, Article 7.
Available at: http://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol90/iss1/7

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In a ceremony that incorporated academic traditions dating to medieval times and the College's first live video webcast, Colby inaugurated William D. Adams as its 19th president on October 21. Only the third inauguration at Colby since World War II, the event blended a sense of historical gravity, an air of celebration and a focus on the future.

The formal installation ceremony featured Adams's inaugural address (see page 10) and warm welcomes from Senator Olympia Snowe and Congressman Tom Allen among others, and it featured Colby faculty plus representatives of four dozen other colleges and universities in full academic regalia. Marching to strains of a brass quintet, the inaugural procession included a long splash of color—the flags of 64 nations, each carried by a Colby student hailing from the corresponding country.

Based on “The Colby Difference,” the inaugural celebration began with an evening of student-centered performances and demonstrations on Friday and ended with a semi-formal inaugural ball on Saturday night attended by trustees, faculty, administrators, alumni, guests and a majority of the student body—an event where Adams and his wife, Cathy Bruce, set an up-tempo pace on the dance floor.

Past presidents Robert E. L. Strider II and William R. Cotter were both on the platform at the installation ceremony, representing leadership of the College dating back to 1960. William M. Chace, president of Emory University, who worked with Adams at Stanford and Wesleyan, introduced Adams.

Activities on Friday night were planned around three themes—service (in Cotter Union), science and technology (in Dana Dining Room) and arts and humanities (in Mary Low Commons). Entertainment ranged from a handbell choir performance to the use of 3-D goggles for visualizing molecules to a walk-through scrapbook of students' community service projects.

"We wanted a way to demonstrate to visitors and to ourselves those things that make Colby distinctive and to center on the academic experience," said Dean of the College Earl Smith, chair of the inaugural planning committee. "It turned into a wonderful night that joined students and faculty together to boast about The Colby Difference... It was the most interesting nontraditional aspect of what is usually a rather traditional event."

Kids took swings at pig-shaped piñatas in Foss, and the student musical group Waking the Neighbors did a set between faculty acts. In Cotter Union there was a teddy bear drive for a new children's medical center. People lined up (Adams among them) to get their photos taken with cardboard cutouts of Bro Adams and first-pig Pedro.

The three venues emptied at 10 p.m., and hundreds of people formed a phalanx behind a bagpipe band for a procession to the library steps to watch fireworks. "Everybody came together and set off in the same direction; it was a moving and very exciting moment in the College's history," Smith said. Skyrockets between the library tower and the arboretum echoed through the Kennebec valley, announcing to the College, the town and the countryside that the Adams era had begun.

Photos by Martha Mickles '71
THE ARTS: MARY LOW COMMONS

Every Tuesday Night, They're Just Folk

The 40 or so people assembled in the Coffeehouse in Mary Low already had been treated to fiddler John Kuehne (information technology services) and his bluegrass band, and singer/guitarist Elizabeth Leonard (history) was waiting in the wings. Filling the middle of the inauguration weekend bill were math professors William Berlinghoff and Thomas Berger. “I’m Bill and this is Tom,” Berlinghoff said, giving his guitar strings a last tweak. “We’re from the math department, but we have other lives, too.”

Three years ago the pair attended a math department get-together at the home of another member of the department. Berlinghoff brought his guitar, folk music was played, and a chapter in Colby Coffeehouse history had begun. Every Tuesday night since, they have hosted a hootenanny in Mary Low Hall. (Berlinghoff, who teaches every other semester as a visiting professor, comes even during terms when he is not teaching.) They typically attract 20 or more students, and a sprinkling of area folk musicians, for two and a half hours of participatory music. “One student was interested in playing the harmonica,” Berger said, “so I gave him a harmonica. I have a variety of [Hohner] Marine Bands. They just play and play and play.”

And so do Berlinghoff and Berger, nearly 40 years after each first picked up an instrument. Now their repertoire includes songs by Bob Dylan, Woodie Guthrie, Gordon Bok, James Taylor and a lot of artists in between.

This acoustic music from before the beginning of recorded—at least in terms of CD burning—time might seem the last thing that would appeal to the generation of rap, hip hop and techno. But Berlinghoff and Berger find that today’s Colby students have folky roots. “Often what we’ll hear is, ‘Oh, yeah. I know that stuff,’” Berlinghoff said. “My parents had those albums.” —Gerry Boyle ’78

“We are grateful for the opportunity to work in a community that renews itself each year with bright, energetic young people; to be invigorated by such splendid faculty colleagues; to meld our life work with a passionate belief in the liberal arts; and to be part of a team that fervently believes in this great institution.”

Dean of the College Earl Smith, bringing greetings from the administration
A hand-held global positioning system (GPS) unit can pinpoint a spot on the surface of the earth within one meter. At Colby, researchers use GPS to record the location of geologic samples and to record the range of individual birds, among other applications. Using GPS to turn an old-fashioned campus scavenger hunt into a high-tech trivia chase was part of The Colby Difference.

As five teams of students, faculty, staff, alumni and trustees raced from clue to clue Friday afternoon, their locations were recorded every five seconds.

Event co-chair Associate Professor of Chemistry D. Whitney King dreamed up the treasure hunt after he heard Larkspur Morton talk about her research studying gray jays. “Here’s technology being used by people on campus and in society in general,” said King. “Wouldn’t it be neat to do something fun that incorporates that?”

A course was mapped, clues were prepared, and a computer program was written by John Kuehne (FTS) using GPS and Global Information System (GIS) to display on an aerial photograph where the teams went.

King arranged an elaborate handicap system for the hunt, using average team ages and bonuses for recruiting trustees, staff and community members.

One (fairly easy) clue, “A solid reminder of the promise of research in the pursuit of levity,” sent teams scurrying for the antigravity monument near the tennis courts. Afterward GPS data was loaded into a computer, which plotted courses and speeds. Results were presented that night in Dana.

Organizers were able to verify that each team reached required destinations in the correct order, and it was clear how quickly and how far afield teams traveled. Though the hunt was conducted over a two-kilometer course, teams averaged five kilometers in their wanderings. In the end the electronic evidence helped decide the winners. “It was pretty obvious when people were in a car,” said King, who assessed a penalty for the vehicular transgression and threw the race into a tie. —Alicia Nemiccolo MacLeay '97

“You will bring to Colby an exacting intelligence, great enthusiasm mixed with great stamina, generous confidence in people at their best and limited interest in them at their least, an eagerness to stretch Colby mixed with a firm respect for its traditions, and, above all, your sense that a good laugh can carry us further than any expression of worry.”

William M. Chace, president of Emory University, Adams’s friend and former colleague
"I bring you greetings and a warm welcome from the 22,373 Colby College alumni... a diverse organization with representatives from all fifty states, three U.S. territories and an impressive seventy foreign countries."

John B. Devine Jr. '78, president of the Alumni Association and chair of the Alumni Council

SERVICE: Cotter Union

In the Fishbowl, between the Cotter Union lobby and the Spa, past and present students from Professor Phyllis Mannocchi's American studies course, American Dreams: The Documentary Film Perspective, projected The Colby Difference on screen. Documentary videos showed dispossessed teenagers, Waterville firefighters, a Latino bodega, convicted felons who visit schools to scare students straight and women who perform as exotic dancers in Lewiston.

The course description reads: "Through a series of essays, students work toward a creative resolution of our issues and dilemmas." Mannocchi says the course gets students in touch with a larger community and its problems. The students are transformed, sensitized to worlds outside the Colby campus and empowered by their own success as video technicians and storytellers.

"I had no idea my team was capable of creating something we would be so proud of," said Lindsay Hayes '99, who came back to Colby to introduce a video about Waterville teenagers struggling on the margins of society. "It's amazing how invested we got," she said. "It makes me want to make a difference. It makes me want to be a thoughtful and present parent when that time comes for me. It shows how important parents and teachers are," said Hayes, who is applying to graduate programs in education. "I keep a copy of that video with me always; I'm so proud of it."

New Perspectives Transform Students

Mark Edgar '01 showed a documentary on Waterville firefighters. The son of a police officer, he volunteered at the Waterville Fire Department and got the feeling that "no one ever listens to these guys."

After an intense semester in production, Edgar and his team showed their video last spring in the annual American Dreams presentation. Six fire trucks parked outside Given Auditorium that night, and the firemen watched. Said Edgar, "All eight of these big, burly guys had tears in their eyes," watching the video probe feelings about accident victims they couldn't save, risks they live with and a comrade who succumbed to cancer. At the end it was the firefighters who received a standing ovation.

"This is the thing I'll take away from Colby and show people," Edgar said. "Phyllis has the power like I've never seen in a professor to motivate students." —Stephen Collins '74

From left, Matthew Reeber '01, Lindsay Prichard '01 and Sarah Belanger '01, members of Phyllis Mannocchi's American Studies course, American Dreams: The Documentary Film Perspective, at the video editing station in Miller Library. The trio produced "At This Point in My Life," a video about prison inmates who travel to schools to speak about the mistakes they've made.
President Presidential inaugurations have been uncommon in the modern life of Colby—only six in the entire 20th century and only two in the last 40 years. As I contemplated this day and what I might say to you, these facts were very much on my mind. If Colby's history is in any way predictive—and I very much hope it is—this moment will not come again soon.

What sort of moment is it? In the most common meaning of the word, it is of course a moment of beginning, the start of something new. And what is new, what begins today, is only partly connected to the relatively unfamiliar face among you, though that is not unimportant. The fullest meaning of this day embraces the entire Colby community and signals a collective beginning, or more precisely a re-beginning, of the common enterprise. It is a moment, then, that leads us naturally to recall our most fundamental commitments and the ways in which we currently meet them.

In a still broader sense, however, the moment is also about the future and things not yet known. This sense of anticipation is wonderfully inscribed in the root of the word “inaugurate,” which has to do with “augur” and “auguration” and the interpretation of signs and omens.

The classicists among us know already what the Oxford English Dictionary says about this matter. The augur was “a religious official among the Romans whose duty it was to predict future events and advise the course of public business, in accordance with omens derived from the flight and singing and feeding of birds, the appearance of the entrails of sacrificial victims, celestial phenomena and other portents.”

Wishing to leave no stone unturned, the inaugural committee has cleverly arranged for pigeons and the sacrifice of the representatives of certain neighboring liberal arts colleges. Your names will be called shortly.

A bit more seriously, I want to share with you today some thoughts inspired by these related meanings of the inaugural moment: the sense of collective beginning and purpose, and the sense of looking ahead to see what might be coming.

Engaging first in the role of the augur, I would tell you that many of the omens hovering about this remarkable enterprise of ours are most encouraging. Indeed, I think that it may not be too stretching to say that things have never looked more promising in several important ways.

The most encouraging omen of all, of course, is the level of interest in the education we provide. Like other highly selective liberal arts colleges, Colby has seen applications grow steadily and impressively in recent years. More and more high school seniors are seeking us out, and the students we ultimately enroll are by every measure more talented with each passing year.

What those students find when they arrive has also changed in many ways over the past several decades. The physical changes—from academic and residential spaces to the ubiquity of new technologies—are notable and exciting. But in still deeper and more consequential ways, the power and range of our teaching and learning have also advanced appreciably. We offer more in more compelling ways than ever before, and the creativity, professional aspiration and competitive pressures that fuel these changes will certainly not abate any time soon.

The College’s capacity to respond to these pressures and opportunities has depended in part on our recent success in augmenting the financial resources available to us. That success has had a great deal to do with the remarkable vigor of the U.S. economy during the past decade. Partly as a result of that vigor, several things are true. First, the financial markets have permitted us to increase our endowment even as we invest strategically in the institution. And second, philanthropic support of this and similar institutions has expanded dramatically in recent years.

Other encouraging omens might be observed here, but I think this is sufficient to suggest that the picture of what the world has in store for us is reassuring in several important ways.

But you will probably not be surprised to hear me say just as quickly that this is not the whole picture. And while it may not have been politically correct for the augur of ancient times to mention less than perfectly reassuring things, let me tell you what else I think the “flight and singing and feeding of birds” are currently telling us.

Nearly 40 years ago, Clark Kerr, chancellor of the University of California, published The Uses of the University, a short but remarkable book on the future of American higher education. The basic premise of that important work was that the American system of higher
education had entered a new and altogether different phase of its history, which Kerr called its “second great transformation.” At the very heart of that transformation, he argued, was the growing importance of the “knowledge industry”—our industry—to the basic structure and fundamental health of the American economic system.

At the risk of being slightly hyperbolic, I think it is the case that American higher education may be approaching its “third great transformation,” or at least an important new cycle within its second. And that transformation is rooted in the steady intensification of the reciprocal dependency between our enterprise and the nation’s productive life and organizations.

The evidence for this amplification is everywhere, but nowhere is it more obvious than in the closer and more consequential collaboration between colleges and universities and the many small and large corporate concerns committed to the elaboration of new technologies—informational, biological and productive. These “knowledge-industry clusters,” as Kerr called them, have emerged across the country, in both familiar and new places, and in many forms of industrial and economic collaboration.

Principally because of these connections, American colleges and universities have experienced deeper and more insistent demands for a perfectly obvious kind of programmatic relevance. The demands come from two directions—from the corporate and industrial consumers of the products of the knowledge industry and from parents and prospective students who clearly and correctly sense the increasingly tight correlation between higher education and the prospects for professional success in an economy so dominated by knowledge.

A related change of much recent discussion is the notion of “the virtual university.” The ultimate promise of this formation is unclear, but its advocates are already challenging the core assumptions and condition of the liberal arts college—the campus, the classroom and the real (as opposed to virtual) relationships among students and teachers in a residential setting.

Another even more radical prospect, less broadly discussed but every bit as fateful, is the possibility that the knowledge industry will begin to migrate, in part or in whole, outside the nearly exclusive control of colleges and universities and into for-profit corporate settings of either the virtual or embodied variety.

Two forces are driving this prospect. First, and in spite of the recently strong economy, powerful concerns about the steadily growing cost of our enterprise remain very much alive. That concern will surely reemerge, and when it does so too will the notion that other, more efficient means of transferring knowledge need to be developed.

In the meantime, and in light of the magnitude of the education market in the United States, there is plenty of interest among investors and entrepreneurs alike in the prospect of profit-making alternatives to traditional, not-for-profit public and private educational institutions.

All of these trends and pressures have contributed in various ways to the erosion of the ideals and practices of liberal education. That erosion has not always been noisy, but its effects have been steady and incontrovertible: of the roughly 14 million students enrolled today in this country’s colleges and universities, fewer than 250,000—about 2 percent—are enrolled in residential liberal arts colleges like Colby.

And herein lies the precise and important irony of our situation. While Colby and other highly selective national liberal arts colleges flourish and grow stronger each year, the practice of liberal learning in the broader context of American higher education is in decline.

This trend is worrisome for several reasons. First, the relevance and impact of our enterprise has in part to do with its reach across the American social landscape. We ought to view the narrowing of that landscape with some concern.

Second, one of the important characteristics of liberal learning has been its commitment to a unifying vision of the educational enterprise across disciplinary and professional academic boundaries. The weakening of that vision will lead to the further compartmentalization of our intellectual practices, with distressing consequences for our public life.

Consider how much shared intellectual purpose and interdisciplinary dialogue it will require for us as a nation to deal with the massively complex issues that the knowledge industry has already placed in our laps and that are now matters of high public policy debate. The moral and political conundrums created by the information technology revolution and the biological sciences, for instance, are not vague apparitions looming somewhere down the track; they are going by us even as we speak. How will our students—the ultimate arbiters of many of these matters in the political realm—acquire the intellectual capacities to deal with them if we do not teach them?

“It is a moment both solemn and joyous, both excellent and fair, as the poet Emily Dickinson puts it, and like the conferral of an honorary degree, this inaugural that welcomes William D. Adams into our diverse community of scholars is for all time—irrevocable. No one else can or ever will be the nineteenth president of Colby College.”

Lee Family Professor of English Cedric Bryant.

bringing greetings from the faculty
What do all of these omens—the encouraging and the worrisome, the comforting and the not so comforting—mean to us as we consider the other side of this inaugural moment, the moment of collective beginning and renewal?

We should agree to recognize, first of all, that the encouraging omens I mentioned earlier have a great deal to do with the commitment and accomplishments of this community over many years. The Colby of this precise moment—so admirably attractive and strong—is something that everyone associated with it—students and faculty, administrators and support staff, trustees and alumni, parents and friends—should view with enormous pride.

Especially in this inaugural moment, that recognition should give us considerable confidence—confidence in our fundamental quality and capabilities, first and foremost, and confidence in the likelihood that we can be even better and stronger in the future.

But better in what specific ways? With an eye on all the omens, let me mention briefly several that are on my mind.

Now and in the years ahead, I think we must be committed to the steady reinvention of the practices of liberal learning. I say this not because I fear that demand for the particular brand of liberal learning we provide will somehow evaporate—the omens here suggest something very different—but rather because our strength and excellence create the opportunity to do some striking things, and because the dynamic leadership of places like Colby will have a great deal to do with the prospects for liberal learning in the broader context of American higher education.

At the risk of sounding ironic and perhaps even contradictory, let me suggest that the guiding spirit of this reinvention should be a kind of pragmatism. By this I do not mean a narrowly utilitarian vision. I mean instead to invoke the philosophical pragmatism that William James had in mind when he spoke of his own philosophy as being concerned with “the conduct of life.”

What James had in mind, I think, might be best understood in terms of several closely related questions. And the first and most important relates to our vision of the historical moment we inhabit and the challenging terrain that all of us encounter as members of a common enterprise. What are the broad and broadly shared contours of the experience our students will have as members of American society at this moment in our collective history? What demands and challenges will they confront as citizens, as professionals, as private persons; And what in light of those experiential features and demands are we certain they will need to encounter and experience in their time with us?

Answering this last question in this forum is both difficult and risky. I will try nevertheless, knowing I will have years to explain and defend myself:

- A pragmatic conception of liberal learning will be interdisciplinary in spirit, striving to acquaint students with the interconnections among things and the means we have of understanding them;
- It will be multicultural and international in perspective, providing the intellectual foundations for engaging the cultural diversity and complexity of American society and the world;
- It will be committed to the values of democratic citizenship, community service and social justice, and to understanding the principal forms of institutional and organizational life and how individuals shape and change institutions and organizations;
- It will be concerned with the forms and history of technology and with the methods and practices of the natural sciences, which form the intellectual foundations of those technologies;
- It will be committed to providing the intellectual foundations of moral judgment and the ability to negotiate complex moral terrain;
- It will be committed to the creative imagination and to the works and practices that embody and exemplify that imagination;
- It will be committed to fundamental intellectual capacities—the capacity to communicate, to think analytically and critically, among others.

The democratic thrust of this view of liberal learning is closely related to a second major element of our ambition in the coming years: let us make certain that the education we provide remains accessible to all those qualified to benefit from its riches. This involves at least two additional areas of concern and effort.

First, and in spite of the recent and surely temporary hiatus in public anxiety about this matter, we must continue to worry about the cost of what we do. The social relevance and impact of the form of education we practice will have a great deal to do with our capacity to stay within reach of a diverse population of prospective students.

"President Bro Adams, Cathy Bruce—your predecessors, Bill and Linda Cotter, brought Colby into the first rank of American colleges. We can only imagine where this college will go under your leadership."

**U.S. Congressman Tom Allen**, bringing greetings from the State of Maine
"With both your father and your grandfather hailing from the Pine Tree State, there’s no denying you come to us with impeccable credentials."

U.S. Senator Olympia Snowe, bringing greetings from the State of Maine

Second, we must continue to expand the permanent resources available to us to provide financial assistance to those who cannot otherwise afford the full freight of what we do. Especially in light of the highly competitive company that Colby now keeps, financial aid will become an increasingly important part of our commitment to access and to the broader ambition we must have to remain a viable and compelling part of the landscape of American higher education.

The concern for access is closely related to a third major challenge for Colby—the need to continue to diversify the institution. That ambition has been prominent on the agenda of the College in recent years. I hope we can agree to seek its fuller realization in the years to come.

Doing so will require several things of us. The first and perhaps most important is for all of us to place this matter at the head of our busy individual and professional agendas, wherever we find ourselves in the institutional framework. Everyone needs to be on this train all of the time.

The second is the willingness to admit that all of us, regardless of our backgrounds or current commitments or places in the institutional structure, have a great deal to learn about this matter and its complexities. Seeing ourselves as learners will be helpful in at least two ways: it will give us the eagerness and openness of learners, while it also will promote understanding of the inevitable false starts and temporary setbacks of the learning process.

The third and last requirement is the recognition that we are in this together. We cannot get to where we want to go unless we all understand ourselves to be pulling on the same rope.

Innovation in liberal learning, accessibility, achieving greater diversity—these are some of the important challenges this moment places in front of us. What will we need to succeed?

Since I have focused on three challenges, let me also mention three virtues: confidence, aspiration and community.

Our confidence, as I noted earlier, springs from an objective and healthy regard for our achievements and the excellence of the educational experience we provide. And that is where we must remain focused.

At the same time, this is a place that rather naturally aspires, and must aspire, to be better. And better not in relative or comparative terms but in the fundamental quality of what we do—in the teaching and learning that forms the core of our enterprise, in the quality of the human relationships that define the life of the campus, in the ways we support and are supported by alumni and friends, and in the general aspiration to excellence.

But nothing will be more important to our success than our sense of community. And here Colby has a great deal to rely upon.

My own acquaintance with that sense of community is brief compared to the familiarity that most of you have. But it is long enough for me to know something about its prominent features. Colby is blessed with an extraordinary level of commitment and affection among those who work here, in every part of the institution. It is a place of remarkable friendliness and warmth, as I have come to know in a personal way over the last several months. And it is a place that inspires and relies upon the generous and continuous loyalty of many thousands of alumni, parents and friends across the country, and indeed around the world, who have benefited from what we do here and who feel a part of our fortunes and future.

In the long run this deep and extensive sense of community may be our strongest asset. For it is what we have to rely upon as we change and grow; it supports everything else that we do and will aspire to do. We must therefore consciously appreciate, nourish and preserve it.

I look forward to that work and to the many other challenges, large and small, that accompany this office and the moment in which we find ourselves today. Thank you for sharing that moment with me, for listening so patiently to these inaugural reflections and—most of all—for your company on this extraordinary journey.

crashing the INAUGURATION party

Each time the College selected a new president during its first 100 years, "the new president forthwith became such, and that was all there was to it. There was nothing but a change of stenographers," wrote Ernest C. Marriner ’13 in The History of Colby College.

Simplicity certainly marked the inauguration of President J. Seelye Bixler in 1942. Colby operated year-round as war raged across the world, and on July 18, Bixler assumed the executive duties of the College in a special assembly at which he addressed the student body on the future of education after the war. The new president, reported the Echo, "was very well received in his initial appearance in an official capacity."

But times were good back on Friday afternoon, June 14, 1929, when the inauguration of Franklin W. Johnson, Class of 1891, set the standard lived up to by the subsequent inaugurations of presidents Strider, Cotter and Adams.

Johnson took his oath of office in the Waterville Opera House before a large company of graduates, undergraduates and friends of the College. The 125 people on the platform included all of the faculty, members of the board, Governor Gardiner of Maine, the ex-governor and 41 representatives of colleges and American philanthropic and scientific institutions.

The procession, a hymn and an invocation preceded an address that was followed by the presentation to Johnson of a charter and key as the insignia of his high office. A hymn led up to the new president’s inaugural address, in which he stipulated—remember, this is only months before the stock market crashed—that his efforts "shall be directed to the building up of the College as an educational institution, rather than to canvassing funds for endowment and equipment." After the conferring of the degree, a hymn and a benediction concluded the proceedings.

It is certain, though, that no Colby inauguration ever matched the excitement of President Jeremiah Chaplin’s back in 1822, when the event was concurrent with Colby’s first commencement. A military company and a band led a procession of professors and students and the governor into the community meeting house—where the local Waterville citizenry crashed the proceedings. Although Chaplin’s wife wrote of her initial encounters in Waterville that “They do not seem to be such ignorant, uncultivated beings as some have imagined,” the locals grew restless with the lengthy pageantry and overflowing speeches and finally bolted back outside. Order was ultimately restored, however, and Colby’s first president at last was able to deliver the College’s inaugural inaugural address. —Robert Gillespie