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From the President

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

When I was young, there was nothing like a Polaroid camera and photo. Polaroid was pure magic. True, the image was not crystal clear, and the colors faded quickly. But compared to bringing a film canister to the store and waiting several days for the photos to be ready? Nothing could compare. It was a special treat to drive along Storrow Drive in Boston and see the Polaroid headquarters sitting proudly on the Charles River—the solidity of the building and the groundbreaking products produced there symbolized enduring progress.

Only it wasn't enduring. Polaroid failed to diversify its product line and stopped innovating. Its once-great product, an industry leader and cultural icon, became an anachronism as digital photography made instantaneous, high-quality images mainstream, cheap, and ubiquitous.

It is easy to see our great colleges and universities as similar symbols of enduring progress, and that view certainly contains some truth. But there is great risk to ignoring the perils of standing still, of not evolving quickly enough, of becoming the fading memory of a Polaroid photo.

Colleges that haven't adapted to new realities are closing at a faster clip than we have witnessed in our lifetimes. The world's once-great centers of discovery and learning, dotted throughout the European continent, are, with few exceptions, no longer considered among the top universities in the world. Progress is unforgiving for institutions that lack the foresight and will to change as the times demand.

On occasion, I am asked whether Colby's pace of change and progress, which has been substantial in recent years, needs to continue. It is hard work, after all. And institutions with restless spirits and a drive to be at the front of the pack demand a tolerance for risk and a deeply ingrained culture of innovation and high performance. Those who are satisfied with the mundane and routine, who see the past not as a compass for the future but as an unmovable anchor, can see disruption as simply disruptive. Yet others find it stimulating and an invitation to create—a chance to do things better and to do better things, as my friend David Pulver '63, P'93 would say.

Colby's mission of truly exceptional education and scholarship has real permanence, but how we bring that mission to life needs to be subject to evaluation and critique, to regular growth and evolution. We prepare our graduates to undertake groundbreaking work throughout their lives, and we equip them with the qualities of mind that allow them not only to adapt to new circumstances but to shape those circumstances. A college that takes that work seriously can find no comfort in stasis or the status quo.

Colby's secret weapon is humility. Long a trademark of the College, it serves as a persistent reminder that we can always do better. This defining attribute is our engine of progress. If we keep that engine well fueled through hard work, strategic investment, and a commitment to innovative leadership, this remarkable College is at no risk of faded glory. We can leave the sepia tones for those institutions living in the past. At Colby, we choose to live in vibrant color.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Greene". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping tail.

David A. Greene