

Kresge Foundation awards \$500,000 for Science Center

The Kresge Foundation of Troy, Michigan, has awarded Whitman College a \$500,000 challenge grant to complete the Science Center renovation and expansion project.

The first phase of the project, a new \$13 million, 35,000-square-foot building, opened to classes in the fall. It was dedicated November 15 in

New Science Center dedicated

ceremonies honoring donors and other distinguished guests. Just as the new building opened for classes, the College began a \$7 million project to renovate the original building, constructed in 1964, and its 1981 addition.

The result will be “a truly exciting place in which to teach and learn science,” said chemistry professor Chuck Templeton, faculty liaison for the project.

The Kresge Foundation is an independent, private foundation created by the gifts of Sebastian S. Kresge. It is not affiliated with any corporation or organization.

Fall highlights: awards, events, speakers

■ Physicist Amory Lovins, coauthor of *Natural Capitalism: the Next Industrial Revolution*, presented the FPL/PacifiCorp Lecture September 20. He was keynote speaker for the annual Northwest Renewable Energy Festival held at Whitman this year. Lovins’s book was required reading for the sophomore class last summer.



Adam Hardtke, '03

At the dedication of the Science Center, President Cronin presented a drawing of the Stevens Atrium to Barbara Holmes Stevens, '44. The atrium is named for her husband, Fred, a 1944 graduate of the College who majored in math and physics.

■ Hal Varian, dean of the School of Information Systems at the University of California, Berkeley, gave the 2002 Genevieve Patterson Perry Lecture in Economics. Other fall speakers included Sister Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking*, and University of Pittsburgh Professor of Chinese History Evelyn Rawski, who gave the Sivert O. and Marjorie Allen Skotheim Lecture in History.

■ Former U.S. poet laureate Robert Hass addressed the campus as part of the Visiting Writers Reading Series. Hass read his own and others’ poetry, including translations of Japanese haiku. Poet and playwright Derek Walcott, who won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1992, presented the annual Walt Whitman Lecture December 4.

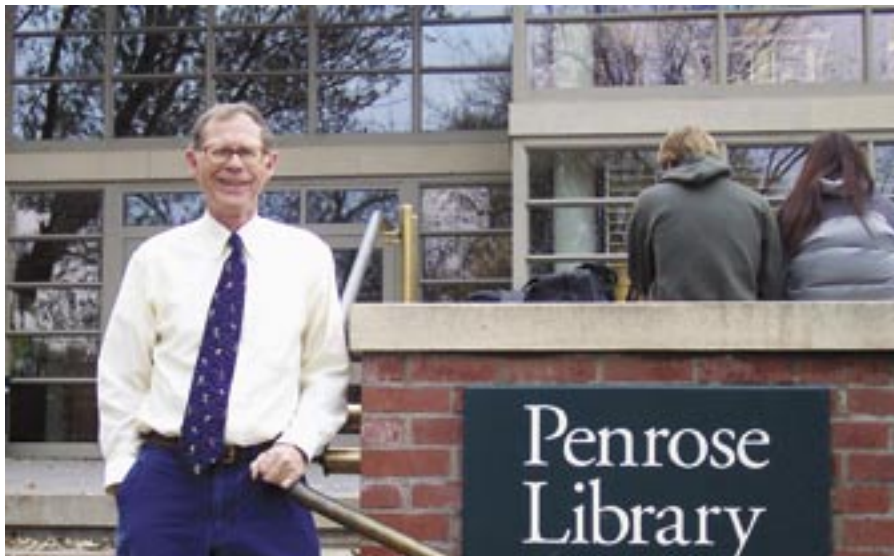
■ Whitman hosted the regional conference on undergraduate research of the Murdock College Science Research Program November 15-16. More than 350 faculty and students from colleges and universities in the Pacific Northwest convened.

■ Professor of Rhetoric and Film Studies Bob Withycombe received

the 2002 Whitman College-Chamber of Commerce Town-Gown Award, which recognizes outstanding community service. Among many other volunteer contributions, Withycombe is a long-time leader of the Walla Walla Habitat for Humanity program.

■ Whitman’s Center for Community Service received a \$5,000 United Parcel Service (UPS) Voluntary Service Award for its cross-cultural outreach program. The program matches Whitman volunteers — and this year UPS volunteers — with children at the farm labor community south of Walla Walla. The money will support field trips for the children, said Rebecca Sickels, center coordinator.

■ Assistant Professor of Biology Ginger Withers has received a prestigious National Science Foundation CAREER Award of \$550,000 over five years. The CAREER program fosters integration of research and teaching. Withers’s research focuses on the cell biology of brain development and will expose Whitman students to live cell imaging techniques. Withers also plans to use the grant to develop an outreach program for K-12 science teachers and students.



Library director Henry Yaple is proud of Whitman's Penrose Library.

Penrose librarian innovates to meet student needs

On a crisp fall afternoon, Penrose Library is a warm and inviting haven for students. From his office in the newly renovated building, library director Henry Yaple comments, "I'm as lucky a librarian as you can get."

In the second full year of service, the facilities have both Yaple and students pleased.

As he tours the building, Yaple prides himself that the facility is both heavily used and respected by

students. He continually works to meet students' growing needs and takes their suggestions to heart. For example, the balcony overlooking the Allen Reading Room was recently equipped with 42 senior thesis lockers. These lockers allow students to keep library materials at their disposal within the building without the books and documents being reshelfed or misplaced.

With its physical renovation

completed, Penrose Library now is undergoing organizational changes. This fall, the library helped establish the ORBIS Cascade Alliance, expanding Whitman's available research library from 10 million to 22 million publications without additional costs to the College. Through the alliance on-line union catalog, accessible via the Penrose home page, students can request materials from 25 additional academic institutions around the Northwest. The materials are received within three days.

Whitman also recently hosted the annual Oberlin Conference, a gathering of 74 library directors from liberal arts colleges around the country. The conference gives the directors an opportunity to confer about student programming and a first-hand look at facilities at other colleges. Yaple says that participants were impressed with Penrose Library and the College as well as with the Walla Walla Valley in general.

— Mo Brady, '03

Yaple shares interests in skiing, canoeing, kayaking

Above the Penrose Library atrium hangs a large canoe, a senior thesis art project by Robbie Thompson, '02. Library director Henry Yaple, a canoeing enthusiast, had the work displayed prominently in order to expose visitors to student art as well as to promote one of his hobbies. Canoeing is one of the many passions that Yaple shares with the College, inside and outside of the library.

Yaple was a self-proclaimed "skibum" working toward a doctorate in

17th-century English literature when he decided to pursue a library career. Having spent large amounts of time in libraries in his undergraduate and graduate careers, he was intrigued by the idea of "working on the other side of the circulation desk."

When he came to Whitman as library director in 1987, Yaple was asked to teach the cross-country skiing course, a sideline he continued for three years. About six years ago, he was inspired to establish a

canoeing course for students; it is a sport he himself began as a student 30 years ago. Two years later, he was asked to teach kayaking as well.

Yaple's academic interests focus currently on a bibliography he has compiled of all English books, videos, films, and other publications on the subject of skiing from 1890 to 2000. Yaple hopes to publish the list of more than 7,700 titles early next year.

Meanwhile, he oversees a library that serves students 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

On Community and Free Speech

by Thomas E. Cronin

Those of us who help lead colleges today regularly champion freedom of inquiry, thought, and speech. Yet just as strongly and passionately, we promote community and encourage mutual respect, tolerance, and civility.

Do these values sometimes collide? Of course they do. There is an inevitable tension between freedom and community. Indeed, the paradox is that either freedom or community, taken to the extreme, can be toxic. Excessive community may lead to cults that breed groupthink or tyrants. Excessive liberty can lead to bullying extremists who operate under the flag of “might is right,” or perhaps equally debilitating, a “do your own thing” mentality, or even anarchy.

In the academy, we abhor racism and mean-spirited commentary, yet we are reasonably tolerant of criticism, dissent, and even wrong-headedness. How do we reconcile our desire for both community and free speech? Frankly, it is never an easy proposition, and there is no boilerplate formula.

A liberal arts college is engaged in the “liberalizing” and “freeing” arts, in encouraging everyone to question his or her own prejudices and examine different political, economic, and cultural values with an open mind. We also challenge students to develop their own personal belief systems that just might be independent of those of parents, peers, professors, and even most of society.

Colleges at their best promote questioning, reflection, discourse, and debate. Better ways of understanding ourselves and our universe, we believe, will emerge from such methods. Good colleges purposely invite speakers who espouse a range of opinions. Some of the views expressed are plainly more agreeable than others, depending on one’s own persuasions. Yet, if there weren’t heated debates on campus, we wouldn’t really be doing our job. For if there is any safe haven for contrarian or controversial ideas, it should be in America’s academies. We who believe so strongly in ideas believe that ideas are strong and can stand up to each other in battle, and that the best ideas will survive and persuade us in the end.

But conflict and heated disagreements are inherently good only if we can learn from them without undermining our very human connection to each other. Unless one lives within a community where individuals are physically and emotionally free to hold and express their own independent or even iconoclastic views, there is really no point to freedom of speech. We need a sense of community as a basic prerequisite for freedom of speech.

Yet we can no more legislate community than we can legislate trust. Community doesn’t just come about.

It has to be nurtured, encouraged, and honored. Part of the essence of community is learning how to disagree and debate in a way that accepts general rules of the game and supports our ability to disagree, even passionately, without diminishing each other’s physical safety and well-being.

Seldom does a month go by at any college without someone complaining, often with some justification, about an article in the student newspaper, a professor’s political commentary, or a racist or homophobic remark heard somewhere on campus. This past year, in the wake of the 9/11/2001 terrorist attacks, colleges and universities across the country have witnessed examples of intemperate, threatening, and even violent incidents. Intense passions sometimes translate strongly-held beliefs into contemptible actions. And these actions cannot be tolerated.

In my other professional career as a political scientist, I have often written about a parallel set of tensions involved in constitutional government. For constitutional democracy is essentially a system of checks and balances, an intricate system designed to balance competing values.

As Americans, we are profoundly committed to freedom and liberty, and along with majority rule we want the protection of minority rights to be a high priority. Thus most Americans want a government that is efficient and effective which also promotes fairness and social justice.

We insist our government balance individual liberties against the collective security and the needs of society. The question is: which rights of which people are to be protected? And while we may usually agree on ends or principles, we often differ on the means. And we argue a lot over such questions as: what will the price be to individuals and society?

We are tolerant of the political critic or dissenter in America because, as Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson once wrote in a landmark court ruling, “If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion or other matters of opinion. . . .” One of my mentors, John W. Gardner, put it this way:

We believe that even those aspects of society that are healthy today may deteriorate tomorrow. We believe that power wielded justly today may be wielded corruptly tomorrow. We know that from the ranks of the critic come cranks and trouble-makers, but from the same ranks come the saviors and innovators. And since the spirit that welcomes nonconformity is a fragile thing, we have not depended on that spirit alone. We have devised explicit legal and constitutional arrangements to protect the dissenter.

As a college president I write a letter each summer to incoming students and ask them to join us in a commitment to freedom of thought and expression. I warn that this may be unsettling at times and that all of us must have the courage to face some ideas we will regard as misguided or even stupid. The idea of free speech involves not only the freedom to speak one's mind, but also the notion that speech itself — the civilized exchange of ideas in a civil community — is to be valued, and free speech means allowing not just the free expression of those who agree with us, but also freedom of expression that we find wrong or even repugnant. It is in arguing against such mistaken assumptions or beliefs that our own values become clarified and strengthened.

I remind our incoming students that an effective liberal arts college must be open to a broad range of views and values. Jefferson once said of the academy that error can be tolerated so long as reason is free to combat it. Indeed, it is necessary to confront and counter “wrong-headedness” in a spirit of actively engaging each other — and in the spirit of authentic learning.

As legal scholar and educator Benno Schmidt emphasizes, freedom of thought is not always easy to embrace:

It requires willingness to take the long view, the courage to confront the unthinkable without losing one's composure, and a willingness to trust that reason and good, if free to play their part, can overcome evil and insanity. . . .

Because ideas live, because imagination is the key to wisdom, John Stuart Mill was surely right to contend that if we give in to the urge to suppress that which is error — even very offensive and dangerous error — we lose a benefit as great as truth itself, namely “the clear perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.” Much expression that is free may deserve our contempt. We may well be moved to exercise our own freedom to counter it.

Thus the search for truth will always require the presence of contending theories as well as controversial ideas. Suppressing the exchange of ideas, whether through censorship or disruption, threatens not only freedom of speech, but also the search for truth.

The challenge here is to encourage honest and frank exchange of ideas, yet do it in as civil and respectful a way as possible. Harvard University's Neil Rudenstine says we should “speak our views perfectly openly but in ways that are also consistent with the purpose of a university, where the fundamental motive is to learn and to understand, not to abuse.”

The principle of freedom of speech, so richly woven into the fabric of constitutional democracy, is also fundamental at all serious colleges and universities. This is so, in good part, because discerning what is nonsense and

what might be a brilliant breakthrough can be a challenge. I like the formulation by University of Chicago anthropologist Ralph W. Nicholas:



President Tom Cronin

Nonsense should be criticized wherever it occurs, but we cannot always be as sure as we would like about what nonsense is. Declaring an idea to be foolish does not make it false. It is the work of academic people to try out new ideas and test them against competing views. Very few of them withstand testing, but those that do justify the effort — including failures. Genuine testing and probing can be done only in an environment of radical freedom for rival ideas.

Who decides what or who is right? Individuals have to decide for themselves. But the genius of the “liberalizing arts,” as well as constitutional democracy, lies not in banning dissent and prejudice but in encouraging a robust examination of ideas. Ideas that stand on their own merit, subject to challenge, debate, and rebuttal, will generally endure.

Expression needs to be protected and encouraged. There is a difference between expression and action, and communities such as colleges must plainly protect students and staff from intimidating threats of violence.

Hateful and stupid speech needs to be defeated by counterargument and debate as much as possible. Hateful or offensive actions are yet another matter. Actions that are physically intimidating and threatening directed at specific groups or individuals are unacceptable. We can and do regulate actions and some forms of speech through statutes punishing libel and violence. Still — and this is where the academy has a special obligation to promote debate, counterargument, and learning — the presumption must lie in favor of “free speech” unless a compelling case can be made for its limit.

A civil community in which free speech thrives can be achieved if everyone is committed to the goals of understanding and to the search for knowledge. This happens when individuals and groups who disagree with one another are able to have candid discussions about their disagreements. Colleges should lead the way in showing how all of us — inside as well as outside the academy — can be tolerant of dissent in times of crisis while also encouraging civility in our own discourse.

Tom Cronin has been president of Whitman College since 1993. A political scientist, he is the author, coauthor, or editor of 10 books.