

## Short Subjects

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# Ties That Bind

By AUSTIN WRIGHT

Ties are strong among this year's graduates at Whitman College. In fact, they're made of metal.

At last month's commencement, Whitman's 335 graduating seniors received tiny bow-tie lapel pins, meant to remind them of their lifelong ties to the Walla Walla, Wash., college — and of its dapper president.

President George S. Bridges is known for his bow ties, a rarity out West. He became president at Whitman four years ago — when most members of this year's graduating class entered as freshmen — and students soon noticed his neckwear.

That winter, students built him a 10-foot-tall, bow-tie-wearing snowman. And this spring, the Whitman College Bookstore began selling bow ties. Before that, Mr. Bridges had to buy his online.

"It became a unique signature that people could recognize from afar," he says.

Mr. Bridges is not the only college president for whom bow ties are part of an identity. Last year the perpetual bow-tie-wearer E. Gordon Gee, president of Ohio State University, sent one of his bow ties where none had gone before: outer space, aboard the space shuttle *Endeavour*. An astronaut who is an alumnus of the university took it with him on a two-week stay at the International Space Station.

Mr. Bridges says that at conferences, he often sees other college presidents wearing them.

"It conveys a sense for some of serious scholarly attire," he says. "You'll never see us in *GQ*, I'll tell you that."

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