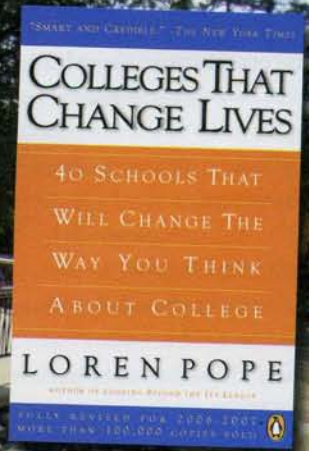




HENDRIX

COLLEGE



A College That Changes Lives

by Loren Pope

On a balmy April day, as one enters the fifty-acre enclave of masses of red and white azaleas, dogwoods, giant willow oaks, and manicured lawns that set off Hendrix's attractive buildings, the overwhelming impression is that this Shangri-la in Conway, Arkansas, thirty miles north of Little Rock, must be the most beautiful campus of them all. And inside this lovely setting is a warm community that offers an educational experience to match; one without peer.

No city street intrudes; the outside world is walled off by the trees and shrubbery. Even the parking is way out of sight. A walkway high over the street takes visitors to a 120-acre parklike expanse of recreation and sports facilities. There are tennis courts, intercollegiate playing fields, and a fitness trail in the woods. A giant indoor activities center has more tennis, as well as basketball courts and a Nautilus fitness area. Students said it is more used by the girls than by the boys.

Close by are streams, lakes, forests, and hills of that outdoorsman's paradise, the Ozark Mountains, offering canoeing, whitewater rafting, spelunking, rock climbing, horseback riding, hot-air ballooning, hiking, and camping, not to mention some beautiful country. The college takes full advantage of this bounty with a comprehensive outdoors program for every interest and every range of skill.

These attractions are bonuses offered by one of the country's academic gems. It truly is a too-secret treasure that is both a financial bargain, with 92 percent of students receiving financial aid,¹ and a great opportunity for a better educational experience than you'd find in the name-brand places. It really is a shame that this century-old college of 1,040 students² isn't more widely

known. Partly because it's in Arkansas and partly because of modesty stemming from its church origins (Methodist), Hendrix has blushed unseen rather than trumpeted its virtues.

Hendrix accepts 86 percent of its applicants, and in 2003, slightly over half of them came from out of state. This book has helped make people across the country aware of Hendrix's virtues. The middle 50 percent have SAT totals in the 1,250 range, which means a lot of scores are below as well as above. Half of those accepted were in the top half of their high school class, but that includes many small rural ones, so it is a good bet for B students with good programs from larger and more competitive high schools. And that also goes for C students who mean business.³

There are no fraternities or sororities. As a student from Alaska said, "You make friends with people from different departments, different parts of the country, different cultures. Your 'group' becomes the whole campus."

Nearly 90 percent of the faculty hold doctoral degrees from the great American and European universities. All of the rest have terminal degrees in their fields. In the last decade, the faculty has grown from sixty to eighty although enrollment is only up by 10 percent. New majors have been added in international relations, anthropology, and computer science, while more strength and diversity have been added to existing fields. The student-faculty ratio has been lowered to 12-1, and the average class size to fifteen.⁴

In 2002 and 2003, the college completed several new buildings. One is for the physical sciences and another is for the life sciences and psychology. Biology and psychology are the two largest majors. There is also a center for programs in literature and language, a new

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has three terms of three courses each,⁸ so students can concentrate their energies. They start their Hendrix Odyssey, as the college calls its new plan, with Journeys, an interdisciplinary course that explores the life journeys of people in several different cultures. This is followed by Explorations, a sophisticated orientation course for the liberal arts and success at Hendrix. There is a required course, Challenges of the Contemporary World, which is just what the title says it is. There is also a capstone experience that can be a

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comprehensive examination or any one of a number of other scholarly or creative projects. The Odyssey also requires an approved activity in at least three of the following six categories: artistic creativity, global awareness, professional and leadership development, service to

the world, research, and special projects.

Off-campus study opportunities are many. There's a Washington Semester Program, a Hendrix-in-Oxford Program in England, and many others around the world.⁹ Students interested in marine biology can take courses in the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. Often these are heady experiences the student couldn't have imagined having when he was a freshman. For instance, the high point of one political science major's college career was a summer internship in the White House where, among other things, his duties included the exciting work of drafting political speeches.

Hendrix is an easygoing, unpretentious, democratic place. A senior from Missouri headed for medical school said she had been “charmed by the people and by the community atmosphere,” to which a freshman added, “this is a really unique community. You can relate to your profs; they are your friends and they are involved in the volunteer programs.” (Long before she's a senior I'm sure she won't try to modify “unique.”) A senior from Texas called it the most welcoming and friendly place he had visited, noting that after he got here he found the work “challenging.”

They all talked about how important their out-of-class experiences had been to them. Some mentioned activities and some the excitement and broadening experiences of the foreign-study programs, but the common thread was that getting involved was essential to getting what you should out of the experience. “This is no place where you can fall through the cracks,” one student said.

The kind of person who should come here, they said, should be willing to be involved in the life of the community, be “open-minded, accepting, and willing to grow, because this is a most diverse place.” He especially should want to take an active part in his own education. This was not the place, they felt, for anyone who wouldn't be happy in a completely unpretentious place. It's not for the fast-track person.

Little Rock is only thirty miles away but students and faculty

felt like the richness of the campus cultural programs, the variety of activities, and the limitless outdoor attractions were more than enough compensation for not being next door to a major metropolis. There is a good cultural life on campus. The generosity of foundations has enabled the college to put on some first-rate festivals.

This is an ideal place for African-American students. They are very active. They have a pep music group that plays at games, and a choir. As one said, “I know that I can do what I want at this school.” An African-American sophomore said that she came here because “I was ready to take on a challenge, academically and socially; a positive challenge.” And she's glad she did.

At first I was a little puzzled that none of the African-American students had mentioned Hendrix's charismatic African-American English professor, Dr. Alice Hines, the kind of teacher there should be more of. I concluded they didn't feel a need to mention race any more than she had in lovingly relating the successes of some of her late-blooming students. She didn't mention color until I asked whether the African-American students felt they were part of the community. “Absolutely!” she said. “Black students are very active at Hendrix and are part of the community. When they come here they know where they're going; it's not a new culture, and they're self-starters.”

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Like some of the faculty members, I was unexpectedly blown away by Hendrix. It is an exemplary college and teenagers of a wide range of abilities and interests would find this a very happy fit socially. It is a far nicer and more sophisticated place, besides being infinitely more exciting academically, than the retreaded teachers' colleges that are now universities in most states, or the state universities. There should be at least one college as good as Hendrix in every state.

Ten years later, students and recent graduates say that Hendrix has changed their lives for the better.

A 2004 graduate, a Fulbright scholar, said, “Hendrix College has been an amazing influence on my life. The students were more intellectually curious and open-minded than at other colleges, and much less pretentious, and a welcoming environment for gay students.” He was one of the several

who called foreign-study terms their best experiences. He said, “It forced me to look at American culture from an entirely new perspective.”

A rising junior said, “Being a biology major in a world-culture class taught by a religion professor was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. The last two years have been the best of my

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art complex of three buildings for art history and photography, one for two-dimensional art, and one for ceramics and sculpture. In the plans are two more additions: a multi-purpose campus center that will be a student union plus, and a comprehensive wellness and athletics center.⁵

To accommodate all this growth, the college has added new centers for physical and life sciences as well as two new dormitories and six small residences housing sixteen to eighteen students each to provide opportunities for residential programs.⁶ It has installed a new pipe organ in a renovated chapel and has added intramural and regulation soccer fields to its already well-equipped recreation area.

Sixty percent of the graduates go on to graduate or professional school. And they are welcomed. They score in the ninety-eighth and ninety-ninth percentiles in the graduate tests because they've already been doing what graduate students do: research. Each year students accompany faculty members to professional meetings to present the results of collaborative student-faculty research. The chances of a student getting this kind of experience at a great university are close to none.

It should be no surprise that by 2004, Hendrix seniors won twenty-two Watson fellowships in that program's nineteen years, seventeen Barry Goldwater fellowships in that program's sixteen years, and, to me, the most impressive of all, six Rhodes Scholars.⁷ One in eight of the state's physicians went to Hendrix. And the National Science Foundation ranks Hendrix among the top fifty in producing Ph.D.s in chemistry, physics, and engineering.

All this is achieved in a warm community of learning in which minority students are an integral part, and campus employees not only call students and professors by their first names, but put on the Christmas banquet. Former president Ann Die had hired a catering firm so that the employees could come. But after one banquet, the employees said they could do a better job and took over.

Developing moral thinking is an important part of the Hendrix experience. A former provost said, "It is places like this that are incubating the continuity of democratic values." What he said is certainly true at Hendrix and at other colleges in this book. In 2003,

students adopted a code defining academic integrity, along with penalties for infractions.

Hendrix knows, like other colleges in this book, that they must prepare students to live in a global rather than an American world. So, in every major they are

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encouraged to have a term, or more, abroad. For most of them it becomes the mind-opening pinnacle of their college experience.

The faculty is an exceptional body of teacher-scholars for whom teaching is an act of love. One of them, Dr. Thomas Goodwin, a chemistry prof, won the national baccalaureate teacher of the

year award in 2003. Some of them had planned only to start their careers at Hendrix and then move on to research institutions, but found that their lives had been changed.

A music professor said, "I came out of an undergraduate education [University of Texas] not much different than when I went in, except that I had a lot more knowledge. What's amazing to me is that

the kids who come in here are unrecognizable when they leave. They learn to cope with challenges and to understand other ways and points of view, partly because of the foreign programs." To which another professor added, "I told a kid just today, 'You couldn't possibly have done something this sophisticated six months ago.'"

Collaborative learning is emphasized. Built with this idea in mind, the new library has small study rooms where little groups can work together. There is not cutthroat competitiveness.

As at other colleges in this book, the faculty's enthusiasm for their students is one of the two main reasons they have stayed at Hendrix instead of moving on to a university. The other is a faculty belief in a shared enterprise and the strong sense of fellowship. A history professor recalled, "I was only going to stay three or four years, and mine is the standard story, and it's the students, it's not the Arkansas climate. One of my students is a combined physics and history major, another designed his own interdisciplinary major. They're interested in many things, not just preprofessional or vocational."

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A music professor said he came twenty years ago not intending to stay long, "but now you couldn't blast me out of here. The commitment of the students was a new world for me. Students are interested in music who aren't music majors. Both students and faculty are interested in worlds other than their own. The collegiality here was unbelievable; no factions at all, no infighting. This is a more appropriate kind of education; you get opened up earlier and specialize later."

A biologist who had come to Hendrix as a temporary stop on his way to being a researcher summed it up with, "I was blown away by the collegiality, a feeling that there was something special happening, that everybody was in this together, that they really were changing students' lives, and that that was something important—the most important thing you could do with your life. I've now been here twenty-seven years. We don't have disciplinary problems; they attend class. We've got good people, good counseling, and a positive atmosphere, and this is critical to a student looking for a place. We have very high standards and I think that is why our students are so successful in graduate and professional schools—that and collaborative learning and critical learning."

Freshmen have a two-day bonding and orientation campout with faculty members before the fall term begins. The school year

life, but they'll have to compete with the next two."

A rising sophomore said Hendrix had taken "a rough, careless student and made a dedicated scholar. Hendrix has an incredible ability to provide for its students whatever it is they need to expand and grow, and isn't that what education is about?"

Two alums in top graduate programs, who'd been hotshot students in high school, said Hendrix was the best undergraduate experience they could have hoped for, that they "were challenged daily by professors who truly cared about the growth of their students."

A classmate said the foreign terms had made her realize who she was as a global citizen and thus became more accepting of other cultures and people.

A freshman girl said, "Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined I would be able to seek advice from what I consider the greatest minds in the country, and they are also asking about my life and opening their office doors and their homes to me and my peers."

A junior from Houston said, "I know this sounds really cheesy, but coming to Hendrix has made me a better person. I went to school with kids who got brand-new Mustangs for their sixteenth birthdays. I had to have the coolest clothes, the newest shoes, etcetera. At Hendrix those things matter much less. I can honestly say that I am much less materialistic because of my time at Hendrix. My confidence level has increased exponentially due to my experiences here."

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- 1 100 percent of students currently receive some form of achievement-based and/or need-based state, federal, or institutional assistance.
- 2 Hendrix's total enrollment currently stands at 1,350.
- 3 Hendrix accepted 78 percent of its applicants in 2008, and two-thirds of them came from out of state. In the same year, 41 percent of the entering class had graduated in the top 10th of their high school class, and 75 percent in the top quarter. The new class' midrange scores for the SAT were 1150-1340 and 26-31 for the ACT.
- 4 In response to the approximately 30-percent increase in enrollment since 2005, the size of the faculty has grown to maintain a 12-1 student-to-faculty ratio. There are currently 103 full-time faculty members, and 96 percent have a Ph.D. or terminal degree. In order to support enrollment growth across the curriculum, new majors have been added in allied health, American studies, biochemistry/molecular biology, and chemical physics. Minors have been created in American studies, dance, film studies, and international business. The current average class size is 18.
- 5 Opened in August 2007, the 100,000-square-foot Wellness and Athletics Center (WAC) includes an aquatics center with a retractable roof, competition and recreational gymnasiums, a climbing wall, and a state-of-the-art fitness center, as well as space for dance and aerobics and the department of kinesiology. Adjacent to the WAC are new lighted soccer, baseball, and softball fields, an eight-lane track with an artificial turf playing field in the center, and a sand volleyball court. The 80,000-square-foot Student Life and Technology Center is currently under construction. Scheduled for completion by the spring 2010 semester, it will house offices for the various Student Affairs departments, the Odyssey Program, and student organizations, in addition to including the Jewish Cultural Center, a dining hall and café, a game room, the post office, a 5,000-square-foot centralized programming space, and the Educational Technology Center.
- 6 Growing enrollment has caused the institution to seek and construct additional student housing. In August 2008, the college opened The Hendrix Corner. This 28-unit residential complex, which consists of two-bedroom townhouses and three-bedroom flats, provides homes to more than 70 students. A second set of apartments, currently under construction in The Village at Hendrix, is scheduled to open in fall 2009. It will provide space for approximately 130 students.
- 7 Since 2004, Hendrix seniors have won two more Watson fellowships and two more Barry Goldwater fellowships. Additionally, four more students have been named Fulbright Scholars, increasing the total number of Fulbright Scholarships awarded to Hendrix students to 12, and two students have won the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation Graduate Scholarship.
- 8 Hendrix adopted the semester calendar in 2002. An academic year at Hendrix typically consists of two semesters of four courses each.
- 9 Hendrix currently has exclusive overseas study programs in Austria, Belgium, China, Costa Rica, England, Italy, and Spain. Hendrix's participation in the International Student Exchange Programs (ISEP) connects its students with nearly 150 additional study programs all over the world.



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