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From the President

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

I visited Colby alumni, parents, and friends in Europe this June (the toils of a college president ...). The Colby family is spread around the globe, and everywhere I go I find that the enthusiasm for Colby among those who know us best could not be higher.

Being abroad inspired me to reflect on Colby and the state of higher education in the world, helped along by news stories back in the States. While I was in London, the University of Washington and Tsinghua University of China announced a partnership, funded in part by \$40 million from Microsoft, to develop technology-related academic programs and an innovation hub. That same week, the Bloomberg Foundation announced a \$100-million donation to Cornell Tech, the fledgling partnership between Cornell University and Technion – Israel Institute of Technology, to develop an applied science campus in New York City.

These announcements followed a variety of global partnerships and initiatives launched by United States universities in recent years. These include NYU Abu Dhabi; Duke Kunshan University, a collaborative effort between Duke and Wuhan University in China; and Yale-NUS College, an effort by Yale and the National University of Singapore to bring a Western liberal arts approach to learning to Singapore. While at the University of Chicago I led efforts to establish major research and teaching centers in Beijing and New Delhi, and the university is now designing a new campus in Hong Kong.

There are many more examples—many still in formative stages, some showing significant signs of success, and others struggling or abandoned. It is a period of great experimentation, with institutions demonstrating a high tolerance for risk. The anticipated reward is the development of a fully global institution—one with global visibility and impact, a strong international footprint, and the power to recruit the most talented faculty, students, and staff from all corners of the world.

While American research universities have been charging ahead to develop the optimal global strategy, our liberal arts colleges have barely begun. It is not that we lack for international efforts. At Colby more than two thirds of our students study abroad, we offer a strong set of international internship and research experiences, Jan Plan provides a great opportunity for study-travel courses, we continue to support a foreign language requirement, and roughly 12 percent of the incoming class are non-U.S. citizens.

Colby, started more than 200 years ago as a small regional college, has of course developed into a leading national college. What would it mean for us to be the leading global liberal arts college? That is a question I think we should consider.

Should we be thinking about a more robust set of global partnerships with educational, research, and cultural institutions? Should we expect (require?) all students to have meaningful global experiences, which could include academic as well as work experiences? Are there areas of the world that we see as strategically important—areas where we would want to invest or develop partnerships—or are we better off embracing a more organic approach to program development? How should we think about the international composition of our community, and what would that suggest about recruitment programs and international outreach and marketing? Will there be enough value in having a global reputation in the years to come that it is worth investing now in this effort, understanding the inherent risks?

These are questions we have been asking on campus, and they have been stimulating a very productive conversation. I welcome your thoughts on them as well. My own view is that Colby's future has to be global and that the liberal arts college that can legitimately define itself as a leading international center of learning will have a compelling advantage, will attract the very best students, and will provide the richest set of opportunities for the next generation of global leaders. It seems to me just the right moment for Colby to truly step onto the international stage and to determine its own strategy for being the premier global liberal arts college.

I hope we can think more about these issues together in the coming months. Though liberal arts colleges are trailing universities in global experimentation, investment, and initiatives, there is still plenty of time to formulate and execute a strategy that would be true to and would further Colby's important mission of preparing students for lives of meaning and impact.

David A. Greene