

September 2007

Dear Friends,

As a residential college, Hamilton operates much like the small town in which it is located, maintaining sites for housing, dining, recreation and athletics, along with areas for religious practice, for socializing and, of course, for study, research and the arts. And, like a small town or village, a college or university counts as part of the natural life cycle periodic investment in infrastructure through the refurbishing and improvement of outmoded buildings. The scope of our current investment in the physical plant has been as far-reaching in its consequences as any undertaken since the Kirkland College campus was built and the Daniel Burke Library was added more than 35 years ago.

The spaces recently created for fitness, dance, squash, outdoor activities, admission and financial aid are as basic to the College and to campus life as the ongoing renovations of our residence halls. My focus here, however, will be on the investment we are making in the buildings that support our core mission: classrooms, laboratories, studios and academic support areas.

When I first visited College Hill in 2003, a wave of construction was already under way. Now, as I walk the campus from north to south, I see stunning transformations. Those of you who have visited in the past few years have witnessed these changes firsthand; indeed, many of you have made them possible. But whereas the casual observer may take pleasure principally in the exterior appearance of the structures, the environmentally sensitive way in which they are planned, and the attention paid to blending new with existing architecture, I am struck by how the physical transformations on campus help to give form and shape to the intellectual transformations that take place inside those magnificent structures.

In an era of concern over college costs, I am sometimes asked if such specialized academic facilities are really necessary, especially at a liberal arts college. It is a fair question.

From a purely practical standpoint, a college in today's world cannot attract the finest students and faculty without providing excellent facilities. This is plainly evident every time prospective students and families tour the campus. Upgrading the physical plant is essential to securing our future; it is an investment in this institution's stature and reputation. The data are explicit on this point. Prior to the opening of the Science Center in 2005, Hamilton's academic facilities were rated lower than those of our peers in a survey of admitted students. But one year after it came on line, students admitted to Hamilton judged our facilities as better than those of the other colleges they were considering.

The fundamental reason why we invest periodically in new and renovated buildings is our academic mission. At Hamilton, every major academic construction project of the past decade has been preceded by an extensive review of the educational program. Advances in pedagogical understanding and practice guide our planning.

In the case of the sciences, faculty members explored questions related to their teaching methodologies and educational philosophies for years before the College sought an architectural firm for the project. It then became the architect's responsibility to create physical spaces that would support our pedagogical

and research needs. The result is a beautiful and highly functional building in harmony with the way our faculty teach and our students learn. Whereas similar construction projects on other campuses tend to replicate design elements throughout a facility, Hamilton's approach has been toward customization. The more common design elements in the Science Center – a good deal of open space, an emphasis on points for casual and spontaneous interaction among students and faculty, and the placement of labs for student work in close proximity to faculty offices and research labs – simultaneously reflect and enable the faculty's commitment to hands-on, individualized, research-based instruction.

The investment has paid dividends. Science enrollments and the number of science concentrators have risen, student research productivity has likewise increased (in large measure because the building and the faculty draw students back to work in the summer) and the number of national science fellowships won by Hamilton students is climbing. In sum, the student experience has been measurably enhanced by the renovation and expansion of the building. I write this letter fresh from a conversation with a newly appointed science professor who was recruited by eight colleges but decided at first sight of Hamilton that she wanted to work with *these* colleagues and *these* students in *this* science building. The building that so appealed to her scientific aspirations and interests is, moreover, frequently visited by faculty and administrators from other colleges contemplating an investment in their own undergraduate science programs.

The planning model that worked so well in the sciences has been adapted to the renovation and expansion of the social science spaces currently in progress in the Kirner-Johnson Building. Like their counterparts on the north side of campus, the social scientists spent several years reviewing their programs and teaching practices before setting to work with the architectural firm that would eventually convert their pedagogical needs into physical realities. Of note is an emphasis on spaces that support the kind of team approach to problem-solving increasingly prevalent in the business and nonprofit worlds that many of our students will inhabit. Also driving the need for improved classrooms are the large enrollments in the social sciences.

Teaching methodologies and student interest alike have fueled our desire to enhance the work of the College's signature programs in oral communication, public policy (the Arthur Levitt Public Affairs Center) and writing (the Nesbitt-Johnston Writing Center) with new and expanded spaces that support the one-on-one and hands-on learning that increasingly characterizes a Hamilton education in all disciplines.

With the majority of the funding for the K-J project secured and construction under way, the focus of our planning for future academic spaces has moved to the arts. Our vision for our arts future blends theory and practice, and recognizes the arts as vital for all Hamilton students, arts concentrators and non-concentrators alike.

Appropriate physical spaces make student-faculty interaction more satisfying and fruitful. Evidence collected two years after the opening of our Science Center suggests that the structure itself has been a wise investment in education. I expect the completion of comparable facilities in the social sciences and the arts to produce similar outcomes, and I thank the members of the Hamilton family whose generosity and discernment are making them possible.

Sincerely yours,



Joan Hinde Stewart