

COLUMBIA COLLEGE

This is certainly a challenging economic climate for private colleges as we daily digest the news about student loan markets, endowment losses, reduced tuition grants, and the difficult fundraising environment. The distressing news is softened by the knowledge that we are blessed to be doing God's work as we remain committed to guiding the development of students empowered to work for social justice and to dedicate themselves to making the world better for the generations to come.

We began the year with the largest first-year class in thirty years and with the largest evening program in our history. However, the economy had an impact on our retention and enrollment was slightly down in spite of the large number of new students. For our opening Convocation on September 3, the new pastor of College Place, Tiffany Knowlin, was our speaker. Of course, we are especially proud of her since she is a 2003 graduate of Columbia College! That was soon followed by the annual Columbia College Day at College Place United Methodist Church on September 14. I spoke on Jesus' example of putting the needs of others before our own.

A very meaningful activity throughout the fall semester was sponsored by our Diversity Committee. A large group of faculty and staff members formed a discussion group. We met on several occasions during the semester to discuss *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race* by Frances Kendall.

In preparation for our upcoming (February 2011) accreditation visit by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the entire campus community, including students, faculty, staff, alumnae, trustees, and community leaders, have been engaged in development of our Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The board effort has narrowed our choices to five commitments: globalization, experiential learning, second-year experience, student engagement, and personal and social responsibility. The final selection of a topic for further development will be announced this spring.

The Alliance for Women at Columbia College continues to work in partnership with the Commission on Women to address issues of poverty, educational access, health, and low political representation by women. We have sponsored numerous workshops, conferences, and residential camps. In addition, we are pursuing funding to establish a micro-lending program statewide.

Our annual Medallion Dinner recognized two women who embody the 4Cs of Columbia College leadership. Senator Linda Short and Judge Karen Williams exhibit courage, commitment, confidence, and competence in their lives and accomplishments.

Columbia College Chaplain Valerie Mireb directed a week-long celebration of the life of Dr. Martin Luther King. On January 19 students and faculty joined the march to the Statehouse. The campus held a luncheon and panel discussion with guests who were present for Dr. King's historic "I have a dream" speech. An honored guest at the luncheon was the student winner of the annual MLK Day poetry contest. On Tuesday, the campus celebrated the inauguration of President Barak Obama with a group viewing in the student union and a discussion, moderated by communication professor Jason Munsell, following the President's speech. In Wednesday's chapel the Reverend Tiffany Knowlin spoke on the principles evident in Dr. King's life. On Thursday Dr. Mary Stepling discussed regional and race-specific dialects and our responses to them. On Friday, the campus completed the week of activities with a volunteer project with Harvest Hope food bank.

An important activity at the college this spring is what we are calling the "Re-visioning of Columbia College." The vision statement that guides the process follows:

The re-envisioning of Columbia College is designed to assure that the college is as relevant to women's education for the next 150 years as it has been throughout its history. We must focus and transform our message to resonate with a new generation; we must adapt to national and global changes and to increasing opportunities for women; we must provide a community and an academic program that is strong, exciting, and accessible to prospective students and potential donors. In re-envisioning Columbia College we must inspire students through a strong liberal arts curriculum, a deep grounding in United Methodist values, and commitment to developing women leaders. We must respond energetically to economic challenges that could endanger our future.

To achieve this vision, we must ensure that our human, physical, and financial resources are effectively allocated. Specifically, we must enhance the funding for salaries, facilities, and growth opportunities.

To thrive as a college we must:

- Budget efficiently in order to be selective in enrollment and control costs to students
- Position the college to attract a wide base of students and donors
- Analyze and respond to evolving academic and professional markets
- Provide competitive salaries for faculty and staff
- Develop desirable academic and residential facilities

Six committees and a steering committee worked many hours and sought wide campus input to present recommendations this spring to achieve this vision.

While we look to the college's future, we continue to celebrate our heritage. On February 11, Dr. Wright Spears, beloved president emeritus of Columbia College was honored at our annual Founder's Day celebration.

We continue to find blessings in sharing the values of our United Methodist faith and in shaping the power of young women to change the world.

Caroline Whitson, President