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"This is Colby's Time": Inauguration of President David A. Greene Showcases Faculty, Luminaries

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GREENE’S INAUGURAL AGENDA:

• To move Colby “to a preeminent position among the world’s liberal arts colleges.”

• For the College to shape more broadly the evolution of the liberal arts for our time.

• For Colby to be a partner in revitalization of Waterville’s historic center.

HOW TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN:

“It is our time to commit to the highest level of support for our faculty, students, and staff, and to have unwavering focus on the excellence of our programs; it is our time to fully open our campus to the greatest diversity of perspectives; it is our time to make the liberal arts more integrated with the world beyond our campus.”

For more on the inauguration of President David A. Greene, go to colby.edu/inauguration.

A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE:

Colby “approaches this moment with the leadership of an extraordinary individual as president whose vision, strategic thought, energy, and absolute commitment to execution will, I am totally confident, help make extraordinary progress here.”

—Robert Zimmer, president of the University of Chicago, formally presenting David A. Greene for installation as president
Faculty Take Center Stage

AT SHOWCASE PROFESSORS SAY SCHOLARSHIP AND TEACHING ARE INTERTWINED AT COLBY

Considering the best way to kick off his inauguration, President David A. Greene got to the heart of the matter. “Academics is the core of Colby’s mission,” Greene said, “and faculty is the core of Colby’s academics.”

Colby held that thought as inauguration weekend began Sept. 12 with a faculty showcase in Given Auditorium—three hours that offered the opportunity to hear six professors explain what they do and why they do it.

The professors were Catherine Besteman, Francis F. Bartlett and Ruth K. Bartlett Professor of Anthropology; D. Whitney King, Dr. Frank and Theodora Miselis Professor of Chemistry; Lydia Moland, associate professor of philosophy; Philip Nyhus, associate professor of environmental studies; Andrea Tilden, J. Warren Merrill Associate Professor of Biology; and John Turner, associate professor of history.

Their subjects and fields of expertise varied. Their dedication to scholarship, knowledge, and their students did not. Here are brief excerpts, with more at colby.edu/mag.

Besteman, whose research has taken her to Somalia and South Africa, and to Seattle and Lewiston, Maine, said anthropology students talk about “never seeing the world the same way again, rethinking all of their beliefs and values as they create for themselves a new understanding of themselves and the world around them.”

King has joined his students and former students on research expeditions from the Belgrade Lakes to the Straits of Magellan, in the southern Atlantic Ocean. Collaborations with colleagues in biology, environmental studies, and economics, and with fellow scientists at the Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences, have opened doors for students who have gone on to groundbreaking research and policymaking. “A senior in high school isn’t going to draw those connections,” King said. “It’s really up to the faculty to draw those connections.”
Nyhus, who has spent more than a decade studying the state of Asian tigers in the wild, said Colby has played a major role in work on tiger habitat study. In 2010, he noted, the leaders of tiger-range countries pledged to double the number of wild tigers by 2022. “This was an ambitious goal, a bold goal, a risky goal,” Nyhus said. “But I actually feel much more optimistic that we’ll be able to reach this goal … knowing that ambitious, bold, and risk-taking Colby College students are going to be helping to write that story.”

Moland, whose scholarship focuses on the work of the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, has led students to contemporary philosophical questions with modern-day implications. “We don’t want to be sending our students into the world without having thought very carefully about the history and the theory and all of the complexities that go into these things,” she said.

Tilden spoke of her ongoing study of melatonin, a hormone involved in the sleep process that may be connected to everything from cancer prevention to creation of new memories. Students, who are coauthors of many of her publications, are key, Tilden said. “Students have always been a part of my research at Colby. It’s the reason that I do research. I would not be interested in doing research in an environment where I was doing it by myself.”

Turner, who teaches the history of Islam and has spent years studying the Middle East, presented his analysis of the phenomenon of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). “Teaching here at Colby pushes me every day to clarify my thinking. Students ask hard questions. They see new things and meanings and challenge me to delve more deeply into my research with them to try to find answers and better questions.”

There is nothing isolated or isolating about this place. It is a place that is deeply connected in the world.

—President David A. Greene
With four high-profile guests on campus to receive honorary degrees as part of the inauguration of David A. Greene, the academic community seized the opportunity for a discussion of the liberal arts and citizenship. Ostrove Auditorium was packed for a 10:30 a.m. Saturday panel discussion, “The Role of the Liberal Arts in Developing Future Leaders: Toward a More Engaged—and Civil—Citizenry,” Sept. 13.


Maisel outlined the challenge in stark terms: partisanship is rampant in Washington and elsewhere, and public discourse is often acerbic and bitter.

“Our college campuses are fertile ground for airing fundamental differences,” Maisel said.

How, Maisel asked panelists, do we translate those tenets of academe into a commitment to civility as students become engaged citizens capable of raising the level of public debate?

Video of the panel discussion: colby.edu/inauguration

Zimmer: “Argument is actually the act of trying to understand the complexity of situations.” He said it should be “an attempt to integrate multiple perspectives and not succumb to simplicity.”

Lawrence-Lightfoot: Relationships and respect are essential to fostering civil discourse, and diversity is key. “It becomes more sweetly etched if you are interacting with people who are different from you.”

Axelrod: “I think this is one of the most public-spirited generations of young people that I’ve seen. ... They care deeply about the world, they take things less for granted than we did, they’ve been through wars, they’ve been through an economic downturn, they know that you can’t assume the future, and they want to shape it.”

Senator Collins: “Civility does not mean meaningless discourse that is devoid of any principle or passion. What it does mean is being respectful to those who have different views, listening carefully, being open to new ideas, and, in the Senate, searching for common ground.”