

Colby



Colby Magazine

Volume 103
Issue 2 *Fall 2014*

Article 17

January 2015

From the President

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Recommended Citation

Greene, David (2015) "From the President," *Colby Magazine*: Vol. 103 : Iss. 2 , Article 17.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.colby.edu/colbymagazine/vol103/iss2/17>

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

There are many unexpected pleasures of living on Mayflower Hill. One of my favorites is seeing the sunrise from my kitchen windows. It is spectacular, especially the way it plays off the foliage at this time of year. In Chicago I didn't see the sun until it was much higher in the sky, as it was obscured by the density of the city.

Although I have a great view of the rising sun, I recognize that the planners of this campus made it their highest priority to have the first light (and the last of the day!) reflect off the sloop weathervane that adorns Miller Library's magnificent clock tower. It was a brilliant way to shine a light on Colby's landmark building.

Miller Library was the largest and most expensive building designed for the new campus on Mayflower Hill. It was intended as the physical and symbolic center of the College, an enduring statement of Colby's academic values and purpose.

Academic libraries, including Miller Library, have been undergoing rapid change over the last two decades. The rising cost of scholarly books has strained acquisition budgets, many academic journals have moved online, and efforts are well underway to digitize entire collections. Digital archives of images and media have become essential research tools, and the competition is fierce for acquiring unique collections and archives.

The use of precious library space in this changing environment has been a much-studied issue on campuses. One common result has been the establishment of offsite facilities to store major segments of collections. The Harvard University Library Depository, for example, opened in 1986 and now has capacity for three million linear feet of shelving. Colby opened a nearby facility last year and moved a large proportion of the collection there.

Members of our community are asking whether we considered adequately the available options before making changes to Miller Library. There seems to be overwhelming support for having brought back the historic reading room and improving other spaces in the building. Yet is it also clear that we would do well to broaden and deepen the conversation about the current and future needs of our libraries. I have asked the faculty committee on the library to consider what we need to do to ensure that Miller Library remains at the center of the College's intellectual life, including how we might optimize space allocation and access to physical volumes. The committee expects to provide its recommendations by the end of the academic year.

One of Colby's greatest assets is its scholarly faculty who are deeply committed to research and discovery as well as teaching. Although research methods are constantly changing, the library remains the most important scholarly and teaching resource in many disciplines. These include disciplines where Colby has been and must continue to be excellent. Our libraries are key to ensuring that is the case.

Colby's libraries give us a comparative advantage over many institutions that did not have the foresight and resources to amass great collections and to literally as well as symbolically place the library at the center of the college. The light that illuminates our library each morning is a reminder of our enduring values and the need to focus on the excellence of our libraries and the richness of our intellectual life.

David A. Greene