next year “America will be 3 million college-educated workers short” of meeting society’s demand. In particular, the report cites the essential need for liberally educated college graduates who can work with people who have different views, who understand democratic issues and values, who have the capacity to contribute to the greater good, who have a breadth of knowledge and can make connections across disciplines, and who have the intercultural skills to live and work in the global community. We all want and benefit from neighbors and friends with these kinds of abilities.

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Nayef Samhat, President of Wofford College

Nayef H. Samhat, the 11th president of Wofford College, is a native of Detroit, Michigan. He holds a B.A. in international affairs from George Washington University’s School of International and Public Affairs, a master’s degree in international affairs from Columbia University and a Ph.D. in political science from Northwestern University.

Samhat came to Wofford in July 2013, after having served as provost and professor of political science and international studies at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio. Prior to his time at Kenyon, he was the Frank B. and Virginia B. Hower Associate Professor of Government and International Studies and an associate dean of Centre College in Danville, Kentucky.

His academic interests include international relations theory, international political economy and the politics of the Middle East, especially international relations in the Middle East. He has contributed articles, papers, reviews and essays on these and other topics to a variety of journals. He is also a staunch advocate of the liberal arts educational experience, and he and his wife, Prema, love living on Wofford’s beautiful campus.

Wofford’s mission is to provide superior liberal arts education that prepares its students for extraordinary and positive contributions to society. The focus of Wofford’s mission is upon fostering commitment to excellence in character, performance, leadership, service to others and lifelong learning.

Wofford College does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation or any legally protected status.

Making an Informed Decision #4

Fourth in a six-part series on the importance of the liberal arts and Wofford College’s role in preparing students for extraordinary and positive contributions to society.

Enriching the curricular with the co-curricular and why a holistic educational experience is important

by Nayef Samhat, President of Wofford College

W hen The New York Times columnist David Brooks was on campus during the fall semester, he visited with several classes, spoke to a crowd from the college and community in Leonard Auditorium and met with the Old Gold and Black student newspaper staff. While meeting with our student journalists, Brooks offered advice for finding opportunities in the field after graduation.

He explained that while scanning resumes to fill internship positions, he sees the same things. All of the applicants have done everything right. They’ve made good grades, taken the appropriate classes and held progressively responsible leadership positions. On paper, they would all make perfectly acceptable interns. Brooks, who has made a name for himself globally as a political and cultural commentator, however, is looking for something more. He’s looking for students who have taken risks, stepped out of their comfort zones and engaged in the world in ways that inspire a deep interest and passion.

In other words, the baseline knowledge and competencies that students develop in college are necessary, but no longer enough. That’s why providing opportunities for co-curricular experiences, experiences that augment what students learn in the classroom, and “living the discipline” are so important.

Wofford Trustee Steven Mungo, Wofford Class of 1981, summed it up well in an interview last spring for a story about Wofford’s creation of an academic exchange. According to Mungo, “… academic studies are just the foundation of what makes a person successful later in life. International studies, community involvement and internships, for example, are essential to rounding out the educational experience and making our students more competitive in the workplace or when applying for graduate, medical or law school.

They’re also essential to fulfilling Wofford’s mission of providing a superior liberal arts education that prepares students for extraordinary and positive contributions to society. It is absolutely about providing opportunities for students to develop various competencies, but more importantly — and of far more significance to humankind — it is about offering students opportunities to find their purpose within the greater community. Wofford College has a responsibility to both prepare students for what they will find in the world after graduation and for their unique contributions to society — a tall order, but one that Wofford has been fulfilling for 163 years.

Leaders at Wofford, founded as “a college for literary, classical and scientific education,” never confused teaching and learning solely to the classroom; the co-curricular was as important to the development of the entire person as the curriculum. Even in the earliest days, mandatory chapel services, literary societies, debate teams, a lyceum speaker series and physical education requirements were organized and supported with
college resources to prepare students for the familial and societal roles they would fill upon matriculation. When the curriculum changed to meet society's needs, enhancements to the co-curriculum followed suit.

One of Wofford's largest expansions of the traditional classroom came in 1969 with the first January Interim. During that inaugural month, Wofford students experienced air travel for the first time, gaining insight and studying among the ruins of ancient Rome or with Spanish-speaking families in Mexico. They studied jazz in New Orleans, international politics at the United Nations in New York City and art in Florence. They explored careers in the ministry, teaching and medicine, and they produced the college’s first play, creating what eventually became Wofford Theatre.

Dr. Charles Marsh, Wofford's seventh president, considered Interim one of the most accomplishment of his presidency. With the changing social and political climate, he, Dean of the College Philip Covington, and other members of the faculty and staff recognized that sheltering students from the world was no longer an option. Interim was developed in response as a way to bring the world and the classroom together to meld the curricular and co-curricular.

Still today, Interim provides opportunities for students and faculty to explore new and untried topics, take academic risks, observe issues in action, develop capabilities for independent learning and consider different peoples, places and professional options. Wofford will commemorate the 50th anniversary of Interim during January 2018 with the reprise of a few of the early Interim experiences within the pages of a special Interim edition of the Old Gold and Black student newspaper, but the college has been celebrating the transformational intent of Interim and the opportunities it provides to make the most of the college experience since the beginning.

Wofford’s current co-curricular offerings include opportunities for undergraduate research, internships, global study and travel, entrepreneurial work, service to the students publication staff, participation in pre-professional organizations and community-based learning. All are focused on giving students an educational experience that makes a difference, find purpose and understand what it means to engage civically as well as academically.

For example:

- Students in Dr. Laura Barbas Rhoden’s Spanish 503 classes drove their understanding of the needs for mentors and study buddies in a local predominantly Hispanic neighborhood and school.
- Jack McDonald, a student from Rochester, N.Y., is working in the financial aid office to connect his finance major, independent study of computer programming and travel experiences from New York to Spartanburg to improve small-business travel and expense reporting through the development of a travel app.
- Students and faculty in physics, English and art have collaborated on a book to explain the principles of quantum mechanics to children. The summer research experience meant that teachers became students, students became teachers and everyone learned lessons in how to work with one another. It is likely because they shared the same experience that they share the same understanding of the meaning of college elsewhere. For many students, it’s the co-curriculum that offers the most interesting, compelling, and institutionally-defining education experiences.

Nationally recognized liberal arts colleges such as Wofford understand how to extend academic rigor beyond the classroom so that co-curricular experiences are also steeped in intellectual challenges. Blending the two settings does not only add to the intellectual rigor, it makes the intellectual learning experience more relevant and interesting for students.

According to economic research presented in 2016 by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, the co-curricular experience is possible.

Giving students opportunities to make a difference, find purpose and put into practice what is being taught in the classroom is not a new concept. Aristotle said, “Where your talents and the needs of the world cross, there lies your vocation.” And there lies the core of Wofford’s mission — a mission that benefits the individual as well as society. Wofford takes this mission seriously and puts people, programs and facilities in place to ensure that learning happens around the clock and around the globe. Achieving intentional, meaningful and individualized co-curricular programming is labor-intensive work. It requires trained professionals who are creative, experienced and dedicated to student success. The old adage “you get what you pay for” certainly holds true when it comes to hiring faculty and staff professionals who are fulfilling their daily roles that foster in students a commitment to excellence, intellectual curiosity, lifelong learning, global awareness and social consciousness.

Take the staff in the Office of International Programs for example. Dean of International Programs Amy Lancaster and Assistant Dean for International Programs Laura Braun both speak multiple languages, hold advanced degrees, have studied and traveled abroad extensively, and are active in professional organizations. Sara Milani, international programs advisor, and KyleKeith, study abroad coordinator, both of whom have found out what it means to be a college staff. The entire department stays current on world politics, travel conditions and best practices in the field. Their commitment to understanding what students need is not new. This summer 21 first-year Gateway Scholars (primarily first-generation, Pell-eligible students) spent two semesters living and studying among the ruins of ancient Rome or with Spanish-speaking families in Mexico. They studied jazz in New Orleans, international politics at the United Nations in New York City and art in Florence. They explored careers in the ministry, teaching and medicine, and they produced the college’s first play, creating what eventually became Wofford Theatre.

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Wofford’s curriculum and the co-curricular are rich with the loyalties of the many organizations that make Wofford, high of good curriculum and co-curricular.

2. The Space in the Mungo Center is the heart of the Wofford College campus. It is designed to be a gathering place for students, faculty and visitors to meet, study, work and relax. The Space is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and is available for all members of the Wofford community. The Space is a place for students to study, work, and relax. It is a place for students to meet and study together. The Space is a place for students to work and study together. It is a place for students to relax and study together. The Space is a place for students to study, work, and relax. It is a place for students to meet and study together. The Space is a place for students to work and study together. It is a place for students to relax and study together.
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next year “America will be 3 million college-educated workers short” of meeting society’s demand. In particular, the report cites the essential need for liberally educated college graduates who demonstrate:

- Knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world, with focus on engagement with big questions.
- Intellectual and practical skills, practiced within and outside of the curriculum.
- Personal and social responsibility, anchored through involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges.
- Integrative and applied learning, as shown in new settings and with complex problems.

Employers and graduate school admission committees want college graduates who can work with people who have different views, who understand democratic issues and values, who have the capacity to contribute to the greater good, who have a breadth of knowledge and can make connections across disciplines, and who have the interpersonal skills to live and work in the global community. We all want and benefit from neighbors and friends with these kinds of abilities.

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