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Our University – Fresh Ideas

Walter V. Wendler

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, wendler@siu.edu

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Our University – Fresh Ideas

Nothing is more important to the lifeblood of a university than fresh ideas. These valuable nuggets, like gold, come from panning and searching. They are the results of diligent effort on the part of faculty and students. You can't buy them, they must be mined.

Some might argue fresh ideas come from graduate students engaged in research with leading faculty members. True to some extent. However, the institutions that produce the preponderance of fresh ideas cherish excellent undergraduate education as the foundation for creative, critical, insightful, and penetrating thought.

Undergraduate acceptance rates are the lowest at universities that generate fresh ideas. The names you know, the Ivy League schools and excellent publics such as Virginia, North Carolina, Illinois, Wisconsin, California, and Texas, are on the list.

Acceptance rates in single digits at a few institutions, as low as 7 out of 100 students are recorded at the best public and private universities. Students applying have strong records; the competition is fierce. The best of the best. Not everyone gets a chance at the place where they want one. They must have performed in one or more ways.

There are two possibilities.

On the one hand, the best students gravitate towards the universities that have the best reputation, and those are always the universities that produce the fresh ideas measured in faculty publications, research expenditures, patents, critically acclaimed artistic endeavor, and other indicators of high levels of intellectual activity directed towards innovation and excellence.

On the other hand, it is possible that by bringing in excellent freshmen, those students with good records in high school achievement, strong records on standardized exams, and demonstrated leadership ability, a culture of ideas and mental sharpness is developed.

Most assuredly, a combination of forces is at work. Faculty stimulate a rich environment, but freshmen, who are eager to learn and have demonstrated some level of success, help create a milieu of

inquisitiveness that leads to greater achievement for all. Good students infect a place, as do poor ones.

Freshmen help lead the faculty. Every worthy professor knows it.

Excellence breeds excellence.

If a good university wants to be a better university, shrinking the aperture through which the freshmen must pass, and raising the bar of qualification is needed. This is counterintuitive for some, but increased reputation will always follow. It takes courage and a vision for quality to implement.

The best public and private research university students and families vote with their report cards and test scores. Students selecting good state universities vote with entrance accessibility and their checkbook to inform their selection, and look at quality too. Community college students vote with their checkbook and driving time. It does not mean there is low value or limited opportunity at any institutional type. A good community college is better for all than a poor university is for anyone.

If a university wants fresh ideas as a response to the social mandate for excellence, that institution must always vote for quality first, and with excellent leadership and management, growth of reputation and success will follow. There is an old proverb that suggests that between two lemonade stands, side by side, one with a sign proclaiming "Free Lemonade" and the other with a sign stating "Lemonade - 25 cents", the long line will be at the latter, not the former.

Parents and students correctly believe that quality comes at a price and that value is part of the equation... and they like fresh ideas as much as our university does.