

Leading with connections

Wheaton began this year on an upbeat note. First, the college won recognition from the *New York Times* as one of the nation's "hidden gems": excellent colleges that more people should consider. And then in August, *U.S. News & World Report* recognized the college's national standing by jumping the institution ahead 11 places in its annual ranking.

Now, I'm not crowing about all this press attention. I would submit that Wheaton is better than the 55th-in-the-nation ranking *U.S. News* accorded the college, and I've expressed my concerns about flaws in their ranking system. In addition, the *New York Times* article did not tell the Wheaton community anything it didn't already know. Nevertheless, the recognition has noticeably increased the number of high school students and their parents who are dropping by the Admission Office these days. And that is always a good thing.

You might wonder why the sudden attention to Wheaton. In part, the answer is that so many good things are happening here that it has become impossible not to take notice. Most other top liberal arts colleges would be glad to be able to boast about one Rhodes Scholar since 2000; Wheaton has produced three. And those awards are just a few of the more than 60 prestigious scholarships that our students have won in the past six years. With so many examples of outstanding scholarship, Wheaton demands notice. However, the college's rising reputation for excellence runs deeper than the accomplishments of just 60 graduates, impressive though they are.



For example, it was primarily through our inclusion in a book written by George Kuh last year, *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions That Matter*, that

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we were included in the *New York Times* list of 20 "hidden gems." Kuh's book highlights effective educational practices at 20 colleges, ranging from small, private liberal arts colleges such as Wheaton to large state universities. Despite the variety of the institutions on the list, each one shares two common characteristics: clearly articulated educational purposes and aspirations, and a coherent, relatively well understood philosophy that guides "how we do things here."

For the past two years, the Wheaton community has been engaged in conversations about these very matters through the strategic plan, "Wheaton 2014: Transforming Lives to Change the World." But what exactly do we mean by transforming lives

to change the world? In large measure, it means that Wheaton continues to do what it has always done well: provide the type of personalized education in which students work closely with individual, full-time faculty members and are both encouraged and challenged to aim high, achieve more, and realize their full potential in every sphere of life—personal, professional and civic.

How do I know Wheaton has always done this? Well, we have studies, like George Kuh's research, that consistently point to the great value that students find in their Wheaton experience. But put aside the numbers for a moment. Everything I have learned in three years of meeting with alumnae/i around the country leads me to believe deeply in Wheaton's power to transform lives in ways that change the world. The value proposition of the strategic plan is that all Wheaton graduates will be global citizens prepared to lead in a complex world by 2014.

One young man who just graduated from Wheaton and is interested in human rights and the law is currently working with the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) on the war crimes trials there. Over the summer, a young woman was invited to participate in a national leadership conference for young women interested in careers in finance. The experience has excited her in the possibilities not only for herself but also for other young women with similar interests here at the college.

At first blush, the title "Transforming lives to change the world" may sound overly grand, but I am convinced that it describes very well what is and has always been Wheaton's primary goal. And the time that I have spent getting to know Wheaton people has convinced me that this capacity to change lives is a precious gift that we must preserve and strengthen. 