



Whitworth is who we are, who we'll be

Have you ever been asked if you like “change?” It’s an odd question. It seems to me that everyone who can fog a mirror would have to answer, “Sometimes.” Yesterday, when I was being sucked into a small cylinder for another MRI, I thought it would be nice to change spines. But today, when I was working on our strategic plan, I was building blockades to protect us from forces that could change Whitworth’s mission. I don’t think you can talk about change without supplying an object of the verb. For that matter, it also helps to give the verb a subject. For example, I’m fine with *other people* changing, particularly in areas that annoy me.

Whitworth changes every day. We all do. Some changes are harder than others to manage. This issue of *Whitworth Today* reports on a change that should be easy for Whitworth, but one that has been hard for many colleges. We’re changing academic deans. After nine years of warm, strong and effective service, Tammy Reid will hand off the job to Michael Le Roy. And Michael will do great work. He’s just what we need on the administrative team. I haven’t read the article yet, but I’m sure you’ll see that Michael is smart, he exalts the Whitworth mission, he’s hard-working and disciplined, and he loves students. He also represents a different genera-

tion, and that could turn out to be very helpful (for example, he can turn on his computer without the help of a child). When I was a 36-year-old college president, I had a 50-something #2 person. Between my nerve and his wisdom we managed change pretty well.

This spring the board of trustees was asked to endorse an ambitious five-year strategic plan that blueprints a very exciting future. Most of the changes, if we can pull them off, will be welcomed by all. At their upcoming fall meeting, they’ll consider at least one change that will distress some of the Whitworth faithful. After careful study of current conditions and literally 15 years of discussion, we find almost inescapable the conclusion that some day Whitworth College will rename itself Whitworth University – a change that I have resisted. At one time, most colleges that became universities were, in my view, naming themselves something that they weren’t. Now, we may be the ones guilty of nomenclature that is misleading.

In *U.S. News and World Report’s* “Best Colleges” issue, out of the 30 Top Ten schools listed as master’s-level universities in the South, Midwest and West regions, only two are colleges. Further, the number of community colleges and junior colleges that are labeling themselves simply as colleges increases sharply every year. Adding these industry changes to the confusion created by the term “college” in most international settings suggests that Whitworth will someday need to change for the sake of clarity.

Our new strategic plan calls for limiting growth and protecting the intimate sense of community that we all love.

This climate is especially present in our traditional undergraduate program. But limiting growth in this population may require us to expand enrollment in our graduate and nontraditional programs, both of which appeal to markets that respond more enthusiastically to a university. For all of these reasons, the trustees will give serious consideration to a name change that would take place in three or four years.

So, will Whitworth change if we actually do this? Sure. It will change no matter what we do. Whitworth will become better than ever. Will changing its name usher it into becoming a fundamentally different institution? No. Whitworth will be stronger, slightly larger, and more deeply committed to faculty and student research. But it will not change its commitment to great teaching, to close student-faculty relationships, to traditional undergraduate programs as the base of its identity, to the liberal arts as foundational for all our programs; and it certainly will not change its commitment to honor God, follow Christ and serve humanity. In fact, this change will ignite a new excitement both on and off campus as it brings a fresh look at the value and character of Whitworth. As I have asked people over the past few years for their reaction to the change, I’m surprised how many have said, “I never really thought of Whitworth as a college or university. You’re just Whitworth.” That’s right. We’re just Whitworth, and that will never change.