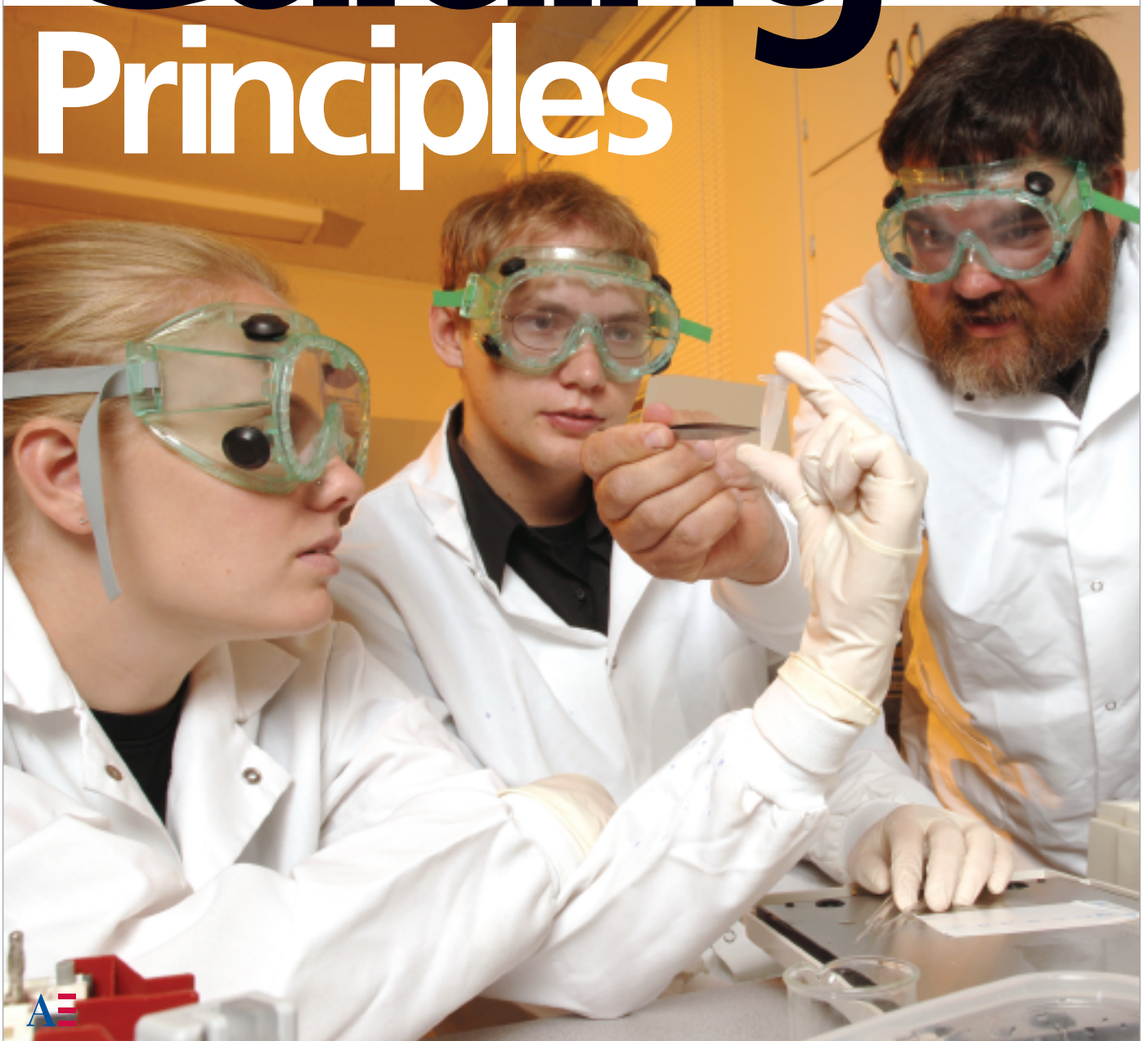




This 118-year old school blends Christian service
and faith with intellectual curiosity
and openness. Dr. Bill Robinson explains.

Whitworth University

Guiding Principles



No ideas are off limits at Whitworth University in Spokane, Wash. The school was founded to prepare students to “honor God, follow Christ, and serve humanity,” and those are the principles that continue to guide Whitworth today. But to Dr. Bill Robinson, president since 1993, one of the school’s biggest assets is a commitment to academic exploration of different viewpoints.

“We are developing discerning and thoughtful people who can contribute to the leadership of society. Our students don’t vilify those who disagree with them,” he said. “They hold their points of view respectfully and recognize they don’t have all the answers and can learn from those with whom they disagree.”

With aspects of our culture and media vastly polarized on a myriad of issues, one could be forgiven for thinking it impossible for secularism and Christianity to coexist in a collegiate setting. But among the principles on which the United States was founded are freedom of religion and the right to disagree. It should therefore be possible to believe a modern, faith-based liberal arts university capable of marrying those two cherished beliefs.

Whitworth’s ability to do that stems from its leadership. Individuals cannot become a Whitworth board member if they hold so fast to one end of the spectrum that they have no interest in the other. Although some board members may be more interested in a Christian emphasis than openness, the reverse is also true. What this creates is a model of leadership and dialogue that mirrors what takes place among professors and students.

“We try to build a board that reflects our sense of mission. Our board members see the value in providing that balance between Christian principles and philosophical openness,” Robinson said.

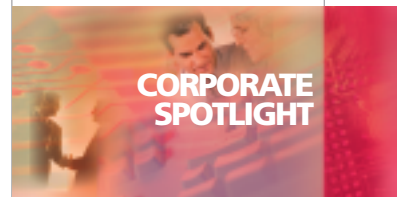
In his role as president, Robinson also led some major overhauls to Whitworth’s infrastructure. These changes allowed the school to offer amenities available at many high-profile schools with which it increasingly competes for students, without sacrificing the spirit of the school.

Since 1993, Whitworth spent more than \$75 million on campus improvement, including



Weyerhaeuser Hall (a key academic building), new residence halls and athletic facilities, and a new visual art center that should be completed in a couple months. With a rise in science, music, and theater majors, the school also designed a new science center likely to be finished by 2010 and will follow that up with a new performing arts center.

“Our VP of finance and administration keeps an eye on the physical structure of the campus and listens to recommendations from our academic VP and others,” said Robinson. “Our nine-member president’s cabinet then takes a big picture institutional point of view. We don’t have a lot of territorialism. We sit down to figure out priorities, how much we need to raise, and where to go to get it.”



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Invest in your strengths

Of all things a university can ultimately be known for, the most important aspects are the ability of professors, the strength of its curriculum, and the quality of the students. Whitworth has an abundance of each.

Finding professors with a strong Christian background and well rounded in their academic discipline is the first step. The school is upfront about its mission when positions are posted, letting prospective instructors know the school is looking for Christian scholars, but those open to ideas that challenge their thinking. In the interview process, professors are asked how faith influences the way they see their subject and how they will integrate faith into their teaching and scholarship.

This commitment to faith-learning integration sets a Whitworth education apart in ways that may not be obvious by perusing the course catalog. Worldview studies at many colleges is a survey on the history of western civilization; Whitworth's required three-course Core program pushes students to examine their most closely held religious and philosophical beliefs and to consider how to live out those beliefs in the ethical and political choices they make. Biology professors teach evolution, but also ask students to consider how it may challenge or support Christian doctrine.

Whitworth clearly isn't just another school. It is one of the most renowned Christian liberal arts schools in the country. The university has been as high as fifth on *US News & World Report's* ranking of best regional universities in the West, and in 2008 was ranked ninth. This is one reason the school has seen a nearly 450% increase in the number of freshman applications in the last 15 years.

Robinson said Whitworth students, Christian and non-Christian, are attracted to the school because of the quality of the education and an environment grounded in public service. The school's dual commitments to Christian conviction and intellectual curiosity are well documented on Whitworth's Web site and in promotional literature, and students are exposed to the service aspects from the start. One day during the first month of the fall term, classes are cancelled and more than a dozen buses pick up students and faculty to volunteer at various social service agencies. Whitworth ends up contributing about 5,000 hours of community service.

Students also take the initiative to heart. In 1990, two freshmen decided on their own to start a Saturday night program delivering meals to agencies serving the homeless. By the end of the year, they were bringing 400 meals every Saturday. Eighteen years later, current students continue that moment of inspiration. That is true Christianity in action.

The challenge now is to ensure the school retains its socioeconomic diversity. With federal and state funding for financial aid falling and costs rising, it is becoming more difficult for deserving students to afford a college education. Though Whitworth has an abundance of applicants, Robinson doesn't want to see Whitworth become an elitist institution.

"We are lucky because we have more demand than supply. But if we operate on a supply and demand basis, we could leave out some students who need the education the most," he said. "We tackle that by building our endowment through gifts that will allow us to make our school affordable for everyone." ■

—Eric Slack



Since 1890, Whitworth University has held fast to its founding mission to “provide an education of mind and heart” through rigorous and open intellectual inquiry guided by dedicated Christian scholars.



WHITWORTH
AN EDUCATION OF MIND AND HEART

www.whitworth.edu