Sweet Sixteen
Great Colleges of the South
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John Pulley
To my parents, Carolyn and John. Thank you.
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Choosing a college is an important decision. What you decide today will influence many tomorrows. At the least, it will determine your mailing address for the next four years.

The process can be bewildering. With so much at stake, it can also be overwhelming. Lacking guidance, students and their families often seek a shortcut. Too often, that means relying on lists that seek to rank institutions of higher education based on criteria that aren’t necessarily important to you.

Beware. The value of such lists is limited. Over-reliance on them can lead to choosing an institution for which you are ill-suited. The goal isn’t to enroll at the best college (assuming that such a thing exists), but to enroll at the college or university that’s best for you. You’re looking for an institution that is comfortable but challenging, one that will develop your unique talents, one where you’ll feel at home. You’re looking for a place that fits you like a favorite pair of jeans. You want a college where you will thrive.

The good news is that you have lots of good options.

It is universally acknowledged that the system of post-secondary education in the United States is without peer. To take but one measure, our colleges and universities regularly dominate various lists that attempt to identify and rank the world’s best institutions of higher education. Depending on who is doing the assessments, institutions in the United States typically occupy anywhere from thirteen to seventeen of the top twenty spots.

Those rankings may be flattering but, as noted, they are flawed. They fail to capture what may be the greatest strength of American higher education: diversity. Simply put, colleges and universities in the United States manifest a range of educational styles, sizes, models, and philosophies that does not exist anywhere else in the world. The breadth and depth of colleges and universities here means that
every prospective student can find an institution that is well suited to his or her particular needs, talents, preferences, and goals—if that student knows where to look.

This book will introduce you to a splendid group of colleges, and it will help you to think about important factors you’ll want to consider when weighing your options—regardless of what you ultimately decide.

Even a cursory review of post-secondary educational diversity requires consideration of numerous factors. First, there are public institutions that receive significant, though dwindling, financial support from public sources of revenue; there are private colleges and universities that rely primarily on private sources to cover operating expenses; and in recent years, the for-profit education sector has expanded rapidly.

Consider scope and size. American higher education comprises some 3,500 institutions, among them massive institutions, such as The Ohio State University, that enroll more than 60,000 students and field major athletics programs, and a few, such as Thomas More College of Liberal Arts, that enroll fewer than 100. There are single-campus colleges and multi-campus systems, secular institutions and colleges affiliated with religious faiths, from Catholicism (University of Notre Dame) and Protestantism (Liberty University) to Buddhism (Soka University of America).

The United States has 1,200 or so community colleges that grant two-year degrees and funnel graduates to four-year colleges. We have large universities that support Ph.D. programs and basic scientific research. The latter frequently partner with government agencies and private companies to produce new knowledge. These mega-institutions support every manner of professional pursuit at affiliated medical, law, and business schools, among others.

Then there are the liberal arts colleges, of which the institutions in the following pages are shining examples. As you read, notice how the institutions are alike and how each one is unique. Contemplate the possibility of engaging the great ideas of the world. Consider whether small classes and teachers who know you as a person
are important. Think about the accessibility of extra- and co-curricular activities on campus, of opportunities for travel abroad and whether you have an interest in doing undergraduate research.

Think about finding a place that will help you to become your best self.

You are setting out on an exciting journey. We hope that this book will prove to be a helpful guide.
This book seeks to shine a light on sixteen exemplary higher education institutions of a particular type—private, liberal arts colleges in the American South. From Tennessee to Texas, Alabama to Arkansas, they are the private, liberal arts colleges in a twelve-state region encompassing the Gulf Coast and the lower halves of the Atlantic Coast and Appalachian regions. Geographic designations aside, these small colleges and universities—collectively known as the Associated Colleges of the South—are among the best undergraduate institutions of higher education in the country.

The colleges profiled in the following pages strive to do a few things exceedingly well. Concentrating on the whole student, they seek to provide a rigorous, broad-based education of the type that prepares graduates—intellectually, ethically, spiritually, physically—to be adept problem solvers. Indeed, these institutions expect alumni to possess the skills—thinking, reasoning, speaking and writing, cultural awareness, persuasion, discernment—to be leaders of their communities.

Morehouse College counts among its graduates Martin Luther King, Jr., a giant of twentieth-century leadership. More recently, the University of Richmond founded the Jepson School of Leadership Studies, the first school of its kind in the nation.

Before continuing, it's worth noting that ACS colleges and universities are not Southern institutions of higher learning. Rather, they are top-tier liberal arts colleges that happen to be in the South—a geographical reality that does, in fact, confer certain benefits. More on that later.

As models of the liberal arts ideal, ACS colleges prepare people to lead meaningful lives. These institutions manifest the bedrock traits of liberal arts education—and then some. Despite variations, they are small in size, eliminating the necessity of large lecture
halls. Favorable student-to-teacher ratios make it possible, almost unavoidable, for undergraduates and academicians to know one another. It is not uncommon for students at these colleges to dine in professors’ homes and to sit for their children and pets.

“Our faculty are extraordinary teacher-scholars who are committed to student learning,” says Michael Drompp, dean of the faculty and vice president for academic affairs at Rhodes College. “A liberal arts education of the kind provided by the ACS schools offers extraordinary opportunities for talented and ambitious undergraduates. At Rhodes, this is further enhanced by our location in a vibrant urban setting which gives students access to exceptional educational opportunities in a variety of settings, from St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital to FedEx.”

No one at these institutions gets lost in the crowd. The result is alumni who leave college prepared to enter graduate school or begin careers, and the vast majority does so within months of earning an undergraduate degree. Acceptance rates into medical, law and other professional schools are, overall, much higher than the national average. Graduates excel in the corporate world and in the non-profit sector, at home and abroad. “We’re going to train you for nothing,” says Furman University’s director of alumni relations, “but we’ll prepare you for everything.”

Academically, these colleges and universities embrace rigor in a way that is not possible at larger institutions. Professors put teaching and students first, an educational philosophy that is at odds with the prevailing culture at large universities where research is professors’ primary focus. At those places, teaching can be an afterthought. “We bend over backwards to help students succeed,” says Marcia France, a chemistry professor at Washington and Lee University.

Ironically, large research universities provide precious few opportunities for undergraduates to pursue research, an endeavor that is largely the domain of tenure-track professors and graduate students at those places. At ACS schools, by contrast, professors welcome students as research partners, helping them to publish papers
in leading journals and to present the results of their scholarship at professional conferences. Said an English professor at Sewanee: The University of the South: “You measure yourself by your students.”

ACS colleges and universities support the academic research of professors and students with top-grade facilities and equipment. The chemistry program at Furman University, which recently dedicated a new $60-million science center, has “an array and quality of equipment that exceeds what you would find at almost any other institution,” boasts John Beckford, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College.

Building on the shared commitment to excellence among ACS institutions, these colleges have unique programs and initiatives for developing the talents and aptitudes of students. Centenary College of Louisiana publishes the country’s only French-language newspaper, has the only heritage language academic press, and supports what the French newspaper Le Monde has called one of the most important language restoration projects in the world; the Odyssey program at Hendrix College, which exhorts students to “think outside the book,” challenges undergraduates to complete a series of hands-on learning projects that break down barriers imposed by traditional classroom-syllabus limitations; the Paideia program at Southwestern University prepares students for global citizenship; students at Millsaps College do field research at the institution’s 4,500-acre biological and archeological reserve in the heart of the Yucatán peninsula, then assess what they discover at the only undergraduate laboratory in the country with a focus on biochemical archeological analysis; at Sewanee, students and professors have at their disposal thirteen thousand sprawling acres of contiguous old-growth forest known as The Domain; Spelman College is one of only two post-secondary institutions in the country established to educate women of color.

In addition to programmatic concerns, the scale and culture of liberal arts colleges promote and nurture vibrant communities. This is particularly true of ACS institutions, which are more small-town than big-city (even though some of them are located in
or near major metropolitan areas). Tight-knit, pedestrian-friendly campuses dispel anonymity and promote community. The intrinsic beauty of these places, which include some of the most aesthetically pleasing college environments on the planet, further contributes to an enduring sense of well-being and belonging. Not infrequently, the grounds of these colleges have buildings listed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Students and alumni at these small institutions often remark on a prevailing sense of trust that promotes meaningful connections. Indeed, ACS institutions do extremely well on the National Survey of Student Engagement, which measures student participation at colleges and universities. Engagement of the type that occurs at ACS colleges tends to endure. Long after they’ve graduated, alumni stay connected, networking with each other and supporting their alma maters. Centre College, for example, has attained a rate of alumni giving over the last twenty-five years that is unsurpassed in higher education.

Students, staff, and faculty frequently involve themselves in their larger communities. They volunteer with non-profit organizations, do internships with local businesses, and engage in service learning, a kind of hands-on pedagogy that takes classroom lessons into the community. “Being part of the community and serving is part of the college’s culture,” says Kathleen Rossmann, an assistant professor of economics at Birmingham-Southern College. The sentiment is equally valid for all ACS institutions.

These colleges are small enough that students can participate in almost any extra- or co-curricular activity of their choosing, whether writing for the college newspaper, taking part in theatrical productions, or playing intercollegiate or club sports. In addition to the more traditional athletics endeavors, ACS institutions field teams in lacrosse, ultimate Frisbee, and polo.

At a time of rapid, unprecedented change, the liberal arts colleges of the ACS are abreast of emerging trends. Responding to globalization, they have bolstered the international aspect of educational programs, so much so that travel and study abroad are fast
becoming the norm. For example, Centre College, ranked third in the nation for study-abroad percentage, promises that every student will have the opportunity to study abroad or the college will provide a free year of tuition. If you don’t have a passport, the college will get one for you. Rollins College, recognizing the imperative of having a faculty with international bona fides, has established a program that sends all professors abroad every three years.

At home, ACS colleges are welcoming students from a broad range of geographical, ethnic, religious, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds. Moreover, they are backing up their commitments to diversity with money. Davidson College, for example, became the first liberal arts college in the country to assist with the full cost of college without requiring students to take out loans.

ACS institutions are keeping up with technological changes as well, building high-tech facilities and acquiring sophisticated new tools of discovery. In the era of Wikipedia and WikiLeaks, Trinity University has established a program that teaches students to access the glut of online information and to evaluate its credibility—and that of its sources! Responding to global climate change and the challenges of conservation and resource stewardship, ACS colleges have developed and implemented a broad range of green initiatives, from building LEED-certified buildings and reducing food waste to creating new recycling programs and moving toward the use of renewable energy sources. Southwestern University is only the seventh institution in the country to use wind energy to provide all of its electrical power.

Now, about that Southern thing. As mentioned above, ACS institutions are top liberal arts colleges located in the South—not Southern colleges—that disprove the notion of liberal arts colleges as a phenomenon of the Northeastern United States. It is a common misconception.

In fact, liberal arts colleges in the North and South are more alike than different. Yet there are differences, primarily of place, history, and culture. Consider climate. The prevailing year-round meteorological conditions at most ACS institutions are consid-
erably more hospitable than you’ll find at colleges in Boston or Vermont. Second, the history of the South is largely the history of the United States. Third, the South has had an outsized impact on American and world culture. The blues, jazz, rock and roll, gospel, and American folk music would not exist as we know them in the absence of Southern influences.

Of course, we live in an increasingly interconnected world. As population demographics of the nation continue to shift toward the Sunbelt, these schools can be expected to continue their rise in academic prestige and global impact. While the institutions of the ACS undoubtedly have a generous helping of Southern charm, they are, in fact, global institutions.
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On the campus of Birmingham-Southern College, the cornerstones of buildings bear inscriptions that challenge students to acquire greater wisdom, strength, faith and similarly affirmative attributes. Exploring these cornerstones becomes a metaphor for what the college encourages each of its students to do: explore their interests, their passions and their potentials.

Toward those ends—and to prepare students for the challenges of today’s complex environment—the college brings to bear a multi-faceted academic program that nurtures the whole student. In addition to meeting the requirements of one’s declared major, all students must satisfy the demands of the college’s Explorations Curriculum, which is designed to impart the range of knowledge and skills expected of a liberal arts education—and desired by today’s employers and graduate and professional schools.

The Explorations Curriculum “emphasizes what students will be able to do as a result of their education.” The curriculum commits the college to develop five learning outcomes in its graduates—to communicate effectively, solve problems creatively, engage in their social and political world, connect their coursework to the wider world, and engage in self-directed teaching and learning.

As part of the Explorations Curriculum, all first-year students must complete an intensive seminar in which they explore what it means to be engaged college students, collaborating with others, connecting ideas, doing research, and giving and receiving feedback. They also take two courses focused on writing, one that stresses critical thinking and one that hones their writing skills in their major. “Our students write frequently and in a variety of courses,” says Sara Robicheaux, dean of business programs, “and every student must make public presentations in order to graduate.”

The college believes “learning in a liberal arts context is a creative endeavor” that is best “understood as an exploration.” To that
end, degree candidates also must take a variety of courses that “explore a wide range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches” to the five learning outcomes of the Explorations Curriculum.

Students can learn to solve quantitative problems in mathematics courses, finances courses or in physics. Interpretative or analytical problems might be addressed in fine arts, social science or humanities courses. Scientific methodologies might be studies in the social sciences or in the natural sciences.

Students complete natural science labs and academic courses in top-tier facilities, many of which are new or have undergone renovations during recently completed campus improvements. The design of the college’s 100,000-square-foot, $24 million Stephens Science Center “enhances collaboration between students and faculty using a ‘hands-on’ approach that fosters interdisciplinary connections and undergraduate research opportunities.” Built primarily with support from alumnus Elton Stephens, the facility includes numerous teaching and research laboratories, 1,100 data port connections, an interdisciplinary environmental studies laboratory, a greenhouse, a zoological museum/herbarium, a radioisotope laboratory, a laser lab, machine shop, and a photographic darkroom.

The college’s recently dedicated Urban Environmental Park (a 1.5-acre lake on a 22-acre site) is a living laboratory and al fresco classroom used by students who pursue the college’s new Urban Environmental Studies major. Tucked into the college’s wooded, 192-acre campus, the park features rain gardens, native habitats for indigenous plant and bird species, and lighting designed to reduce light pollution. Two new residence halls are the first LEED buildings on campus and among the first LEED-certified residence halls in the state of Alabama.

To further encourage students to explore a variety of interests, the college requires completion of a course in a creative or performing art, and self-selected courses outside the students’ major. In the interest of developing awareness and appreciation of other cultures and competing community interests, students study a foreign lan-
guage or complete a selection of global perspectives or community interest course as well.

Acknowledging the necessity of producing new knowledge, the college’s Connections in Scholarship requirement compels degree candidates to identify and employ connections within one academic area, among academic areas, and “between the academy and the wider world.” To that end, all students must complete a scholarly senior seminar, Exploration Term, or independent study, and publicly share results of their research, scholarship, and creative endeavors with faculty and peers at a Senior Conference.

“If you’re really educated, you should be able to teach something you’ve learned to someone else,” says Susan Hagen, Mary Collett Munger Professor of English and director of the Harrison Honors Program.

Emily Wallace, who enrolled at Birmingham-Southern in large part because of the relationship her brother, a BSC alumnus, had with his professors (whom she met when they joined the family for dinners), collaborated with one of her mentors on a joint publishing project that compares the literacy environments of middle schools serving students from low and high socioeconomic status groups. Their research compared the age and quality of books, the availability of commercial versus trade texts, and the cultural diversity of books in schools enrolling students in kindergarten through third grades.

Wallace pursued this special project in an education course for credit in the Donald C. Harrison Honors Program, which the college “designed for the highly motivated, the intellectually curious, the type of student who likes thinking outside the box.” Harrison Scholars complete five honors seminars (which have included The Economics of Poverty, Contemporary Southern Politics, W. E. B. Du Bois and American History, among others) and an interdisciplinary project outside their major. Harrison Scholars have studied yard art as an expression of identity, the psychology of helping behavior, and the origins and influence of traditional American folk and bluegrass music.
Perks of the program include priority registration for classes, honors housing, and eligibility for a $3,000 research stipend that can be used for research-related travel, study abroad, or completion of a research project.

“Education is not a spectator sport at Birmingham-Southern College,” says Guy Hubbs, the college’s archivist. “Students are to be actively engaged in their education.”

The Faculty Factor

If Birmingham-Southern’s academic program is the foundation for students’ success, then faculty members are the pillars upon which nascent aspirations ascend. “This place has a native genius in the way faculty, programs and departments reflexively reach out” to young scholars, says Mark Schantz, the provost. “Students learn to become more intellectually adventurous while here.”

During a comprehensive orientation program, faculty and staff introduce students to the wide array of learning experiences available to them. “Faculty help students to find their intellectual connection to the college, to begin to navigate their career path and their new passions,” says Kathleen Rossmann, an associate professor of economics and vice president for enrollment management, who maintains contact with far-flung former students enrolled in graduate programs at places like Michigan Law School, the London School of Economics and the University of Arizona.

“When we write recommendation letters, it is obvious we know the student. Those letters show the depth of our interactions with [them].”

Rossmann says professors regularly attend a weekly “Faculty Friday” gathering to exchange ideas for becoming better teachers. “The level of participation by faculty in the life of the college is unusual,” she says.

Moreover, Dean Robicheaux says “faculty get involved in the overall development of students, in and out of the classroom.” In her “Strategic Management” class, the capstone course for undergraduate business majors, Robicheaux brings community business executives (bankers, human resources directors, entrepreneurs) in
to evaluate and provide feedback to her students.

Faculty engage students in research, co-author papers with them, and escort young scholars to professional conferences not necessarily intended for undergraduates. Kimmie Farris, who majored in English, traveled to Costa Rica with a biology professor to do research on the mating patterns of red-eyed tree frogs. She went to Ireland to study the manuscripts of William Butler Yeats—research that formed the basis of her senior project.

“There is a particularly close relationship between faculty and students,” says Hagen. “Faculty are generous with their time in training students to do research with them.”

Allison Bovell, a recent graduate from Chattanooga, Tennessee, was drawn to Birmingham-Southern’s environment, which she describes as a “small campus in a big city.” Every professor she had knew her name and came to know her “politics, writing style, strengths and weaknesses.”

Her shortcomings as a writer came to light when a paper she wrote for a 400-level religion and political science class earned a C-minus, the lowest grade she’d ever received. The professor assured Bovell that she could do better and allowed her to rewrite the assignment over Thanksgiving break. The second effort earned an A, and the professor asked Bovell to be a research fellow. Under the tutelage of her mentor, Bovell went on to write a chapter in a book about politics in Alabama.

Professors routinely help students navigate academic and career pathways. Ryan Melvin came to Birmingham-Southern to study religion and philosophy before going into the ministry. As a freshman, however, he took a physics course taught by a professor who recognized in Melvin “an interest and aptitude” for the physical science. “BSC helped me to decide what I really wanted to do,” says Melvin, who declared a major in physics while continuing to nurture his original academic interests.

“Physics is what I do,” he says. “Religion and philosophy keep me up at night.”

The college’s academic calendar is divided into two semesters (during each of which students take a four-course academic load)
separated by an Exploration Term session devoted to a single, intensive course, travel or independent study. In 2009, Melvin spent an Exploration Term session at sea in the Caribbean with twenty fellow students and three chaperones. By the end of the trip, the students were running the vessel, and Melvin had decided that his honors project would focus on the tourist economy of the islands. In recent years, students have pursued service work and academic study during Exploration Term in Mozambique, Chile, Ecuador, India, San Francisco and Washington, D.C.

“People who do well here,” Melvin says, “are students first.”

**Excellence and the Institutional DNA**

Birmingham-Southern exemplifies the twin notions that character (whether of a person or institution) develops over time and becomes most apparent when it is most needed. In this regard, the college is a model.

For more than a century and a half, the institution has maintained a consistency of purpose. From the beginning, dual missions of education and service have been entwined in the college’s DNA. “From the get-go, the Methodists were concerned with reaching out to and serving the world,” says Hubbs, noting that the founding fathers articulated a vision of “academic excellence for a lifetime of selfless service.”

The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1824 recommended establishment of a seminary of learning that would eventually become Birmingham-Southern College. Not until thirty years later, however, in 1854, did the Alabama Conference of the church move to carry out the directive, raising funds and selecting a campus site. The state of Alabama granted a charter for Southern University, in Greensboro, Alabama, in January 1856, and the college’s Board of Trustees met for the first time on March 17, Founder’s Day.

Division of the state into two Methodist conferences resulted in the creation of North Alabama Conference College, in Birmingham. The foundation of what would become the campus’s first building was laid in 1897, and the college’s first president and
faculty were retained the following year. In 1898 students arrived at the college, which later changed its name to Birmingham College. The Methodists maintained both institutions for two decades before combining them, in 1918, to form Birmingham-Southern College.

The ideal of preparing students for service informed the curriculum from the earliest days. One hundred years before John F. Kennedy challenged Americans to ask themselves what they could do for their country, the college’s president told the second graduating class that their “time at the college was not about what you will get but what you will give,” Hubbs says. In the nineteenth century that meant an institutional focus on producing graduates who would tend to the body politic (through law), the physical body (medicine), the spiritual body (ministers) and the social body (educators).

In the 1920s, then-president Guy E. Snavely declared that the college was not about education for education’s sake. “We don’t do this for ourselves,” says Snavely. “The goal has to be service.” Later, BSC’s longest-serving president, Neal Berte, focused on the college’s “servant leadership” mission.

The college has maintained those strengths and built others. Its alumni consistently post high rates of acceptance into professional and graduate schools. Some graduates go into the clergy after leaving Birmingham-Southern, “a strongly Methodist school …[that] is very open to religious diversity,” says Hubbs.

Some turn to higher education, which beckons Birmingham-Southern graduates who choose to become professors and administrators. And students who pursue business degrees find themselves pursued by businesses.

**A Tradition of “Service Learning”**

Birmingham-Southern’s long-held devotion to service has in recent years evolved into its embrace of Service Learning, a sensibility that breaks down barriers that in the past separated educational and humanitarian activities. The concept of service learning posits that endeavors centered around helping others, if leveraged
properly, can be an effective means of teaching…well, just about anything.

Service learning at Birmingham-Southern entwines threads (education and helping others) that have wound through the institution's history and culture for a century and a half, gaining strength along the way. Indeed, approximately seventy percent of Birmingham-Southern's students perform service work each year. The Bunting Center for Engaged Study and Community Action and other campus offices support a broad range of groups and programs, among them African Awareness: Invisible Children, Habitat for Humanity, Bread for the World, and the First Light shelter for women.

Admission Counselor John McGinnis, a former student, co-founded The Coalition for Human Dignity, a campus group that coordinates activities among individuals and groups “who want to help but don't know how or don't believe their efforts will make a difference.”

“There is a sizeable community here focused on compassion and caring for your neighbor,” McGinnis says. “The college is perfectly situated to focus on issues of compassion.”

More than a quarter of a century ago, the college took the first tentative steps toward formally leveraging humanitarian efforts as a means of bolstering its education mission. In 1984, Stewart Jackson, then the college's chaplain, led two students on an exploratory service project to the Dominican Republic. Building on that experience, the college offered for the first time during the 1987 January Exploration Term session an intensive service learning class that involved students traveling to St. Petersburg, Florida, to work with Habitat for Humanity.

Since then, service learning opportunities have expanded to include programs involving local schools, regional-housing initiatives, disaster-relief programs, homeless shelters, AIDS intervention programs and Meals on Wheels programs, among others. Students have taken service learning trips to Calcutta, India, Mozambique, Chile and Brazil.

Opportunities for service learning at the college continue to
grow. In 2007, a pair of Birmingham-Southern alumni made a gift to establish the Bunting Center for Engaged Study and Community Action. The center, a repository of volunteer opportunities and service learning classes, among its other functions, serves as a command center for engaged learning at the college.

Since its founding, the center has worked with faculty “to incorporate service learning into course content,” notes the college’s alumni magazine. Kristin Harper, director of the center, told the publication that “we would like to have at least one course offering in each department that has a service learning component.”

**Steeped in Culture**

Birmingham-Southern excels at combining community, culture and the arts. To graduate, all students must meet the requirements of the college’s Explorations Lectures and Arts Events program. Students must attend twenty-four approved programs (lectures, events, performances, recitals, etc.) held on campus. Many of the events are held during the college’s twice-weekly Common Hour.

“Vibrant, active arts are a real presence on campus,” says Michael Flowers, chair of the college’s theatre department. “There is always an event.”

To prepare for a theatrical production of *Dead Man Walking*, whose main character is a prisoner awaiting execution, the cast and crew visited Donaldson Correctional Facility and met men on death row. “It was eye-opening. It made something abstract not abstract,” Flowers says. “In theater, we are always thinking pedagogically about how to enlighten the community.”

The college also produced *The Laramie Project*, a meditation on the murder of Matthew Shepard, a gay student at the University of Wyoming, and its aftermath. The play explores the repercussions of hate. “Six hundred people saw the show and had to think about it,” Flowers says.

“The college does a good job of dealing with the whole person,” he says. “There is a really strong sense of community here, of people working together to help students find their way during a precarious time of their lives.”
Professors don’t simply guide students on their academic paths. They also walk with them. In the arts, that can translate into the college’s voice teachers giving a recital on campus or Flowers playing the role of Claudius in a production of *Hamlet*. “Faculty don’t just teach what they do,” he says. “They do what they teach.”

Expressions of creativity and culture on campus take many forms, from an art exhibit that explored transgender issues to the Stump Entrepreneurial Challenge, which was created by alumni of the college “to inspire resilience and creativity in the free enterprise system.” McGinnis and another student won the inaugural competition, in 2010. Their winning entry, “Acts of Love,” uses theatre to support educational, medical and social services.

**Above and Beyond the Curriculum**

When they’re not studying and helping others, Birmingham-Southern students involve themselves in an array of extra- and co-curricular activities. Eighty-five percent of students live on campus, including members of Greek organizations (six fraternities, seven sororities). Many of the Greek men reside in houses that constitute the recently completed Fraternity Row; some of the sorority members reside in the Sorority Townhouses. About half of BSC students join Greek organizations.

Athletics are popular at the college, which competes in twenty-two varsity sports as a member of the NCAA Division III and the Southern Athletic Association. The college fields men’s and women’s teams in lacrosse, basketball, tennis, golf and soccer, among others. In 2007, Birmingham-Southern fielded a football team for the first time since 1939. In 2010, the college debuted a new marching band that performs at halftime of all home football games. During spring semesters, it performs as the college’s symphonic band.

BSC also boasts some of the finest athletics facilities in the nation, including a new Athletics Complex that features a football stadium with state-of-the-art artificial turf and an eight-lane regulation track surrounding the field. The complex also has an athletics building with training room, weight-training room and locker
rooms.

BSC’s true scholar-athletes perform at high levels in the classrooms as well as on the playing fields and courts, consistently receiving recognition on NCAA Division III all-academic teams.

Athletics competition aside, students are most passionate about helping others. Kathleen Smith, a recent graduate who completed the requirements for an interdisciplinary major, learned about the concept of microfinance in a first-year political science course. (Microfinance is the concept of providing financial services, including small loans, to groups of people, typically from impoverished regions, who do not have access to banks and other established financial institutions.)

“I loved the idea and wanted more people to know about it,” says Smith, who involved fellow students in an initiative to raise money for making loans to people in developing countries. She used a grant from the college to study existing models of microfinance during an Exploration Term session, with the intention of adapting the concept “to make loans locally” in Birmingham.

That sense of purpose (and a well-established institutional iconoclasm) largely preclude the community’s having much regard for traditions and superstitions of the type that other campuses find endearing. “There are a lot of people here with new ideas and energy, but there’s not a lot of stuff we cling to. We don’t jump in the fountain. We walk on the seals,” says Emily Wallace, poking fun at campuses where students celebrate milestones with a dip in the campus fountain or worry about the possibility of not graduating should they step on the college’s seal.

“We know we’re going to graduate,” says Wallace, an officer in her sorority, a member of the Honor Council, a ’Southern Ambassador, a peer advisor and tutor. “We stride confidently. We don’t have time to walk around the seals.”
Centenary College of Louisiana is a selective, private liberal arts college in Shreveport, the state’s third-largest city. Beyond those basic facts, the institution defies easy categorization.

The college attracts talented people who aren’t constrained by the status quo. Not only do Centenarians think outside the box, they’re likely to disassemble it and use the materials to conduct a science experiment or to fashion a toboggan for sledding the campus’s hills. The college nurtures that uniqueness in many ways, offering individual tours to prospective students, providing personal trainers in the fitness center, and encouraging faculty mentors to guide young scholars’ academic development.

“Centenary is all about getting to know you on a personal level,” says Priscilla Hawthorne, a self-described “big nerd” who is majoring in biology and psychology. “The typical Centenary student is very intelligent but has a quirky side.”

Centenary, with about eight hundred students, is smaller and less clique-ish than the high schools attended by many of its students. It’s a place where two girls joined different sororities (there are only two) yet remained roommates for four years. About thirty percent of students join a Greek organization.

“We don’t have enough of any one (subgroup) for you to associate only with people like you,” says Harold Christensen, a professor of economics and director of the Economics Education Center.

Centenary’s “eclectic” student body is a mix of metro-area students—drawn heavily from Little Rock, New Orleans, Houston and Dallas—and students from small towns who graduated in [high school] classes of fewer than one hundred,” says David Hoass, economics professor. Some twenty-one percent of students identify themselves as belonging to a minority group.

Adds Saige Wilhite, an alumna and the college’s director of alumni relations: “I was exposed to so many different types of
people here, from so many backgrounds.”

Christensen personifies the bonds that develop between professors and students at Centenary. Over the past thirty years, he has mentored scores of undergraduates, including one former student who asked him to write a letter of recommendation—despite having received a “D” in Christensen’s class. “We even get to know the ‘D’ students,” says the longtime professor, who views Centenary as a place where intellectually curious kids come to discover what they love to do.

“A student who succeeds here has relatively broad interests,” Christensen adds. “A kid who knows exactly what he wants to do with his life doesn’t do as well here.”

His colleague Hoass embodies the camaraderie between students and faculty as well. More than three dozen of the names and numbers stored in the economics professor’s cell phone are those of former students who have become friends. Since joining the faculty in 1986, Hoass has advanced from associate to full professor, won a prestigious alumni research award and been named teacher of the year, yet the most meaningful recognition, he says, came when a former student, Ashwin Damodaran, asked the professor to be a groomsman at his wedding. “In my mind,” Hoass says, “that’s the greatest honor bestowed on me.”

The college has an unusually high percentage of students who major in the sciences; a vibrant community in the creative and performing arts; and a strong business curriculum. Students attend professional meetings throughout the country, invest a portion of the college’s endowment in a student-managed fund, and make presentations at the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. During a recent three-year period, forty-four of forty-seven Centenary students who applied to medical schools were accepted. The college’s choir, dubbed America’s Singing Ambassadors, has performed globally, including gigs at Carnegie Hall, the White House and the Berlin Wall.

Centenary’s students publish the country’s only French-language newspaper, *Les Cahiers du Tintamarre*, and the college has the country’s only heritage language academic press. Les Editions
Tintamarre is “devoted exclusively to American literature written in languages other than English,” including Arabic, Navajo, Chinese, French, and German. France’s *Le Monde* newspaper has called it one of the most important language restoration projects in the world.

“Centenary has been a place where if you can imagine it, the question is ‘How do you do it?’” says Dana Kress, a professor of French.

Adds Troy Messina, a physics professor who mentors students and engages them in research: “I’m allowed to take on as esoteric a project as I want.”

Serious scholarly pursuits notwithstanding, Centenarians are not grinds. Far from it. Students, faculty and staff flat-out enjoy themselves. At orientation, President B. David Rowe has, on occasion, jammed alongside students playing the video game Rock Band. The college’s ethos, the president says, revolves around “academic rigor [and] sincere and deep inquiry,” yet there is plenty of space for “imagination and creativity.”

Creativity takes many forms. The Mr. Centenary competition involves male contestants dressed in drag, and a highlight of the annual cultural calendar is Freak Week, a celebration of Halloween with a theme (e.g. *Star Wars*). The chemistry club contributes to the merriment with an exhibition of pumpkin explosions. The quirkiness appeals to and draws out students who might wither in a more buttoned-down environment.

“In high school I was very shy,” says Megan Lerchie, an alumna and speech pathologist who majored in psychology and minored in French. “I came here and was in ten organizations in the first month. I’m a much more outgoing person now. I had to come out of my shell.”

Autumn Casaus, a special education teacher and alumna who earned degrees in studio art and psychology, says the “hodgepodge” of opportunities at Centenary “pushes you out of your comfort zone.”

In addition to more traditional athletics pursuits, students and staff compete in a Harry Potter-inspired Quidditch tournament,
engage in water jousting, play TOLF (golf with a tennis ball), scale a massive climbing wall and race green garden wagons in the Silver Bayou Downhill Derby. Scott Chirhart, a professor of biology, regularly plays football with the members of a campus fraternity.

A Rich, Tumultuous History

The institution's beginnings go back to the founding of the College of Louisiana in Jackson, in 1825, making Centenary College of Louisiana the oldest chartered liberal arts college west of the Mississippi River and the forty-third-oldest college in the United States. Established by the state, the institution initially served the sons of “planters and professional men,” according to Centenary College of Louisiana, 1825-2000: The Biography of an American Academy. The liberal arts institution emphasized the study of Latin and Greek, and men made up almost all of the college’s faculty, administration and staff. Tuition was $50 per year plus $7 per month for room, board and firewood, writes Lee Morgan, the book’s author and a professor emeritus of English.

Early on, the college had great success. With as many as three hundred students showing up for some sessions, the institution’s enrollment rivaled that of Harvard. The state’s lackluster financial support sapped the institution’s vitality, however, and in 1845 it merged with Centenary College of Clinton, Mississippi, a Methodist institution. Reconstituted as Centenary College of Louisiana at Jackson, the merger revitalized the institution as a going concern, and construction of new buildings ensued.

The outbreak of the Civil War once again derailed progress. A line scrawled in the faculty minutes of October 7, 1861, tersely summarized the situation: “Students have all gone to war—College suspended….”

The campus was the site of multiple battles. Northern and Southern forces occupied the area at various times during the war, with both sides commandeering college buildings and using them as a makeshift hospital. Of ten seniors who had left college to fight in the war, six died in battle or succumbed to illness or injury.
The college never fully recovered, muddling along for several decades. In 1895, it admitted women, who by 1903 constituted four of twenty graduates. Then a move was imminent. Recruited to Shreveport by prominent Methodists there, the college’s relocation in 1908 marked the beginning of a sustained resurgence. It merged with Mansfield Female College in 1930, amid a two-decade building boom that created much of the campus as it exists today.

In the intervening years, the college has continued to improve its facilities and faculty, resulting in a quiet but persistent surge in stature. In recent years, *Newsweek* named Centenary the “Hottest Liberal Arts School You Never Heard Of,” and *Forbes* ranked it one of the country’s ninety best colleges.

**Broad Inquiry, Deep Scholarship**

Centenary believes that intellect and empathy are hallmarks of an educated person. In the interest of producing effective leaders, the college seeks “to develop intellectual capacity and the capacity to care—to be in solidarity with those who suffer,” says President Rowe.

Elaborating, the president says the college “takes information and turns it into knowledge…. If we confuse information and knowledge, we no longer have a basis for civil discourse, and society is at risk of disintegrating into customizable truths without a common vocabulary for solving problems or advancing the common good.”

The engine for expanding students’ intellectual capacity is a first-rate academic program led by accomplished faculty and administrators. “Education programs that are effective depend on people,” says Rowe.

Teachers make the extra effort, helping students to land internships and occasionally bringing brownies to class before a test. “Centenary is all about getting to know you on a personal level,” says Hawthorne, who has telephone numbers for all her professors. “It’s all about the students.”

Centenary’s culture of involvement manifests itself in hands-on, pragmatic, experiential learning opportunities that bring academic
concepts to life. They include service learning, research alongside professors, involvement in student organizations, athletics, and other co-curricular activities. Led by a professor of accounting and finance, students at the college’s Frost School of Business have provided free electronic tax preparation services to both people on campus and local residents.

The college’s first service learning course, developed by Amy Hammond, a psychology professor, engaged students who interacted with children at The Arc of Caddo-Bossier’s Goldman School, which serves developmentally disabled children. Centenary’s undergraduates observe the progress of students at the Goldman School and compare what they see with theories of human development that they’ve learned on campus.

“We do a good job of recognizing that learning takes place beyond the four walls of the classroom,” says Webber, the assistant dean. “Our culture is set up for that.” The hands-on approach and its repercussions won’t appeal to isolationists, though, as “you probably won’t be a philosopher on top of a mountain,” the dean says.

In the tradition of liberal arts education, Centenary promotes broad inquiry linked to deep scholarship in one or more fields of major and minor study. Within the framework of the college’s core curriculum, students have great latitude in determining their academic pursuits.

At the end of four years, graduates will have learned “to write and speak clearly; to read, listen, and think critically; to comprehend, interpret, and synthesize ideas; to analyze information qualitatively and quantitatively; to appreciate the diversity of human cultures; to respect the value of artistic expression; and to recognize the importance of a healthy mind and body and the interdependence of people and the environment.”

All students must complete the First Year Experience, comprising two four-hour courses; an interdisciplinary introduction to the liberal arts that emphasizes written and oral rhetoric; and a “writing-intensive introduction to cultural inquiry and the art of persuasion.” FYE classes enroll about seventeen students who identify a
research project and work together to make a group presentation.

To qualify for graduation, students must complete four courses in the humanities, one in mathematics, two natural sciences courses and three in the social sciences. The bachelor’s of arts degree requires foreign-language proficiency, and the bachelor’s of science degree requires proficiency in calculus and, in some cases, statistics.

In meeting graduation requirements, students draw on a range of resources, from Bill Joyce, the college’s resident artist and a collaborator on projects with the Walt Disney Company, to the Jack London and American Literary Research Center and the Turner Art Building, which displays rotating exhibits of art works produced by undergraduates. Students pursuing a minor in “Environment and Society” have observed at close range the residents of nearby Chimp Haven, a sanctuary for chimpanzees who are retired from medical research and the entertainment industry. Students also volunteer at the only spay-and-neuter clinic in northwest Louisiana.

Degree candidates also must complete separate upper-level speech and writing courses; exhibit computer proficiency; and complete requirements of the college’s Trek program, which focuses on career, culture and community. The career program prepares students for life after graduation, and the community component focuses on civic involvement. Students majoring in communications have worked for ESPN, and their colleagues aspiring to medical school have landed gigs at the Louisiana State University Medical Center.

Since graduating from Centenary in 2006, Scott Lerchie, an accountant, has had two jobs. The first one he landed with the help of a professor. An alumnus facilitated the second.

“The connections on campus branch out into the city,” says Casaus. “Professors have feelers everywhere.”

Chris Lavan, the college’s Director of Global Engagement, arrived at Centenary with the intention of majoring in biology. He switched to psychology, with an English minor, before discovering a passion for education administration, largely the result of his involvement with student government (he was the college’s first
African American student body president) and close relationships with Centenary’s faculty and staff. President Emeritus Schwab was his mentor.

The third component of Trek requires “direct interaction with people of a different culture,” an experience that provides participants insights into themselves and the places they are from.

Many students fulfill the culture requirement by way of “module” courses, intensive five-week classes taken on or off campus during the annual May session. Students have completed module requirements in China, Greece, Nicaragua, and Paris. Closer to home, they have studied differences in the Chinese cultures of New York City and San Francisco.

David Otto, a religious studies professor, oversees a module course that pairs students with Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns. The students help the Tibetans improve their English skills, and the monks and nuns introduce the students to the cultural norms of Buddhists, including daily meditations and yoga. On occasion, professor and students have been in the presence of the Dalai Lama.

The program, Otto says, “brings a little dharma to the South.”

A Culture of Connection

In ways large and small, the Centenary community exhibits a sense of shared experiences and shared responsibility. The college’s crisis intervention team relies on a network of people to identify and help resolve students’ problems before they become intractable. On a different front, everyone on campus knows that the best pies are served at Strawn’s Eat Shop, which on occasion doubles as a meeting place for early-morning classes.

Centenary has a simple formula for dispelling the anonymity and isolation that pervade many larger universities: Mix students, faculty and administrators on an intimate campus, involve them in myriad academic and co-curricular pursuits, and engage them in service learning opportunities beyond the campus’s boundaries. The result is a community that feels like a family.

“At Louisiana State University, you’re involved in two or three things max. Here, it’s four or five minimum,” says Lavan, who chose
to attend Centenary because of “that feeling…the hospitality. It’s real here.”

As Director of Global Engagement, Lavan is leading the charge to broaden opportunities for “connecting students to service in new ways… We’re on the forefront of this.”

Connecting academic pursuits to practical concerns provides an immediacy and academic “stickiness” that abstract classroom lessons sometimes lack. Service learning also models an ideal that Centenary expects its alumni to uphold.

“The idea of community is scalable,” adds President Rowe. “What we’re modeling on campus, students will model when they become doctors, clergy, and business people.”

Being an active and integral part of something larger than themselves (but not massively larger) appeals to people such as Hawthorne, who visited the campuses of several colleges (Baylor, LSU, and Yale among them) before deciding on Centenary. “Centenary is a community. It’s a family here,” she says. “This is home.”

The sentiment is repeated time and again.

“And everyone knows you,” says Lerchie, the speech pathologist.

But it’s not the right fit for everyone. Webber recalls a conversation with a student who was withdrawing from Centenary to enroll at a considerably larger university. The student remarked that his teachers attempted to engage him in class, inquired about him in the halls, and reached out to him when he was absent. He was withdrawing not in spite of professors’ attempts to connect with him but because of it.

“He shared that he doesn’t want to be in a small class where a professor knows him. He felt guilty when he wasn’t prepared and he didn’t like being included in discussions,” Webber says. “He said he wanted something bigger.”

At the other end of the spectrum is Kelly Weeks, associate professor of business and chair of the college’s diversity committee. Her biological family is frequently indistinguishable from the Centenary family. Siblings, a parent, aunts and cousins have attended
the college. Her father and brother were in the same fraternity. Her
grandfather, a civil rights activist who founded the college’s sociol-
ogy department, once had a cross burned on his lawn, says Weeks,
whose husband, Matt, is a professor of psychology.

“It’s hard to be here without somebody knowing you,” she says.
Students without blood (or marital) connections to Centenary
speak of community and kinship as well. Matthew Wallace, a recent
graduate, visited a dozen colleges before making a decision. Cente-
nary appealed to him as a place where he would be part of a com-
community, says Wallace, who became president of the student govern-
ment association.

Cara Miccoli, also a recent graduate, visited only Centenary, yet
she arrived at the same conclusion. “It’s very family-oriented,” she
says. “I didn’t want to be a number.”

An Enduring Religious Tradition

Furthering the sense of community and social justice at Cen-
tenary is the college’s affiliation with the United Methodist church.
Unlike many colleges and universities with roots in one or another
religious tradition, Centenary’s connection to the church endures—
without compromising the institution’s academic integrity.

“We’re not a Bible school,” says Rev. Betsy Eaves, the college’s
chaplain and vice president for student development. “We are
strong supporters of academic freedom.”

The church gives money to the college (more than $500,000 an-
ually), and about a quarter of Centenary’s students are Methodists
who receive scholarships from their home congregations. Another
twenty-five percent are Baptists.

The church also contributes to the college’s spiritual wellbe-
ing. Centenary has a tradition of “surrounding people in need with
support from many directions,” says President Rowe. A powerful
manifestation of that spiritual dimension is the choir’s practice “of
encircling a room or person and singing the benediction, “The
Lord Bless You and Keep You.”

Upon his arrival at Centenary, Rowe recalls, he and his family
were thus embraced, “bathed in a sound and sentiment that seemed
to well up from the soul of Centenary.... We model what we want graduates to do, encircling them with wisdom, care and values.... It connects us to something deeper and transcendent.”

The college holds an optional weekly convocation, and its Christian Leadership Center offers programs to help students develop leadership and service skills. True to the college's ideals, the spiritual community on campus comprises a diversity of religious affiliations, including Jewish, Mormon, Greek Orthodox, and Protestant traditions. As if to put an exclamation point on its commitment to religious diversity, some Centenary students gather regularly under the banner of the secular students association. The college is connected to a global network of Methodist outposts, including more than 100 in the United Stated and more than 750 world-wide.

“We see ourselves as forging a new way to be difference-makers in the world, not just a place to prepare people for successful careers,” says Eaves. “We transform lives so that those people can transform the world.”
Regina Basconi’s decision to enroll at Centre College pivoted on a number of factors, but the tipping point was the “smiling and friendly” people she encountered on this leafy one hundred sixty-acre campus tucked into the heart of Kentucky’s famed Bluegrass country. So she wasn’t taken aback when, on move-in day, a gentleman on a bicycle peddled up to her dormitory, exchanged pleasantries, introduced himself to Basconi’s sister and offered to haul her dorm fridge up three flights of stairs.

Nor was she surprised that the do-gooder was John Roush, Centre’s president.

“President Roush blows my mind,” says Basconi, who graduated in 2011 and had majors in Spanish and economics and ran track and cross country. “He cares.”

That passing encounter is symbolic of Centre’s commitment to students. When the going gets tough, as it invariably does at a selective college that pushes young people to raise their aspirations, Centre helps with the heavy lifting. Even the president pitches in—particularly the president.

President Roush and his wife, Susie, welcome each incoming class to campus during an annual fall picnic at their home and, four years later, invite all seniors to join them for dessert and reflection on their time at the college. Between those bookend events, he presides over what for many will be the most transformative period of their lives. President Roush works out with students at the gym, takes meals with his wife in the students’ dining hall, and attends athletic and cultural events. If college presidents were ranked according to the amount of face time they give undergraduates, the ubiquitous President Roush would no doubt top the list. He has a well-earned reputation for remembering the names of Centre’s 1,300 undergraduates.

“I do this because of the young people,” says President Roush,
a master in the art of leading by walking around. “It isn’t just a job. It’s a lifestyle.”

Centre’s president embodies a cultural norm that pervades the place: Personal education. Extraordinary success. Those four words, says Randy Hays, the college’s dean of student life, “encapsulate what we do here.”

Following the president’s lead, professors participate in students’ pursuits in and out of the classroom. They open their homes to undergraduates who, in turn, invite professors to attend volleyball games, artistic performances, and other events. They do what is necessary to help students succeed. A particularly dedicated French instructor set aside thirty minutes after every class, for an entire semester, to work with a struggling but determined student.

“We have an uncommon devotion to students and the undergraduate experience,” explains Bob Nesmith, dean of admission and student financial planning.

**Passion and Commitment**

Manifestations of Centre’s ethos abound. Stephen Powell, a Centre alumnus and renowned glass blower whose pieces reside in museums throughout the world, works alongside students who assist in the creation of those works. Vincent DiMartino, a professor of music, is widely regarded as one of the world’s leading performers and teachers of the trumpet. Giants in their fields, they are here for a reason.

“Their passion is teaching,” says Beth Glazier-McDonald, professor of religion and associate dean.

Professors Steve Asmus and Brian Cusato, who conduct research funded by the National Institutes of Health, welcome students into their laboratories. And Lisa Williams, an associate professor and poet whose most recent book, *Woman Reading to the Sea* (W.W. Norton 2008), was selected by Joyce Carol Oates for the 2007 Barnard Women Poets Prize, mentors students who themselves win literary prizes.

“There’s a willingness and a feeling of people going out of their way to make things happen,” says Stephanie Fabritius, Centre’s academic dean.
Just ask Cortney Miller, who is majoring in Spanish and art history. She took a class, The Art of Walking, that involved morning discussions of works by Kant and other philosophers followed by afternoon and evening jaunts, including an epic fourteen-mile ramble taken in January. The professor, Ken Keffer, an award-winning teacher whose class has been featured in Readers Digest, on the TODAY show, and as an answer on Jeopardy, vowed to Miller and other students that he would review anything they write—until the year 2030!

Sometimes students need a dash of compassion. During finals week, members of the faculty and staff don aprons and serve breakfast to stressed-out students in need of a break. At other times, Centre’s omnipresent president and flapjack-flipping faculty and staff serve up bracing doses of tough love.

Consider Clarence Wyatt, an alumnus and a professor of history at the college. Wyatt was about to get underway with an early morning class one day when he observed that he was one student shy of a full roster. Given that the typical section at Centre has fewer than twenty students, it isn’t remarkable that he was aware of the absence. It would have been odd if Wyatt hadn’t noticed. On this particular day, the professor had reason to suspect that the no-show had blown off class to sleep in.

What happened next would be unthinkable at most institutions of higher education. The professor assembled his students and led them on an impromptu excursion to the absent student’s room. He rousted the malingerer and invited him to attend class, which he did—in his pajamas.

“We take attendance here,” Nesmith says. “Students understand that they’re expected to show up. We take the academic program seriously.”

**Swim or Swim Harder**

Centre is a place of rigor—and contradiction. It pushes students with one hand and pulls them along with the other. It is competitive without being cutthroat, selective but not elitist. It is a crucible lined with fireproof velvet.
Just as Parris Island transforms raw Marine Corps recruits into warriors, Centre transforms bright and energetic young people into self-assured leaders—with nary an exhortation barked by a gun-nery sergeant.

“Teachers push them very hard and challenge them” to excel, says Michael Strysick, the college’s communications director. “In a sense, it’s like an academic boot camp. Once they realize they can succeed here, they know they can succeed anywhere.”

But unlike the sink-or-swim culture at Parris Island, where the brass count on a percentage of every class washing out, Centre’s leaders “expect students to walk across the stage in four years,” says Dean Hays. “It’s not sink or swim.”

Students meet those high expectations with an exceptional four-year graduation rate that exceeds eighty-five percent. Spanish, history, economics, and biology are among the most popular of the college’s twenty-seven majors and twenty-eight minors. To accommodate special interests, students have the option of creating a customized major.

All students take a rigorous, broad-based curriculum of the sort that is back in vogue of late. At Centre, it never went away. General education requirements include two science courses with labs; two social sciences; proficiency in math, a foreign language, and writing; two semesters of humanities; and two “fundamental questions” classes in religion or philosophy. Double majors are common.

“It’s tough here academically,” say students who are quick to add that there’s “lots of support.”

To help “first-years” get off on the right foot, Centre assigns faculty and career counselors to them before they arrive on campus. Should they stumble anyway, the college provides “a big safety net,” says Dean Fabritius. In addition to taking attendance, members of the faculty submit progress reports on all students who are on academic probation. The reports are part of an “early warning system” that detects and corrects problems before they become intractable. At midterm, professors submit to administrators the names of individuals earning marginal and unsatisfactory grades. Tutoring is available to those who need extra help.
“There’s no way for you to fall through the cracks,” says Miller, a native of Kentucky.

Consequently, ninety-two percent of Centre’s first-year students return for their sophomore year of college, a key indicator of “student persistence” and likelihood of graduation. Moreover, earning a degree doesn’t unravel the net. Relationships with faculty and staff endure, and the college provides career counseling to graduates for as long as they need it.

“Graduates remain connected to Centre, as a rule, for their entire lives,” Strysick says. “They don’t drift away.”

Centre’s academic year includes two long terms and a three-week January session, called CentreTerm, that affords opportunities for intensive study, internships, and a range of study abroad options. At the college’s urging, approximately eighty-five percent of students study outside the country, sixty percent of them for a long term. One in four graduates studies abroad more than once.

“There’s no good reason for not studying abroad,” says Milton Reigelman, professor of English and director of international programs. If a student doesn’t have a passport, Centre will assist them in getting one—at no cost.

Unlike many abroad programs where the students all live and eat together, Centre students typically get a more authentic cultural experience. They live in apartments or with local families. Rather than subsisting on cafeteria food, they receive a food stipend, shop in local markets, and prepare their own meals.

When they’re not traveling, students come home to “a place where they can breathe deep in all aspects of college,” including free cultural events offered through the convocation series, says President Roush. Recognizing that undergraduates need a certain amount of guidance, the college requires students on campus to attend at least a dozen programs each year. Some of the convocations include performances by cultural icons such as the Bolshoi and Kirov ballets, Yo-Yo Ma, Willie Nelson, Al Green, Aretha Franklin, and the Vienna Philharmonic led by Gustavo Dudamel. Performances are held at the recently renovated Norton Center for the Arts. Designed by the
Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, the Norton Center is an extraordinary facility for a college or university of any size.

“We send our students out into the world and bring the world to our students,” says Dean Hays.

**A Vibrant Community and Culture**

Centre has avoided becoming a place of privilege, a fate that can befall first-rate institutions. Compared to the populations at many small private liberal arts colleges, Centre’s students are a diverse lot.

“We’re becoming a rarity,” says President Roush, “a place of high achievement and a place of high opportunity.”

Centre’s students arrive at Danville, Kentucky, from forty-four states. About one in every six either belongs to a minority group or comes here from another country. Some Centre students enroll through the Posse Foundation, an innovative national program that “identifies public high school students with extraordinary academic and leadership potential who may be overlooked by traditional college selection processes.”

Approximately sixty percent of Centre’s undergraduates receive some form of need-based aid, including around eighteen percent who are awarded education subsidies through the federal Pell Grant program, which helps students from low-income families. Centre also enrolls a high percentage of students who are the first in their families to attend college.

“It makes the culture more interesting, more fun,” says President Roush, who notes that many of Centre’s low-income students “might have gone to Yale or Stanford, but they don’t know those places. For a lot of students, this is their chance.”

Diversity notwithstanding, Centre’s students do have predominant characteristics. They are bright (sixty percent graduated in the top ten percent of their high school classes) and tremendously loyal (Centre’s alumni have set the national standard for the percentage of graduates who annually give to their alma mater). Homecoming here is a big deal.

Centre’s students are “very Type A, very driven” people who tend to get involved in…well, just about everything, says Hays.
Approximately forty percent of students are varsity athletes, and about half belong to one of nine national Greek organizations on campus. Students enthusiastically join the one hundred or so clubs and organizations here, and they volunteer for organizations such as the Humane Society and Girls on the Go, a mentoring program for elementary school students.

“Our biggest challenge for students is not getting them involved but keeping them from getting too involved. We help them make smart choices,” says Hays, who encourages students to engage in a few activities “with your whole heart.”

Centre’s students are intellectually curious. An undergraduate research conference, in its second year on campus, generated one hundred eighty presentations. As always, students were well-supported. Eager to limit technological glitches, the college’s IT gurus showed up at the conference wearing T-shirts that encouraged presenters to “Ask Me for Help.”

Almost all Centre students live on campus for four years, which promotes “the idea of a resident community that becomes an intellectual community,” says Genny Ballard, a Centre alumna and professor of Spanish who came to the college from the University of Kentucky. “We travel together. We work together. We see films together.”

The Spanish Program exemplifies a growing emphasis at Centre on community-based learning. Students majoring in Spanish, for example, must tutor native Spanish speakers or work in Centro Latino, a clearinghouse set up to meet the needs of the local community’s Spanish-speaking immigrants.

“You can never understand a culture unless you understand the language,” says Leigh Cocanaugher, assistant director of the Center for Global Citizenship.

Community outreach takes many forms. A Centre graduate with Vista AmeriCorps is achieving notable success working with faculty to promote more community-based learning opportunities in their classes. And Bonner Scholars at the college volunteer for and meet a host of human-services needs at the local, regional, and national level.
Ahead of the Curve

To understand the Centre culture, consider its roots and impact. The college has long hewed to a philosophy of pushing students to become their best selves before sending them into the world to continue the cycle.

Founded in 1819 by pioneer Presbyterians, the college came into being with two instructors and five students. (Centre maintains a relationship with the Presbyterian Church but functions independently, welcoming students, faculty, and staff of all creeds and faiths.) The ethos of challenging students to better themselves and to make a difference in the world took hold from the start.

In 1826, Centre conferred a degree on one John Todd Stuart, who went on to become a lawyer, lawmaker, and politician. While fighting in the Black Hawk War in 1832, Stuart befriended a young man who was down on his luck and deeply in debt. Having failed at several ventures, the individual had settled on becoming a blacksmith.

Stuart had other ideas. Convinced of the young man’s potential, he loaned him law books to study. The protégé eventually passed the bar, became Stuart’s first law partner and married Stuart’s cousin Mary. The man was Abraham Lincoln.

Following the Civil War and Lincoln’s assassination, the former president’s vision of a reconciled North and South crumbled and justice gave way to Jim Crow. Yet prominent alumni of the college worked to repeal institutionalized bigotry.

In 1883 and 1896, the United States Supreme Court, ruling in the Civil Rights Cases and Plessy v. Ferguson, reversed federal antidiscrimination law and endorsed the legality of Southern segregation statutes. The lone dissenter in both cases was a Centre alumnus, John Marshall Harlan, Class of 1850. “In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law,” Harlan wrote. “The humblest man is the peer of the most powerful.”

Later, another Centre alumnus, Fred Vinson, Class of 1909, served as Chief Justice of the United States from 1946 to 1953 and presided over many rulings that eroded precedents that had
propped up segregation. The work of Harlan and Vinson contributed to the legal framework that eventually toppled the legal justification for discrimination.

Former Justice Sandra Day O’Connor characterized the men as “key architects of a...bridge to what some people called the most important decision of the modern Supreme Court—Brown v. Board of Education.”

Vinson, an avid football fan, died the year before the high court’s historic ruling, but mortality hasn’t kept him from attending Centre’s football games. In honor of the great man, the campus chapter of Vinson’s fraternity, Phi Delta Theta, has brought him to every home game since 1953, in the form of a framed portrait affectionately known as “Dead Fred.”

Commitment Pays

The impulse to strive is embedded in Centre’s DNA. It may have to do with its being a small institution or the fact that the college doesn’t have a billion-dollar endowment. Whatever the impetus, the college is motivated to make its mark.

“We have to prove that we can do it,” Milton Reigelman says. Centre’s faculty, staff, and students “believe in the small school experience,” Hays says, but they don’t buy into the notion of Centre’s being a good little college. The institution expects to succeed on a scale that is disproportionate to its size and resources.

“We behave like we’re Middlebury or Washington and Lee—without the money,” says President Roush.

Or Princeton. A quarter of a century ago, that bastion of Ivy-ness boasted that no institution of higher education could match its percentage of alumni who made annual gifts to the university. Centre deemed it a noteworthy achievement and determined to claim it. In the intervening years, Centre’s alumni have distinguished themselves for having the highest rate of alumni giving, holding the top spot for sixteen of the past twenty-five years, including the all-time one-year record of 75.4 percent.

“It was accomplished through back-breaking work,” former director of communications Mike Norris says. “Centre’s people,
from the very beginning, haven’t been afraid to take on daunting challenges, and haven’t been afraid to win.”

The importance of alumni giving and what it says about an institution isn’t lost on *U.S. News & World Report*, which uses the statistic to rank colleges and universities. Centre is a top-50 *U.S. News* national college and the top-ranked institution in Kentucky.

“It’s a satisfaction survey,” says Shawn Lyons, associate vice president for development and alumni affairs, of Centre’s alumni giving. “People are casting votes with their pocketbooks.”

If dollars are votes, then Centre’s recently concluded $120-million capital campaign was a landslide triumph. When the pledges were tallied, the college had secured commitments for $170 million. As a result, Centre has made major upgrades to its historic Classical Revival-style campus, despite the worst recession in decades.

The chairman of the college’s board contributed $15 million for a new residence hall, Pearl Hall, named after his mother and his grandmother, who made it possible for him to attend Centre. The facility is the first in Kentucky awarded LEED gold status by the U.S. Green Building Council, which recognizes building design, construction, and operation that is environmentally sustainable.

Acknowledging benefactors and mentors is a Centre tradition. During the Honor Walk Ceremony, graduating seniors form a procession alongside parents, teachers, and others who provided guidance and support. Pausing at the college seal embedded in the walkway at the front of Old Centre, the Classical Revival building completed in 1820, students present mentors with a coin embossed with the Centre nameplate and seal. Presentation of the coin, called a talent, is a way of “honoring somebody who helped them get that far,” Hays says.

The honoring of Centre itself has also become something of a tradition. *Consumers Digest* has ranked it the No. 1 value among liberal arts colleges, and *Forbes* magazine puts it thirty-four among all U.S. colleges and universities and has ranked it top-5 among all institutions of higher education in the South for three years running. *Kiplinger’s* magazine ranks Centre as among the top thirty values in all of higher education.
Almost eighty percent of the college’s students receive either merit or financial aid. The average award totaled over $25,000 in 2010-11. The recently inaugurated Brown Fellows Program covers tuition, room, board, and the cost of annual summer enrichment programs for ten top scholars every year. As new classes enter, the number of Brown Fellows on campus will grow to forty.

“If a student has the desire to come here, we’ll do everything in our power to make that possible,” Strysick says. “For many of them, it’s an introduction to a wider world.”

Students here win awards in bunches, including Fulbright, Goldwater, and Rotary scholarships every year. The college has had more Rhodes Scholars than virtually any college its size, including two Rhodes winners in the past ten years. Like most things at Centre, little is left to chance. Faculty and staff members of the Honors and Prizes Committee rigorously work with candidates interested in applying. In addition, Centre is the only private institution in Kentucky with a chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa academic honor society.

Word about Centre is getting around. In each of the past five years, the college has set a new record for campus visits by prospective students. Some of them are no doubt intrigued by the Centre Commitment, which guarantees students who fulfill their academic and social obligations the opportunity to 1) study abroad; 2) complete an internship; and 3) graduate in four years—or Centre will provide a year of free tuition at the college.

The guarantee is effectively moot, as most Centre students graduate in four years, many with two majors. Moreover, within ten months of graduation, ninety-eight percent of alumni, on average, land jobs or enroll in graduate school.

Apparently—for Centre and its students—rigor, a personal touch, and a tradition of determination pays.
Davidson College

Davidson College exemplifies the liberal arts ideal of harmony. This small college in North Carolina develops and balances within its students a high level of academic achievement, service to others, spiritual growth, honor and ethics. And at a time when many higher education observers bemoan the corrosive effect of unchecked collegiate athletics on education, Davidson’s students win championships, pursue academic research, study and do service abroad, and involve themselves in the community—all at the same time.

Davidson’s location and physical attributes impress. Stately brick buildings rise alongside towering, century-old trees on the college’s arboretum of a campus—just twenty minutes from Charlotte. The beaches of the Outer Banks lie to the east, the Blue Ridge ranges of the Appalachian Mountains to the west. Davidson maintains a Lake Campus about fifteen minutes from the main campus; students go there for recreation and relaxation.

Davidson’s most closely held values—love of learning, integrity, community, service—spring from the traditions of the college’s founders. Life on the campus focuses on an honor code that has been in place for more than a century.

The college was founded in 1837 by leaders of the Presbyterian Church. They named the institution after Brigadier General William Lee Davidson, a commander in the Revolutionary War who died at a site not far from the present campus. The founders’ commitment to learning, tolerance and selflessness are still evident, as the college now welcomes students, faculty and staff from all faith traditions.

The tenets of Davidson’s founders extend back to the Reformation origins of the Reformed tradition and the sixteenth-century church leader and theologian John Calvin. This branch of the church readily embraced learning as a significant aspect of faithful living, notes Rob Spach, ’84, the college’s chaplain.
“They felt that high-quality education was very important because you are to love God with your mind,” says Spach.

In this tradition, the Davidson view of education extends well beyond career preparation and personal enrichment. More than a means to an end, academic inquiry is a wellspring of intellectual and spiritual sustenance.

Just as the college’s founders determined Davidson’s initial direction, the institution’s Honor Code has helped it to stay the course. Administered by students themselves for more than fifty years, the code is a model of elegance and simplicity. Students pledge not to lie, cheat or steal or to condone these actions among their peers.

“You can’t know Davidson without knowing that the Honor Code is the cornerstone of life here,” says Kathy Bray, ’85, associate dean of students. “Relationships are predicated on mutual trust and mutual respect.”

The Honor Code provides a means for upholding shared values that engender a high level of trust. Professors allow students to take unproctored exams at the time and place of their choosing. Honor Code violators are subject to the judgment and punishment of their peers, up to and including expulsion. Students frequently resume studies at the college after fulfilling the terms of their sanctions.

“Everyone starts from this baseline of integrity,” says Kealy Devoy, Class of 2008.

For most Davidson alumni, the Honor Code is an ethical compass that informs career choices and other major life decisions. “It’s something students carry long after they leave Davidson,” says Bray.

Working (Hard) Together

Davidson is known for its “academic rigor”—a euphemism if ever there was one. To be blunt, Davidson is hard. It is one of the most selective colleges in the nation. As a student, if you get an “A,” it’s because you earned it.

“I get accused of having faculty grade too hard,” says Clark Ross, vice president of academic affairs and dean of faculty, without
apology. The intent isn’t to be Draconian, but “to match accomplishment and performance with grades.”

The most welcome evaluations of professors, Ross says, come from students who acknowledge that a course was hard, but that they learned a lot and “the professor was always there to help.”

This sort of rigor contributes to a high acceptance rate among Davidson graduates who apply to medical and law schools and other graduate programs. Approximately eighty percent of alumni attend some type of graduate or professional program after Davidson.

“We attract kids who want to excel academically. They are intellectually curious, and they understand the value of learning,” says Tom Ross, Davidson’s seventeenth president. “If you like to sit in the back or pick an easy major and move on, this is not the place for you.”

Davidson matches its lofty expectations with a rich array of resources that support student success. The most significant of these resources is a world-class faculty that is devoted to teaching. Almost every member of the faculty has a Ph.D. or other terminal degree, and there are no graduate degree programs at Davidson to divert resources away from undergraduate education. The college’s faculty provide academic support to an extent that would be impossible at a large research university.

“We want professors who are scholars, teachers, and interested in students’ lives,” says Spach.

Davidson’s investment in its students manifests itself in myriad ways. Need help with a speech? Make an appointment at the Speaking Center. Struggling with physics or calculus? Get help from students or professional staff at the new Math & Science Center. Need help polishing your prose? Get thee to the Writing Center. These—and more—are part of Davidson’s Center for Teaching and Learning, and this support for students has been successful—Davidson’s retention and graduation rates are among the best in the nation.

Perhaps the most innovative program for student support is The Davidson Trust. Initiated in 2007, the program is a commitment, made by the college, to assist with the full cost of attending
the college without requiring students to take out loans. Davidson was the first liberal arts college in the country to adopt such a policy.

This promise allows students of high ability to have access to a great college without taking on burdensome debt. Need-based financial aid packages include no mandatory loans—only scholarships and on-campus employment. As a result, the percentage of enrolled students eligible for financial aid has risen steadily, and the average financial aid package now exceeds $24,000.

Davidson is also one of the few colleges in the nation that has a need-blind admission policy. The college admits students without regard to the applicant’s ability to pay, and pledges to meet one hundred percent of admitted students’ demonstrated financial need.

“A student’s character and academic potential, not the family bank balance, are the factors considered for admission,” states the college’s web site.

Davidson has a classic liberal arts curriculum. The college offers twenty-two majors and fourteen minors. If those don’t suit, there is a self-designed major option.

Regardless of one’s academic concentration, students devote themselves to becoming proficient writers. All first-year students must meet a composition requirement by completing a writing seminar taught by tenured faculty from across the college. Seminars cover a range of topics, from “Justice and Piety” and “American Racisms” to “Sex, Love, and Friendship.”

Davidson also provides ample opportunity for undergraduate students to do research alongside professors who are accomplished in their fields. Since 1996, the number of Davidson students doing research on campus during the summer has increased from five to seventy-five students. In 2008, Davidson for the first time filed for patent protection of work undertaken jointly by faculty and students.

Erin Feeney, ’11, a native of Massachusetts, has done research in synthetic biology as a member of a research team that has manipulated genes in *E. coli* bacteria to produce a living machine capable of performing computations. The team has published in prestigious...
scientific journals and excelled at the International Genetically Engineered Machines (iGEM) Jamboree at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, despite being the only team from a liberal arts college at the competition.

The World is Our Campus

Seventy percent of Davidson students study abroad for credit, and many of them pursue service abroad. They work, for example, with the U.S. Agency for International Development in Senegal, the Green Bank, or at a health clinic in Kenya.

On campus, students have access to a strong international program, too. Much of this activity is coordinated through Davidson’s Dean Rusk International Studies Program, which was founded in 1986 and named for the former U.S. Secretary of State who graduated from Davidson in 1931. The program embodies Davidson’s belief that knowledge of other cultures and of the social, economic, political, and scientific forces that shape our world is integral to a liberal arts education.

Incorporating the offices of study abroad, the international student adviser, and a grants and programming staff, the Dean Rusk Program works to give a global dimension to every student’s education. In cooperation with other organizations, the program also serves as a catalyst for international education in the greater Charlotte area.

Hitting the Books as Hard as the Blocker

Dan Hampton, ’11, a football player, was sold on Davidson after meeting an offensive lineman on the team who published a biology paper as an undergraduate prior to his being accepted into graduate school at Duke University. Hampton was also drawn to the school’s desire to have students succeed on the field without compromising academic success.

“Coaches understand if you have a lab,” says Hampton, who began doing research on high-efficiency solar cells after his freshman year at Davidson. Indeed, Davidson’s scholar athletes are well-known for having “the heaviest luggage of any team on the
road—bags full of books and notes,” boasts the college’s web site. And despite the dual rigors of competitive athletics and academics, Davidson’s student athletes graduate at rates that are slightly higher than for the college overall—a rarity among post-secondary athletics programs.

Despite being one of the few liberal arts colleges in the country to play Division I athletics—and the second smallest to field a football team—the college’s teams attain uncommon achievements. “We expect our students to perform at the very highest level in the classroom every day,” says Jim Murphy, ’78, the college’s director of athletics. “Why would we expect anything less from athletics?” (Approximately one of every four Davidson students competes in Division I athletics, and an additional twenty-five percent play club sports.)

In 2007 and 2010, the college’s two-man croquet team won the national championship title in Croquet Golf. In Detroit, in 2008, the basketball team came within inches of making a last-second shot that would have defeated Kansas, the eventual national champion, and sent Davidson to the Final Four.

Unlike the pampered and sequestered sports stars at some universities, Davidson’s student athletes are fully involved in college life. Stephen “Steph” Curry, who now plays in the NBA, served on Davidson’s orientation committee and appeared in satirical rap videos produced by the college’s video news show. His teammate, Andrew Lovedale, organized the “Kicks from ’Cats” shoe-collection drive that solicited donations of more than 10,500 pairs of basketball shoes. Upon returning to his hometown of Benin City, Nigeria, Lovedale and a team of Davidson volunteers distributed the gear to local youngsters.

The college supports athletics not as its raison d’être or as an addendum to the “real” mission but as part of Davidson’s ethos of involvement and excellence. Yet if there was a time when sports might have overshadowed Davidson’s sense of balance, it would have been in March 2008, when Curry led the Davidson College basketball team on one of those NCAA tournament runs that justifies the term March Madness. Having dispatched basketball
powerhouses Gonzaga and Georgetown in the first two rounds, the tenth-seeded Wildcats advanced to the Midwest Regional. In Detroit, Davidson crushed Wisconsin, captivating the sports world and earning a chance to play another hoops heavyweight, Kansas.

Nearly half the college’s 1,920 students attended the basketball tournament, transported to Michigan aboard chartered buses paid for by some of the college’s devoted trustees. (Six months later, members of the same student community enthusiastically boarded buses bound for Louisiana, where they took part in the “Jena Six” civil rights demonstration that focused attention on racial inequality in the legal system.)

The undergraduates brought fervor to the Motor City, not to mention laptops, textbooks and half-written term papers. Befitting a college known for academic rigor, the Davidson contingent transformed the lobby of their hotel into a makeshift library and designated “quiet rooms” throughout the hotel for more intensive studying. Members of the team hit the books, as well.

In the end, the basketball team fell short of winning a national championship, but the college’s ethos of balance prevailed. When the hoopla had subsided, Davidson remained a tight-knit community whose members support one another and stay connected long after graduation. (More than sixty percent of Davidson’s graduates make annual financial contributions to the college—that was the top participation rate in the nation in 2010.) The college, its professors, and students continue to be serious about academic pursuits—yet they know how to have a good time; Davidson still strives for excellence, while steering away from competition run amok; and its students and alumni remain less interested in making a name for themselves, more interested in making a difference.

The primary purpose of Davidson College, the institution says, “is to assist students in developing humane instincts and disciplined and creative minds for lives of leadership and service.”

The Life of the Spirit

One of the most distinctive aspects of Davidson—its aforementioned pursuit of harmony and balance—is also the most difficult
to pin down. Davidson’s students relentlessly pursue truth yet respect the accepted truth of others. They rigorously seek excellence in a way that is at times decidedly non-competitive. They strive to do their best with a sense of humility. They lead without making a lot of unnecessary noise.

“You’re not a leader unless other people want to follow you,” says Julia Jones, director of Davidson’s Chidsey Center for Leadership Development. “If you get to Davidson, you have the ability and responsibility to lead.”

On a memorable spring weekend, for example, Kathy Bray received a call at home from a senior who had spent an entire day with a sophomore. The younger student was overwhelmed and anxious going into finals week. Despite his best efforts at counseling the distraught sophomore, the senior suggested that a talk with the associate dean would benefit the young man.

At the time, the older student was in contention to be valedictorian, and his thesis was due in two days.

“His standing in the class was critical, yet he took time out to spend a whole day with a student,” she said. “Davidson students are very humble. They’re more likely to celebrate other students’ victories and achievements rather than trumpet their own.”

The institution reflects those values, as well. During the annual scrum among colleges and universities to line up celebrity commencement speakers, Davidson foregoes the competition to attract entertainers, politicians and captains of industry. In a time-honored tradition, though, the Davidson president makes a few brief remarks to the graduating class—usually reminding each person of the expectations alma mater will have of her or him henceforth.

Humility and tolerance compel Davidson’s students “to be open to learn from others,” Spach says. The college supports thirteen different student-led religious organizations. In addition to its Presbyterian worship services, the college each week holds Catholic mass, a Muslim prayer meeting, an Episcopal Eucharist, and a Quaker meeting. There are Shabbat services and Hillel Fellowship programs, as well.
“Atheists and evangelicals can feel at home,” Spach says. “We can learn from each other.”

On campus a few years ago, a Muslim woman from Pakistan who had never met a Jewish person made the acquaintance of a young woman from Israel. The meeting led to the Pakistani woman’s involvement in the college’s interfaith program.

“We want to be a place where the life of the spirit is celebrated but never forced on anyone,” Spach says. “We want students of all traditions to feel at home. A liberal arts education allows you to go deep in your own religion and be exposed, in respectful ways, to other traditions.”

A Cohesive Community

Davidson’s students, faculty and staff frequently remark on the college’s sense of community as a distinguishing feature. Not a few refer to the college as a family.

“It feels like more of a family,” says Kealy Devoy, ’08. She attended Davidson, the only college in the South on her short list, after looking at Amherst, Colby, Williams, and Holy Cross Colleges, and Colgate, Brown, and Princeton Universities. “Everyone who works here wants the students to succeed.”

“I babysat and dogsat for professors. I ate at their houses,” says Devoy, who returned to campus after graduation to become Davidson’s inaugural sustainability fellow. Her duties entailed working with students, faculty and staff to assess and mitigate the college’s impact on the environment.

“Davidson is so much more than an academic institution,” she says.

Contributing to community cohesion is a student body of 1,920 students, some ninety-three percent of whom live on campus in eighteen residence halls. (Students are required to live on campus unless they receive permission to reside in off-campus housing.) Most faculty members live in the town of Davidson. Some students join eating houses that further strengthen community bonds and take part in more than one hundred fifty student organizations on campus.
“We encourage staff, teachers and students to develop relationships, and we’re small enough that that can happen,” Spach says. “Nobody is a number at Davidson.”

Data back that assertion. The student to faculty ratio is ten-to-one, and the typical course consists of about fifteen students. What the student population lacks in quantity, it makes up for in geographical diversity. In a recent year, Davidson enrolled undergraduates from forty-eight states and thirty-one countries.

Unlike college towns that have strained relations with institutions of higher education, the town and college of Davidson get along famously. No walls or fences separate campus and municipality. Residents enthusiastically support the college and its athletic teams.

A favorite annual fall event is the Cake Race, a Davidson tradition since 1934. During Orientation, first-year students race across campus. At the finish line of the two-mile course, students take home dessert. The order of finish determines the order in which students select from scores of cakes baked by members of the community.

“The college is very much a part of the community,” says Stacey Riemer, associate dean of students and director of civic engagement. “It’s a reciprocal relationship.”

The Davidson Commitment

Another cornerstone in Davidson’s foundation is the concept of giving back.

“The ethos of service is important to understanding the Davidson experience,” Bray says. “Students have a sense that they need to make their lives count.”

Take Doug Ammar, executive director of the Georgia Justice Project. After graduating from Davidson in the early 1980s and earning a degree in law, the former wrestler from West Virginia became concerned about recidivism rates that were a pox on the justice system.

Rather than bemoaning the large number of ex-cons who revert to crime after imprisonment, he founded GJP, a not-for-profit
organization that provides free legal services to people ensnared by the justice system. Members of the group counsel clients in prison and, upon their release, arrange employment with the organization’s New Horizons Landscaping Company. For his part, Ammar characterizes his work as a mission: “I feel like we can become the redemptive force in someone’s life,” he told the Atlanta Journal Constitution.

Ammar is an exemplar. “He set up a law agency to identify criminals, offer legal defense, maintain relationships while in prison and provide a job when they get out,” says Spach. “That is a legal practice that fits our idea of service.”

By comparison, “If someone went to Davidson and left and [they] were very successful in law or business and used their wealth to buy an island and sit for thirty years,” Spach says, “that would be a failure.”

“We don’t live for ourselves…. We need to live for the common good.”

More than ninety percent of Davidson’s students do service work, contributing 115,000 hours annually. Forty-one campus organizations are devoted to direct service, social justice or advocacy, and the college’s Center for Civic Engagement reaches out to one hundred sixty-five public and not-for-profit agencies.

Davidson is one of two hundred colleges to sign the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment, a network of colleges and universities committed to eliminating “net greenhouse gas emissions from specified campus operations” and to promoting climate research and education.

Moreover, the college created a fellow’s position to help implement the commitment.

“It’s a school that walks its talk,” says Riemer.
In the northwest corner of South Carolina, on the campus of
Furman University

Furman University, the concept of engagement is an incantation, an educational elixir, and a summation of the college’s ideal. The term’s multiplicity of meanings—commitment, action, absorption, encounters, involvement, connections—speak to and hint at Furman’s essence.

Here, where foothills step toward the Blue Ridge Mountains, engagement pervades the campus in and out of classrooms and throughout the college's larger community. Engagement informs the college’s relationship to the world, including its stewardship of the environment. Mostly, it is an institutional ideal that is evident in the way the college engages students—in mind and spirit.

“There is a culture here among the faculty and student body that really values interactions,” says Courtney Tollison, an assistant professor of history and historian of the Upcountry History Museum. “The culture encourages collaborations.”

Engagement happens in every aspect of undergraduate life. It happens when a student collaborates with a chemistry professor on a research project, performs in a production by Furman’s conservatory-caliber music department, travels with classmates for a semester abroad, completes an internship, or volunteers to work in the community.

“I like to tell the students that this experience is all about you,” says Rodney A. Smolla, a renowned First Amendment scholar and former Dean of the School of Law at Washington & Lee University, who became Furman’s sixteenth President in July 2010. “That is, it’s all about you learning that life is not all about you. We expect our students to engage with one another and with their faculty, to think deeply and broadly about achievement and the way it must represent values deeper and causes greater than achievement itself.”

Says Marianne Pierce, the university’s Senior Associate Academic Dean: “If a student wants to go somewhere and disappear, he
Furman gives students a voice, such that “the student has a huge say in what goes on here,” says John Schmidt, a communication studies and art major from Marietta, Georgia, recalling successful lobbying efforts to get a hot chocolate machine in the dining hall and sand volleyball courts next to one of the campus residence halls. The courts were “a huge hit”—so naturally the students asked for lights.

“Furman demands a response from you,” Schmidt says.

Furman’s ethos of engagement is also apparent in the way it nurtures a sense of community among faculty, students, administrators and alumni. Unlike large universities that have hierarchical infrastructures to keep their academic machines running, Furman relies on individuals rather than an army of administrative bureaucrats to get things done.

“At a small institution,” says John Beckford, vice president of Academic Affairs and professor of music “everyone has responsibility for contributing.”

Everyone is engaged.

A Rich History

One of the country’s oldest universities, Furman has a rich history, the vagaries of which are a testament to resilience and perseverance amid shifting fortunes.

The institution began in 1826 for the purpose of training Baptist ministers, and for one hundred sixty-six years Furman would be affiliated with the South Carolina Baptist Convention. It was established as the Men’s Academy and Theological Institute in Edgefield, South Carolina, about twenty miles from Augusta, Georgia. Within a few years, it was renamed the Furman Theological Institution in honor of Richard Furman, a Revolutionary War-era Baptist minister. After several moves during its first twenty-five years, in the early 1850s Furman relocated to Greenville, at the time a sparsely populated mountain town.

Throughout its first century, Furman struggled to make ends meet, but its financial stability was assured in the 1920s thanks to
the benevolence of James B. Duke, the tobacco baron and founder of the electric power company known today as Duke Energy. He left much of his fortune to a foundation, the Duke Endowment, that provides annual support to four institutions of higher education: Duke University, Davidson College, Johnson C. Smith University, and Furman.

Furman’s inclusion was serendipitous. While preparing to sign the indenture establishing the trust, Duke is said to have instructed his lawyer to insert as a beneficiary “that little college in Greenville that Ben Geer is such a fool about.” Bennette E. Geer, a former Furman professor (and later a president of the university), ran a mill owned by Duke, and the two had discussed the school on a number of occasions. During the Great Depression, Duke’s philanthropy kept the college from failing. Moreover, since 1924 the Endowment’s annual support has provided financial stability—and has been the qualitative difference in the university’s development.

Duke’s money made a quantitative difference, too.

In 1933 Furman and the Greenville Woman’s College were coordinated under a single board and president, although they continued to operate on separate campuses. And after World War II, faced with limited expansion opportunities in the city’s downtown area, an influx of post-war students, and the continuing challenge of operating two campuses, Furman’s trustees voted to relocate the campus to 1,100 pastoral acres outside of town. Ground was broken in 1953, and the architectural firm that had restored Colonial Williamsburg was asked to design the new campus, which is considered one of the most beautiful in the country. Male students moved to the new facilities in 1958, the women in 1961.

During the 1980s, the relationship between the state Baptist convention and Furman became strained. The university grew increasingly concerned when the convention began appointing trustees to the Furman board who had limited understanding of the institution and of academic freedom. Tensions deepened in the fall of 1990 after Furman's board asserted that it, and not the convention, had the legal right to elect its own trustees. After eighteen months
of threats, discussions and negotiations, in 1992 the South Carolina Baptist Convention voted to sever ties with Furman, which became an independent institution.

Today, Furman has risen to the top echelon of national liberal arts colleges. And Greenville, once known as the “Textile Capital of the World,” is now home to international companies such as BMW and Michelin North America. A magazine published by the Financial Times Business Group named Greenville the country’s number one micro city (population of less than 100,000) of the future. Students with a penchant for macro cities can drive to Atlanta (two and a half hours by car) or Charlotte (two hours).

**Intellectual Rigor**

In some ways, Furman is a different type animal than the typical liberal arts college, says one administrator with the University. Its 2,700 students make it and the University of Richmond the two largest ACS institutions. Furman’s pool of applicants overlaps those of Wake Forest, Vanderbilt and Duke universities, as well as top-tier liberal arts colleges.

The university’s rigorous academic program readies students for life after graduation. For seventy percent of Furman’s graduates, that means graduate school. “We are going to train you for nothing,” says Tom Triplitt, director of the Alumni Association, “but we’ll prepare you for everything.”

In 2008, Furman implemented a major curriculum initiative that emphasizes broad preparation across the humanities, deep intellectual inquiry, proficiency of expression (in writing, speaking and the arts), cultivation of global citizenship, and hands-on application of knowledge. The new curriculum increased the number of interdisciplinary courses and instituted a modified “semester plus” academic calendar. A three-week “May Experience” provides opportunities for deep inquiry into a single topic, including research projects.

Of interest to first-year students is the new curriculum’s requirement that they take two seminars, one of which must be
writing-intensive. The goal, says history professor Tollison, is to introduce students to the expected level of work at a competitive college.

The sciences are particularly strong at Furman. The chemistry program, recognized by the American Chemical Society as one of the best in the country, has an outstanding faculty and “an array and quality of equipment that exceeds what you would find at almost any other institution—to the chagrin of Furman’s chemistry majors who go to graduate school,” says Dean Beckford.

The recently dedicated, $60 million Charles H. Townes Center for Science, named for a 1935 graduate who earned the Nobel Prize for work that led to the discovery of the maser and laser, is evidence of Furman’s commitment to scientific inquiry. “When you do good research, you get big grants,” Beckford says. “Our entire science division has distinguished itself for the amount of undergraduate research that students engage in.” Indeed, students cannot graduate from the chemistry department without having done significant research.

Organic and bio-organic chemistry professors have also collaborated with students on an e-textbook project in which students write and edit an online text for their class. Unlike printed textbooks, which can be rendered obsolete before the ink is dry, the online approach allows for an iterative process and continual refinement. “Ten years from now, we’ll have the best textbook for this course because it will have been created, modified and improved upon by twenty generations of Furman students,” says Brian Goess, a chemistry professor.

Furman’s unwavering commitment to undergraduate research results in the opportunity for many students to present their findings at regional and national conferences and other professional meetings. Students also co-author articles published in major academic journals.

Since 2007, a dozen students have worked on a project undertaken by the Upcountry History Museum to document the impact of veterans returning to Upstate South Carolina after World War
II. Through internships, independent study and coursework, the students conducted oral histories, collected thousands of photos, assisted in the publication of a book, and helped produce an award-winning documentary, *Threads of Victory*.

“Furman students’ efforts have been absolutely essential to every product that has emanated from this research project in the last two years,” says Tollison.

**Synergies Abound**

Furman’s intimate campus environment contributes to dynamic exchanges among teachers and undergraduates. Enrollment in first-year seminars is limited to about sixteen students. (Members of one recent seminar class became so close that they vowed to reconnect as a group every semester.) Small classes allow professors to understand the capabilities of their students, who work closely with instructors and peers on group projects.

“One thing I love about working here is we have opportunities with smaller classes,” says Tollison, “opportunities to know our students.”

And students know them.

“You’ll know your professors. You’ll have a support system. We're here for the students,” says Susan Zeiger, director of internship programs. “Everybody contributes.”

Onarae Rice, a psychology professor, confirms the two-way nature of the student-professor dynamic at Furman. “It’s not just us teachers engaging the students,” says Rice, recalling a student who, having collaborated with him on research, presented their findings at a conference attended by 35,000 neuroscientists. “They engage us as well. They challenge us. These students are really, really bright.”

The music program alone has twenty full-time faculty members. They teach one hundred eighty music majors who can earn a bachelor of music degree in composition, church music, music education, performance, or theory. Unlike conservatories that restrict enrollment in classes and membership in ensembles, Furman welcomes students majoring in other fields to pursue study and performance in more than twenty vocal and instrumental groups.
The college’s symphony orchestra is one of the few all-undergraduate orchestras in the country.

To help its professors stay sharp, Furman created the Center for Teaching and Engaged Learning. Its purpose is to hone professors’ skills in teaching, course development and educational technology. The low attrition rate among faculty has resulted in a cadre of experienced academicians who are available to mentor less-seasoned colleagues. Ninety-six percent of faculty members hold a terminal degree in their field.

“It’s wonderful that I can walk down the hall and ask more experienced colleagues about things,” says Monica Black, a history professor.

The faculty is also active in Furman’s off-campus learning programs. Professors often accompany students on travel-study trips that “provide more organized connections between study abroad and on-campus experiences,” says Beckford. Prior to departing for Spain, South Africa, Belize or one of many other destinations, students take preparatory courses that make study abroad meaningful, he says.

“I was drawn to Furman by the study-away opportunities,” says Reid Matthews, a recent graduate in Spanish who participated in the program in Madrid.

Maureen Megan, a religion and music major from Pennsylvania, spent a semester in India, where she planted rice alongside people who live on less than a dollar a day. Prior to their encounter with Megan, some of the Indians had never seen a Caucasian person, yet her eagerness to learn impressed them. “A white girl with rice planting talent? How absurd,” they exclaimed, according to Megan, who wrote about the experience when she returned to campus.

A Worldwide Campus Community

Furman is a community. Most students graduate within four years, but they never really leave. More to the point, the university’s commitment to alumni and lifelong learning means that Furman never leaves them.
This sense of affiliation and shared values typically begins with the campus visit. “I never got the same feel of community at any other school,” says Lydia Rowe, a recent graduate from Georgia who majored in Spanish and communication studies.

The sense of community is nurtured during an intensive orientation week for first-year students and is heightened by the residential nature of the school—more than ninety percent of undergraduates live on campus all four years.

J.T. Wilde, a communication studies major who had attended a boarding school in Pennsylvania, knew that he wanted to go to college in the South, as his father had, but until he visited Furman, he wasn’t sure what the best fit was. “I knew when I stepped on campus that this is where I wanted to go,” Wilde says. “I realized that I didn’t want to be a number, one of five hundred [kids] in a lecture hall.”

Before he decided on Furman, Reid Matthews had gone to a small private school in Greenville where he “was surrounded by a high falutin’ crowd.” By comparison, Matthews says his Furman friends were “humble, content people…from modest backgrounds. Furman draws down-to-earth people.”

As one of three institutions in the sixteen-member Associated Colleges of the South consortium to play NCAA Division I athletics, Furman also excels on the playing fields. Alumni Ricardo Clark and Clint Dempsey were on the 2010 United States World Cup squad, and Furman is one of only half a dozen private institutions whose football teams have appeared in the NCAA I-AA (now FCS) championship game. The Paladins have made it to the title game three times, in fact, winning in 1988. In 1976, behind the play of Betsy King and Beth Daniel (both of whom would go on to qualify for the Ladies Professional Golf Association Hall of Fame), the women’s golf team earned the university’s first national championship of any kind, and it remains a national power. Paul Scarpa, coach of the men’s tennis team, has the most wins of any coach in Division I.

The college’s eighteen-hole golf course underwent a major reno-
vation in 2008, and the Greenville area is a destination for bicyclists and white-water kayakers.

Furman reaches out to the community in a variety of other ways. The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute sponsors an assortment of non-credit programs for retirees and local residents, and The Woodlands at Furman is a recently opened retirement community that appeals to those who want to take advantage of the cultural and intellectual opportunities the university offers.

Furman also derives strength from the service work it does in Greenville and beyond. The Richard W. Riley Institute of Government, Politics, and Public Leadership sponsors programs and lectures on a host of topics, ranging from urban politics and policy to women in politics, the environment, politics and the media, and the American Congress. The Institute has brought to Greenville such national figures as Hillary Clinton, Madeleine Albright, ambassador to China Stapleton Roy, John Glenn, and Newt Gingrich.

One of the Institute’s programs, the Diversity Leaders Initiative, seeks to mend “racial divisions and…deep divides that continue to challenge social and economic progress in South Carolina.” A decade after its founding, five hundred alumni of the program are working to break down inertia and barriers to success within the state.

Furman’s student-run Heller Service Corps provides volunteer support to a host of social service agencies, schools and other groups, and the “Bridges to a Brighter Future” program, for at-risk high school students, was recognized by the National Center for Summer Learning at Johns Hopkins University as one of the nation’s best.

“It’s rare for a student at Furman to not be involved in service,” says Pierce, the senior associate academic dean.

The college has a strong career planning program as well. The Student Alumni Council, for example, connects current students with graduates who serve as career mentors. And Furman has a loyal group of alumni; in recent years, almost half of the college’s graduates contributed to the annual fund.
Any discussion of Furman would be incomplete if it neglected to mention the university’s commitment to the environment. In 2001, the board of trustees declared that sustainability would be a defining characteristic of the institution.

In typical Furman fashion, the college engaged the initiative with gusto, mandating that all new buildings and renovated structures meet guidelines for LEED certification. LEED standards promote energy and water efficiency, reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, healthy indoor environments, stewardship of natural resources, and reduction of adverse environmental impacts.

Furman has also created a Center for Sustainability, named for former president David Shi, who served for sixteen years prior to the arrival of Rod Smolla, and who led Furman to be a charter signatory of the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment. ACUPCC members take steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, set a target date for their schools to become carbon neutral, and integrate sustainability into the curriculum.

The Furman faculty recently voted to establish a new major in the emerging field of sustainability science, making Furman one of the first universities to offer such a multidisciplinary program. To graduate, all students must take at least one course that focuses on the natural environment and humans’ interactions with it. The university has also developed an organic garden that abuts Cliff’s Cottage. The cottage, completed in 2008, was Southern Living magazine’s first sustainable Showcase Home and now houses the Center for Sustainability.

“There is no question we are at an auspicious moment in Furman’s history,” says Smolla. “We have proven we can be innovative, that we can be a leader in higher education, and that we can educate students for academic success. The challenge that lies before us now is to bring our tradition of innovation to the cultivation of both mind and spirit, to teach our students to be beacons for civility, compassion and respect, and to instill in them the sense that our deepest beliefs must affirm the essential dignity and worth of
every human being.

“Then we will be able to say that we have truly achieved the goal of a Furman education.”
Two things you’ll encounter at almost every college campus are Greek organizations and reserved faculty parking spaces. The former are hubs of student social life, the latter professorial perks whose spray-painted boundaries symbolize divisions in the social order.

Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas, has neither. Students and staff are largely uninterested in status of the kind conferred by a patch of asphalt or membership in the right fraternity or sorority. At Hendrix, the value of outward appearances is steeply discounted. Social justice trumps social climbing.

“Nobody cares if you have dreads or wear a tie or have piercings,” says Pamela Owen, an alumna of the college and its associate vice president for alumni and constituent engagement. “People are not judged on their appearances. You have to be authentic.”

At Hendrix, authenticity frequently manifests itself as engagement and “a campus ethos of cooperation and egalitarianism,” says Charles Chappell, an English professor and alumnus, who retired in 2010 after forty-one years on the faculty. Students and the academicians who teach them are socially aware, inclined to cooperate, and drawn to a good debate. Whether their political views are liberal or libertarian, the students tend to be nonconformist. The campus is rife with vegans and vegetarians, for whom Hendrix is as welcoming as Tofu U.

Hendrix attracts students with “intellectual curiosity and concern about the world, the environment and social justice,” says Peg Falls-Corbitt, associate provost for engaged learning and director of the college’s Miller Center for Vocation, Ethics and Calling.

Annie Greenaway, a chemistry major, was considering the possibility of undertaking a research project at the National Renewable Energy Lab, in her home state of Colorado, that would combine her
interests in chemistry and politics, her minor. “I want to do socially relevant science,” Greenaway says. “I don’t want to be a chemist holed up in a laboratory.”

Compared to more traditional college campuses, “Hendrix students are more open, emo, earnest and a bit more granola and crunchy,” says President J. Timothy Cloyd. “They are politically active and interested in liberty and justice issues and…critiquing the accepted social order. They don’t accept orthodoxy in any form.”

Hendrix’s departure from the status quo extends to the college’s academic philosophy, which encourages students to “think outside the book.” In service to that ideal, the college expects undergraduates to become deeply involved in areas of learning for which they have a distinct passion.

“You get a chemistry or biology student directing a one-act play or singing in the choir,” says Cloyd. “Hands-on, engaged liberal arts at Hendrix is universal and defining of the experience. Students learn both outside and inside of the classroom and they follow their passions.”

Notwithstanding the unmistakable signs of granola on campus, Hendrix students don’t confuse laid back with lazy. Blake Burkett, a recent graduate who majored in biochemistry, came to Hendrix with the intention of preparing for medical school. In addition to a rigorous pre-med course of study, he completed a medical internship in Zanzibar, off the coast of Tanzania, living with a local family and assisting a surgeon in the operating room. At a time when Americans were hotly debating health-care reform, Burkett’s hands-on experience led him to analyze health care systems throughout the world. It was, he says, “a defining experience of my life.”

Like Burkett, forty percent of the college’s undergraduates major in such hard sciences as chemistry, biology, physics, and math. There are four tenure-track professors in physics alone. And more than sixty percent of Hendrix graduates pursue post-graduate degrees, a testament to the college’s academic rigor.

It would seem that Hendrix has attained a rare and delicate balance, cultivating an environment that is “rigorous academically but
friendly and warm...demanding but supportive,” says the president. “That’s because Hendrix students support one another and because faculty encourage collaborative learning.”

The upshot is a place where students strive to do their best without undercutting their colleagues, a place that values cooperation over competition, a place where students who are struggling in chemistry and other “high-risk” academic areas get help from peer-led tutoring programs.

“There is not a lot of pressure for students to compete against each other for grades,” says Karen Foust, vice president for enrollment. “We have smart students but not a cutthroat environment.”

Mitigating against the hyper-competition and grade-grubbing that are pervasive at some colleges is a culture that values learning and intellectual curiosity as something more than the means to an end. Learning is its own reward.

“Everybody here really wants to study,” Foust says.

“The student who is intellectually passive,” adds Robert Entzminger, provost and dean of the college, “won’t do well here.”

The social dynamic at Hendrix is largely open. The college’s size, absence of members-only Greek organizations and disdain for unnecessary hierarchy discourage fragmentation of the campus into impermeable subcultures.

“The student body is less inclined [than at other colleges] to segment itself. Their identity is with the whole campus,” says Entzminger. At the same time, “they are more individualistic, less cookie-cutter. Our students don’t feel the need to fit in.”

Hendrix, you might say, is a community without conformity.

“There are not a lot of cliques,” says Ellis Arnold, an alumnus who serves as executive vice president and dean of advancement. “People do things socially in a more cross-pollinated way.”

Before Hendrix was Hendrix

Hendrix College hasn’t always been the open, socially cross-pollinated, progressive institution that it is today. Indeed, Hendrix hasn’t always been Hendrix.

It began in 1876 as Central Institute, a primary school estab-
lished in Altus, Arkansas, by the Rev. Isham L. Burrow. Thereafter, the institute began its enduring affiliation with the United Methodist Church in 1884; awarded its first four-year degrees in 1886; was renamed Hendrix College in 1889; and relocated to Conway in 1890.

A decade later, the U.S. Office of Education recognized Hendrix for having the highest standards for admission and graduation among all the state's public and private institutions of higher learning. In 1910, a Hendrix student became the college's first Rhodes Scholar.

The college's tradition of open and progressive thought began in the early 1900s.

In the late 1920s, by popular referendum, Arkansas passed a law forbidding the teaching of evolution in publicly funded schools, colleges or universities. Despite pressure from conservative supporters, President John Hugh Reynolds vehemently opposed the law, referring to the measure as “a war on science.” He openly supported the right of the faculty at Hendrix to teach what they thought science required. This instilled the belief at Hendrix that the role of academic inquiry was to seek the truth even if that did not sit well with popular opinion in Arkansas or the South.

Hendrix experimented with fraternities and sororities in the 1930s and early 1940s, but students voted to disband the college's Greek system in 1945, preferring the more open atmosphere of residence hall-based social activities.

In the 1960s, the college discontinued compulsory chapel attendance, and the 1970s ushered in more relaxed residence hall policies. This continues today with single-sex, co-educational, and apartment-style housing available to meet the needs of Hendrix students.

Chapel attendance is no longer required, but the College’s continuing relationship with the United Methodist Church underpins its commitment to principles of openness and inclusiveness. This is reflected in the welcoming atmosphere of the campus, creating a comfortable environment for the gay community, supporting activities of the Crain-Maling Center of Jewish Culture, and embracing
differences among students from diverse backgrounds and faiths.

**More Than a Curriculum**

At the heart of the contemporary Hendrix experience is a thoughtfully conceived academic program whose comprehensiveness and rigor is second to none.

“The academic program is amazing, but you may not appreciate it until you’re out of college for ten or fifteen years,” says Arnold, who graduated in 1979 and took with him “an insatiable appetite to continue to learn. If you don’t want that, don’t come here.”

“I came away equipped with competencies and skills that prepared me to do whatever I wanted to do,” says the successful trial lawyer turned executive vice president, a self-described “prototypical Hendrix grad.”

“No one trained me to be a college administrator,” Arnold says. “The liberal arts [academic program] shaped me and allowed me to develop strategic planning, leadership, and critical analytical skills.”

The college’s general education requirements are divided into three areas: the Collegiate Center, which initiates students into post-secondary learning through the study of “diverse cultural, intellectual and linguistic traditions shaping the contemporary world”; Learning Domains, which cross academic boundaries to focus on “the content, disciplinary styles and modes of inquiry in the humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences”; and Capacities, which ensures that students acquire “basic proficiencies in fundamental skills used across multiple disciplines.”

The Collegiate Center has three components. Journeys, a one-semester course taken by all first-year students, “explores how different cultures and different peoples have made sense of their own life journeys.” Students begin their inquiry in Confucius’s China, from there visiting with Plato and Socrates, Islamic thinkers, Charles Darwin, John Locke and W.E.B. Du Bois, among others.

The second component of the Collegiate Center is Explorations: Liberal Arts for Life, taken alongside Journeys during the first semester at the college. The intention is to engage students in the lib-
eral arts experience and the Hendrix community through “academic and career exploration, self-inquiry and personal development.”

The third leg of the program, “Challenges of the Contemporary World,” complements the Journeys component through exploration of a threat in the current era involving the environment, race and ethnicity, gender, and other global issues. The goal of the Collegiate Center is to prepare students to promote a world that is “just, sustainable, and spiritually satisfying.”

Fulfilling requirements of the Learning Domains program provides the broad foundation on which a liberal arts education is built. Students must take seven courses across the six domains: expressive arts; historical perspectives; literary studies; natural sciences; social and behavioral analysis; and values, beliefs and ethics.

The Capacities component ensures that students have mastered the ability to produce “clear and effective writing, [which] is inseparable from clear and coherent thinking.” Students must attain proficiency in a foreign language and mathematical/computing skills, and there is a physical activity requirement, as well.

In addition to the general education requirements, students must satisfy the demands of a major chosen from among thirty-three options. There is also a well-established tradition of self-designed majors, allowing students to follow their passions through interdisciplinary studies. Some students choose to double major or to pursue one of thirty-two minors. Most majors require completion of a senior capstone project.

In the course of completing the academic program, students encounter many opportunities for working closely with Hendrix’s distinguished faculty, pursuing undergraduate research, studying abroad, delving deeply into a single subject during annual Maymeisters, and engaging in service learning outside the classroom.

“We do undergraduate research and study abroad well,” says Falls-Corbitt, the associate provost for engaged learning. “We truly value interdisciplinary thinking.”
The Odyssey

The most distinctive aspect of Hendrix’s academic program, and the single feature of the college that most distinguishes it from other liberal arts institutions, is “Your Hendrix Odyssey: Engaging in Active Learning.” The program challenges students to complete a series of hands-on learning projects that go well beyond the traditional classroom-syllabus divide. Established in the fall of 2005, Odyssey made official a part of the culture that had always been important.

“The Odyssey program codified what we’d been doing for a long time,” says Tom Goodwin, a chemistry professor who has won national awards for teaching and research.

To graduate, students must embark on and finish three projects chosen from half a dozen Odyssey areas: artistic creativity; global awareness; professional and leadership development; service to the world; undergraduate research; and special projects. To satisfy an Odyssey requirement, a student can take a designated course, such as “Ethics in the Face of Poverty,” participate in an approved activity, or design his or her own project. Graduates’ transcripts include descriptions of their Odyssey endeavors. The college anticipates creating an e-portfolio of projects on the Web for every student.

During the program’s conceptual phase, President Cloyd referred to it as the Galileo Project because “Galileo understood and worked through theoretical notions…but he also wanted to test those ideas in the world. Odyssey ensures students are engaged in the learning process in a way that connects to the broader world.”

Goodwin, one of the architects of the Odyssey program and a nationally recognized leader in the field of undergraduate research, says “the faculty developed the program to emphasize hands-on learning experiences as a central component of undergraduate education.” In 2010, the Council on Undergraduate Research recognized Goodwin as one of two professors in the country who had attained “excellence in undergraduate research.” He was also recognized for his teaching skill in 2003 when the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for the Advance-
ment and Support of Education named him the nation's Professor of the Year for liberal arts colleges.

Kelsie Holmes, a biology major, undertook a special project, “Ridin’ Dirty with Science,” to fulfill one of her Odyssey requirements. Working with fellow students, she introduced biology and chemistry concepts to underprivileged third- and fourth-graders at the county Boys and Girls Club. The students grew bacteria from samples swabbed from their shoes, conducted experiments with helium, experimented with parachutes made of different materials (using a Barbie doll as their crash test dummy), and assessed the effectiveness of various hand-washing techniques.

“I learned that kids can act like adults,” says Holmes, who discovered that she enjoys being around children. The experience led her to consider a career in pediatric medicine.

Most Odyssey projects require a reflective component, such as keeping a journal or writing a paper that meditates on the experience. Sometimes, students reflect on a project as a group or make a presentation on campus.

“Students go abroad and say the experience has changed their life without being able to say how,” notes Falls-Corbitt. “The reflection piece helps them to understand how.”

Taylor Kidd, an American studies major from Texas, completed one Odyssey project that focused on energy and the environment and another with a concentration on media, leadership and politics. The environmental project involved him in construction of the campus’s first LEED certified building and the first LEED-Gold building on a college campus in Arkansas.

Taylor’s media and politics project combined a two-part classroom course with field work in the halls of the Arkansas state legislature. He worked for a National Public Radio affiliate in Little Rock, spending two months interviewing lawmakers, writing and delivering on-air editorials and gaining insights into how a legislature that meets for ninety days every two years gets things done.

He also researched the career of Wilbur Mills, Hendrix Class of 1930, who as chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee
in the 1960s was considered by some to be the second-most powerful man in Washington.

During the first six years of the Odyssey program, the college supported students’ projects with grants totaling $1.8 million. The process for procuring funds, which are approved by The Committee on Engaged Learning, is itself an education. “Students have to learn how to prepare a program proposal, put together a budget and find out if they will be funded,” says Wayne Clark, the college chaplain and an alumnus.

The program’s expanding reach extends to Odyssey Distinction Awards that are given to incoming students in recognition of achievements in high school. “We offer scholarships for academic achievement and need-based financial aid, but Odyssey Distinction Awards recognize students’ gifts, talents and passions,” says President Cloyd. (All Hendrix students receive merit and/or need-based financial aid.) Exemplary alumni who have excelled in areas targeted by Odyssey are selected for recognition as well, through the Odyssey Medal program. Recipients are held up to the students and to the community as exemplars of lives to emulate.

The program has also expanded to offer endowed Odyssey professorships that provide funds for faculty-student research for up to three years. “Relationships between students and faculty have deepened,” says Falls-Corbitt. “It has brought out the creativity of the faculty.”

**An Expressive Architecture**

The Hendrix campus in many ways mirrors the college’s values. It is a warm and inviting place of some three dozen buildings, many of them red-bricked, tile-roofed and trimmed in white, including several listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The college’s distinctive Galloway street lamps illuminate the walkways of the one-hundred-sixty-acre campus.

Students and professors relax in the Pecan Court, an open courtyard that the college has covered in pecan shells since the days when a shelling factory operated nearby. (The shells make an ideal
ground cover because they don’t float away when it rains.) People move among leafy oaks that shade the campus and provide habitat to legions of nimble, sure-footed squirrels, mascot of the college’s Ultimate Frisbee team, The Flying Squirrels.

The region’s mix of rural and urban environments provides many opportunities for the kind of education that happens when students and professors do things outside of the classroom. Located at the foothills of the Ozark Mountains, the college’s locale offers numerous recreational options for outdoor enthusiasts. Multiple state parks and the Arkansas River entice students who enjoy hiking, fishing, and canoeing.

The city of Conway itself has the small-town feel and amenities one would expect to find in a sixty-thousand-person city, including a cozy downtown area that is a ten-minute walk from campus. In addition, the College is developing a new-urbanist Village next to campus, complete with a bookstore, wood-fired-oven pizzeria and pub, and a Panera Bread bakery and café. More urban-inclined students are drawn to Little Rock, thirty minutes away. As the state capital and a metropolitan area with a population of six hundred thousand, the city is the regional center for politics, culture and entertainment.

In recent years, the college has upgraded its physical plant to ensure that facilities are on a par with Hendrix’s academic programs. Donations generated by an ambitious $100 million fund-raising campaign have made possible a new $22 million, 100,000-square-foot Wellness and Athletics Center and a $26 million Student Life and Technology Center, the largest capital project in the college’s history.

With an eye toward sustainability, the latter incorporates low-VOC materials, energy-efficient windows, motion detectors that turn off lights in rooms that are not in use, and native-plant landscaping. The building houses offices for a swath of campus organizations, from the student-run radio station and the student senate to the literary magazine and the yearbook.

True to its name, the building also incorporates a state-of-the-
art educational technology center, including high-tech classrooms, conference areas and “technology clusters” designed to support group projects. “Only at Hendrix would we have an academic component incorporated into a building largely devoted to student life and co-curricular activities,” says Karla Carney-Hall, vice president for student affairs.

The building also houses a new dining hall, a function that at Hendrix has always been about more than simply eating. The dining hall has special theme days that, in true Hendrix fashion, tend toward themes like Berlin Wall Day, in which the dining area is divided into East and West, and National Coming Out Week.

The dining hall staff has a familiarity with students that doesn’t exist at larger schools. Miss Martha, a stalwart of food services, is said to know the name of every student, each of whom gets a cake on his or her birthday. The staff solicits recipes from students’ families, a practice that hints at the relationships that develop among Hendrix students and the people who feed them.

“It’s kind of a family,” says Chaplain Clark. “The dining services workers have tears when the students graduate.”

Getting Involved

Aside from its facilities, faculty and academic programs, the thing that distinguishes Hendrix from other colleges and universities is the degree to which members of the community get involved. Activism is a core value.

“We attract earnest students. We have an open and inclusive environment which we perpetuate by bringing people in” who are a good fit, says Arnold, whose oldest daughter “found a niche” at another national liberal arts college. Hendrix was a better fit for Arnold’s younger daughter, who “is more engaged in social justice issues and service.”

In the interest of social justice, the president and a member of the Board of Trustees worked with the Rwandan government and the Clinton Foundation to create the Rwandan Presidential Scholars Program. The program seeks to rebuild the intellectual
capital of that ravaged country. It began in 2007, when four Rwandan students traveled to Arkansas from their African homeland and enrolled at Hendrix College. Since then, eighteen colleges have joined the program, which as of 2010 enrolled one hundred thirty students. “The Rwandan students talk to our students and dispel stereotypes that Americans have,” the president says.

Bringing Rwandans to campus is part of a larger demographic shift that has taken place since the era when most Hendrix students came from Arkansas. Half a dozen years ago, the college enrolled one new international student annually. Today the college typically enrolls students from forty or more states and at least fourteen countries.

Activism also works from the inside out. The student-led Volunteer Action Committee undertakes service projects in and beyond the central Arkansas area. They help with food and clothing drives, support Big Buddy and Adopt-a-Grandparent programs, volunteer at a homeless shelter and help at Riddle’s Elephant and Wildlife Sanctuary, a home for elephants that had belonged to private owners, circuses and zoos. During the fall 2005 break, students organized a service trip to Mississippi to help victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Farther afield, students have taken service trips to Poland and Vietnam, and distributed medical supplies in Mexico.

On campus, hardly a day passes without an opportunity for students to engage in some type of open forum, such as the weekly session of the Tuesday Talks series. Sponsored by the Office of the Chaplain and the Miller Center, the series invites faculty and staff members to ruminate on a single question: “What is my calling/vocation and how do I know?” Thursday afternoons are given to forums undertaken as part of the college’s association with Project Pericles, a national not-for-profit organization that challenges colleges and universities to make social responsibility and participatory citizenship a key element of their educational programs.

And the college’s focus on open dialogue provides a forum for people to discuss a broad range of topics, from religion and philos-
ophy to politics, literature, social issues and scientific questions.

Says Ms. Greenaway: “It’s the ability to go out and do whatever you want, and the willingness of people to help you that makes Hendrix distinctive.”
Millsaps College

At the center of Millsaps College’s one-hundred-acre campus, in the heart of Jackson, Mississippi, a partly-shaded and grassy area known as “The Bowl” beckons students and professors. Globe lamps light walkways that intersect at the central lawn, and green benches invite passersby to pause for moments of respite and reflection. When the weather is inviting, students unfurl blankets stashed in backpacks and spread themselves out on the gently rolling expanse—a pastime known as Bowl sitting.

Partly ringed by Eastern Cottonwoods, crepe myrtles, and oak trees, the Bowl is what landscape designers call “versatile space.” It is an ideal venue for games of Frisbee, impromptu open-air study sessions, al fresco relaxation, concerts, an annual multicultural festival, and campus rites of passage. During the Fourth Night ceremony each fall, first-year students congregate in the Bowl and introduce themselves to the Millsaps community. They sign the college’s code of conduct by candlelight and write a personal essay about their aspirations. As seniors, they return to the Bowl and reflect on the changes they have undergone.

Presided over by the Bell Tower, the Bowl is a symbol of the college’s power to transform. It connects the campus—physically and otherwise—allowing for the free movement of people and ideas. Without walls or divisions of any kind, the Bowl is open and balanced. You half expect the college’s grounds crew to cut the grass in the form of a yin-and-yang symbol.

The Bowl bespeaks an institutional ethos that challenges boundaries, including those that separate academic departments as well as boundaries that circumscribe students’ comfort zones. Millsaps takes on the demarcations of race, politics and social divisions, the lines that separate the classroom and the larger world, the false distinction between service and learning, and the frequently self-imposed walls that cleave a person’s career from his or her passion.
“The college is a very open place,” says George Bey, professor of anthropology and associate dean of international education, of an institution that is noted for its balance of principles and programs as well as for the courageous stances it has taken on important issues of the day, such as the civil rights movement in the 1960s.

Millsaps’ eleventh president, Robert W. Pearigen, says the strengths of the college are its high quality faculty and staff; distinctive academic programs that exemplify the best in liberal arts as preparation for life; and a strong sense of service and community. The college is an exemplar of a community of scholars in pursuit of excellence.

“We have a passionate belief in liberal arts education as intrinsically meaningful for individuals as well as being the very best preparation for a good and worthy life of learning, leadership and service,” Pearigen says.

In ways small and large, evidence of Millsaps’ boundary-busting bona fides are everywhere. A campus statue of John Wesley, the Anglican cleric credited with founding the Methodist movement, is balanced by one of Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of India’s independence movement, who encouraged nonviolent civil disobedience.

Many of the boundaries obliterated by Millsaps are internal. The college is a good fit for “smart students who aren’t afraid to work and are willing to play with expanding their comfort zones,” says Kim Burke, a professor of accounting in the Else School of Management. “To do well here, you have to be willing to punch at the edges.”

Millsaps is a place where people—young scholars, professors, administrators—can try on different roles, but the “role doesn’t determine social status,” says Tonya Nations, director of the college’s career center. “I’m allowed to go outside my role.”

Millsaps has a diverse student population. The college’s demographics and its penchant for crossing boundaries engender a culture that is less stratified than those found at many institutions. “Our students aren’t presumptuous,” says Bey. “Our best students don’t know how smart they are.”
Millsaps excels at making connections among academic disciplines. Award-winning professors in chemistry, biology, and anthropology founded a center to compare New and Old World cultures through the comparative analysis of Mayan relics recovered from Yucatán and relics discovered in Albania. Forays into field work have informed the college’s approach to study abroad. And whereas most business schools are walled off from their colleges and universities, the Else School at Millsaps works closely with the college’s faculty to teach business and to train future business leaders within the context of a liberal arts education.

Millsaps has strong ties to Jackson’s hospitals, museums, state agencies, and business communities, resulting in internships for students and other opportunities. The college is located just blocks from the Mississippi Capitol, where the Legislature convenes each January, and is across the street from the University of Mississippi Medical Center, the state’s academic health science center.

“Millsaps has done a good job of making meaningful connections with the city,” says Elise Smith, a professor of art history.

Millsaps: A Promise Kept

Millsaps’ founder, Reuben Webster Millsaps, was a boy from a farming family residing in Pleasant Valley, a hamlet in Mississippi’s rural Copiah County. Exhibiting a love of learning early on, Millsaps vowed that if he were to become a man of means, he would establish an institution of higher learning that would provide a first-rate education that included the state’s needy students.

“That promise is part of our legacy,” says Howard McMillan, dean of the Else School of Management.

Indeed, almost a fourth of the college’s students are Pell Grant-eligible, and many either receive some kind of financial aid, work, or complete paid internships.

“When they leave here,” McMillan says, “they’ve got real experience.”

As a child, Millsaps benefited from the intervention of a Methodist minister who recognized that he was bright. That minister
made sure that young Millsaps received the equivalent of a high school education. Diploma in hand, he and his brother walked and rode a steamboat some seven hundred miles to attend Indiana Asbury University, known today as DePauw University.

Working his way through college, Millsaps graduated with distinction and won a scholarship to attend Harvard Law School, where he chopped wood for money. He graduated and went on to practice law, raise cotton, and establish a bank. During the Civil War, he served as a major in the Confederate Army.

Having prospered, Millsaps kept his promise. He donated land and $50,000 (a sum matched by the Methodist church) to establish Millsaps in 1890. Initially, the campus comprised two buildings. It grew quickly, and soon thereafter, the college began admitting women. In 1908 it conferred a degree on its first international alumnus, Sing Ung Zung, of China.

In addition to his monetary assets, Millsaps bequeathed to the college a model of self-determination that is palpable on campus today. “It’s a can-do campus,” says Tim Ward, a professor of chemistry and associate dean of sciences at Millsaps College.

Since its founding, the college has evolved to become one of the country’s premier liberal arts institutions, enrolling approximately 1,100 students from across the nation and numerous countries. About two of every five students are from Mississippi. Eighty percent live in on-campus housing, including three recently opened dormitories of single-occupancy rooms.

About half of Millsaps’ students belong to one of twelve national fraternities and sororities. More than half take part in varsity or intramural athletics. Most are involved in at least one of the more than eighty on-campus clubs and organizations, including numerous groups dedicated to public and community service.

The Millsaps Portfolio

Millsaps provides the full array of offerings one would expect from a top tier liberal arts institution: professors who are highly regarded in their fields, multidisciplinary endeavors, innovative
programming, a vast array of support services and co-curricular activities, and opportunities for off-campus learning. In 1988, Millsaps became the first institution of higher education in Mississippi to have a campus chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, the oldest and most prestigious academic honor society in the country.

Millsaps offers thirty-four majors, forty-one minors, and the option of a self-designed major. Popular fields of study include business, history, English, economics, psychology, anthropology, and areas that fulfill the entry requirements of medical schools. The college’s continuing exploration into uncharted areas of inquiry leads to new offerings, such as the recently added museum studies minor, a communications major, and a neuroscience and cognitive studies major and minor.

In addition to its overall excellence, four intertwined aspects of the academic enterprise make Millsaps distinctive: an emphasis on writing, field-based learning, an intensive core-curriculum graduation requirement, and the institution’s embrace of interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship.

True to its predilection for knocking down barriers, Millsaps champions a “writing across the curriculum” approach. By liberating the instruction of writing from the confines of the English department, the college affirms the value of written communication and makes its acquisition by students the responsibility of professors in all disciplines. In lieu of a perfunctory one-semester writing course, undergraduates perfect writing skills over the entirety of their Millsaps careers. The course, Freshman Seminar: Critical Thinking and Academic Literacy, requires composition of introspective essays challenging students to assess the way they form value judgments. “It’s about thinking and pushing boundaries,” says Burke.

Subsequent requirements result in an evaluated portfolio of work that demonstrates writing proficiency, a requirement for graduation. In addition, seniors must compose a reflective paper demonstrating “their ability to think in complex ways, to bring multiple perspectives to bear upon an issue, and to make well-reas-
soned judgments.”

Millsaps has earned high praise for its emphasis on writing. *U.S. News & World Report* included the college among a group of seventeen institutions that make writing “a priority at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum.”

Students fulfill writing requirements in the context of ten course requirements that constitute the core of Millsaps’ baccalaureate program. Core courses provide a foundation for developing students’ critical skills: social awareness, historical consciousness, the ability to effectively communicate, and various modes of reasoning (quantitative, scientific, ethical and aesthetic).

In addition to the introductory writing seminar, core requirements include four humanities courses, four courses in the social and natural sciences, and the capstone writing project. In lieu of the humanities courses, typically taken during the first and second year, students can take Millsaps’ innovative double-credit, one-year program, “The Heritage of the West in World Perspective.” Students must also meet a fine arts requirement and demonstrate writing proficiency, as mentioned above. The bachelor of arts degree requires foreign-language study, and other requirements apply to science and business degrees.

All degree candidates must pass rigorous written and oral comprehensive exams that assess mastery of concepts within academic majors.

Millsaps is a leader in field-based learning. Its Helen Moyers Biocultural Reserve, a 4,500-acre biological and archaeological resource in the heart of the Yucatán peninsula, anchors the college’s Living in Yucatán program. The college’s resources include a laboratory and research facility in the Maya town of Oskutzcab and the new Center for Business and Culture in Merida. Students travel to the rain forest to study archaeology, business, ecology, education, geology, history, literature and socio-cultural anthropology. Moreover, the Yucatán reserve and the programs it offers “have formed the basis of how we think about study abroad,” says Bey. “More and more professors are gravitating toward field-based learning.”
The Yucatán program’s success supported the creation of the W.M. Keck Center for Instrumental and BioChemical Comparative Archaeology, the only undergraduate lab in the country focused on biochemical archaeological analysis. The Keck Lab has analyzed European and Central American archaeological artifacts from such places as Albania, Sweden, and Mexico, and collaborates with universities and colleges throughout the nation. Ward says, “What is truly remarkable about the Keck Lab is the diversity of projects it can support. In addition to the archaeological research, the lab has developed collaborations with the Audubon Society on projects such as the Gulf oil spill, assisted premedical and other Millsaps students in the sciences with their research projects, and supported a recycling project through the Center for Entrepreneurial Development in the Else School.”

In addition to Yucatán, students and professors pursue field-based research in the Pacific Northwest, Yellowstone National Park, the Blue Ridge Mountains and elsewhere. More traditional study-abroad destinations include Costa Rica, Israel, Japan, China, Ghana, Mexico, and most of Western Europe. Almost forty percent of students undertake coursework in another country.

About half of Millsaps’ professors teach afIELD, a concept that departs from traditional study-abroad jaunts. The poet Greg Miller, a professor of English, takes students to Paris to study verse. Bob McElvaine, a professor of history, teaches the American War in Vietnam in Southeast Asia. The cultural field studies of alumna Chelsi West led her to write an honors thesis about local hip hop music in Albania and Tanzania, which resulted in her being awarded a Fulbright Fellowship.

Where Collegiality Counts

Millsaps proves the maxim that an enterprise is only as good as its people. “From cafeteria workers to groundskeepers, from top to bottom, our people are so friendly,” says Michael Thorp, dean of admissions and financial aid.

The staff spares no effort in making students feel at home on campus, beginning with roommate pairings made by administra-
tors before freshmen arrive on campus. “We hand-select and pair every freshman for dormitory assignments,” says Matt Binion, director of housing and campus activities. “The people here and the joy they put into their work creates a multigenerational, family-type atmosphere. We care about students a lot.”

And students have a voice. When Millsaps undergraduates complained that the lottery system for assigning rooms to upperclassmen was arbitrary, administrators instituted a student-designed “dormitory draft” that uses class standing and G.P.A. to determine the order in which students select rooms.

“Millsaps is a home away from home,” says Maggie Tumminello, a volleyball player from Baton Rouge who considers herself a “cool nerd” of the type commonly found at Millsaps. “You feel safe here. It’s fun.”

A warm, intimate environment and a top-shelf faculty are conducive to students’ attaining “a world class liberal arts education and the other skills you need to be successful,” says McMillan, whose father and son are alumni of Millsaps. “It’s the best faculty I’ve ever dealt with. Their number one goal is teaching kids.”

With a student-to-faculty ratio of 9:1 and small classes (fifteen students each, on average) taught by senior faculty, professors, and students get to know one another. It’s not unusual to see instructors having lunch with students in the dining hall or the campus grill.

“Any student who comes in here will be challenged. They’re going to grow. If they need special attention, they will get it,” McMillan says. “You’re not going to get lost here.”

Christy Kokel enrolled at Millsaps in part because she “felt alienated at other campuses” she visited, and in part because she “fell in love with the atmosphere” at Millsaps. She excelled socially and academically, completing several independent studies in anthropology. Kokel was president of the student body and a varsity cheerleader. A nationally ranked fencer from Houston, she founded a fencing club at Millsaps.

“Students put their time, soul and energy into what they do,” says Kokel, an alumna who is working on a doctorate of anthro-
pology at the University of Texas at San Antonio. At Millsaps, she “learned not what to think but how to think.”

The dogged pursuit of such an outcome informs almost everything the faculty does. Brit Katz, vice president and dean of students, says Millsaps is “the first place I’ve worked in twenty-seven years that is singularly focused on learning, in and out of the classroom…. Students are close to faculty and see them as mentors and role models.”

Professor Ward and many of his colleagues have turned down multiple offers to take positions at research universities with doctoral programs. “When you go to graduate departments, you see a lot more egotism,” Ward says. “I don’t see the esprit de corps that characterizes the Millsaps faculty experience.”

Millsaps alumna Aprile Gilmore says Ward was an exceptional mentor.

“Dr. Ward always believed in me, even in times when I did not believe in myself,” confided Gilmore (who was accepted into medical school at the University of Mississippi), in a story published by Millsaps Magazine. “On graduation day, after I received The Founders’ Medal, Dr. Ward told me…that he could not be any prouder of me than if I were his own daughter.” The Founders’ Medal is awarded to the senior who has the highest grade point average for the entire College course of study at Millsaps and has received a grade of excellent on comprehensive examinations.

Says Ward: “We excel at becoming engaged in students’ lives at a deep level.”

The Classroom and Beyond

Millsaps students pursue interests outside the classroom as well. Whether taking a leadership position with a fraternity or sorority, getting involved in student government, or joining (or founding) a club on campus, students indulge co-curricular interests that sharpen non-academic skills they will need to find success following graduation. When a reporter once asked a Millsaps football coach the difference between Millsaps’ Division III program and the big-time programs of the Southeastern Conference, the coach
observed that the kids at 'Bama aspired to play in the National Football League, while the athletes at Millsaps aspired to own an NFL team.

Many students hone those skills on Millsaps’ athletic fields, whether at the level of NCAA, club, or intramural sports. The college’s athletes often are some of Millsaps’ best students.

Regardless of students’ athletic prowess, Millsaps strives to get them in shape for post-college careers. “We’re particularly good at helping people envision who they want to be after college and giving them opportunities to test that,” says Raymond Clothier, associate director of the college’s Faith & Work Initiative, which strives to cultivate both passion and compassion in leaders for the future.

The program encourages students to explore their personal and professional futures in relation to issues of ethics, values, faith, and the common good. Students in the program take a course, “The Meaning of Work,” that challenges them to find what Frederick Buechner, the writer and theologian, refers to as “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”

The college’s location in Jackson, a bustling and progressive capital city, provides many opportunities for finding mentors and internships that aren’t available to students of liberal arts colleges located in more pastoral settings. (Farther afield, Millsaps students have completed internships at NASA, Nike, the FBI, and Sotheby’s.) Those opportunities explain why graduate and professional schools accept Millsaps graduates in large numbers. The college’s medical school applicants are accepted at nearly twice the national average; one component of the Millsaps program, a medical mentoring program that matches pre-medical students with local physicians, has contributed to this success.

Millsaps’ Else School further prepares students for careers, whether or not they major in business. Professor Burke recalls the consternation that bubbled up when her godson, from Texas, stated his intention to get a liberal arts education from Millsaps. His family worried that he wouldn’t be able to make a living.

The young man’s parents were won over by the college’s five-
year MBA option, which allows students to earn a bachelor’s degree and a master’s in business. The young man, who is double majoring in English and Spanish with a concentration in creative writing, is exploring various career options.

“We brought him in and said, ‘Let’s push the boundaries back. We’ll help you figure out and discover your passion,’” Burke says. “We’ll help you figure out how to turn that passion into making a living.”

The college’s Business Advantage Program for Professionals teaches basic business skills to the city’s professionals, including physicians, lawyers, and state legislators. An Executive MBA program will be offered starting in January 2012.

“Millsaps teaches you how to live,” says Burke. “The Else School teaches you how to make a living.”

The combination of liberal arts and business acumen puts Millsaps graduates in good stead with employers, says McMillan, who before becoming dean of the business school ran a $7 billion regional bank that employed 3,500 employees. His bank recruited and hired students from colleges throughout the region.

“The best kids, the ones who were more equipped to hit the floor running and make an immediate contribution were the Millsaps kids,” he says. “They all knew how to communicate, how to write and present thoughts and ideas concisely. They knew how to think critically, strategically, and how to make good decisions. You didn’t need to give them an instruction manual.”

A Culture of Service

As much as Millsaps prepares its students to do well, it also equips them to do good.

“Community service is one of the main [pillars of the] ethos on our campus,” says Thorp.

The college’s “1 Campus 1 Community” program, created in 2006, grew out of the institution’s commitment to serve “the least, the lost and the last.” The program creates long-term partnerships with local communities in need, especially local public schools and a low-income neighborhood near the college.
Upperclassmen initiate first-year students into service work through the college’s Wellspring program. Participants develop a culture of service by sharing a residence hall and engaging in weekly community service. Students adopt elementary school classrooms, serve as mentors at Mississippi Children’s Home, and participate in a variety of service opportunities.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching awarded Millsaps its community engagement classification—national recognition for Millsaps’ commitment to education that transforms both individuals and communities. The college’s vibrant service learning program helps students connect classroom experiences to real-world problems, deepening their learning while addressing such issues as poverty, illiteracy, and youth violence.

“Receiving the Carnegie community engagement classification is confirmation of our efforts to take student learning out into the world in imaginative and humanizing ways,” says Darby Ray, director of community engagement at Millsaps. “Our student body is eager to put its education to positive use in the world, and our location offers us myriad opportunities to do just that.”

Students taking a religious studies class at Millsaps, for example, taught local school students about Islam. Conversely, a Millsaps art class brought budding artists to campus. A group of political science students and their professor collected textbooks that they donated to university libraries in Afghanistan.

Millsaps students also built a database that the Red Cross used to track volunteers in the aftermath of the Hurricane Katrina disaster, and they’ve taught local children, some of whom may not have regular access to fresh foods, to plant raised-bed vegetable gardens.

Living up to its reputation as a community of scholars in pursuit of excellence, Millsaps inspires students for lives of learning, leadership, and service.
Every August, not far from downtown Atlanta, a solemn ceremony unfolds on the campus of Morehouse College.

Seven hundred or so young men, primarily African American, gather in Martin Luther King, Jr. International Chapel. The institution’s leaders address the incoming class, members of which arrive here from forty states, eighteen countries, and a broad swath of socioeconomic backgrounds.

The speakers talk of their expectations for the young men, their voices reverberating in a chapel named in honor of the college’s most esteemed graduate. They talk of the college’s high standards and meaningful traditions. They talk of the Morehouse mystique, “a distinctive and mysterious bond between good men that strengthens us when we’re together and sustains us when we’re apart...a fundamental sense of discontent with mediocrity...a healthy impatience with the status quo,” says the college’s president, Robert M. Franklin. They talk of a brotherhood, of a long procession of young men who came before them and took the steps to become Morehouse men, and of those who will follow in the years to come.

They speak of achievement and service and what it means to lead.

“We have tremendous success in taking raw material” and transforming that potential into leaders, says Terry Mills, formerly the college’s dean of humanities and social sciences. “Graduate schools, corporate America, and Rhodes Scholarships seek them out.”

After four years they will leave here and go out into the world to make their mark. In time, some of the young men gathered in the chapel will return to Morehouse. “A significant number of our faculty did undergraduate work here,” says J.K. Haynes, the college’s dean of science and mathematics, who recalls the dinners he shared with then-president Benjamin Mays and his wife, Sadie, who were
Haynes’s freshman advisers. “It allows us to pass on the tradition. It speaks to the close interactions between key staff and students.”

For parents, the ritual at King Chapel marks an end to orientation week, the beginning of letting go. In the chapel, young men sit apart from their families, a symbol of emerging independence and responsibility. During one part of the ceremony, parents write out the dreams they have for their sons.

“There’s not a dry eye in the house,” says Terrence Dixon, the college’s former associate dean of admissions and records.

Exiting the chapel, students don their burgundy Morehouse blazers for the first time and line up at the hill near Graves Hall, the oldest building on campus. They proceed onto the main part of the college’s sixty-one-acre grounds, the gates of Morehouse shutting behind them, their families on the other side.

Proceeding along the campus’s main quad, the first-year students drink in symbols that reflect the principles spoken of in the chapel. Here are the mausoleums of Dr. Mays and John Hope, the first black president of Morehouse College and Atlanta University, known today as Clark Atlanta University. There is the obelisk marking the remains of Howard Thurman, the Morehouse graduate and influential philosopher-writer who served as dean of theology at Howard and Boston Universities and founded one of the country’s first racially integrated and multicultural churches.

Alumni include Julian Bond, civil rights leader and politician; Spike Lee, film director; Maynard Jackson, Atlanta’s first black mayor; Samuel L. Jackson, actor; Lerone Bennett, Senior Editor Emeritus of Ebony magazine; Walter Massey, who has served as director of the National Science Foundation, president of Morehouse and Bank of America chairman; and Edwin Moses, the track and field star and one of the top fifty American athletes of the twentieth century, according to ESPN.

And there is King.

“There’s something about this place...a vibe,” Mills says. “It’s hallowed ground.”

King’s funeral was held here. Morehouse’s current president,
Robert M. Franklin, recounted during his inaugural address to the college his recollection of that day in 1968. A teenager in Chicago, he watched the funeral on television at the insistence of his father, who declared that his son would attend the institution, one of the best private liberal arts institutions in the country. Franklin went on to graduate from Morehouse with Phi Beta Kappa honors.

“Our students inherit that tradition and air of expectancy,” says Walter Fluker, former director of the college’s Leadership Center. “The intellectual rigor and sense of inherent worth and dignity gives students that extra leg up. People are attracted to the ethos [here]…and affirmation of who they are as human beings.”

Indeed, Morehouse is all about readying young men to make a difference. It was here that King, Bond, Franklin, and countless others discovered voices that they would use to change the world, frequently by changing the way others view it.

“Morehouse,” says Haynes, “has a reputation for producing leaders.”

**A Singular History**

Even among historically black colleges and universities, Morehouse is a singularly historic institution. Founded in 1867, in the aftermath of the American Civil War and the emancipation of the country’s slaves, the college has graduated more black men than any other institution of higher education in the United States. It is one of a handful of colleges devoted exclusively to the education of men, and one of two HBCUs to have produced one or more Rhodes Scholars. There’s nothing else like it.

“There’s nowhere else in the United States,” says Mills, “where you can see three thousand African American men who are not in jail.”

Morehouse has always had close ties to the church, a pillar of African American culture. The college started off as Augusta Institute, which came into being in the basement of Springfield Baptist Church, the country’s oldest independent African American church. The institute’s founder, the Rev. William Jefferson White, a Baptist minister in Augusta, Georgia, envisioned the institute as a
place to prepare black men to serve as teachers and ministers.

White’s collaborators in the school’s founding were the Rev. Richard C. Coulter, a freed slave, and the Rev. Edmund Turney, who had organized the Washington, D.C., branch of the National Theological Institute, which was established for the education of freedmen.

At the outset, the institution strove to escape the shadow of slavery. The “inherent worth and dignity” that contemporary Morehouse students take for granted was often in short supply. “We had to assign that to students early on,” says Fluker.

In 1879, Augusta Institute moved to Atlanta, again taking up residence in a church basement (Friendship Baptist) and changing its name to Atlanta Baptist Seminary. In 1885, the institution moved to a location in the city’s West End that included a historic Civil War site donated by John D. Rockefeller. In 1897, the institution became Atlanta Baptist College. In 1906, Morehouse appointed its first black president, John Hope, who was active in social reform movements and placed the college firmly in the stream of American social justice activism.

In the early twentieth century, the college broadened its educational scope. Building on its core mission of preparing ministers and teachers, it committed itself to educating men of color who would lead in all areas of contemporary life. In 1913, the institution was renamed Morehouse College to honor Henry L. Morehouse, a leader in the American Baptist Home Mission Society.

The college took a leap forward under the presidency of Benjamin Elijah Mays, who took office in 1940 and served until 1967. The college credits Mays with building Morehouse’s “international reputation for excellence in scholarship, leadership and service.” During Mays’s tenure, the college was granted a chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa honor society.

Prior to becoming president, Mays traveled to India and met with Mohandas “Mahatma” Gandhi, the leader of India’s independence movement. Gandhi’s use of civil disobedience to defeat tyranny deeply affected Mays and, in turn, Martin Luther King, Jr., whom Mays mentored. King went on to employ the principles of
nonviolent resistance while leading the Civil Rights movement in the United States.

In the years following Mays’s tenure, the college for the first time chose an alumnus to lead the institution; founded the Morehouse School of Medicine; and produced a Rhodes Scholar, the first HBCU to do so. In the 1960s, Morehouse began admitting a small number of Caucasian students, and young men from Japan and China.

The college continues to become more diverse, enrolling students from a broad range of geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds. In 2007, Tope Folarin, the son of a Nigerian-born air porter, became the third Morehouse graduate to earn a coveted Rhodes Scholarship. In 2008, Joshua Packwood became the college’s first white valedictorian.

Morehouse offers as rigorous and comprehensive an undergraduate liberal arts education as can be found anywhere in the country. Among its attributes, the college emphasizes close student-faculty relationships, undergraduate research, interdisciplinary study, and opportunities for interactive and service learning.

In the classroom, the college has moved away from perfunctory stand-and-deliver lectures in which a professor seeks to impart knowledge to students, preferring instead a model whereby young men actively engage with professors and peers. “We’ll give students a question and have them interact in small groups,” says Haynes. “There is less [superficial] coverage, but the information goes deeper.”

To promote students’ academic engagement, Morehouse has equipped classrooms with high- and low-tech solutions that foster collaboration. Professors project inquiries onto classroom screens, and students use electronic clickers to log opinions and answers. Reconfigured classroom seating encourages interaction, and swiveling chairs promote face-to-face exchanges. “We promote problem solving,” Haynes says.

Long a feeder to the country’s medical, dental, engineering, and business schools, Morehouse has undertaken of late to significantly increase the number of its graduates who earn Ph.D.s, particularly
in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. “We’d like more minorities contributing to the discovery of new information,” says Haynes.

To that end, the college is redoubling its emphasis on undergraduate research, long a feature of the education here. Students pursue research on campus and at neighboring institutions, including the Georgia Institute of Technology, Spelman College, and Morehouse School of Medicine. Similarly, the college has embraced the concept of inquiry-driven laboratories to replace the “cookbook labs” that traditionally accompanied science courses at many colleges.

“Research is a more powerful way of educating students,” says Haynes.

The college is organized into three divisions: Humanities & Social Sciences; Science & Mathematics; and Business & Economics. To graduate, students must satisfy requirements of the core curriculum, a major field of study and elective study. The college offers the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees in twenty-six majors, as well as a dual-degree program in engineering with the Georgia Institute of Technology.

Morehouse’s general requirements exist to provide a foundation of knowledge and to promote “critical thinking, analytical abilities and problem-solving; citizenship; communication; ethical judgment and behavior; knowledge of the natural world; leadership; the understanding of social institutions; aesthetic experience; the African-American experience; philosophy and religion; and the interdependence of nations and cultures.”

In addition to meeting the requirements for their major field of study, students must pass one course each in English composition and world literature, two courses in world history, two in math, four humanities courses, one of biology, two physical sciences (for B.S. degree candidates), two social sciences, and two health or physical education courses. They must demonstrate intermediate proficiency in a foreign language.

In recent years, the college has developed and piloted a modi-
fied core curriculum that moves toward “a more defined model of student development and retention.” The college’s leaders are assessing the revised approach.

Seeking a more integrated academic institution, the college has made strides in transforming what “used to be a bunch of disparate [academic] departments” into a multidisciplinary academic community in which scholars collaborate across traditional academic disciplines and departmental boundaries. To further the transition, the college is seeking to hire new tenure track faculty members to pursue multidisciplinary scholarship, such as the application of math to biology. The college is looking to advance similar initiatives in the areas of neuroscience, bioinformatics, material sciences and public health.

Recently created programs in sports journalism and film/digital media are popular among a new generation of students. “There is a lot of reform taking place at Morehouse,” Haynes says. “Today we have a far more integrated curriculum. Students are getting a better education.”

**Molding Leaders**

The mission of Morehouse College is to provide intellectual and moral leadership for a 21st Century global Renaissance of character, civility and community.

Indeed, those twin goals permeate the institution and inform all its endeavors. Morehouse is one of the few liberal arts institutions to have a leadership center on campus, and the college offers students the option of pursuing a minor in leadership studies. The program is “an interdisciplinary exploration of leadership history and theory, emphasizing the need for 21st century leadership to develop ethical, integrated solutions to complex issues.” There is talk of looking at the potential for creating a major in leadership, as well.

“Every student gets training in leadership,” says Haynes: It “comes closer than anything to being our niche.”

Morehouse College is building Renaissance men—men who possess the Five Wells: well-read; well-spoken; well-traveled; well-dressed; and well-balanced. Ascribing to the belief that leaders are
made and not born—regardless of innate potential—Morehouse strives to nurture those qualities from the outset and for as long as a student is on campus. Students who take part in the institution’s pre-college program arise at seven a.m. to practice yoga and tai chi, disciplines that help to center practitioners. Newly enrolled young men are “awakened in the middle of the night and guided to the statue of alumnus Martin Luther King, Jr. [and] learn about the school’s history,” according to an account of new student orientation published by Atlanta Magazine.

“It’s a proud process,” Joe Whitfield, a Morehouse alumnus, told the magazine. “It makes us realize why we’re here.”

The college resists the popular view of leadership as a rare personality trait or magical quality, such as charisma, that permits its bearer to charm people into becoming followers. To be sure, there are charismatic leaders, but at Morehouse leadership is viewed as a tool, a way of being that transforms the cultivator into an agent of change.

Morehouse, recognizing that leaders are needed in all walks of life, seeks to fill existing voids. In the realm of science, for example, leaders often are chosen based on their scientific acumen, regardless of whether or not they possess the skills to lead. “I think we can do better than that,” says Haynes, who envisions integrating leadership training into existing programs, such as the college’s Hopps Scholarships, which provide, among other benefits, opportunities for students to do research with a faculty mentor for three years. “I want them [Hopps scholars] to begin taking courses in leadership.”

Morehouse acknowledges the spiritual dimension of training leaders as well, including ethics, which “doesn’t begin with rules and formulas,” says Fluker, who served as director of the Leadership Center from 1998 to 2010. “It begins with the face of the other…. It’s not just something we do. It’s something we must think about how we do.”

The Coca-Cola Foundation gave Morehouse $1 million in 1995 to establish the center, which promotes leadership in students through activities that range from “lectures, skills training and
small-group discussions with world-class leaders to mentoring, internships and travel opportunities.” The program incorporates Fluker’s Ethical Leadership Model, which seeks to cultivate character (integrity, empathy, hope); civility (recognition, respect, reverence); and community (courage, justice, compassion).

Leadership is a component of President Franklin’s vision for a Morehouse Renaissance that reinvigorates and builds on what is best about the college. The idea of Franklin’s institutional rebirth is “to produce men with a social conscience who are leaders with integrity, committed to serving the larger good at home and abroad.”

Such men, Franklin says, are well-read, well-traveled, well-spoken, well-dressed, and well-balanced. Upon those pillars, or as he calls them, ‘five wells’, students reach their highest potential.

A Tradition of Superheroic Service

Entwined with the ideal of leadership is the responsibility of service. Put another way, service at Morehouse is leadership in action. “It’s leadership not just from the podium but the leadership of getting out into the community,” says Kevin Booker, the college’s assistant director of student life.

On and off campus, service takes many forms. Morehouse men help with a pre-K childhood development program called Jump-start, and on Saturday mornings they mentor K-12 students. The college’s young men volunteer at the community food bank, at soup kitchens and in local schools.

They’ve built Habitat for Humanity homes alongside members of former President Jimmy Carter’s family and volunteered at the Mel Blount Youth Home, founded by the former Pittsburgh Steelers football player. Morehouse is the only all-male institution in the country that holds an annual walk to raise awareness of breast cancer.

Students also observe the annual Season for Nonviolence, which was established in 1998 by Dr. Arun Gandhi, grandson of M.K. Gandhi. Having noted that 1998 represented the fiftieth and thirtieth anniversaries, respectively, of the assassinations of M.K. Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., he proposed observing the
sixty-four days between January 30 and April 4, the dates of their assassinations, as a season to practice nonviolence. At Morehouse, the observance involves students who form groups named after superheroes (X Men, The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, etc.). Says Mills: “Superheroes are community servants.”

The inaugural observance of nonviolence was launched with opening ceremonies at the United Nations. In 2000, closing ceremonies were held at Morehouse College, culminating in the dedication of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Chapel.

“Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve,” King said. “You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love.”

The Morehouse College Bonner Office of Community Service houses a range of community service organizations and initiatives, including the Bonner Scholars program. Some sixty recipients annually commit to performing at least five hundred twenty-five hours of community service. “The Bonner scholars are the biggest part of the [college’s] community service aspect. More than the impact of the program on the community is its impact on the students,” says Miles of a program that has a transformative impact on campus. “They become social entrepreneurs.”

The center is also home to the Adams Scholars program, created with a gift from Joe Adams, the longtime manager of Ray Charles, and Joe’s wife Emma. The program’s endowment supports twenty-eight recipients who each perform three hundred fifty hours of service; the Morehouse Mentoring Program; and the Service Learning Initiative, which seeks to integrate “academic study with explicit articulated learning objectives.”

Service learning manifests itself in various ways. It happens when a biology professor gets students involved in a community garden, when an economics professor teaches students to prepare taxes for indigent members of the community, when a sociology professor has young men interact with the community’s homeless people.

“Service learning is a pedagogical tool,” says Miles. “Every academic discipline has a service need that can be tied to it.”
Since the mid-1990s, Morehouse’s Community Revitalization Initiative has endeavored to reinvigorate Atlanta’s West End, a once-vibrant community that suffered an extended period of decline in the 1960s and 1970s. The revitalization effort combines community development, service, community-based research, and service learning. The area is home to the Atlanta University Center, the largest consortium in the world of private, historically black institutions. In addition to Morehouse, the group includes Spelman and Morris Brown Colleges, Clark Atlanta University, the Interdenominational Theological Center, and Morehouse School of Medicine.

“Service,” says Marian Wright Edelman, president of the Children’s Defense Fund, “is the rent we pay for living.”

Tempered by Time

Like every great institution, Morehouse is sustained by a unique essence derived from its past, a mystique that guides the college as it evolves to meet the challenges of a changing world. It takes many forms.

Today, as ever, the college insists on students meeting the world with dignity and distinction. “We talk about being excellent in scholarship. We talk about how students deport themselves,” says Haynes. “We expect them to express themselves well verbally and to dress appropriately.”

The expression of those ideals has changed over time. In recent years, the college’s diversified enrollment has increased the numbers of students from northern states and urban areas. “They bring a slightly different swagger,” says Haynes, who attended Morehouse at a time when the majority of students came from segregated Southern states. “We were a fairly tight band of students.”

Regardless of era, a sense of community endures. Fluker, who taught at Harvard and Vanderbilt before arriving at Morehouse, says he has been “impressed with the work ethic of the college’s staff, faculty and students” and the way members of the community interact. “It’s incredibly relational. There’s a certain etiquette of
respectability…. When you come to Morehouse, we expect you to do well.”

“Everybody,” Haynes says, “is invested in the mission.”

Dr. Mills, the humanities dean, discovered at Morehouse “a depth of commitment to develop gentlemen scholars.”

In the age of globalization, Morehouse has evolved to broaden students’ international perspectives, their appreciation of other cultures, a keen understanding of geopolitics and insights into new ways in which businesses operate across borders. The Andrew Young Center for International Affairs supports the college’s global learning objectives through a number of interdisciplinary programs, among them initiatives focusing on international research and leadership, global justice, a visiting lecturer series and a diplomat-in-residence program supported by the U.S. Department of State, and international studies and student exchange programs.

To further reinforce the goal of creating what Mills calls “global citizens with a social conscience,” the college recently inaugurated a Mandarin Chinese language program. Already, some students are using their emerging fluency in Mandarin to write and perform Chinese hip hop songs.

Yet as much as things change, much remains the same, most significantly the spirit that first flickered in a church basement almost one hundred fifty years ago.

“Morehouse,” says Mills, “stands on its traditions.”
Exploring an antebellum plantation site a few summers ago, archaeology fellows from Rhodes College fastidiously dug up and dusted off what remained of a nineteenth-century manor house. The structure had been built in the 1820s, a period of intense agricultural development in an area outside of Memphis. As they dug, students working alongside professors disinterred shards of crockery, tools and…anomalies. Having set out to catalogue detritus discarded less than two centuries ago, the Rhodes team found artifacts entombed for a millennium or more, remnants of a pre-Columbian settlement that later had become the foundation for an 1820s homestead. Today, the site is part of what Dr. Milton Moreland, co-director of Rhodes’ archaeology program, unabashedly calls “the best undergraduate field school in the country.”

In ways literal and figurative, the hands-on archeological endeavors pursued by students and professors at Ames Plantation manifest much of what is essential about Rhodes College. “Our students develop a passion for making a difference through discovery,” says Rhodes president Bill Troutt. “Undergraduate research opportunities range literally from A to Z—from archaeology at Ames Plantation to zoology across the street at the Memphis Zoo, where students conduct research on the giant pandas. Down the street at St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, Rhodes students work with some of the world’s foremost scientists to discover cures for childhood diseases. Across town, our students are partnering with the National Civil Rights Museum to create new ways to dialogue positively about race in America.”

A Rhodes education is an immersive experience. The college believes that working alongside professors and digging deeply, whatever the endeavor, allows students to make connections that are as rich as the Mississippi Delta’s alluvial soil (some of the richest in the world). Furthering that commitment, Rhodes recently
overhauled its curriculum and course-load requirements to promote “deeper instruction for students and a reduced teaching load for professors,” says Michael Drompp, dean of the faculty and vice president for academic affairs. The goal is to afford professors more time for mentoring their students and engaging undergraduates in research.

“What makes us different is doing higher education in the context of an interesting and complex city,” says Dr. Russ Wigginton, vice president for college relations.

An All-Encompassing Curriculum

The success of any academic enterprise is largely determined by dynamism among faculty, curriculum, and students. Rhodes aims for an interplay that crackles and pops. “We try to hire extraordinary teacher-scholars who are committed to students,” says Dean Drompp. “We believe this is the best kind of education for ambitious undergraduates.”

As for the college’s approach to coursework, its new Foundations Curriculum includes a course-load reduction. The change concentrates students’ academics while reducing professors’ teaching loads, permitting more student-teacher interaction outside the classroom.

The primary aim of the Foundations Curriculum is to move beyond a model of degree attainment that focuses on distributional requirements. It emphasizes acquisition of skills, including a dozen requirements deemed essential for a well-educated person and lifelong learner.

“The central motive was to put students at the center of their learning in order to meet individual strengths and interests,” says Robert Strandburg, associate dean for curriculum.

Among the proficiencies promoted by the new curriculum are writing and interpretation of literary texts; facility with mathematical reasoning and scientific approaches; understanding historical forces that have shaped human culture; analysis of human interaction and contemporary institutions; cultivation of a different
cultural perspective and proficiency in a second language; and producing or performing in a work of art or analyzing artistic expression.

Students also must complete one of two three-course sequences (“Search” or “Life”) that delve deeply into issues of meaning and value. “The Search for Values in the Light of Western History and Religion,” which evolved in the 1940s, uses literature as a springboard for exploring big questions. “Life: Then and Now” examines biblical traditions as a starting point for pursuing a deep study of other beliefs. Both courses are defining experiences, according to Rhodes alumni.

“The idea is to get students to define their own values,” says Dean Drompp.

The new curriculum also requires students “to become engaged citizens, participating in the local community—its politics, its culture, its problems, its aspirations—and the world community.” The goal is to become skilled at using knowledge attained in the classroom to make changes away from campus. In turn, off-campus activities inform classroom learning.

Overhaul of the curriculum at Rhodes affords students greater latitude to determine their academic paths, an outcome that aligns with the college's philosophy of developing leaders who can think for themselves.

“We wanted students to take responsibility for their education,” says Dean Drompp of the new academic framework.

Learning Outside the Gates

Rhodes College was founded in Clarksville, Tennessee, about fifty miles northwest of Nashville, in 1848. Less than a decade later, the Presbyterian Church took over control of the college, adding a school of theology and renaming the institution Southwestern Presbyterian University. In 1925, the college moved to its present location under a new name, Southwestern At Memphis.

In 1984, the college changed its name to Rhodes in honor of Peyton N. Rhodes, a longtime distinguished physics professor who
served as president of the institution from 1949 to 1965. Today, Rhodes is recognized as one of the country’s best liberal arts colleges—and one of the most beautiful. Its campus has thirteen buildings that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The college is well-connected to the city’s companies, cultural institutions, and not-for-profit groups, from FedEx to the Memphis Zoo to Opera Memphis. Research, internships, and fellowships at a host of organizations provide opportunities for students to learn new skills and apply their classroom knowledge to the job.

Rhodes supports a broad range of on-campus undergraduate research as well. Dr. Mary Miller, a professor of biology, takes protégés to regional and national scientific meetings that are “geared toward graduate students.” At one such meeting, Miller’s charge, Jackie Hancock, who enrolled at Yale School of Medicine after graduation, made a presentation that blew attendees away.

“People were amazed,” says Miller. “By the time they are seniors, I have to convince people that they aren’t in graduate school.”

History professor Jeffrey Jackson chose student Andy Crooks as a research assistant to build an interactive website for his book, Paris Under Water: How the City of Lights Survived the Great Flood of 1910. From Crooks’ perspective, finding images that conveyed the true essence of the tragedy brought “the destruction and severity of the event home.”

Says a pleased Jackson, “Andy re-introduced me to many elements of this history by seeing them in a different light than I have in the past.”

Art history professor David McCarthy and his students worked with the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art to research and develop an exhibition of photographs from the Memphis World, a newspaper published by African Americans from the late 1940s through the mid-1960s. The students even wrote the catalogue for it.

“It was truly a collaborative project,” says McCarthy. “I was working alongside the students.”

There are formal, off-campus research projects, as well, for which students receive housing, a stipend and research expenses.
The first ones, funded by a $6 million grant from the Robert and Ruby Priddy Charitable Trust in 2002, include:

- The Rhodes Institute for Regional Studies (RIRS), an eight-week fellowship program that engages students in academic research on Memphis and the Mid-South region. Mentored by Rhodes faculty, fellows spend the summer independently researching their chosen topics. They present their findings during the last week of the program, and their research papers are published on the Rhodes website. The Ames Plantation dig had its origin in RIRS, which also supports students who frequently travel one hundred fifty miles to Little Rock to access the archives of the William J. Clinton Presidential Library. “When you open the book of research done there, it’s all done by Rhodes students,” says Dr. Moreland.

- St. Jude Summer Plus offers Rhodes students the opportunity to work in the laboratories of St. Jude researchers for two summers and an academic year. Students conduct independent research projects, participate in lectures and discussions, and attend group meetings. They also present their research at local, national, and international scholarly meetings. Ross Hilliard’s stint in the St. Jude Summer Plus program continued well after it was supposed to end. He even got to do some independent research, present part of his work at a Frontiers in Structural Biology meeting, and turn it into a senior honors project.

- Through the Summer Service Fellows program, sixteen students pursue individual community projects with partner organizations. Their work enables them to have an impact on the people with whom they interact while learning the inner workings of nonprofit organizations. Summer Service Fellow Derek King taught tenth grade English at a local high school for students who are at least a year behind their grade level, and he continued to tutor there throughout the year. “It allowed me to teach them how to put together a research paper,” he says.
Three years after issuing their initial grant, the Priddys were so impressed with Rhodes’ stewardship that they asked for a proposal for a program that would inspire a new generation of leaders in the arts. A few months later, CODA was born. The Center for Outreach in the Development of the Arts encourages student fellows to expand the impact of the arts on the Rhodes community, Memphis, and beyond. Four students collaborated with CODA and a St. Louis artist to paint a mural on a downtown Memphis building owned by a Rhodes trustee. The finished product was featured in The New York Times and on NBC’s “Today” program.

Crossroads to Freedom is a digital archive of primary materials that document the civil rights era in Memphis. Crossroads fellows work collaboratively to collect and process documents for the archive. One of their main activities is conducting oral history interviews with community members. Francesca Davis was one of several student project managers for Crossroads who helped lay the groundwork for the archive. “We tracked down source material and conducted oral interviews with people who were living their lives then. When you’re interviewing, you’re just in awe of these people’s stories because everyone has a story to tell, whether or not they were actively involved.”

**Study at Home and Abroad**

Undergraduate fellowships are a new and improved approach to experiential education. “Fellowships provide a range of opportunities needed for students’ talents to emerge,” says Dean Strandburg. “We encourage every student to do one.”

Fellowships fall into five categories—student research; creative activity; internships; study abroad; and civic engagement/service. Fellowship mentors must commit to fostering five student learning outcomes.

“We want the fellows to reflect continually while they’re doing their work,” says Dr. Scott Garner, director of fellowships. “They must probe the meaning of why they are doing what they’re do-
ing, what they get from it and what others get from it, and why it’s meaningful.”

Rhodes fellow Stephen Bailey, working with mathematics and computer science professor Betsy Williams-Sanders, spent a summer learning about virtual environments or, as he put it, “playing with expensive toys.”

“It’s very cool,” Bailey says. “I thought virtual environments existed only in the movies.” Rather, he learned that the technology is used to train firefighters without exposing them to danger and to teach pilots to fly expensive aircraft.

To underscore its belief in the importance of fellowships, the college has dedicated a full-time professional staff position and a faculty/staff/student committee to the initiative.

Farther afield, Rhodes is one of the few liberal arts colleges with a department of international studies, yet the college continually strives “to be more international,” says Dean Drompp. That means redoubling the emphases on educational opportunities abroad as well as attracting students from a wide range of backgrounds. Indeed, Rhodes enrolls students from Portland, Oregon, to Portland, Maine, along with a healthy number from the world’s continents.

The Buckman Center for International Education offers seven official exchange programs and five summer ones, plus several academic “Maymester” trips abroad with faculty. For students seeking a wider menu, the Buckman Center can place them practically anywhere in the world.

John McGeoch, from Columbus, Ohio, became fluent in Spanish while studying during his junior year at a Chilean University in Santiago and living with a host family. The following summer he received a Rhodes international internship to work with Peacework International in El Porvenir, Honduras.

“It was all memorable. I learned a ton,” he says. “There was both a major earthquake and a military coup while I was in Honduras, so I feel very lucky now to have lived through those events, but I can’t say I felt lucky at the time!”

Bonner Scholar Zach Albert, from the Dallas area, went to
Central Europe on a Maymester interdisciplinary Holocaust travel/study program led by a Rhodes religious studies professor. “Getting to know the elderly survivors of the Holocaust has taught me that the human spirit is indomitable, even in the worst of circumstances,” he says. “Because of their wisdom and courage I know there will never be anything in my life that I cannot handle or accomplish.”

Many Rhodes students blog to the Rhodes website when they study abroad, posting videos along with pithy commentary. Philly Kirkwood wrote: “5 days without luggage isn’t stopping me from enjoying Barcelona!”

The college has its share of postgraduate scholarships—Rhodes Scholars, Fulbright recipients, and Watson fellows—and a few years ago, it became eligible to nominate students for Luce Foundation scholarships in East and Southeast Asia.

Luce internship winners include Aaron Creek, who volunteered at a charity hospital in Memphis before working with the Red Cross in the Philippines. Zac Hill, who wrote for the college newspaper, *The Sou’wester*, and worked for the county government while attending Rhodes, landed a Luce journalism internship in Malaysia.

Rhodes is one of only fifty colleges that nominate candidates for Watson Fellowships, which require recipients to spend a year outside the United States after graduation. A winner from Rhodes, Anthony Siracusa, worked on a bicycle project in the Netherlands, an undertaking for which he was well prepared. Prior to being named a fellow, Siracusa had started a bicycle shop in Memphis where local kids came to build their own bikes.

**Life at Rhodes, Inside and Out**

Students come to Rhodes for many reasons.

Joe Svejkosky came from St. Louis with the goal of becoming “a well-rounded person. It had everything I was looking for—small class sizes, personable professors and a fun Greek life. Also, I wanted to be a better writer. I believed that Rhodes could do that, and it has.”

Peter Hall, from Arlington, Virginia, and Alex Lippincott, from
Boston, wanted to get involved in the city of Memphis. They run Promise Water, a startup bottled water company, from their dorm room, with one hundred percent of their net profits going to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

“St. Jude is on the cutting edge of research,” they say, “and we wanted to support it.”

From student government and the Greek system to the honor code, Rhodes students are deeply involved in leading many day-to-day functions at the college.

Rhodes Student Associates contribute to the daily operations of more than forty academic and administrative departments through an innovative on-campus employment initiative. The RSA program employs students who work ten to fifteen hours per week, earn a competitive wage, and gain valuable staff-level experience that goes well beyond typical work-study jobs.

Several students serve as Rhodes Diplomats, a dedicated corps of volunteers who greet prospective students, lead campus tours, and follow up on prospects. “It was an important part of my experience at Rhodes,” says Peter Zanca, who appreciated the opportunity to gain “professional development without leaving campus.”

Carol Casey, the dean of students, says undergraduates uphold and take responsibility for the college’s governance, community service programs, and one-hundred-year-old honor code, which is deeply embedded at Rhodes. It informs the physical campus (things tend not to be bolted in place), academic life (take-home assignments and unproctored exams are common), and the social dynamic (students trust each other). “To fit, students here have to believe in the honor code;” says Casey.

Adds Dean Strandburg: “I’ve never seen an honor code as well-integrated into campus life.”

About half the student body are members of fourteen fraternities and sororities. Those Greek organizations are integral to social life on campus, and most of their parties are open to all students. To complement activities organized by Greeks, The Big Diehl program each semester offers a slate of student-run social activities, such as movies, skiing, white-water rafting, and paintball. Most of
the events are free or accessible at nominal cost. When the weather is nice, which is much of the year, students congregate for cookouts on the banks of the Mississippi.

Rhodes appealed to Andrew Maryott, a native of Massachusetts, in part because he is averse to cold weather (“I don’t like snow”), in part because he is averse to colleges that are obsessed with Division I athletics. “I was looking for a college with strong academics and athletics,” he says. “I wanted education first, athletics second.”

Rhodes was right up his alley. The Division III college and longtime member of the Southern Collegiate Athletic Conference has joined the eight-member Southern Athletic Association. Rhodes does not grant athletic scholarships, yet twenty-six percent of students participate in ten women’s and nine men’s varsity sports, and sixty-five percent take part in intramural and club sports. Championships come easily to the men’s and women’s soccer, cross country, tennis, and track teams; and the women’s volleyball, field hockey, and golf teams.

Student athletes enjoy indoor facilities at the Bryan Campus Life Center (BCLC), which contains a performance gymnasium, a three-court multi-use gymnasium, three racquetball courts, two squash courts, a seven-thousand-square-foot free weight and resistive exercise room with cardiovascular equipment, and an indoor jogging track.

Adjacent to the BCLC are a stadium for football and track, ten tennis courts, a swimming pool, intercollegiate baseball and soccer fields, football practice fields and additional playing fields for intramural and club sports.

Rhodes’s one-hundred-acre campus in midtown Memphis sits amid “four totally different communities,” says Dr. Wigginton, adding that the college has “important relationships with each of them.”

On and off campus, some eighty-five percent of Rhodes students engage in community service. In fact, for two years running, Rhodes was named America’s #1 “Most Service-Oriented” college by Newsweek. More than 80 percent of Rhodes students participate in community service.
Many of the college’s service-minded students are Bonner Scholars and Summer Service Fellows. They get involved with the popular student-volunteer Kinney Program, which works with about one hundred service programs and agencies in Memphis. Students also run a soup kitchen one night a week at a nearby church.

Then there is the Rhodes Learning Corridor, which includes partnerships with underserved neighborhoods adjacent to campus, four nearby public schools, and other community and educational organizations. Students, faculty, and staff work in partnership with community members, tutoring in the schools and creating and running civic educational programs.

The college is dedicated to being a good and faithful neighbor: It maintains the Rhodes Community Office in the center of the neighborhoods, and the Learning Corridor liaison is a full-time Rhodes staff member.

For Michael Lamb, the experience was an eye-opener. “Because I came from a very small town, I hadn’t seen the faces of hunger and homelessness until I came to the city,” says Lamb, who studied at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. “Those are the two issues I felt most compelled to address.”

As a Bonner Scholar, he immersed himself in community service. As a senior, he compiled a book of stories and poems by Rhodes students and alumni about their experiences serving and befriending others in Memphis and other parts of the world. “These men, women and children taught us about courage, humility, and hope,” he wrote in the afterword. “Our stories are also theirs. I hope their voices are heard.” Lamb attributes his Rhodes Scholarship to his Rhodes education: “Before I was a Rhodes Scholar, I was a scholar at Rhodes.”

**Where a Rhodes Education Can Lead**

The best measure of education, some say, is how those who have it use it. In this regard, Rhodes students and alumni excel. Some current Rhodes alumni include:

- In the business world, Bill Michaelcheck, of New York, is chair-

- In the sciences, Sid Strickland heads a laboratory that does cutting-edge research on Alzheimer’s disease at New York’s Rockefeller University, where he also serves as vice president for educational affairs. Harry Swinney, a pioneer in chaos theory, is the physics department’s Sid Richardson Foundation Regents Chair and director of the Center for Nonlinear Dynamics at the University of Texas, Austin.

- In the arts, best-selling novelist Charlaine Harris entertains millions of fans with her Southern Vampire books and “True Blood” television series, and actor George Hearn, who created the role of Albin in the Broadway production of *La Cage aux Folles*, received a Tony Award for his portrayal of Max in *Sunset Boulevard*.

- Technology is the forte of Katie Jacobs Stanton, head of international strategy at Twitter. She served in two positions in the Obama administration and previously was a senior producer at Yahoo! and a strategic partner manager at Google.

- Attorney Bruce Lindsey, former assistant to the president, deputy White House counsel, and senior adviser to President Bill Clinton, serves as CEO of the William J. Clinton Foundation.

- Cary Fowler, executive director of the Global Crop Diversity Trust in Rome, Italy, spearheaded the establishment of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault in Norway, a cold-storage seed bank created to protect the world’s biodiversity.

- Rhodes Scholar John Churchill, secretary (CEO) of the Phi Beta Kappa Society headquartered in Washington, D.C., says, “When I came to Rhodes as a student, I fell absolutely and deeply in love with the whole liberal arts idea and wanted nothing more than to spend my life on a college campus.”
What could the world need more than men and women who are liberally educated?"

“Our students,” says Dean Drompp, “want to have an impact on the world.”
As one of the South's most distinctive institutions of higher education, Rollins College owes a debt of gratitude to practical Northern influences.

The college's founding inspiration, Lucy Cross, a native of Philadelphia, arrived in Florida in 1879, for the most rational of reasons: Eager to alleviate chronic throat problems made worse by the harsh winters of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and New York, she sought the balm of a warmer climate.

Soon thereafter, the practical-minded Cross had convinced the Congregational Association—the denomination that had founded Yale and Dartmouth—to support establishment of the state's first four-year college. A wealthy Chicago businessman, Alonzo Rollins, pledged his support for the project, and Cross, an alumna of the country's oldest coeducational institution, Oberlin College, ensured the enrollment of women.

From its inception, Rollins has existed as a place that values the application of good ideas more than the allure of abstract principles. With a central Florida campus located in a subtropical region, Rollins has topographical and atmospheric advantages in keeping its collective feet on the ground and its communal eyes on a clear horizon.

Indeed, the college's original seal, a clichéd metaphor depicting a flaming torch and the motto “Sit Lux” (“Here is light”), was jettisoned early on in favor of a more appropriate rising-sun logo and the motto “Fiat Lux” (“Let there be light”). Explains Lewis Duncan, the college's president (and an accomplished scientist): “We have lots of photons.”

From the beginning, the college marketed itself as an educational solution for Florida's residents and, according to an early catalogue, “an opportunity for youth of the North, whose health demands that they should spend a considerable portion of the year
in a more genial climate to pursue their studies.” (After Florida, the second most prolific supplier of Rollins’s students is Massachusetts, a state that practically invented the American liberal-arts college.)

Rollins’s practicality goes well beyond its capitalization on the state’s favorable climate. The college, commonsensical to the core, “boldly proclaims that we are champions of the applied liberal arts,” says Duncan, noting that “the purpose of a liberal education is making society better.”

There are no ivory towers here, no ivy-covered citadels of cloistered knowledge, no walls or fences to box Rollins in. There is, however, Spanish moss, delicate lace-like flora that festoons trees among the campus’s tile-roofed, Mediterranean-style buildings. The seventy-five acres of grounds, in the small city of Winter Park, a suburb of Orlando, border Lake Virginia and are in proximity to the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico.

Rollins has the advantage of being located in one of the country’s megastates (California, New York, and Texas are the others), a living laboratory of contemporary trends and global challenges, among them shifting demographics, urban planning, environmental issues, oceanography, and water conservation.

“Many faculty members study Florida as a way of understanding the world,” says Jonathan Miller, director of the college’s Olin Library. “If you want to know about water wars, come to Florida. This is a really interesting place to be.”

The campus teems with students who exemplify an ideal promoted on the college’s web site: “What you learn in the classroom only becomes knowledge when you’re able to apply it to real-world situations.” Students sit on the boards of local not-for-profit organizations and travel to other continents to undertake community service and complete internships. They engage in research with practical applications, such as using lasers to locate landmines. “They take things and run with them,” says Miller.

The bottom line, codified in Rollins’s mission statement, is educating “students for global citizenship and responsible leadership… meaningful lives and productive careers.” Says David Erdmann,
dean of admission and enrollment: “You will be transformed here.”

As a practical matter, Rob Moore, a 2010 graduate who majored in philosophy and religion, agrees. “I came to college and found people excited about learning,” says Moore, who plans to pursue a Ph.D., an aspiration that would have seemed ludicrous when he arrived at Rollins. “I have become such a different person than anyone in high school thought I would be.”

**Study at Home and Abroad**

The keys to Rollins’s practical application of the liberal arts are a robust international agenda, an unwavering commitment to public service and an academic philosophy that integrates those ideals.

“This is the way we understand the world and our place in the world,” says Hoyt Edge, a professor of philosophy who has led field studies to Australia and Indonesia. “The transformative part comes from international experience and community engagement.”

Rollins’s global perspective begins with the faculty. The college’s initiative to internationalize its professoriate may be the most aggressive in all of higher education. The push began a decade ago with the “Spanish for Professors” program that encouraged faculty members to take language classes taught by their Spanish-speaking colleagues. Upon completion of the two-semester course, lingually enhanced professors road-tested their new language and cultural skills in Oviedo, Spain.

“Every school is trying to find ways of getting faculty to think outside their disciplines,” says Duncan.

Well-traveled professors have a way of changing the climate and broadening the dialogue on campus. Seeing the value of a faculty with global academic experience, Duncan in 2005 created the President’s International Initiative, an unprecedented program that promises to send all faculty members abroad every three years. Professors from disparate academic areas have journeyed together to destinations such as the Galapagos Islands and Antarctica.

“We are on the forefront of pushing the outside world into the classroom,” says Duncan. “We’ve had a proliferation of proposals
for joint projects and jointly taught classes…. To truly provide a
global education for students, you must first internationalize the
faculty.”

Rollins’s students are going abroad in unprecedented num-
bers as well, frequently getting there by way of a road less traveled.
While there are still students interested in studying in Paris, Lon-
don, or Rome, more students are inclined toward destinations in
Africa, Asia, and Central and South America. “Prompted by their
developing awareness of a globalizing world and by energetic facul-
ty with diverse cultural interests, Rollins students are laying tracks
to locations as far-flung as Thailand, Guatemala, Nepal, and Mo-
rocco,” says Giselda Beaudin, director of international programs.

To that end, Rollins, which established the country’s first study-
abroad program in Australia, is strengthening its offerings in Asia,
exploring possibilities for study abroad in India, and expanding
faculty-led short-term programs to offer students more opportuni-
ties to study in varied destinations. Among Masters-granting insti-
tutions nationwide, the college’s study-abroad program is ranked in
the top ten for percentage of students who have an academic expe-
rience abroad, according to the Institute of International Education.

There is a clear link between the global experiences of faculty
and Rollins’s students. Kelly Castino, a recent graduate who ma-
jored in psychology, accompanied professors on field studies in
Greece, London (twice), Peru, Chile, and Argentina. Approximately
three-quarters of Rollins students have an international experience,
a number that is growing. The college recently sent abroad its larg-
est group of student travelers ever.

International study is a given among some groups of students,
including undergraduates opting for the 3/2 accelerated MBA pro-
gram offered in conjunction with the Crummer Graduate School of
Business. The program provides an opportunity for students to earn
an undergraduate degree and a master’s of business administration
in five years. All full-time Crummer graduates have gone abroad at
least once. Candidates pursuing degrees in international business,
the college’s largest major, are required to have international
experience, with opportunities for international internships.

Meanwhile, efforts are underway to infuse all aspects of the college with a global focus or consciousness: this includes offering courses with international content and perspectives, collaborating with academic departments to integrate study abroad into many majors and minors, developing international service learning and supporting students so they can build on their study-abroad experiences once they return to campus.

“Rollins has made a true commitment to internationalization,” Beaudin says. “Students, faculty, and staff are actively engaged in looking outwards to explore the wider world and in looking inwards to develop our own diverse, global community.”

To Learn Is to Serve

With more than half of the college’s undergraduates coming from outside Florida, Rollins has a diverse population drawn from almost every state and more than fifty countries. Regardless of where they come from, they get involved in community service at the outset of their collegiate careers. Before classes start, first-year students arrive on campus for orientation and SPARC (Service, Philanthropy and Activism at Rollins College) Day. Students have sorted canned goods at the Second Harvest Food Bank, built a science laboratory at Fern Creek Elementary School, worked with the Keep Winter Park Beautiful organization to restore outdoor areas, and built hand sanitizers for use by migrant farm workers.

Those service learning projects benefit some two dozen local organizations and serve “to ignite an initial passion in our incoming class” for community involvement, says Meredith Hein, assistant director for the Office of Community Engagement.

After orientation, a campus-wide program called “Be a Part from the Start” allows students to get engaged in service through programs and events linking the college’s mission with the greater community.

It seems to be working.

Rebeca Montaner, a 2008 graduate, founded “The Book Network,” which sells used college textbooks or repurposes them for
use by universities in Venezuela. Proceeds from sales benefit children’s educational centers throughout Latin America.

Rollins student Tessie Swope founded the Five Stones Project, a not-for-profit organization that adopted the Cruz Verde village in the Dominican Republic as part of its mission to improve economic conditions in the country’s poor villages. Five Stones has built a vocational school and secured funds to build a well that will provide the residents of Cruz Verde with a permanent water supply.

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, then-student Steve Miller founded Rollins Relief, a student-run organization that helps disaster victims. To date, the group has made more than a dozen trips to communities in the Southeast United States, including New Orleans. Partnering with Habitat for Humanity, the group has rebuilt homes that were destroyed by the hurricane and subsequent flooding.

The list goes on. EcoRollins students work with recycling and sustainability community organizations; undergraduates teach English to local middle school students; JUMP (Join Us in Making Progress) helps provide meals and support to Orlando’s homeless population; and an annual dance marathon raises money for the Children’s Miracle Network.

The concept of outreach is embedded in Rollins’s culture. Every academic department has at least one course with a community-service component. Involvement is “woven into the curriculum,” says Duncan. “We take what they’re learning in the classroom and apply it.”

The outreach hasn’t gone unnoticed. Florida Campus Compact has named Rollins the most engaged campus in Florida, and the college received one of the six Presidential Awards from the Corporation for National and Community Service, the highest honor given by the federal government in recognition of a school’s service learning and civic engagement. Rollins also earned the Community Engagement Classification given by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, a distinction held by less than five percent of colleges and universities.
Remarked an administrator during a campus roundtable discussion: “We’re trying to understand how every piece of our campus connects with the community.”

**A Curriculum That Challenges**

Rollins goes out of its way to give students a robust academic experience that is characterized by what Edge, the philosophy professor, refers to as heavy doses of “academic vigor.”

To help new students acclimate to the challenges of a competitive liberal arts institution, Rollins requires first-year scholars to enroll in small seminars of about sixteen students each (the average Rollins class size is seventeen). Unlike the large survey courses that swallow up freshmen at many institutions, the Rollins College Conference (RCC) seminars are topical courses that tap instructors’ expertise.

Students choose among thirty-one seminar courses with names such as Crime Scene Chemistry; Fight Club, God and the Buddha; Our Imperiled Planet; Pop Culture; and The Physics of Avatar. One course involves a first-year field experience to study sustainable development.

A full-time professor leads each seminar and also serves as the students’ first academic advisor. (Later, when students declare a major, they work with an advisor in their chosen area of academic focus.) Assisting with each seminar are peer mentors, older students who have engaged in training to promote personal and social responsibility and to ease the transition into a more challenging academic milieu.

“We can’t do our job without peer education. We take the development and training of student leaders and staff very seriously,” says Karen Hater, the college’s dean of student affairs. “We talk about the individual, and I’m amazed at how literally we take that.”

Peer mentors also help with issues ranging from homesickness and roommate problems to potential eating disorders. “We’re looking at students holistically,” says Meghan Harte, executive director for student success.

In about a third of the RCC seminars, students and peer mentors
live together in what Rollins calls Living Learning Communities. Participants in seminars that have an LLC component reside in Rex Beach Hall or Ward Hall, which recently underwent a $9 million renovation. Among the upgrades is a new faculty apartment that allows a professor to live among the students. Ward Hall’s amenities include hardwood floors, flat-panel televisions, a fourth-floor patio, leather couches, and lots of meeting space.

Living Learning Communities allow the college “to extend the classroom and tap into the natural curiosity of students,” says Mike Gunter, a professor of political science who teaches courses in international relations and environmental politics. “Learning is serendipitous.”

Students never know who might show up. A world-class banjo player and a renowned ethnobotanist have visited students in their dorm. At other times, professors have brought in telescopes for astronomy night and screened movies as part of a film series including an annual Global Peace Film Festival.

“You don’t just go back to the residence hall and forget about all things academic,” says a student.

For the most part, Rollins’s professors lecture sparingly, preferring to engage their students in discussion. The predilection for engaging young scholars goes back to the 1930s, when then-president Hamilton Holt proclaimed that “There are two kinds of professors. One, the research man, draws his inspiration from learning; the other, the teacher, draws his from life. The first is a great scholar, the second a beloved teacher…. To my way of thinking it is more important for the college to have good teachers than good research men who may turn out to be teachers.”

An advocate for the League of Nations and human rights, Holt became an influential educator. He encouraged lively discussions among professors and students of the sort that the Yale-educated journalist had engaged in as editor of the liberal Independent magazine. His legacy endures.

“We believe the richness in classroom discussion is more important than the textbook,” says Craig McAllaster, dean of Rollins’s
Rollins College

Crummer Graduate School of Business. “You’ll have a relationship with faculty that you won’t have elsewhere.”

Rollins’s culture of hands-on, interactive learning appealed to psychology major Laura Berk, who came to Florida, by way of Connecticut, because she wanted to attend a college “where I’ll have connections with professors.”

The college’s student-to-faculty ratio of ten-to-one encourages professors and undergraduates to engage in collaborative research. The Student-Faculty Collaborative Scholarship Program affords students an opportunity to conduct high-level research that at other institutions would be available only to graduate students. In the program’s first decade, three hundred fifty students and seventy-seven faculty members collaborated on undergraduate scholarship in twenty-four disciplines, and the program granted $1.5 million in support of undergraduate research.

Faculty-student collaborations typically result in papers published in peer-reviewed journals on topics such as “Determination of drug binding sites in alpha-beta integrins,” or a jointly created work in the arts. A summer research project on public murals concluded with students and a professor completing murals for the Jewish Community Center, the Winter Park Day Nursery, and the Girls and Boys Town of Oviedo.

Convinced that the research of Rollins’s young scholars deserved a wider audience, then-student Fay Pappas in 2007 created the Rollins Undergraduate Research Journal as a means of archiving research that otherwise would languish in file cabinets and on dusty shelves. Today, the on-line journal serves as a central repository of student research that is accessible from anywhere in the world.

Says Pappas, who enrolled in law school after graduation: “This idea was such an obvious solution to a clear problem.”

A Culture of Innovation

Indeed, Rollins belies the stereotype of a college as a place of musty tradition segmented by schools, departments, specialties and subspecialties, each of which jealously guards its turf.
Rather, Rollins is a place of innovation, where sixty percent of the faculty and seventy percent of the staff joined the college since 2000. The emphasis on international travel and collaboration across disciplines has resulted in what President Duncan calls “peculiar partnerships,” such as the working relationship that developed on campus between a physicist and an artist.

The new Winter Park Institute, “a center for intellectual engagement” that serves the college and its surrounding community, provides “public lectures and readings, symposiums, seminars, master classes, interviews, and special-interest sessions…from a broad spectrum of disciplines and expertise,” the college says. The Senior Distinguished Fellow of the Winter Park Institute is two-time U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins. Other recent fellows have included Jean-Michel Cousteau, Béla Fleck, Marilyn Horne, William Greider, Paul Simon, and Alejandro Toledo.

Students steeped in the college’s culture of innovation become practiced in the art of the possible. Recent graduate Moore, for example, wasn’t content to serve on the Honor Council, compete on the debate team, and start the philosophy club. He thought Rollins should have a mountain biking club, a concept that is as improbable in pancake-flat Florida as deep-sea diving would be in the Rockies. Undeterred, Moore found the hills he sought in an old phosphorous mine.

“These students are very entrepreneurial,” says Miller, director of the library. “This is not a tradition-bound school.”

Rollins’s proclivity for innovation hasn’t gone unnoticed. In 2009, Entrepreneur magazine named the Crummer School the top graduate business school for entrepreneurial studies in Florida and twenty-second in the nation. (The school also has a philanthropy and nonprofit leadership center.)

Rollins is also known for taking an entrepreneurial approach to its academic philosophy. Several times in its history, the college has convened intensive reviews of the educational landscape that resulted in new innovations. During the Holt era, Sinclair Lewis remarked during his acceptance of the Noble Prize for Literature that
Rollins’s promotion of creativity in contemporary literature made it a leader among American colleges.

More recently, the college and its faculty have begun testing a new curriculum that changes the way students meet general education requirements. Rather than have students select courses from a grab bag of options, the college is testing a program that seeks to attain educational outcomes in a more integrated way. Called the Rollins Plan, the initiative packages courses across multiple divisions that focus on a single theme.

The experiment will bring “cohesion and strength to general education at Rollins by examining a single big idea from a variety of viewpoints, culminating in a capstone course in which teams of students integrate these various ways of approaching the big idea in a cooperative project,” said Mark Anderson, a professor of mathematics who is helping to implement the pilots. “This is the largest transformation of the curriculum to take place in over thirty years.”

The college’s penchant for ingenuity notwithstanding, Rollins isn’t a place of unrelenting iconoclasm. After one hundred twenty-five years, the college has developed cultural norms and picked up a few beloved traditions.

Students can join five fraternities, seven sororities, and more than one hundred other student organizations. One in four play Division II sports. Since 1935, the campus has hosted an annual two-week Bach festival, one of the oldest in the country, and its Cornell Fine Arts Museum has one of the finest collections of any college museum.

And then there is Fox Day, a tradition begun in 1956. Each spring, without forewarning, the president escorts a three-hundred-pound statue of a sly fox to the Rollins Green, signaling a day of canceled classes and much-anticipated freedom.

“We have a very busy student body,” says Hater. Fox Day, she notes, is a chance to take a breath and relax.

It’s only practical.
In Texas, which sprawls over 262,000 square miles and has a growing population of 26 million residents, bigger is presumed to be better. Yet deep in the heart of the Lone Star State lies Southwestern University, a decidedly small institution that enrolls about 1,300 students.

Southwestern University is an anomaly. In a state where boastfulness is an accepted rhetorical technique, Southwestern tends toward humility.

“We are a place that doesn’t have promotion in our DNA,” says Jake Schrum, who by way of explanation has characterized the institution as something of “a New England college in Texas.”

More to the point, it is one of the best private liberal arts colleges in the country, a place that offers students “the kind of education provided at elite institutions,” says the college’s provost, Jim Hunt. “But we’re not elitist.”

So what to make of Southwestern University, located in the small yet vibrant town of Georgetown, Texas, thirty miles north of Austin, the state’s epicenter of government, technology, intellectual capital and the arts? Where the preferred mode of transportation in Texas is a motor vehicle, the campus choice is the fuel-efficient yellow Pirate (Southwestern’s mascot) Bike. Students, faculty, and staff jump on Pirate Bikes, ride to their next location, and park the bikes for the next person’s use.

“We have a tight-knit community,” says Tom Oliver, Southwestern’s vice president of enrollment services. “Students come here and make connections.”

Indeed, the Southwestern commitment, articulated in the college’s mission statement, is “to a broad understanding of knowledge, the full development of each student we enroll, the fostering of diverse perspectives and the creation of a dynamic residential community where students are challenged, supported and engaged.”
The college seeks to realize its core purpose—“Fostering a liberal arts community whose values and actions encourage contributions toward the well-being of humanity”—by cultivating academic excellence; promoting lifelong learning and a passion for intellectual and personal growth; fostering diverse perspectives; being true to oneself and others; respecting the worth and dignity of persons; and encouraging activism in the pursuit of justice and the common good.

Attainment of those goals “can only be done when you have a small, intimate learning environment,” says President Schrum, noting that the college’s student-to-faculty ratio is ten-to-one, and that classes enroll, on average, fourteen students—obviating the need for stadium-size lecture halls.

“We go against the grain,” says Georrianne Hewett, associate vice president for alumni and parent relations. “We’re small in a state that reveres big…. If we get people on campus, though, they feel the difference.”

The *Fiske Guide to Colleges (2010)* drew the same conclusion, noting that “Southwestern proves that good things can—and do—come in small packages.”

**Learning Navigation Skills for Life**

Southwestern is a place given to self-discovery, an institution that pushes students to find within themselves the unique passion that will inspire and sustain them for decades. Southwestern helps students to understand their place in the world, to cultivate broad perspectives, and develop the habit of lifelong learning. Students, in turn, use those tools to navigate their life’s journey.

“We help students to find their intellectual passion,” says Oliver, the vice president of enrollment services. “Students come here without a clear idea of [where they’re going]. They’re bright and curious but don’t know their path.”

Oliver knows whereof he speaks. As a student at Southwestern, the native Chicagoan “found a passion in education” that informed his career. He worked at Southern Methodist, Trinity, and Texas Christian Universities before coming home to his alma mater.
Oliver and other alumni who find their way home to Southwestern (President Schrum, Class of 1968, is a returning alumnus as well), personify the Association of Southwestern University Alumni’s motto: “A Lifelong Southwestern Experience.”

A particular type of person tends to thrive here. Students (and alumni) who get the most out of Southwestern, Oliver says, are open to new ideas and discoveries that emerge across academic boundaries.

“Intellectual curiosity is the core,” Oliver says. “If they are smart but not curious, they will hit a wall. But if they are willing to push themselves and be challenged, they will find a place here.”

Frequently, the place they find isn’t one students had envisioned at the outset of their journey. Undergraduates often “end up going in a different direction than they thought they would when they came here,” Oliver says.

Take Duncan Alexander, who transferred to Southwestern from Carnegie Mellon University. Having declared a major in physics in Pittsburgh, he found himself on an “inflexible” academic track that railroaded any chance of his embarking on a journey of discovery. “I had more interests than just physics,” recalls Alexander, who encountered few “opportunities for doing other things” at Mellon.

At Southwestern, he pursued his interest in theatre at the Sarofim School of Fine Arts, which led to “lots of interdepartmental” work and a newfound passion for “digital reproduction and its implication for the arts,” says Alexander, who intends to study multimedia digital imagery in graduate school. “Now I’m using physics as fuel for new ideas.”

Alexander thrived in part because Southwestern is the only top liberal arts college in the country with a separate school of fine arts. Sarofim is “to us what the music program is to Oberlin College,” says President Schrum, referring to the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, the oldest continuously operating conservatory in the United States.

Oberlin and Southwestern integrate top tier liberal arts colleges with schools of music and fine arts, respectively, to provide distinc-
tive undergraduate experiences. The Sarofim School is one of the many resources that make it possible for Southwestern to “continue to put our primary focus on our students and the student experience,” says Provost Hunt.

Students also benefit from a robust study abroad program. More than half of Southwestern’s students pursue academic interests outside the country on every continent and through specialized programs in Washington, D.C., New York, and London. The college’s intimate size and wealth of opportunities create and “contribute to a student’s ability to take risks that, perhaps, he or she wouldn’t take at larger schools,” says the college on its web site.

There is an expectation at Southwestern that students will venture beyond their comfort zones. “If someone is not open to being challenged and not willing to broaden their horizons, they might not be happy here,” says Oliver. “People who see education as a means or a step to something else will miss out…. It’s not about the first job [out of college]. It’s about preparing you for a lifetime.”

For the record, Southwestern’s alumni tend to do well after graduation. A survey of 2008 graduates found that ninety-one percent of respondents had obtained employment or acceptance into graduate school within ten months of graduation. The 2008 edition of The Best 366 Colleges, published by the Princeton Review, ranked Southwestern seventh in the country for Best Career/Job Placement Service. The career office coaches students on how to interview for a job and the etiquette of work dinners. There is also a “Career Connections BBQ.” This is Texas, after all.

The Birth of Texas, the Birth of Southwestern

Texas and Southwestern have grown up together. The former declared its independence from Mexico in 1836, following the defeat of the Mexican Army by General Sam Houston at the Battle of San Jacinto. Four years later, the fledgling Republic of Texas chartered its first institution of higher education, Rutersville College, which would become Southwestern.

The name honored a Methodist minister, Martin Ruter, who
helped to found the college. The religious affiliation continues to
this day, yet Southwestern is a nonsectarian institution, a place
where “dogmatic rigidity is alien to our institutional spirit,” notes
the college’s web site.

From the outset, Southwestern admitted women, making it
not only the oldest university in Texas but also the second oldest coeducational liberal arts college west of the Mississippi. Women
constitute about sixty percent of the student body.

The Southwestern name was adopted in 1875, two years after
Rutersville College merged with three other institutions to form
Texas University, a name that was simply too big for the small col-
lege. It became Southwestern in deference to Texas lawmakers who
wanted to establish, in Austin, a state flagship university with a
name to match.

Southwestern University located its campus in Georgetown,
a dot on the map in a central part of the state known as the Texas
Hill Country. More than a century later, in 1997, the municipality
became the first city in Texas to receive the National Trust for His-
toric Preservation’s designation as a Great American Main Street
City, the group’s highest honor. Today, as one of the fastest-growing
areas of the country, the area has burgeoning science and medical
industries that are of interest to students and graduates.

The region is characterized by rugged topography and an
abundance of caves that provide many opportunities for outdoor
activities, such as water sports, spelunking and hiking. Deposits of
sedimentary rock yielded the native limestone used to construct
campus buildings. Southwest’s architectural gem is the Roy and
Lillie Cullen Building, whose turrets and curved arches are typical
of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture. (Trinity Church, in
Boston, is an exemplar of the Richardsonian Romanesque style.)
Each spring, Southwestern’s seniors ascend the spiral staircase in
Cullen Tower and sign their names on walls that bear testimony of
those who preceded them.

Just as Southwestern doesn’t align with all things Texas, so too
is The Hill Country somewhat different from the state’s prevail-
ing culture. The region, notes Wikipedia, “combines Spanish and Central European influences in food, beer, architecture, and music that is distinctive...from the state's Southern and Southwestern influences.” Incorporation of the accordion into Tejano music, for example, resulted from the nineteenth-century influence of German settlers, who also established the Spoetzl Brewery, maker of the region’s popular Shiner Bock Bavarian-style beer.

Central Texas, home of the state government, is a bustling center of research activity. The southernmost region of the state, formerly part of Mexico, is rich in Tex-Mex culture. The state’s eastern area, which includes Houston, has a rugged, risk-taking culture reflected in the oil, gas and timber industries, as well as the Space Center. Dallas is the state’s corporate headquarters, and West Texas, a rolling landscape that gives way to Big Bend National Park, is known for ranching and, more recently, wind energy.

**The Southwestern Difference**

Ask Sarah Gould, who graduated with a major in English and a minor in business, what is distinctive about Southwestern, and she replies without hesitation: “It’s the open-door policy of faculty members. They’re very friendly, open, and committed” to students. At Southwestern, Gould encountered professors who went out of their way to gauge her interest in scholarships and speaking opportunities that, as a first-generation student, she “would not have known how to apply for.”

Diana Parra, a Latin American Studies major, corroborates Gould’s observation. During her first year she took advantage of instructors’ office hours, dropping in on political-science and history professors whom she had heard were particularly outstanding. “They spent hours talking with me about history, politics and books I should read,” says Parra, who was not enrolled in those instructors’ classes. “With Southwestern professors, if you’re interested, they’re interested.”

The dynamic connection between Southwestern’s students and professors generates the intellectual energy that sustains the academic enterprise and encourages collegial relations among academ-
ic mentors and their protégés. During the college’s annual matriculation ceremony, professors welcome new students by forming a human corridor through which the incoming class passes. Graduates recess through a similar portal four years later.

In between those rites of passage, professors shepherd students through the challenges they encounter. During finals weeks, Southwestern’s faculty prepare and serve a midnight breakfast to students cramming for exams. Given that ninety-nine percent of the college’s professors hold a Ph.D. or terminal degree in their field, those short-order cooks and servers are undoubtedly among the brainiest in central Texas.

Digging into a stack of pancakes prepared and served by top-notch academicians speaks to Southwestern’s “human-scale community at whose center are meaningful relationships rather than bureaucratic routines,” says the college’s web site.

The students themselves are an increasingly diverse lot, even though eighty-eight percent of them are natives of Texas. The large number of in-state students isn’t surprising when you consider that eighty percent of American undergraduates attend a college within two hundred miles of home. The fact is that millions of residents can travel two hundred miles in any direction without leaving Texas, which is like five states in one. The college seeks to enroll more international and out-of-state students. At present, Southwestern’s students come from thirty-five states and ten countries, and the past five years, out-of-state enrollment has doubled; the goal is twenty-five percent. Of the top 100 nationally-ranked liberal arts colleges in the U.S., Southwestern ranks first in its percentage of enrollment of Hispanic/Latino students.

Even as Southwestern’s campus becomes more diverse, the college has redoubled its commitment to undergraduate learning. Elsewhere in academe, the priorities of some top-tier liberal arts colleges are tilting toward faculty research at the expense of teaching undergraduates, a strategic move aimed at leveraging scholarship to burnish institutions’ reputations. “New England liberal arts colleges have tipped the teacher-scholar balance to emphasizing
the scholarship side,” says Pres. Schrum. Provost Hunt acknowledges hearing from professors at those liberal arts institutions who bemoan “that they have lost student-centeredness” as a core value. Both Schrum and Hunt were quick to add, however, that 210 Southwestern students have made presentations at regional and national conferences in just the last three years.

Sara Daly is fortunate that her professors weren’t constrained by the tyranny of a publish-or-perish culture. Early in her career at Southwestern, Daly was shy and lacking in confidence. She didn’t engage in class discussions. An observant professor invited Daly to participate, gave her encouragement and helped to develop her talents. Coaxed from her shell, Daly thrived academically and went on to become a terror analyst for the CIA and the Rand Corporation. In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, national media outlets frequently called on her to explain events.

“Faculty notice what happens in the classroom, and they’re very thoughtful about teaching and how to get through to students and stimulate them,” says Hewett, assistant vice president for alumni and parent relations. “It’s about development of the whole person.”

The National Institute for Technology in Liberal Education validated the college’s commitment to teaching when it moved its headquarters to Southwestern’s campus. The institute, funded from the beginning by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in New York, focuses its efforts at the intersection of teaching, learning and technology. In addition, the not-for-profit organization Teach for America has visited Southwestern to study ways to collaborate on the professional development of teachers.

Making a Difference

From the beginning, Southwestern has sent into the world graduates who improved their communities. Early on, the college produced a lot of ministers and school teachers.

“Alumni and students are civically involved,” says Hewett. “It’s not just about how big a paycheck someone can get or how far up the ladder people can climb. The culture here says ‘This is not just about me.’”
More than sixty percent of students volunteer on campus or in the community every year—twice the national rate. In recent years, students have pitched in to build a “playscape” for Georgetown’s children and mentored the city’s middle and high school students. During spring break, Southwestern’s undergraduates build homes for poor people and clean up national parks through the Destination Service program. Dozens of students have traveled to Louisiana to aid the victims of Hurricane Katrina. In a typical year, students log approximately sixteen thousand hours of service that benefit some eighty agencies.

In recognition of those efforts, the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll has honored the college annually since the program began in 2006.

Opportunities to do service abound. Gillian Graham, a pre-med student majoring in English, created an educational curriculum designed to teach local second graders about nutrition. Using a color-coded system, the Rainbow Foods Program reminds children how to eat healthful foods.

Sarah Gould volunteered to work with the Boys & Girls Club of Georgetown, raising money for an event to celebrate club members’ achievements in the fine arts. That experience led her to found the Society for Young Women Leaders, a mentoring program whereby college women counsel their high school counterparts. The summer before her junior year, the J.S. Kemper Foundation granted Gould a prestigious Kemper Scholarship, which enabled her to volunteer with Chicago’s Joffrey Ballet.

She and other students also revived the college’s debating tradition and founded a mock-trial team. “Debating brings together all the disciplines,” Gould says.

Southwestern is particularly focused on environmental issues. It was the second university in Texas to sign the Talloires Declaration, which calls on institutions of higher learning around the world to be leaders in the sustainability movement. More recently, Southwestern signed the College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, which seeks to eliminate campuses’ greenhouse
emissions and “accelerate progress toward climate neutrality and sustainability.”

The college walks the talk. In 2009, Southwestern opened its first green building, the Wilhelmina Cullen Admissions Center, which will use forty percent less energy than a building constructed using standard materials and methods. The center features skylights, energy-efficient roof shingles, bamboo floors and solar-powered sink faucets. In 2010, Southwestern agreed to get its electricity exclusively from wind power, becoming the first university in Texas to use only renewable energy resources.

As is the case with many academic pursuits at Southwestern, the environmental studies program cuts across disciplines to bridge the movement’s history, contemporary political issues, environmental literature, and the sciences.

It works because “all those faculty know each other,” says Laura Hobgood-Oster, a religion faculty member and chair of the environmental studies program. Students further benefit from alumni who come back to share their experiences in environmental education, environmental justice and law, the Peace Corps, and AmeriCorps.

Students recently had an opportunity to meet and hear the late Wangari Maathai, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 for her work with the Green Belt Movement in Kenya. The program, founded by Maathai, has resulted in the planting of more than thirty million trees that have prevented erosion while providing food and firewood.

Every other year, Southwestern’s students travel to Washington, D.C., for Power Shift, a biannual climate change conference geared toward younger activists.

**Education as Transcendence**

Southwestern’s distinctiveness is most apparent in its first-year seminars and the college’s renowned Paideia seminar program. Both programs incorporate the most vital elements of the Southwestern experience: learning in small groups across multiple disciplines and mentoring by faculty members who engage students in
research. The goal is to transcend academe’s traditional boundaries of time (the semester) and place (academic departments).

“The lynchpin is the seminar,” says Provost Hunt.

The first-year program provides a transition into the rigors of college-level academic work. New students, who arrive on campus for first-year orientation a week before the semester begins, log ten hours of seminar work before classes get underway. “We want students to understand the complexity of things that are spoken of simply,” says Hunt. “It sets up expectations for other classes.”

For a more intensive first-year seminar experience, students can join a “living learning community” of young scholars who share a seminar and a residence hall. LLCs, as they are known, cross traditional boundaries that tend to compartmentalize students’ academic and social lives.

First-year seminars take as their starting point a discrete topic (chocolate, say), and explore it through multiple disciplinary lenses, such as biology, social issues, marketing and commerce, etc. Seminars look at issues such as the enduring popularity of monstrous romantics heroes, from Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* to the *Twilight* series (Bad Love: Myths, Monsters and Mating in Literature and Culture), the global fascination with Mickey, Cinderella, and Mulan (Where Dreams Come True: A Cultural Analysis of the World of Disney) and what our reliance on canines says about us (Going to the Dogs).

Looking back across millennia, “you can understand what people were doing by looking at what their dogs were doing,” says Hobgood-Oster, the environmental studies program director. She teaches the seminar alongside a professor in the natural sciences.

Southwestern’s pièce de résistance is the college’s Paideia program, which takes its name from the Greek term for an educational process that reveals man’s genuine nature. Following their first year, students admitted into the Paideia program coalesce into groups of ten scholars led by a single professor who meets with those students weekly for the next three years. Groups are diverse in term of interests, race, ethnicity, and other characteristics. “It pushes you to
be in a group that wouldn’t be your” default cohort, says President Schrum.

During those three years, students in the program must complete three transformational experiences: a cross-cultural experience, an undergraduate research project, and a civic-engagement project. “The professor’s role is to help students make connections between these three transformational experiences and the classroom experience,” says President Schrum.

David Gaines, the program’s director, says Paideia encourages multidisciplinary interaction, nurtures an extended community of colleagues, and cultivates leadership skills among students. Undergraduates take ownership of the program’s field work, influence the direction of inquiry and shape the program’s civic-engagement requirement.

One group of Paideia scholars collected obsolete computers, reformatted them in Spanish, and distributed the machines to children in Honduras. (A coup forced Southwestern to temporarily suspend the distribution program.)

Paideia has realized Gaines’s hope that the program “would produce more public intellectuals,” he says. “We have a community built around shared intellectual passions.”
There are few places in higher education where putting one foot in front of the other is anything other than a pedestrian act. Then there is the University of the South, familiarly known as Sewanee. Here, on Tennessee’s Cumberland Plateau, going for a walk—that most fundamental of human endeavors—is an invitation to traverse a rarefied plane.

Stepping from a Gothic stone campus building, the peal of the carillon’s fifty-six bells shimmering in the pristine Appalachian air, one might take a stroll, engage in a meditative perambulation or embark on an epic saunter. From Sewanee’s central campus, students can walk for days without leaving the university’s thirteen thousand contiguous acres, one of the few remaining large tracts of unspoiled old-growth forest in the United States.

The Sewanee community refers to the swath of land as The Domain, an appellation befitting an asset that is intrinsic to the university. The topography is rugged and diverse, invitingly so. There are caves, coves and cliffs, waterfalls and wetlands, meadows, ponds, forests, streams and lakes—an environment that begs to be explored.

The Domain manifests what the college’s Dean, John Gatta, calls the university’s reverence for “tradition and mythology.” It is fitting that Gatta is a scholar of Henry David Thoreau, a man who knew something of walks in the woods. It’s a safe bet that Thoreau would have felt at home here.

The Domain is classroom and playground, laboratory and outdoor fitness facility. Among the most biologically diverse habitats and ecosystems of the world’s temperate deciduous forests, it teems with bacteria, fungi and more than one thousand species of vascular plants. It accommodates scientific experimentation, anthropological inquiry, philosophical musings, artistic endeavors, and
discussions of religion. It is home to bobcats, mountain lions, black bears, and rare amphibians.

“Every biology lab I’ve had, we’ve gone out into the wild,” says Jack Duffus, a biology major from Columbus, Ohio.

Sewanee’s wide-open spaces promote an expeditionary ethos. Students and professors on the Domain hike it and bike it, climb its rocks, canoe and kayak its waters. They fish and camp and delight in spelunking its caves. The Outing Program Office, overflowing with gear used by outdoor enthusiasts, resembles an REI warehouse.

Beyond its obvious attributes and utilities, the Domain is a living symbol of the university’s revered ideals. Vast and timeless, it diminishes artificial boundaries and blurs contrived distinctions: between college and town, science and humanities, teacher and learner.

**The Soul of a New Pedagogy**

In 2010, John M. McCardell Jr., president *emeritus* of Middlebury College, became the university’s sixteenth vice-chancellor. A distinguished historian and respected leader in liberal arts education, McCardell possesses a record of achievement as the chief executive of one of America’s finest liberal arts colleges and as a national figure in the public discussion about higher education and student life. The University of the South, he says, is an institution “where those fleeing an increasingly soulless world find a place that has not lost or compromised its own soul; a place shaped by the knowledge and experience, first-hand, of what it means to live in a fallen world; a place that reminds us history did not begin on the day we were born; where as few utterances as possible begin with ‘I’ or end with ‘me.’”

Not surprisingly, the curriculum at Sewanee emphasizes composition and enduring, classic works.

“We teach the canon,” says Pamela Macfie, who chairs the English Department, “the best that has been written and the best that has been thought.”
All first-year students study Shakespeare. The university publishes the Sewanee Review, the country’s oldest, continuously published literary quarterly. And no less a literary genius than Tennessee Williams thought enough of the university to leave it his estate. “Even our scientists are conversant with literature,” says Dean Gatta.

Education at Sewanee is marked by breadth of inquiry pursued with rigor. To earn a bachelor’s degree, students must complete thirty-two full academic courses; satisfy general distribution requirements in literature, language, math, science, art, history, social science, and philosophy/religion; maintain a grade point average of at least 2.0; and complete two physical education credits.

In addition, seniors must pass comprehensive exams in their major fields of study. Clearing that formidable hurdle is an achievement referred to as “being comped.”

The most popular majors are English, Economics, Environmental Studies, History, International and Global Studies, and Political Science. The university recently added a minor in pre-business.

Sewanee hews to the notion that a solid grounding in the liberal arts provides a firm foundation for future endeavors. Some fifty-five percent of graduates go on to earn advanced degrees. Of graduates who apply to medical, dental or veterinary school, eighty-five percent gain admittance. The acceptance rate among law school applicants is more than ninety percent.

One such lawyer, recalls Joel Cunningham, Sewanee’s former president and vice-chancellor, confided to the president that development of his ethical bearings was largely informed by Sewanee’s teaching of Dante.

The propensity of Sewanee’s graduates to earn advanced degrees notwithstanding, the university is dedicated almost exclusively to undergraduate education. Exceptions are the School of Theology at Sewanee, which offers master’s degrees as well as a doctorate of ministry, and the Sewanee School of Letters, a summer master’s degree program in English and creative writing.
Students here have many opportunities for complementing their academic pursuits. Some thirty percent are members of twenty-four varsity athletics teams, including lacrosse, a recent addition. The Sewanee Tigers football team plays its home games at Harris Stadium/McGee Field, the fourth-oldest such facility in the country; Sewanee's five-year-old equestrian center is one of the newest.

To better prepare students for life after Sewanee—and to enrich their lives here—the university encourages study abroad, community service, and internships.

Some forty percent of students take part in international study programs, including semesters at Oxford, an interdisciplinary program in Spain, and summer programs in France, Bangladesh, Morocco, South Asia, China, and elsewhere.

“We encourage students to study abroad, but sometimes they’re reluctant to give up a semester at Sewanee,” says Jay Fisher, vice president for university relations.

If the mountain will not accede to Sewanee students’ worldliness, Sewanee will bring the world to the mountain. A robust performing arts and lecture series, available to students at no charge, says Lisa Burns, the associate dean of admissions, does indeed “bring the world to campus.”

Service to others has long been central to the Sewanee way. The university “played an important role in post-war education in the South,” says Eric Hartman, dean of students. Later, some of Sewanee’s professors had an association with what was then known as the Highlander Folk School, which educated coal miners as a means of combating abuse by mine owners. Highlander became active in the Civil Rights movement. Rosa Parks attended the school where the anthem “We Shall Overcome” was adapted for the movement.

The tradition continues. Today, eighty-three percent of Sewanee’s students engage in service. Housing Sewanee Inc., the university’s chapter of Habitat for Humanity, uses profits from football game concessions and fraternity fundraisers to build a house per year for needy local families. Students coach local little league players, staff the volunteer fire department, and respond to calls for emergency medical technicians.
“You don’t go to college; you join a community,” says Fisher. Campus and town are so connected that Sewanee’s president and vice-chancellor also serves as mayor.

Sewanee also engages in service abroad. Long before the world reached out to help distressed families in Haiti, Sewanee professors and students for years had been making annual visits there to provide humanitarian relief. On one such trip, recalls Dixon Myers, coordinator of Outreach Ministries, a pre-med student doing service at the Partners in Health clinic was called on to assist with an amputation.

“Everything you do affects somebody else,” says John Ruzic, a recent graduate from Louisville whose major was in political science. “Sewanee is practice for the real world.”

To that end, Sewanee has amassed endowments that provide funds to students who undertake unpaid internships. Every summer, undergraduates leave the mountain and travel to Capitol Hill, in Washington, D.C., to experience the inner workings of government, and to Wall Street’s concrete canyons, where they work at major financial institutions.

A Serendipitous Campus

The Domain exerts a kind of gravitational force that serendipitously draws certain people to it.

Take Jack Duffus, the biology major. He was on a backpacking and rock climbing trip when a wrong turn led him here. The unplanned visit resulted in his transferring to Sewanee from Allegheny College.

Or Kristin Whitely, a biochemistry major from Alabama who had never heard of Sewanee. Visiting campus at the behest of a high school friend, she arrived just ahead of an ice storm that pummeled the campus. Despite the chilly reception, she decided to attend Sewanee anyway.

The word “sewanee,” from the Shawnee language, means lost, in the sense of “a person who starts for a given place and unexpectedly arrives at a very different one,” according to the book Sewanee
Places. Indeed, creative people have been losing and finding themselves here for some time. Petroglyphs discovered in caves on the Domain attest to the presence of indigenous peoples whose occupation of the land goes back hundreds if not thousands of years.

The University of the South is a relatively new fixture. It was founded in 1857 by bishops of the Episcopal Church, who wanted a national Episcopal university in the United States. Many of the founding bishops were military men.

The onset of the Civil War didn't bode well for Sewanee, which was soon occupied by Union troops. The defeat of the South ended Sewanee's occupation, but the university's treasury had been decimated by the war. Its leaders turned to the Church of England, which answered the university's prayers in the form of financial assistance, funds that Sewanee's leaders used to make a fresh start. In the bargain, Sewanee adopted many features of Anglican universities that persist to this day, most visibly the university's pervasive Gothic architecture.

Despite the visible nods to the past, McCardell cautions, “This is not the University of the Old South, or even the 1990s South. We must look ahead. This university is ready to assume a place of new prominence and vigorous leadership in higher education.”

At the center of campus is All Saints' Chapel, Sewanee's architectural jewel and “the campus living room,” says Olivia Schubert, a junior from Alpharetta, Georgia, who gives tours to prospective students and their families. She declined the offer of a full scholarship to the University of Georgia in favor of attending Sewanee.

At the front of All Saints', sunlight streams through the chapel's Rose Window, a replica of the original in Notre Dame. Throughout the sanctuary, scenes rendered in stained glass illustrate the intertwined histories of the Episcopal Church and Sewanee. “Here we are reminded of firm foundations and cornerstones, of unity of mind and soul,” says McCardell.

In addition to religious services, the chapel is the site of a long-standing and solemn annual tradition that marks the admittance of first-year students into Sewanee's community of trust. Each fall,
newly arrived freshmen gather at the front of the chapel to sign Sewanee’s honor code, a century-old rite of passage. Faculty members bear witness as students pledge not to lie, cheat, or steal. Professors routinely give unproctored exams, and people here aren’t overly concerned with securing their possessions.

A student-run Honor Council of elected peers oversees the system. The council hears allegations of wrongdoing and metes out punishment to students who are found guilty of breaching the trust.

**Innovation Informed by Tradition**

The Honor Code is but one of many customs that inform Sewanee’s culture and campus life. Tradition is serious business.

Prospective students can get a jump on all things Sewanee by attending the Pre-College Field Studies Experience, essentially a campus visit on steroids. Led by Sewanee’s faculty, the two-week summer residential program is an interdisciplinary introduction to environmental studies. Available to rising high school juniors and seniors, participants have access to a wide array of university resources, including the Landscape Analysis Lab—a state-of-the-art GIS (Geographical Information Systems) computer mapping facility that is part of new ecology and biodiversity laboratories.

“Environmental studies is about problem solving,” says Jon Evans, a professor of biology and director of the Sewanee Environment Institute. “We are involved in trying to protect the land around us. We are the think tank that will create a conservation blueprint for our region.”

Likewise, newly enrolled students take part in an intensive pre-orientation session that introduces them to the Domain and to each other. By way of building trust and friendships among new students, upperclassmen lead freshmen in rock climbing, caving, hiking, ropes course, canoeing, community service, and overnight excursions.

Among its benefits, pre-orientation provides a primer on the mores of Sewanee. New students learn about “class dress,” the tradition of wearing attire to class that signifies respect for Sewanee
and the enterprise of higher learning. When spelunking, it’s fine to
dress like a caveman; in the halls of academe, students are expected
to exhibit a touch of class.

Sewanee is a civil place where people acknowledge the presence
and worth of others. The tradition of “the passing hello” encourages
staff, faculty, and students to exchange pleasantries when passing
in the halls or elsewhere on the Domain. In a fast-paced world, the
tradition is a tip of the hat to old-fashioned comity.

Similarly, Sewanee’s students eschew public use of cellular
telephones, iPods and other electronic devices requiring ear buds
or headphones. The social contract here calls on members of the
community to be publicly available in public places. Drowning out
one’s fellows with digital noise isn’t polite.

Sewanee has the only collegiate choir in the country that per-
forms the full Anglican repertory, one of the ways the university’s
connection to the Episcopal Church informs the culture here. The
influence derives from the church’s embrace of tradition, reason,
service to others, and the study of classic texts.

Sewanee embraces diversity. Current students are from some
thirty states plus the District of Columbia and eight foreign coun-
tries. An in-state population of twenty-five percent makes Sewanee
the least regional of the Associated College of the South institu-
tions. Minority students make up fifteen percent of the undergrad-
uate population.

“We’re not about doctrine but academic excellence,” says Fisher.

Distinctive among Sewanee’s customs is the Order of Gowns-
men, founded in 1873 to honor academic excellence. Students who
distinguish themselves with outstanding academic performance are
awarded academic gowns and afforded special privileges, such as
priority consideration for dorm assignments and class registration.
It is not unusual to see students and professors on campus draped
in flowing, Harry Potteresque garments. Gowns that have been
in circulation for a while—passed from one student to the next—
frequently bear the monograms of numerous prior recipients. It’s
tradition.
“Sewanee,” says Evans, “does things thoughtfully, carefully, and well.”

**Effort and Excellence**

Sewanee functions, in no small measure, because its people know how to work and play together. Being located on a rural mountain leaves them no choice but to cooperate.

You rarely see Greek letters displayed on campus, even though sixty percent of students join one of the twelve fraternities and nine sororities on campus. Most of the parties held by fraternities and sororities are open to non-Greeks.

“You’d never see Greek letters on the back of a car windshield,” Fisher says. “The affiliation is to Sewanee.”

Almost all Sewanee students live in dormitories, which are microcosms of the larger community. Rooms aren’t wired for cable television, and there are no freshmen-only halls. Mixing upper and lower classes helps to perpetuate Sewanee’s traditions and bolster the sense of community. The National Survey of Student Engagement found that Sewanee students are more active in classroom discussions than are their peers at comparable institutions. “We all live in the same residential system,” says Dean Hartman. “We all eat under one roof.”

Residing among students in the dorms are proctors who serve much the same function as residential advisers at other colleges. Drawn primarily from the Order of Gownsmen, they guide freshmen through orientation and provide support to students throughout the academic year. Students further benefit from the presence of head residents, or “matrons” and “patrons.” Frequently retired from their primary careers—one head resident is the town’s former police chief—these men and women are a valuable resource to residents of Sewanee’s dormitories.

Perhaps most integral to the Sewanee community and its academic mission are the close relationships that students have with their professors, ninety-nine percent of whom have earned a terminal degree in their field.
Kit Deppe, a recent graduate from Jacksonville, Florida, says professors and students “are at eye-level.” On geology exams, the place where she signs her name isn’t marked “student” but “geologist.” Collegiality aside, professors “push us to be more than we think we can be, to be the people who will make a difference,” says Deppe, a natural-resources major.

That push often comes in the form of doing research alongside professors. Rob Bachman, an associate professor of chemistry and director of undergraduate research, has nine students working in his lab this year. The experience, he says, can transform a young person as surely as a chemical reaction transforms a compound.

“They learn that they can be a generator of knowledge instead of a receiver of knowledge,” says Bachman, who recalls a former student who arrived at Sewanee from a private school in St. Louis. The young man had potential but lacked maturity. His first-year grades were mediocre. Then he started doing research. As a senior, he published in top chemical journals and presented at two national conferences. Today he is completing a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Mainz, in Germany.

“He was transformed,” says Bachman, who attended the young man’s wedding. “He saw a path to a career that he hadn’t known existed.”

For Pamela Macfie, student development is a long-term commitment. She speaks weekly with a former student, a poet, who is now in her forties. Another student, Jon Meacham, won a Pulitzer Prize and became editor of *Newsweek* magazine.

“You give your life to a small liberal arts college to be a teacher-scholar, with the emphasis on ‘teacher,’” says Macfie. “You measure yourself by your students.”
Tucked into a corner of Atlanta’s sprawling metropolis, Spelman College is five minutes and a world away from the city’s bustling downtown. Occupying an area of only thirty-nine acres, the compact campus might be easy to overlook if not for its enduring and outsized impact: For more than one hundred thirty years, Spelman has transformed talented women and girls of African descent into leaders who make a difference.

Graduates, professors, and administrators see Spelman as a place that nurtures and challenges its charges, a place that tests and steels its students, a place devoted to developing intellect and confidence. In short, Spelman polishes young women and prepares them for lives of leadership. “Coming to Spelman is a choice to change the world,” says Beverly Daniel Tatum, the college’s president since 2002.

Spelman nurtures without coddling so that its graduates can excel in courtrooms, boardrooms, and operating rooms. The college “prepares our students to compete in a larger community that has assumptions about women and people of color,” says Cynthia Spence, associate professor of sociology and a former academic dean. “They can compete with anybody.”

And in any field.

In the popular imagination, math wizardry and computer geekdom are the exclusive provinces of nerdy white boys. Witness television’s The Big Bang Theory. Playing against type, approximately one-third of Spelman’s students major in math or science. The college is also the leading producer of black female medical-school entrants as well as black women who go on to earn Ph.D.s in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields.

They are members of the Spelbots robotics team, which more than holds its own in international competitions. In 2009, it tied with Fukuoka Institute of Technology for first place in the championship match of the RoboCup Japan Open, held in Osaka. The
SpelBots narrowly missed winning the tournament, which involves matches that pit teams of humanoid robot soccer players, when a penalty kick booted by a bot bounced off the goal post.

Says Tatum of the Spelbots students: “Any of them could have gone to M.I.T.”

**Women Going Their Own Way**

Spelman women invariably come to think of the college as a place that was built just for them. It was. Spelman is the oldest historically black college for women in the country, and the only institution of higher education created with that mission in mind. (Bennett College, another HBCU that serves women, was founded as a coeducational institution and later became a women’s college in 1926.)

Spelman was founded in 1881, a decade and a half after the end of the Civil War, by Harriet Giles and Sophia Packard, white missionaries from Boston commissioned by the Woman’s American Baptist Home Mission Society to open a school for black women and girls. The few institutions of learning that served Southern blacks at the time were co-educational and affiliated with other denominations, raising concerns among Baptists that without a school of their own they would lose female parishioners who sought an education.

Founded as the Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary, the college initially occupied the basement of Atlanta’s Friendship Baptist Church. Packard persuaded Henry L. Morehouse of the American Baptist Home Mission Society to let the fledgling women’s institution use property that the Mission Society had optioned for the Atlanta Baptist Seminary (now Morehouse College). Mr. Morehouse suggested that the institutions merge, a proposal that the women rebuffed. Saying “no” to such a union at a time when it would have been easy to say “yes” set the school on its unique path and permanently established Spelman as a school for women.

“There are opportunities here you will not get at a co-ed institution,” says Geneva Baxter, associate dean of first-year students.

The college bought its original nine-acre campus, formerly part of Fort McPherson, at auction. After the war, the U.S. Army had
garrisoned troops there to enforce Union regulations during the period of reconstruction.

Seeking much-needed funds, Packard made an appeal to John D. Rockefeller, whose Standard Oil boomed during the period of post-war prosperity and the country’s westward expansion. The wealthy philanthropist obliged. In recognition of Rockefeller’s generosity, the college changed its name to Spelman Seminary for Women and Girls in 1884. (Rockefeller’s wife was the former Laura Spelman, a daughter of abolitionists who herself had attended a women’s college.) In 1924, the institution was renamed Spelman College. Five generations of Rockefellers have served on the college’s board of Trustees.

The campus’s grounds were modeled after Mt. Holyoke and, early on, landscaped with the help of Rockefeller’s gardener. On a recent summer day, colorful impatiens brightened a central quad ringed by stately brick buildings trimmed in white.

To his credit, Rockefeller didn’t simply give money. He set up a matching-funds system that brought other gifts to the college. In 1987, the entertainer Bill Cosby and his wife, Camille, donated $20 million to the institution. The Cosby gift, along with many others, has helped Spelman maintain a solid fiscal footing. “We’re healthy, not wealthy,” Baxter explains.

Where Tradition is ALIVE

When Beverly Daniel Tatum was approached about the possibility of becoming Spelman’s ninth president, she did what any reasonable person living in the Northeast would do. She reconnoitered. “I made a secret trip to Spelman before deciding if I wanted to be a candidate,” recalls Tatum, a Massachusetts native who at the time was serving as the acting president of Mt. Holyoke College. She acknowledges the tendency in some quarters north of the Mason Dixon line to dismiss liberal arts institutions located anywhere other than New England.

“I understand that bias, misguided as it may be,” says Tatum, who arrived in Atlanta on January 28, 2002, a day when the temperature climbed to about 75 degrees. It was the first of several
favorable signs.

Strolling Spelman’s grounds, Tatum was “struck by the beauty of the campus” and the serenity of Sister Chapel, where she “felt a peaceful presence.” A phrase in a brochure spoke to her: “This is your heritage and your calling.”

Indeed, it has been. Under Tatum’s leadership, the college has continued to flourish. The president established the ALIVE program to preserve and strengthen what Spelman does best. The acronym is a reminder to the college community to remain focused on its core values: academic excellence, leadership development, improving the environment, visibility of achievements, and exemplary customer service. This serves as a foundation for the college’s new strategic plan, which focuses on global engagement, expanded opportunities for undergraduate research and internships, alumnae-student connections, leadership development, and service learning linked to an increasingly interdisciplinary curriculum.

In less than a decade, applications have risen forty percent, including nearly six thousand prospective students who apply every year for five hundred or so places in the incoming class. Despite the steady surge in interest, the college is eager to connect with prospective students who stand to get the most from a Spelman education.

The best fit is a “student who’s looking for an institution that will value her intelligence and intellectual curiosity above all else,” says Arlene Cash, vice president of enrollment management. “I’ll bet many students who are a great fit don’t know it. There are a lot of students for whom this would be a great place who never apply.”

Lauren Brown-Jarvis almost missed out on Spelman because of her reflexive and unexamined aversion toward attending an HBCU. “Don’t let that deter you,” she advises prospective students. The tipping point for Brown-Jarvis was a realization that Spelman had her best interests at heart. “I was looking for a college that felt like home,” she says, “and it felt like Spelman wanted more from me than just my money.”

Brown found at Spelman a top-tier liberal arts college that is always evolving to better serve students, whether through the
development of new multidisciplinary offerings and dorm-based honors programs or Spelman’s participation in the Atlanta Regional Council for Higher Education (ARCHE), a consortium of nineteen area institutions that makes its combined academic resources available to Spelman’s students. She also found in her neighborhood a community of more than eight thousand undergraduate and graduate students from the three institutions immediately adjacent to the Spelman campus (Morehouse College, Clark Atlanta University, and Morehouse School of Medicine), collectively known as the Atlanta University Center. “We benchmark the college against historically white liberal arts institutions,” says Spence, the sociology professor. “Liberal arts colleges in the South do the same things as liberal arts colleges in the Northeast.”

The rich array of resources available to Brown belied the uninformed young woman’s initial concerns. “I thought I’d get a lesser education here, but Spelman prepared me to go to grad school,” says Brown, who is pursuing a digital media master’s degree in experimental television at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Two-thirds of Spelman’s students attend graduate or professional school within five years of earning a degree from Spelman.

“We believe in lifelong learning,” Spence says. “We believe our students are prepared to go on to the very best graduate and professional schools in the country.”

**High Expectations**

What kind of student is right for Spelman?

“Any young woman who wants to flourish in an academic environment that expects the best from her,” says Spence. “The expectation is that she will be able to compete against anyone.”

To a person, the young women who arrive on Spelman’s campus have already tasted academic success. Graduates of honors programs and veterans of advanced placement classes, they often show up at Spelman having felt like oddities and outsiders in high school. “For young black women who have done well in school, they’ve often been isolated. It’s empowering to find out that they aren’t alone,” says Tatum. “They inspire each other.”
Arriving from fifty states and fifteen foreign countries, Spelman’s students move from places where they were the best to an environment in which they are among the best. Becoming part of a highly capable peer group is the first step toward preparing Spelman’s students to compete at the highest level of their chosen fields. Talent notwithstanding, Spelman’s professors and administrators often view first-year students as diamonds in the rough. They have natural ability, but they need polish—some more than others—as well as an understanding of community and the skill to build and tap a network.

To demonstrate the concept of social capital to young women, Professor Spence has them stand as a group and individually take steps forward and backward depending on their answers to a series of questions. If you grew up in a home with books, take a step forward. If your family owned a home, step forward. If they rented, step back. Raised by a single parent? Step back again.

On one occasion, a young woman blurted out: “I can’t go back any farther.”

“That young woman was the best student in the class,” recalls Spence of the student who went on to attend a selective law school. “It’s affirming to see diamonds in the rough walk across the stage at graduation. Students who perhaps couldn’t have been admitted to Harvard or Princeton [as undergraduates] will go there [for graduate school] because Spelman polished them off…. Individuals who aren’t as advantaged can compete.”

The means for bringing out students’ natural brilliance vary. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, an internationally recognized women’s studies scholar, directs a center on campus that teaches various models of leadership development for women.

The Sisters Chapel WISDOM Center, notes the college’s website, endeavors “to create a safe space, a community of sisters where Black female college students explore leadership, scholarship, gender specific issues and vocation.”

Spelman also encourages its young women to be active in campus life. If the college’s ethos were to be summarized in a single
word, that word might be “involvement.”

“If you’re interested in or passionate about something [that doesn’t exist], you can create it,” Tatum says.

Consider Jennifer “Jaki” Johnson, whose interests include the media and politics. She founded Spelman’s chapter of American Women in Radio and Television (AWRT) and worked at a local radio station (KISS 101.4). She was active in Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE), student government, the Women in Excellence Leadership Series (WEL), and the Spelman Women Empowered through Professional Training (SWEPT). Perhaps most important, Spelman taught her how to do scholarly research and how to get things done. “Everybody here wants to be successful,” says Johnson, who put together a golf tournament that raised money for a student scholarship. “Everybody is a go-getter.”

Looking back on their time at Spelman, graduates often reflect on an administrator or favorite instructor who connected with them and helped them to realize their potential. “She saw in me something I couldn’t see in myself,” recalls Baxter of a professor who had mentored her. “You don’t walk away from this place without having examined who you are, your strengths and weaknesses, and figuring out how that fits into the larger scheme of things.”

The Spelman Perspective

In addition to developing individuals’ innate talents, Spelman strives to ensure that its graduates make the best use of those abilities. To that end, an essential aspect of the college’s mission is broadening the perspectives and worldviews of young women.

Spelman’s goal is for every student to have a study-abroad experience. It already sends more students abroad than any other HBCU. Closer to home, Spelman sends many students on domestic exchanges for a semester or two of study at historically white, elite liberal arts institutions, such as Wellesley, Stanford, and UC Berkeley. “We believe that our women should see themselves as global citizens,” says Spence. “We want to make certain our students are confident and that they can function outside their comfort zones. We also want our students to be politically astute and engaged.”
Spelman’s students are politically aware. Take the 2008 presidential election. College kids have a long-standing reputation for getting fired up during election season but neglecting to actually cast ballots on election day. In a reversal of that trend, the percentage of Spelman’s registered voters who showed up at the polls set a high-water mark among colleges and universities that year.

To further broaden students’ historical perspectives, Spelman requires completion of a course called African Diaspora and the World. The college is undertaking to enroll more African students as well, aided by a recent gift of $17 million from an anonymous donor intended to endow the Gordon-Zeto Center for Global Education and provide scholarship support for African students.

Spelman also welcomes to campus a steady procession of women—and men—of diverse backgrounds who have succeeded in politics, business and other fields. If you come here, there’s a “100 percent chance of meeting someone from a Fortune 500 company,” Cash says.

“Spelman is about empowerment,” adds Brown-Jarvis, who has met Donna Brazile, the first African American to run a major presidential campaign (Gore 2000); Jamal Simmons, a CNN correspondent; and the actress Jasmine Guy. “Spelman wants you to leave Spelman and be a world player.”

Women of the World

You can’t talk about Spelman without talking about the college’s devotion to community service. “Spelman women,” says President Tatum, “are women who serve.” Alumnae find many ways of giving back. Following graduation, some twenty-five percent of newly minted alumnae apply for the Teach for America program, which recruits recent college graduates to teach in low-income communities. In fact, Teach for America announced Spelman College as the number one provider of candidates to their teaching corps in 2010.

A short list of Spelman women who have made a difference could include Marian Wright Edelman, founder of the Children’s Defense Fund; Dr. Audrey Forbes Manley, former acting U.S. Sur-
geon General and the first Spelman alumna to serve as president of the college; Na’Taki Osborne, the renowned environmental scientist and activist; Dr. Evelynn Hammonds, dean of Harvard College; Bernette Joshua Johnson, a trailblazing attorney and the first African American woman elected to the Louisiana Supreme Court; J. Veronica Biggins, director of presidential personnel in the Clinton administration; Ruth A. Davis, a career foreign service officer who has served in American embassies throughout the world; and Kimberly Davis, president, JP Morgan Chase Foundation.

Spelman women are, to paraphrase the title of a Tom Wolfe novel set in Atlanta, women in full.

Whoever you are when you arrive, says Jennifer Jaki Johnson, “you leave here a Spelman woman.”
Trinity University

Trinity University may be the only institution in the country where a young woman majoring in business could have discovered a latent interest in China, resided on a dormitory floor devoted to Chinese studies, traveled to and completed an internship in China, and returned to campus to take a business class taught in Chinese (offered as part of the University’s Languages Across the Curriculum program). Having earned a double major in Chinese and business (Trinity confers more degrees in Mandarin than does the University of Texas, and more than twenty-five percent of Trinity students earn a double major), she went to work in China as a consultant for a Fortune 100 company.

Trinity University defies easy categorization. It draws on a rich trove of resources that would be commensurate with institutions such as Dartmouth and Vassar colleges or Emory and Washington universities. Indeed, its faculty, facilities, programs, and endowment are bigger, more varied, and of higher quality than one would normally find at an institution of 2,400 undergraduate and 200 graduate students. A small liberal arts university, it is nonetheless complemented by selected professional and pre-profession programs.

Further blurring categorization, Trinity University is at home in a state where geographical regions overlap and cultural fault lines intersect. Its home city, San Antonio, with three hundred days of sunny weather every year, could stake a claim as the center of the fast-expanding Sun Belt, a shirt-sleeves-in-January swath of states that is attracting newcomers from across the country and beyond. San Antonio stands out among the country’s large urban areas as a place where cultures, particularly Latino and Anglo, seamlessly come into being. That equilibrium may explain why San Antonio, the country’s seventh most populous city, retains a small-town feel.

Trinity also benefits from a mix of international influences. Almost fifty percent of the University’s undergraduates study abroad,
and during a recent six-year period the number of foreign students enrolled at Trinity increased fivefold. The most recent entering class was comprised of seven and one-half percent international students who arrived from some fifty-five countries. Adding in U.S. nationals living abroad, a total of sixty-eight countries are represented on campus. The menu at Trinity’s dining hall reflects the dietary preferences of students from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds.

Having assembled a diverse community of students, faculty and administrators, Trinity encourages their interaction. Intellectually curious students live on campus for at least three years, and the university’s specialized residential communities bring them together around common academic interests. Student life is vibrant, active, friendly, and connected.

The University offers many outlets for students to exercise their talents, make friends, and serve others. Students act in campus plays, participate in the University’s study abroad program, and volunteer with the Trinity University Action Community. Recently, in consecutive years, Trinity University received the President’s Volunteer Service Award for providing service locally, nationally, and internationally.

Students also have many options for keeping active: More than sixty percent participate in some form of intramural sports and nearly twenty-five percent compete in intercollegiate athletics. The university, according to the Wall Street Journal, is “one of the few of the 400-plus Division III schools that pull off the near perfect balance of learning and playing.”

**Tradition and Change**

As a University, Trinity has endured change. Founded originally in 1869 by Presbyterians in Tehuacana, Texas, the university’s leadership moved the institution in 1902 to Waxahachie, seventy-five miles outside of Dallas, for closer proximity to a big city. In 1941, the University moved to San Antonio, temporarily occupying the campus of the former University of San Antonio.

The University acquired a limestone quarry on which to build
a new campus in 1945, tapping O’Neil Ford, the accomplished architect of the American Southwest, to design what it hoped would be a permanent home. Ford used the site’s hillside topography to create a campus that suggested “a little low-lying Italian village on a hillside, and in the middle was a church bell tower,” recalled Raymond Judd, the University’s chaplain emeritus, in *Trinity* magazine. During the past six decades, as the University and city have grown together, Trinity has evolved into an institution that is an integral part of San Antonio’s culture.

Built on a human scale, the campus’s distinctive red brick buildings complement and, in some cases, seem to float along the hillside that overlooks downtown San Antonio. The Skyline campus, as former American Poet Laureate Robert Haas once put it, is “a marriage of brick and sky.” The single exception to buildings rendered in low, clean lines is the one-hundred-sixty-six-foot Murchison Tower, at one time the tallest structure in San Antonio. It is a tradition here for students to climb the tower at the beginning of their careers at Trinity and again as their four years come to a close.

Through the years, Trinity University athletics have been synonymous with success. From the 1950s and into the 1980s, Trinity University athletes competed in NCAA Division I athletics. The tennis and skeet teams had the most success, winning championships at the top levels of each sport. In 1972, the university produced an individual Wimbledon Champion and an NCAA Division I team championship.

Having made the transition to NCAA Division III (DIII), Trinity joined the SCAC Conference, and by 1993 the university had won the SCAC President’s Trophy, awarded each year to the University with the best all-around athletics program. The trophy resided in San Antonio for eleven of the next twelve years. In 1997, Trinity made its first appearance in the NACDA’s Director’s Cup Standings, which rank the best DIII athletics programs in the country. From 1998 to 2006, the Tigers ranked in the top twenty every year, and finished in the top ten during five of those eight years.

Trinity currently supports eighteen intercollegiate athletics teams.
Rigor and Flexibility

Academically, Trinity seeks to combine a rigorous core curriculum with flexibility of choice, an approach that affords each student broad exposure to various disciplines—the foundation of a liberal education—and an opportunity for deep inquiry into areas of particular interest. The University encourages faculty and students to explore interdisciplinary scholarship. Trinity’s flexible curriculum allows it to offer what University leaders say is “the perfect blend of liberal arts and professional programs.”

“Explicit knowledge is knowing ‘what.’ Implicit knowledge is knowing ‘how,’” says President Dennis A. Ahlburg. “Innovation is driven more by implicit knowledge than by explicit knowledge. At Trinity University we make sure that students have deep disciplinary understanding and we challenge them to apply that explicit knowledge to entirely new situations to discover the ‘how.’… This approach is at the heart of what it means to have a Trinity education.”

The University offers forty-one majors, fifty-five minors, and supports several interdisciplinary programs that focus on East Asian studies, Latin America and Spain, entrepreneurship, interdisciplinary science research, urban studies, and many others. There are also opportunities for self-designed interdisciplinary study programs.

The emphasis on crossing traditional academic boundaries is at the core of the University’s new $120-million Center for the Sciences and Innovation. The 280,000-square-foot complex has glass walls that provide transparency and seek to demystify the sciences and classrooms, and labs designed to foster collaborative approaches to problem-solving. Completion of the Center is expected in 2014.

Trinity’s nationally known undergraduate science curriculum strives to create “productive collisions” of thought that broaden thinking across a range of disciplines. A recently approved biomathematics minor exemplifies new inquiries at the intersection of biology and math, appealing to students with an interest in such fields as mathematical modeling of biological data, ecology, or genetics. Saber Elaydi, a math professor who was instrumental in
developing the curricula, predicts that the blended field of study will result in “a new type of scientist for the twenty-first century.”

Science alumni often say that Trinity’s focus on undergraduate research, including opportunities to attend academic conferences and submit scholarly papers to peer-reviewed journals, prepared them for graduate school in ways only imagined by colleagues from other undergraduate institutions. Between 2006 and 2010, Trinity received nearly $8.8 million in support of scientific research from the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Defense, NASA, National Institutes of Health, Howard Hughes Medical Foundation, and others. The funds underwrite scientific inquiry into areas from forensics and climate change to organic chemistry, thermal modeling and planetary rings.

Should professors and students invent or discover something with commercial applications, Trinity’s new Entrepreneurship program “will teach them how to take creative ideas into the market,” says Mahbub Uddin, professor of engineering science and chairman of the Entrepreneurship program.

Trinity University has small yet distinguished graduate programs in education, accounting and health-care management. In 2010, Modern Healthcare magazine identified three people who had earned Master’s degrees in health care administration from Trinity as among “the most powerful people in healthcare.” Trinity’s graduate program in teacher preparation has been identified as one of seven premier programs in the nation.

Trinity’s Master of Arts in Teaching program builds on students’ undergraduate content major, offering an opportunity to meld theory and practice by spending a year engaged with top graduate-level professors in education while also immersing themselves in a year-long internship overseen by a master teacher. By combining the science and art of teaching, the program produces highly sought after graduates. “We place one hundred percent of our graduates each year in top districts and charter schools across Texas and the U.S,” says Shari Albright, the Norine R. Murchison professor and chair of the Department of Education.
Nearly twenty-five percent of all Trinity students claim business as their major, making it the most popular undergraduate major. As with their colleagues pursuing degrees in other fields, students who choose the business track often earn a second major in a liberal arts-based discipline, frequently opting to acquire competency in a modern language—the university’s second most popular major.

Trinity offers two undergraduate degree programs in business, both accredited by the AACSB International, with concentrations in accounting, finance, legal studies, management, marketing, and international business. There is a graduate program in accounting as well. Students complete internships at major corporations, businesses, and large nonprofit organizations in the San Antonio area. They also take part in study abroad programs and international study trips—often organized and led by Trinity faculty—to destinations such as Alaska, Vietnam, Spain, and the European Union.

“Trinity offers its students the luxury of receiving an education with a substantive foundation in the arts and sciences and the knowledge of business, all of which are necessary to succeed in today’s world,” says Richard Burr, professor of business administration. “Because of this blend, we believe that our graduates with majors or minors in business are much better prepared for what faces them in the world.”

An Uncommonly Challenging Curriculum

The bedrock of Trinity’s academic program is the Common Curriculum, which encompasses the arts, humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Prior to graduation, students must earn academic credits in each of five main academic areas or “understandings,” including at least nine hours each in cultural heritage, arts and literature, and human social interaction; six hours in natural science and technology; and three hours in quantitative reasoning. Students also must demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language and computer literacy.

The Common Curriculum serves as a basis for understanding the varied domains of human knowledge and experience and the skills necessary for active, critical and creative participation in the
academic life of the University, including abilities to think cre\'-
avively and critically and to express such thinking effectively, both
orally and in writing. These skills prepare students to be active and
engaged members of their communities.

The University requires students to complete a first-year semi-
nar that introduces them to the “intellectual discussion of substan-
tive issues” while bolstering their abilities as speakers and writers.
A required first-year writing workshop further refines skills in
critical reading, analysis, judgment, and written composition.

A Trinity education combines breadth as well as depth. A ma-


ajority of seniors take part in the Senior Experience and a capstone
course. “My learning curve has increased exponentially,” says Raj
Singh, a marketing and communications major whose three broth-
ers attended Trinity.

Helping students to navigate academic challenges are dedicated
administrators and a faculty of two hundred forty-six full-time
professors, ninety-eight percent of whom have earned Ph.D.s or the
terminal degree in their field. Classes are small, allowing faculty to
engage students in class discussion and to work with them on their
writing. Professors give sophisticated research and laboratory as-
signments that at other universities would be reserved for graduate
students. The student-to-faculty ratio of nine-to-one allows profes-
sors to advise students and serve as their mentors.

“Learning how to think like a scientist, humanist, or artist is
essential,” says President Ahlburg. “Such learning is acquired most
easily by working closely with those who are already successful sci-
entists, humanists, or artists. This is why we keep classes small and
support undergraduate research internships.”

The Fine Arts also play a significant role on the Trinity Univer-
sity campus. In addition to students who major in music, twenty-
five percent of all undergraduates participate in music programs,
either through an instrumental ensemble or in a choral group. The
Dicke Art Building offers students state-of-the art facilities for
exploring creative talents in various mediums. The facility also fea-
tures the Neidorff Gallery, a space that regularly displays travelling
collections as well as shows of students’ art.

Expanding academic programs and undergraduate research opportunities is a continuing process. During a recent five-year period, the number of Trinity students pursuing summer research projects almost doubled, to one hundred ten. Through funds provided by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Trinity has also established summer stipends for undergraduates to do research involving outreach to the city of San Antonio. A research fair held every January gives students a public forum for presenting results of their scholarly inquiries. Research projects run the gamut, from the exploration of an ancient shipwreck in the Mediterranean Sea to the measurement of ripples in the space-time continuum.

Eager to help answer an age-old question (“What now?”), the university provides personalized help to undergraduate and graduate students as they formulate post-college plans. Trinity Career Services “is high-touch, offering one-on-one advisement and high tech, state-of-the art online services and resources to assist students,” says Brian Hirsch, director of Career Services.

A Commitment to Diversity

At Trinity, diversity takes many forms. Unlike some selective colleges that rely heavily on “legacy admissions,” Trinity provides access to first-generation college students and their peers from low-income families. Some eighty-five percent of students enrolled here receive need- or merit-based financial aid.

Trinity strives to inculcate the ideals of inclusiveness and diversity of experience. The admissions office each year seeks to build a class of students representing a broad range of ethnic, racial, religious, geographic and socioeconomic backgrounds. In one recent first-year class, students arrived on campus from more than forty states and sixty countries. More than thirty percent of enrollees were students of color; eight percent were children of parents who had not graduated from college; and seventeen percent were eligible to receive Pell Grants, federal scholarships that benefit students who have demonstrated financial need.
“These students bring diverse cultural perspectives,” says Chris Ellerton, dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, of the university’s growing international cohort. “It adds a lot to the campus community.”

Knowing that it isn’t enough to simply admit students into a challenging academic environment, Trinity’s commitment to diversity means helping students from diverse backgrounds to be successful. To that end, the university has established an Allies program to provide extra support to first-generation, low-income, and under-represented students. “It’s one thing to bring students to campus, but we want them to graduate,” says Diane Smith, associate vice president for academic affairs.

The typical Trinity student—if there is such a thing—is hungry for varied experiences. A young woman from Australia, for example, augmented her academic pursuits by writing for the university newspaper, working in a campus office, and taking part in theatrical productions. One of her undergraduate colleagues pursued academic research for seven semesters, played on lacrosse fields and in a symphony, and jitterbugged with The Swing Bums dance team.

Trinity prepares students to lead and succeed in a fast-changing global environment. “Our students,” says Michael Fischer, vice president for academic affairs, “will live their lives in an increasingly diverse, increasingly interconnected, ever-shrinking world where borders and lines of division mean less and less, and collaboration, tolerance and diversity mean more and more.”

The rich menu of choices of experience extends to Trinity’s study-abroad office, which asserts that it “does not try to fit every student into a few pre-selected sites…. Rather, placement is based on individually advising students into a program or institution that meets their particular academic, personal and academic goals and qualifications.”

Strengthening Trinity University’s international focus are programs such as EAST (East Asian Studies at Trinity University) that prepares students for life in the Pacific Century. “Through a combination of high-quality language training, in-country experiences,
wide-ranging internships, formal exchange programs, and other educational opportunities, EAST grooms future leaders in business, government, science, and education, among other fields, to be comfortable and confident in the global environment,” says Stephen Field, the J. K. and Ingrid Lee Endowed Professor of Chinese Language and Literature. The program prepares graduates to conduct business, practice their professions, or help shape U.S. policy and political relations in a region of growing influence that is home to a quarter of the world’s population.

The MAS program (Mexico, America and Spain), involving more than thirty members of the faculty who teach in English and Spanish, provides an indispensable boost to future leaders in the MAS world. “Other universities may offer a similar program, but the geographic location of Trinity University makes this program unique. MAS helps students hone Spanish language skills and deepen cultural understanding while providing a wealth of real world experiences that advance postgraduate options,” says Arturo Madrid, the T. Frank and Norine R. Murchison Professor of the Humanities and director of the MAS program.

The program provides students opportunities for engagement with the language, life, and culture of Mexico, the Americas, and Spain. Drawing extensively on the rich Hispanic culture and resources of San Antonio, as well as Trinity’s proximity to Mexico and Latin America, MAS provides students, regardless of major, opportunities for internships in Spain, conferences in Mexico, collaboration with students from other countries, service learning trips, and study abroad. On-campus opportunities include the annual Alvarez Seminar, two locally focused first-year seminars, and $1000 stipends for Trinity students who complete unpaid internships at local nonprofit organizations that work with the Latino community.

**Sustainable Service**

A Trinity education prepares students and alumni to engage with and serve disparate communities, to identify and act on opportunities for making a difference. Students’ exposure to a broad range of people, cultures, and experiences—and the ensuing acqui-
sition of knowledge and skills—affords them the wherewithal to make a difference on campus and in the broader society.

Take Shelley Ramsey, a bilingual sociology major from Memphis, who befriended the Spanish-speaking housekeeper who cleaned her dorm room. Having discovered that the woman wanted to learn English, Ramsey worked with Trinity’s administrators and faculty to create a program that provides academic credit to student tutors and allows housekeepers to learn English during work hours without losing pay. Ramsey collaborated with professors to create the program’s curriculum.

The campus’s commitment to Fair Trade practices aligns with Trinity’s pledge to sustainability. Known as “Red Bricks, Green Campus,” the initiative in recent years has ramped up the recycling program, removed Styrofoam to-go boxes from the cafeteria (replacing them with biodegradable containers), introduced “green leaf courses” that examine the environment from interdisciplinary perspectives and achieved a gold-level LEED certification from the U.S. Green Building Council after renovating a first-year residence hall.

Service at Trinity takes many forms. About one-fourth of students belong to one of twelve fraternities and sororities, and many more belong to one or several of one hundred-plus student organizations on campus. Some of them take part in the university’s Alternative Spring Break, traveling to Washington, D.C., to work in a homeless shelter, or to the Dominican Republic, where they volunteer at an orphanage.

Years spent at Trinity are a defining experience. Students engage with one another, faculty and staff—and the broader community. At Trinity University, students learn to be good corporate citizens and engaged members of their communities. They learn to have an impact on the world.
University Of Richmond

On a late spring day, sunlight filters through pines, oaks, and the occasional magnolia tree, dappling gently sloping brick walks that meander among campus buildings constructed in the Collegiate Gothic style. Roofs of gray slate tilt toward copper downspouts oxidized to a green patina. Flags flap in the breeze. Fountains splash and gurgle and accompany the music of songbirds. Azaleas bloom like fire.

In every season, the University of Richmond enlivens the senses, an allure that makes it a perennial favorite on The Princeton Review’s annual list of “most beautiful campuses.”

The view from above is more cerebral. At a certain elevation, hills and paths appear to transform into the folds and contours of a human brain. The landscape’s central feature, the fourteen-acre Westhampton Lake, cleaves the campus into left and right hemispheres. Hugging the water’s eastern edge, Tyler Haynes Commons houses the campus’ student development offices and bridges the bisected campus the way a brain’s lobes are connected by the corpus collosum, a thick band of more than two hundred million nerve fibers.

The overlay of campus and neurological maps illustrates several salient points: The University of Richmond is smart and beautiful; it is a “category killer,” an institution that easily bridges disparate disciplines; and it is student-centered, a place of rich connections in and out of the classroom.

The genius of the university is its ability to combine what already exists and alchemize it into something new, all the while maintaining the essence of component parts. Having integrated men’s and women’s colleges in the 1970s, for example, the formerly autonomous entities to this day retain aspects of independent governance. The university has a robust international agenda, yet it maintains strong ties to the city of Richmond, the capital of the
country’s twelfth-most-populous state.

“A lot of our students look at Richmond as South, but not too South,” says Joe Boehman, dean of the men’s residential college.

The university’s five schools (Arts and Sciences, Business, Leadership, Law, and Professional and Continuing Studies) are independent, but they work together. The upshot is a liberal arts university that offers the “intimacy and engagement of a small residential college and the complexity of a university. We are leveraging that to maximum advantage,” notes Richmond’s president Edward Ayers.

Indeed, Richmond is small yet not small, “twice the size of a typical liberal arts college but half the size of institutions we compete against,” says Ayers. “We can do some things they can’t do.”

The university is right-sized for what Ayers calls “practical idealists,” people who use both sides of their brains to think up and put into practice new ideas, people like Linda Hobgood, director of the university’s speech center, which she founded in 1996. “The University of Richmond is a place where if you believe in an idea, there is university support to make it a reality,” she says.

An Institution on the Move

Lest the university’s well-maintained grounds give the impression of a sleepy estate, know that Richmond is an institution on the move. A river of creative energy runs through it just as surely as the nearby James River courses through the city of Richmond.

Ranked among the top liberal arts institutions in the country, Richmond was further distinguished recently by *U.S. News & World Report* as one of five institutions embracing “innovative, promising changes.” The university’s Robins School of Business is the twelfth-best undergraduate business school in the country, according to *Bloomberg BusinessWeek* magazine. The Jepson School of Leadership Studies is the first school in the nation devoted to the study of leadership. And *Newsweek* magazine dubbed the university one of the “hottest schools in America” for international studies.

Yet Richmond’s students do more than study. The university’s two hundred and seventy-five clubs indulge interests from baking to stargazing, two recent additions. Thirty club teams provide
an athletics outlet for six hundred students. At the varsity level, the university fields nineteen teams. The Spiders won the NCAA Division I Football Championship in 2008, and the men’s basketball team advanced to the Sweet Sixteen in the 2011 NCAA Men’s Basketball Championship tournament (aka March Madness).

The university’s recently adopted strategic plan, *The Richmond Promise*, is long on innovation and creation of “new paths and connections across schools and disciplines.” The plan embraces inclusivity and diversity, chiefly through a commitment to increase the proportion of low-income, first-generation college, and underrepresented minorities on campus.

Richmond backs its commitment to socioeconomic diversity with a student financial aid program that contributes over $60 million annually. The university admits U.S. citizens without regard to their ability to pay, and it meets one hundred percent of the financial needs of all admitted students. In-state students whose families earn less than $40,000 and qualify for financial aid receive a grant equal to tuition, room and board.

With the class of 2013, the university doubled the representation of incoming first-generation students (twenty-one percent) and minority students (twenty-three percent). Unlike many liberal arts colleges that enroll mostly in-state kids, Richmond draws undergraduates from forty-eight states and more than seventy countries around the world. During the recent economic downturn, as enrollments at low-cost community colleges soared and many private institutions struggled to attract qualified students, the percentage of applicants who accepted offers of admission at Richmond actually increased.

Like any institution that has been around for the better part of two centuries, Richmond has had its ups and downs. Its founding dates to 1830, when Virginia Baptists established a seminary for men, which became Richmond College a decade later. In 1914, the university opened Westhampton College for women, and for the next half-century the combined institutions operated side by side, separated by the lake.
In the 1960s, an era when many liberal arts colleges fell on hard times, Richmond encountered a financial crisis as well. Amid talk of selling the university, an alumnus, E. Claiborne Robins, donated $50 million, at the time the largest cash gift to an American institution of higher education by a living donor. It remains one of the great transformative gifts made to a college or university.

Challenging his alma mater “to become the finest small private university in the nation,” Robins essentially underwrote a Richmond Renaissance. Now, four decades later, Ayers discerns a “once-in-a-generation” opportunity for what might be called Renaissance Redux. “There is a great sense of morale, rebirth, and common purpose,” says Ayers. “We’re trying to do something new.”

**Innovative Broad-based Education**

As with most things at the University of Richmond, the academic program combines the tried and true with the new.

The university anchors its scholastic philosophy in the bedrock of liberal arts and an unwavering commitment to broad-based education. All students begin their academic careers in the School of Arts and Sciences and most earn their degrees there.

Yet preparing graduates to live and work in a world that is changing at an unprecedented pace requires “paths of traditional disciplinary excellence and paths of distinctive educational exploration,” affirms the university’s strategic plan. The blueprint endorses innovation, including development of new majors and minors, concentrations and certificates. In recognition of global interconnectedness, the plan endorses revision of educational requirements and stronger links between community engagement and academic coursework.

The university, for example, requires all first-year students to take one of the more than one hundred recently created first-year seminars. The reading- and writing-intensive foundational program introduces young scholars to the rigors of academic inquiry and effective communication. Seminar topics range from *Shakespeare and the Politics of Leadership* to *Wrongful Convictions in Modern America: Costs, Causes and Solutions*. Law, Business, Lead-
ership, and Professional and Continuing Studies faculty—along with the president and provost—teach the seminars alongside their colleagues in Arts and Sciences.

The small size of seminars—just sixteen students—allows for close interaction with faculty members. A hallmark of the Richmond experience, that closeness is made possible by the university’s student-to-faculty ratio (eight-to-one) and average class size (seventeen). Professors routinely give students their email addresses and cell phone numbers.

“"I couldn’t go to a place where my professor doesn’t know my name," says Adrian Bitton, a 2009 graduate with degrees in rhetoric/communication and leadership studies. Bitton had considered attending a highly-regarded research university but demurred because she “didn’t feel a mutual respect for excellence” there. She chose to attend Richmond after visiting the campus. “The small community feel was really attractive to me,” she says. “I could envision myself there.”

Invigorating Richmond’s academic community is a cadre of teacher-scholars whose priority is the wellbeing and development of undergraduates. Professors nonetheless do research, often in collaboration with students.

“People come here to get to know twenty-year-old kids and help them develop,” says Joe Hoyle, an accounting professor who was named the 2007 Virginia Professor of the Year by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education. He was one of the country’s “22 favorite undergraduate business school professors” in 2006, according to Business Week magazine.

In the introduction to Hoyle’s book, Tips and Thoughts on Improving the Teaching Process in College (Flat World Knowledge), he writes that everything you need to know about him as a teacher is summarized by students who, during his forty-year career, have designated him the professor who is “most feared … least likely to ever retire … most likely to ruin your grade point average [and] … the most caring.”

“It starts with caring for the students,” says Hoyle, whose ac-
counting students congregate an hour before each class to discuss course material. “If you don’t, it ain’t gonna work.”

A benefit of close mentor-protégé relationships is the many opportunities for undergraduates to do research alongside their professors. The university supports those endeavors with hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants awarded to students. A pre-freshman research program brings new enrollees to campus for five weeks of scientific research before beginning classes. Since 1983, students have presented results of their research at annual student symposiums sponsored by the School of Arts and Sciences. As a result, students leave the university “prepared to do graduate-level research,” says Juliette Landphair, dean of the university’s Westhampton College. Indeed, approximately sixty percent of undergraduates majoring in science do research, an experience that no doubt contributes to the eighty-five percent acceptance rate among graduates who apply to medical school. The Fulbright Scholarship program further affirmed the quality of the university’s undergraduate research a few years ago when it awarded prestigious international post-graduate study awards to five members of the same class—a rare feat for a small liberal arts institution.

Professors like Hoyle “push students unmercifully hard,” and some of them play hard—and twangily—as well. On Fridays, when the weather permits, a band of banjo-picking faculty members assembles by the lake and fills the air with bluegrass.

Building Bridges with International Education

Richmond is a leader in international education. Among the people who run those programs, the joke is that the university is as well known in Bulgaria as it is in the city of Richmond. This one-liner does not reflect the positive town-gown relationship the university enjoys. (A new facility in the heart of downtown houses outreach programs. Run by the university’s law school and a center for civic engagement, they provide family-support and legal services to needy residents.) The Bulgaria joke acknowledges the wildly successful internationalization of the university, which has signifi-
cantly raised its profile abroad. Bulgaria just happens to be, along with China, the home country of the single largest international population on campus.

Like most activities here, internationalization is an interdepartmental pursuit. In support of that collaborative effort, a former university trustee made a gift of $10.5 million to create the fifty-seven-thousand-square-foot Carole Weinstein International Center. Its stated aim is to “foster synergies among the university’s five schools and academic disciplines.”

“Internationalization is more than sending students abroad,” says Carole Weinstein. “It’s about building bridges …. Living in an interconnected world, this is what we must do.”

At many colleges and universities, internationalization efforts begin and end with students studying abroad. At Richmond, a comprehensive international initiative encompasses faculty travel; embedding international perspectives into the curriculum and co-curricular activities; recruitment of students and faculty members from seventy countries; an International Film Series and other cultural events; and student exchange programs with major universities. “We think of it as collaboration with the top institutions around the world,” says Uliana Gabara, dean of the Office of International Education, who recently traveled with ten faculty members to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia. The group’s academic expertise ranged from art, the Bible, economics, and history to theatre, accounting, political science, biology, and education. An alumnus from Kazakhstan helped arrange the 2009 trip, one of the most recent in a Faculty Seminar Abroad series that was created to broaden the professors’ perspectives. To date, thirty percent of faculty members have participated.

Among students, sixty percent of the university’s recent graduates have studied abroad. Rather than simply parachuting into a foreign country for a semester or year, Richmond’s foreign-study students engage in intensive pre- and post-travel study “with the full engagement of the faculty,” Gabara says.

In a globally interconnected world, graduates can’t afford not to
have such an experience. A graduate who teaches in the rural Virginia county of Louisa must know how to work with a child from Guatemala, just as an alumnus who takes a job with PricewaterhouseCoopers is expected to collaborate with colleagues in Vietnam. “We can’t pull up the drawbridges,” Gabara says. “No more.”

The Tools to Build a Life

Practicality is evident throughout the university—not surprising at an institution where the goal, according to its president, is to give students “tools to build a life.”

Take the Jepson School of Leadership Studies, the first school of its kind in the nation. On an academic level, the school exists to study the complexities of leadership, particularly the moral and ethical challenges confronting leaders.

Yet Jepson is no ivory tower. Each semester, its students perform three thousand hours of volunteer service in local schools, not-for-profit organizations, and government agencies that provide local residents with food, shelter, health care, and other critical services. Infusing a heavy dose of pragmatism into academic inquiry is what Sandra Peart, dean of the Jepson School, refers to as “liberal arts with a point.”

Through its program of outreach, the school encourages colleges and universities around the world to make the study of leadership a priority. Through a better understanding of what makes leaders tick, the school seeks to produce more of them. Research undertaken at the school also illuminates issues faced by leaders in a complex, interconnected world.

The school’s speaker series, the Jepson Leadership Forum, has featured presentations by Mikhail Gorbachev, Margaret Thatcher, and Elie Wiesel, among others.

Long before Google and China faced off over the latter’s censoring of the former’s customers, William Stanton anticipated the clash. A former Jepson student, Stanton did independent research on the ethical implications of Google’s entry into overseas markets bedeviled by state censorship. Currently in law school, Stanton is drawn to areas of jurisprudence that intersect with corporate re-
sponsibility. He hopes to teach one day.

Another recent graduate of the school, Rebecca Frazier, conducted award-winning research alongside Crystal Hoyt, a Jepson professor who studies the behavior of women in leadership positions. Collaborating with students is a “two-way street,” says Hoyt, a social psychologist who mentors students and relies on them to help with her research.

Jepson strives to “connect research to practice,” says Frazier, who is pursuing a doctorate in psychology and whose scholarly inquiries focused on leadership in applied settings. She developed a tool to assess the way people review resumes, specifically the implicit associations held by readers that often result in gender bias. Not content to simply identify a phenomenon, she is developing interventions to offset gender bias in inner city schools. “Bias exists,” she says. “Now what?”

**Students First**

Richmond puts students at the center of the enterprise, an interconnected and multilayered infrastructure that develops young people in a safe environment. A new wellness center opened in 2007. And to help with time management on laundry day, an online service monitors the progress of washers/dryers and texts students when loads are done. No detail is too small. “Everything here is about students first,” says Ayers.

Academically, Richmond’s students benefit from the varied resources of the only liberal arts institution in the country to have schools of business, law, leadership, and professional and continuing studies. Collaboration among and within those schools and the School of Arts and Sciences results in unique offerings that otherwise would be unavailable. The yearlong Integrated Quantitative Science course, better known as IQ Science, mends material from biology, chemistry, physics, mathematics, and computer science. Made possible by a $1.4 million grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, the course provides a foundation for students interested in medical school or advanced science study. An ambitious new major in philosophy, politics, economics, and law draws
on expertise residing in four of the university’s five schools. “The professional schools give us an edge,” Ayers says.

**Coordinate College System Offers Best of Both Worlds**

A distinctive aspect of the university is the coordinate college system that evolved from what at one time were separate institutions: Richmond College for men and Westhampton College for women. The institution’s academics and student affairs have long since been combined—men and women live in the same residence halls after their first year, attend the same classes, eat at the same dining hall, and graduate together—yet each college maintains independent and parallel governance, traditions, and programs. The colleges have separate deans and student governments, a dichotomy that provides the benefits of single-sex institutions at a coeducational university.

The coordinate system also strengthens the university’s safety net, in part because “students really get to know the deans,” says Steve Bisese, vice president for student development. “We’re the best of both worlds,” says Joe Boehman, the dean of Richmond College. “We use the coordinate system to develop students’ self-awareness as gendered beings.”

For young men, that means promoting their development, focusing on positive images of masculinity, helping male students find their authentic self, and being aware of the ways that men engage and persist in college. Knowing that sophomore year can be a troublesome time for male students, “we work hard their first year to make that connection,” Boehman says. “We try to help them figure out their niche.”

Female students can take part in the Women Involved in Living and Learning (WILL) program, which was originally founded to level the playing field at a time when many colleges and universities had cultures that were geared toward male students. The program combines a minor in Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies with co-curricular gender-related activities and a leadership development organization. A number of institutions have replicated the
program, including Duke University and the University of Michigan. “We’re very progressive in the way we envision gender development,” says Westhampton’s Dean Landphair.

There are parallel traditions as well. First-year men become part of the community during the fall Investiture Ceremony. New students take a class photo, sign the Honor Code, and hear speeches by upperclassmen.

Proclamation Night is a candlelight ceremony for first- and fourth-year women. New students pledge to abide by the Honor Code and write letters to themselves about their expectations and aspirations at college. Senior women read the letters they wrote several years earlier. “I was very serious,” recalls Bitton. “I wrote the most intense letter to myself.”

Reading those letters four years later reveals the many ways the University of Richmond touches its students. Some find their strongest passions reinforced; others find that their lives have taken new directions. There is only one constant in the letters the students have written to their “older selves”: they could not anticipate all the surprises and discoveries that lay in store when their time at Richmond began.
On a midsummer’s day, the front campus of Washington and Lee University resolves into the very picture of refinement. A carpet of lush, green lawn stretches before the Colonnade’s antebellum buildings; stately white columns striate red-brick facades; rooftops edge the clear blue sky of Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley.

A National Historic Landmark District, the old campus evokes bygone eras. The statue of a toga-clad George Washington (“Old George”) surveys the grounds from his post atop Washington Hall. The remains of Robert E. Lee, president from 1865 to 1870, rest in Lee Chapel, and his beloved horse, Traveller, is buried just outside the president’s tomb.

There is a culture of civility that seems a part of an earlier era—students and professors routinely exchange pleasantries as they pass one another on campus—yet respectful debate is encouraged. “There is a strong sense of community,” says June Aprille, who recently retired as the university’s provost. “We have the ability to have disagreements in a rational, civil way…. The enduring characteristic of this place is the value system.”

Don’t let the genteel environs give you the wrong impression. Beyond the brick walks and early-nineteenth-century buildings, this place pulses with activity, much of it enhanced by advanced technology. Every academic building boasts a computer lab, and the country’s first all-digital journalism school is here. With one eye on its legacy and another on the future, the university is plowing $60 million into preserving historic structures while bolstering IT infrastructure. The theme of the university’s latest capital campaign exhorts donors to Honor Our Past, Build Our Future.

“We’re keeping what has made the university distinctive in terms of values and traditions even as we [build] twenty-first-century classrooms,” says President Kenneth P. Ruscio, an alumnus of the college, who lives in the same house that Lee occupied when
he was president. “There’s this yin and yang of tradition and a clear focus on facing the world around us.” In other words, the university acknowledges its past without dwelling in it. “Traditions are not discarded,” says Aprille, “and they don’t restrict us in any way.”

At its core, Washington and Lee is all about equilibrium. It balances past and future; liberal arts and professional training; academics and co-curricular activities; teaching and research; liberal and conservative political bents; Southernness and global perspectives. “Our student body is very national,” the president says. “We can have as many students from California as we do from North Carolina.” (About one in eight students are from Virginia.)

On football weekends in the fall, face-painted fans in T-shirts cheer the team alongside women in sundresses and men sporting rep ties. The college fields twenty-four varsity sports for men and women and also has club teams in polo, rugby and ice hockey, among others.

Even the location in Lexington, a quintessentially quaint burg of seven thousand residents, manifests equilibrium. Topographically speaking, the town is balanced by the Blue Ridge Mountains on one side, the Allegheny Mountains on the other. As for political representation, the college boasts in print that “there are as many points of view here as there are people—from the staunchly conservative to the stridently liberal to the patently apolitical.”

The college strives for programmatic balance, as well. Most top-twenty liberal arts colleges eschew professional programs, yet Washington and Lee embraces them. It is the only liberal arts college in the country with a law school and accredited programs in business and journalism. “The professional schools make the liberal arts conversation better...they give us currency,” the president says, and “the liberal arts shape the professional schools.”

In the same vein, the college looks for and cultivates balance in its students. Enrollees at W&L are “smart, academically capable and ambitious in the right way,” qualities that don’t always show up in grade point averages. As such, the college enrolls academically accomplished students who “want to try new things and explore
new academic areas,” says Ruscio. “They aren’t just good students. Ninety percent of them have a commitment to something besides the classroom.”

Equanimity, it would seem, is its own reward, albeit one that must be earned. Striving for that harmony is endemic to W&L’s culture. “You’ve got to learn that balance,” says Lexi Kierst, a recent graduate, from Utah, who majored in sociology and archeology/politics. “You’ve got to work for it.”

**An Institutional Narrative to Parallel the Nation’s**

The history of Washington and Lee, the country’s ninth-oldest college, parallels that of the nation. It is a place, to quote Shakespeare, where “past is prologue,” a place where students conduct archeological digs on campus. With an institutional narrative that covers more than a quarter of a millennium, Ruscio says, W&L rightly seeks to “draw strength from our past.”

Indeed, the college’s strategic plan, *A Liberal Arts Education for the 21st Century*, is an agenda for moving the college forward. It calls for diversification of staff and student body; enlargement of need-based financial aid; and enhancement of international programs, on campus and abroad. The aim is to meet “the challenges the world will face in the next fifty years,” the president says, “not the challenges of fifty years ago.”

The institution was founded in 1749 as Augusta Academy by Scots-Irish pioneers who had settled the Shenandoah Valley. Fifty years later, having undergone several changes of name and location, the institution (renamed Liberty Hall Academy in 1776) was struggling financially. On the verge of failure, the college received, in 1796, a gift of stock in the James River Canal Company from George Washington. Valued at $20,000, a kingly sum at the time, it was the first major endowed gift to the institution, which soon thereafter changed its name to Washington College.

The institution’s next major turning point came in 1865. The surrender of Robert E. Lee to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court-house ended the Civil War. With the South in ruins and the college’s future uncertain, W&L persuaded Lee to become its president.
Recruiting a vanquished general to lead the college may have seemed like a dubious move, yet Lee’s selection proved to be a brilliant choice. In just five years, the clever and resourceful military tactician became a first-rate educator, reinvigorating and transforming the small institution and setting it on its present-day path.

“I think it the duty of every citizen in the present condition of the Country, to do all in his power to aid in the restoration of peace and harmony,” said Lee, who also contributed the college’s motto, *Non Incautus Futuri* (Not Unmindful of the Future). President Lee acquired a law school, established what became the country’s first school of journalism, and founded the college’s business school. A major part of “Lee’s legacy was to have a commerce school to rebuild the South,” says Larry Peppers, dean of the Williams School of Commerce, Economics, and Politics.

Lee had a profound impact on the college’s culture. He laid the foundation for the Honor System and is credited with starting the “speaking tradition,” whereby people strolling the grounds make a point of acknowledging one another with a kind word or nod of recognition. During orientation week, students get T-shirts emblazoned with a single word: “Speak.” “We have but one rule here,” said Lee, whose name the college adopted following his death. “And it is that every student be a gentleman.”

**Uncompromising Honor**

Honor, integrity and civility—enduring qualities that bind together students and graduates—constitute a fulcrum on which Washington and Lee maintains equilibrium and balance. President Ruscio recalls recent conversations with a pair of W&L alumni. One is an attorney, a white man who graduated in 1939; the other an African American woman, Class of 2008. At first glance, they would appear to have little in common. Yet even across a chronological chasm of almost seven decades, “what they learned was remarkably similar,” recalls the president. “Both talked about integrity, how the honor system had instilled understanding, how important it is to be trusted and to trust others.”

Members of the W&L community learn early on that the Honor
System is sacrosanct, a cornerstone of the university’s way of life. First-year students gather in Lee Chapel for a solemn ceremony during which they pledge not to lie, cheat, or steal, or to abide those behaviors in their fellows. For violators there is but one punishment; they are asked by their peers to leave the college forever. “Students hold each other accountable,” says Aprille, the provost. “It’s a tight-knit community.”

Donald McCabe, a professor of organization management at Rutgers University and an authority on collegiate honor codes, has deemed W&L’s honor system among the strongest in the country. Students take unproctored exams and schedule their own finals. Theft is not a problem here. Students routinely drop off backpacks, purses, and other valuables outside the dining hall, where those items sit unattended while the students eat. “I still don’t lock my car,” says Ken Hopkins, an Arkansas native, prior to his earning a degree in business administration. “I’ve left my keys in the ignition overnight. I can leave a laptop out” in public, unattended.

At a time when concepts like honor and integrity might seem a bit old-fashioned to some ears—hokey even—W&L unabashedly promotes fundamental values as the bedrock on which meaningful lives are built. “We’re not shy talking about education of character,” says Dean Peppers. “Washington and Lee is about education of character and leadership.”

Variation on a Classic Theme

Washington and Lee is a classic liberal arts college with differences, including professional programs and an alternative academic calendar. There are two twelve-week semesters and a four-week spring term during which students take a single, intensive course. Professors develop new topics and pedagogy for the spring term, which they conduct in Lexington and beyond.

The college’s intimate environment promotes close relationships between its almost 200 faculty members and 1,700 students, a closeness that encourages peer-to-peer learning outside the classroom. “You learn as much talking to other people as you do in class because people are excited about what they learned in class,” says
Emily Williams, a recent graduate who majored in the classics. The faculty-to-student ratio at W&L is nine-to-one. The average class has sixteen students, and one of every four sections enrolls fewer than ten undergraduates. No classes are taught by teaching assistants. “It’s a more individualized education,” says Art Goldsmith, an economics professor who has led interdisciplinary courses that explore the Economics of Social Issues; Socio-Economic Themes in Literature and Film; and the Economics of Race and Ethnicity. “We’re able to sort out different types of students and provide opportunities tailored to their needs.” The first priority of Washington and Lee’s professors is to teach students and help them to mature. “The class will always come first,” says Erich Uffelman, a chemistry professor.

The young man or woman for whom W&L is a good fit is “a student looking for personalized interaction with faculty for personal and intellectual development,” says the provost. “The extent to which that happens here is greater” than at many universities, as is the “attention to the student as a person.” In return, there is an expectation that the college’s young scholars will be fully engaged in academic life. Washington and Lee attracts the type of “student who is looking for small, interactive classes in which they’re expected to come to class well-prepared and to participate at a high level,” Aprille says.

The emphasis on mentoring and student engagement often leads undergraduates to undertake research alongside professors. The Robert E. Lee Research Scholars Program provides grants of up to $3,100 each to sixty-five students who pursue summer research. Students assist with professors’ endeavors to produce new knowledge or they pursue their own projects under the supervision of a mentor. “The flow between scholarship and teaching is real at a place like W&L,” Ruscio wrote in the university’s annual report.

In recent years, Uffelman alone has welcomed more than forty-two students into his laboratory, where he synthesizes polyamide macrocyclic ligands, substances that attach to chemicals to form new compounds. Once, after overhearing a student say that she
wanted to be a textile conservator, Uffelman set her up with an internship and arranged for her participation in a specialized program at the Instituut Collectie of Nederland, in Amsterdam. Every other year, W&L’s Science, Society and the Arts research conference provides a public forum for students to present the results of their research. “We bend over backwards to help students succeed,” says Marcia France, a chemistry professor. “We are far more student-centered.”

The emphasis on broad-based academic inquiry and undergraduate research enhances the college’s professional programs, which strive to produce well-rounded practitioners. “We train business students and journalists to have a solid liberal arts foundation,” say Aprille. “They’re not just technicians.”

Among the notables who got their start at W&L are Tom Wolfe, who was in the vanguard of the New Journalism, and Roger Mudd, whose accomplishments include anchoring “CBS Evening News,” co-anchoring “NBC Nightly News,” and hosting “Meet the Press.”

The Williams School is unusual for combining economics and politics, areas typically found in colleges of arts and sciences, alongside commerce in its school of business. The goal is to provide graduates a perspective that extends beyond a corporate balance sheet.

“The mission statement of the Williams School is teaching business in a liberal arts environment,” says Dean Peppers. “We don’t want them to live and breathe business.”

True to that ethos, the school produces graduates who combine majors in business and theater, for example, or business and art. The school’s alumni have a reputation for more than holding their own in the hypercompetitive environments of Wall Street and electoral politics. J.P. Morgan, Goldman Sachs, and other elite firms recruit here.

The college has produced a long line of senators, representatives, and governors, including one who had a campus reputation for naked ambition. In 1804, long before he was elected to the U.S. Senate, the future ambassador to Chile, George William Crump,
“became the world’s first recorded streaker,” according to W&L, which has chosen not to cover up the distinction.

Ideals Realized

Washington and Lee’s ideals might amount to little more than feel-good rhetoric if it weren’t for the resources it has for putting those values into action. As one of the best-endowed liberal arts colleges in the country, it has the funds to animate its ideals. Prior to the current recession, the college’s endowment had a market value of $723 million. After taking a hit in the downturn, as did the endowment of every college, W&L’s fund is growing again. As of this writing, its value exceeds the pre-downturn level of $723 million, in part due to the efforts of students who manage a portion of the university’s endowment through the Williams Investment Society. The fund, which began with an original investment of $1 million, has outperformed the S&P since its inception, despite difficult market conditions. “We don’t just make bets,” says a budding fund manager, quoted in a college publication. “We’re actually doing the kind of stuff business analysts do.”

Among liberal arts institutions, W&L’s endowment per student of $352,000 is among the top twenty in the country. Investment revenue generated by the endowment fund offsets a large portion of the actual cost of educating students. The gift of stock George Washington made to the college more than two hundred years ago continues to provide financial support. How many undergraduates can say that the father of our country helped to pay for their education?

W&L’s sizeable endowment reflects the enduring confidence donors have in its institutional values. In 1913, for example, Robert and Jesse Doremus, traveling from New York City, visited the campus on their way to Charlottesville. Meandering the grounds, they were impressed by a student who greeted them and offered to escort the couple around campus. Although they had no connection to the university, the wealthy philanthropists made a large bequest to W&L, which named its athletic facility Doremus Gym.
That culture of helpfulness endures. A few years ago, during a national meeting held here, President Ruscio sat next to a board member from a college in New England. Like the Doremuses before him, the board member was taken with W&L’s hospitality, confiding to the president that every student he’d encountered had offered to show him around.

More recently, an alumnus gave the college $100 million, the second largest gift ever received by a private liberal arts college. His goal was to ensure that highly qualified students could attend W&L regardless of their financial status. The ensuing Johnson Program in Leadership and Integrity provides students with generous scholarships that will help the college to attain its diversity goals. Each year, the college provides students with financial aid of more than $25 million.

**Students of Consequence**

During the time students are on campus, the university seeks to provide them with the tools they will need to make a difference in the world. Or as one university publication put it: “W&L is committed to its quintessential tradition of preparing students for lives of consequence, motivated by a desire to serve others.”

For most of its history, W&L was an all-male institution. The college admitted women for the first time in 1985, well after many formerly single-sex colleges had gone co-ed. (Its law school went coed in 1972.) The women nonetheless caught up quickly, and today campus enrollment is evenly divided between the sexes. In 2006, women for the first time earned more degrees than the men. “We tend not to be leaders in social change, but once we decide to do it, we do it well,” Peppers says.

Students’ participation in more than one hundred sixty student groups on campus affords young men and women many opportunities to acquire and test leadership and problem-solving skills. Undergraduates run the honor system, the student judicial system, and student-conduct bodies, among others. “We put a lot of responsibility in the hands of students,” Ruscio says.
Between seventy and eighty percent of students join a fraternity or sorority. The experience offers an inside view of what it takes to run an organization. Many Greeks serve as officers in their fraternities and sororities, which occupy on-campus houses maintained by the university. The Greek system serves as the hub of campus social life. Most of their parties are open to non-Greeks. With the completion in 2002 of the Elrod Commons, however, which houses the office of the dean of students, meeting space for student organizations, the university store, and the main dining facility, the campus provides more and varied opportunities for all students to come together.

Between twenty-five and thirty percent of students compete in Division III athletics. Three of every four take part in club or intramural sports.

The big event on campus each spring is the Fancy Dress ball, a tradition that began in 1907 as “The Social Event of the Season.” Students work for months to plan, coordinate and execute the elaborate party, which always has a theme. The motif of the first ball was Colonial American Costumes. More recently, the balls’ themes have ranged from Studio 54 and Mardi Gras to In the Shadow of the Sphinx.

On the political front, W&L holds a mock presidential convention every four years that the university says is “regarded as the best civic educational exercise at any college in the nation.” Started in 1908 after a visit to campus by William Jennings Bryan, the convention has continued for a century, with its only interruptions coming in 1920 and 1944. Some ninety-five percent of students participate in the exercise, a two-and-a-half-year undertaking that culminates with delegates selecting the presidential candidate of the out-of-power party that hopes to regain the presidency. In all but two years since 1952, the Mock Convention has correctly identified the candidate who went on to win the party’s nomination. Most recently, the convention predicted that the Democratic Party would choose Hillary Clinton to be its standard bearer in 2008.

The occasional inaccurate prognostication isn’t the end of the world. The important thing is to stay balanced.
Epilogue

This book seeks to illuminate the many factors that students, families and counselors ought to consider when selecting a college, regardless of where those deliberations might lead. Choosing wisely requires weighing many criteria, from the size of an institution and the quality of its professors to the number and quality of opportunities for study abroad and community service at home.

The most important factor to consider is whether a college or university will bring out the best in a student, whether an institution will prepare a young man or woman to live his or her best life. As such, selecting a college is an intensely personal decision. Choosing well has little or nothing to do with the rank assigned an institution by *U.S. News & World Report*.

What matters is fit between the student and the school.

We hope as well that the preceding pages have illuminated the value proposition of liberal arts colleges and, more to the point, the particular benefits conveyed to students who attend institutions that are members of the Associated Colleges of the South.

To recap, these institutions are relatively small, which provides for a palpable sense of community that’s often missing from large universities. Residing in these academic villages are bright, talented students and extraordinarily accomplished faculties. The combination of small campuses and favorable student-to-faculty ratios allow for and, indeed, encourage academic mentoring of a kind that’s become relatively rare in undergraduate education.

Intimate environments and close relationships conspire to promote pervasive student engagement, a defining characteristic of ACS institutions. Students at these liberal arts colleges are deeply connected to peers, mentors, and communities. Compared to college kids elsewhere, they join more clubs, engage in more undergraduate research, and perform more community service.
A national survey of student engagement indicates that students of ACS institutions are simply more connected—in and out of the classroom—than are the majority of students elsewhere. At ACS institutions, there is no back row.

These colleges have an abundance of resources—from unique, interdisciplinary programs to state-of-the-art scientific equipment. And unlike at large universities where the abundance of students requires restricting access to resources, undergraduates at ACS institution aren’t shut out or told to take a number. The upshot is that a single student can play athletics, present a research paper at an academic conference, study abroad, perform in a theatrical production, serve as an officer in a student organization, and volunteer in the community. Suffice to say that liberal arts colleges of the ACS take seriously the development of students’ characters.

Small liberal arts colleges are also nimble, an indispensable quality in a fast-changing world. From sustainable development to leadership development, ACS institutions are ahead of the curve. Recognizing that established categories are crumbling—political, cultural, academic—these colleges promote interdisciplinary scholarship, cross-cultural understanding, and international awareness. These colleges are preparing graduates to navigate an increasingly fluid world, lest they be disoriented by it.

A final word to students: These pages do not contain every bit of information you will need to make an informed decision about where to attend college. Before enrolling at any institution of higher education, due diligence requires you to walk its grounds, meet its professors, and talk to students who are already there. In doing research for this book, we asked many students why they had chosen to attend a particular college. Invariably, they answered, the final decision pivoted on the campus visit.

Only then did they know for sure.